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# friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD

A Newsletter For Poets &amp; Poetry

Volume 16, Issue 2 - Fall 2011

## Stafford Stamp Proposal

July, 2011

Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee  
c/o Stamp Development  
U.S. Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 3300  
Washington, D.C. 20260-3501

Dear committee members,

I am sending this letter formally on behalf of the board of the Friends of William Stafford, which I chair, but also informally on behalf of thousands of "lower-case" friends of the late William Edgar Stafford, one of the most prolific and admired American writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We propose that the U.S. Postal Service honor William Stafford's life and work by issuing a commemorative stamp in 2014, the centennial year of his birth. Stafford was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, in 1914, and died at his home in Lake Oswego, Oregon, in 1993, at the age of 79.

Between 1960 and 1993, William Stafford wrote more than 60 published collections of poetry and prose, including 12 full-length books of poems. He was also an influential and beloved teacher of writing. He served as Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (the post now known as United States Poet Laureate) during 1970-71 and as Poet Laureate of Oregon from 1975 through 1989.

Stafford's first book of poetry, *West of Your City*, was published in 1960 when he was 46 years old. His second, *Traveling Through the Dark*, won the National Book Award in 1963. Its title poem is one of the most widely anthologized works by an American poet. He also received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Western States Lifetime Achievement Award in Poetry.

It is often said of poets, disparagingly, that they write mainly for themselves, with little audience beyond other poets and the academy. Not so, in Stafford's case. His inclusive poems have gained a wide and diverse following, among young and old alike. Many self-described "nonfans" of poetry stumble onto his work and discover that they appreciate and love poetry after all. His writing has been described as "regional in every region."

"He is a poet of the people in the deepest and most meaningful sense," the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Louis Simpson once said of Stafford, because he "actually writes about the country he is living in; all sorts of ordinary people, places and animals appear in his poems, and not as objects of satire but with the full weight of their own existence." Simpson called Stafford "one of the few poets who are able to use the landscape and to feel the mystery and imagination in American life."

Among his best-known books are *The Rescued Year* (1966), *Stories That Could Be True: New and Collected Poems* (1977), *Writing the Australian Crawl: Views on the Writer's Vocation* (1978), and *An Oregon Message* (1987). The largest single-volume selection of his poems, *The Way It Is* (1998: Graywolf Press), came out after he died.

(cont. on p. 2)



Bill Stafford at age four

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE STAFFORD ARCHIVES

(cont. from p. 1)

Stafford wrote every day of his adult life, usually early in the morning. One of his best-known poems, “You Reading This, Be Ready,” written two days before he died, concludes: “What can anyone give you greater than now, starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?”

Stafford grew up during the Great Depression in central and southwest Kansas, with an appreciation for nature, the Great Plains and books. He graduated from high school in Liberal, Kansas, in 1933 and earned his college degree from the University of Kansas in 1937.

As a pacifist and conscientious objector during World War II, Stafford did alternative service in civilian work camps in Arkansas, California and Illinois. His work included fire fighting, forestry, road maintenance and trail-building. In 1944, while in California, he met and married Dorothy Hope Frantz. They would raise four children.

After the war, Stafford worked for the Church World Service relief organization, taught high school and finished his master’s degree in English at the University of Kansas. (He would later earn a PhD from the University of Iowa.) His master’s thesis, a memoir of his wartime experience in the civilian work camps, was published as *Down in My Heart* in 1947 and is still in print. In 1948, Stafford joined the faculty of Lewis & Clark College, in Portland, Oregon, where he taught until his retirement in 1980. He and Dorothy settled in Lake Oswego, near Portland.

As his reputation grew, Stafford traveled widely to give readings, teach writing workshops and encourage aspiring poets throughout Oregon, across the United States and abroad. He visited nearly every state. In 1992, as a U.S. Information Agency lecturer, he traveled to Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

His poems appeared not only in the most prestigious literary journals – such as *The New Yorker*, *The Iowa Review*, *Georgia Review* and *Atlantic* – but also in hundreds of smaller magazines delighted to publish a poem by a famous poet. Garrison Keillor, narrator of “The Writer’s Almanac,” the daily public radio feature, has over the years recited 54 different Stafford poems on the air.

Stafford’s poems tend to be short and deceptively simple. His plain-spoken style invites readers into the poems, which often take unexpected turns toward discovery. His poems are at once quiet and tough-minded, clear and mysterious, open-hearted and sly, serious and funny, witty and down-to-earth. While grounded in day-to-day life and local experience, they also touch on universal concerns, from war and peace to the tension between individual freedom and social responsibility.

A superb listener and a generous man of unquestioned integrity, Stafford stood for inclusion and the bedrock American values of religious tolerance and respect for opposing points of view. His poems, full of wisdom, are free of self-indulgence and bombast. In classes and writing workshops, Stafford pioneered unorthodox

methods, urging students who complained of “writer’s block” to lower their standards and keep on writing. “When it gets hard, don’t stop,” he told young writers. “It is hard because you are doing something original.” Four books by Stafford have appeared in the influential University of Michigan Press “Poets on Poetry” series; the first of the four, *Writing the Australian Crawl*, remains the series’ best-seller.

Stafford never made light of writing, but he encouraged students not to be intimidated by poetry or the act of composition, which he said was as natural as breathing. “Anyone who breathes,” he said, “is in the rhythm business.” In another essay, he wrote, “A poem is a serious joke, a truth that has learned *jujitsu*.”

In 1992, the U.S. Forest Service commissioned Stafford to submit “poems of place” that could be part of an interpretive signs project in the Methow Valley in north central Washington state. Seven of those poems were etched into signs and posted along the North Cascades Highway and the Methow River in Washington. They also were published in a chapbook as *The Methow River Poems*.

The prodigious William Stafford Archives, including private papers, photographs, recordings, correspondence and teaching materials, as well as 20,000 pages of daily writings, were donated to Lewis & Clark College by the Stafford family in 2008.

Every January, in honor of Stafford’s birth month, public readings take place throughout Oregon and, increasingly, around the world. This remarkable tradition has grown steadily since 2000. Each reading is hosted by a local writer. Several featured poets are invited to read a Stafford poem along with one of their own. Then the forum opens. People in the audience can step forward, in turn, and read a favorite Stafford poem, recount a memory of him or say what his work and example mean to them. Each reading becomes a celebration of Stafford’s life and work – and a community. Stafford Birthday Readings were held this past January at 44 sites in Oregon – in public libraries, bookstores, art studios, places of worship, theaters and schools. Over the years, such readings have occurred in 19 states, from New Hampshire to California and Minnesota to Texas. One took place in a correctional center; another in a National Forest. Groups also hosted Stafford birthday readings in Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Scotland, and Sweden.

We urge you to consider commemorating the life and work of this remarkable American, William Stafford, by putting his name and image on a postage stamp.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Dennis Schmidling  
Chair of the Board  
Friends of William Stafford

**Editor’s note:** This letter was drafted by Don Colburn

## Letters of Support, Please

The above letter was sent to the US Postal service. The Friends of William Stafford board would like to have a commemorative stamp as part of the Stafford Centennial celebration in 2014. Friends could help with this effort by writing letters of support to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee. This is a long shot so letters from supporters are vital to this effort. Please use your imagination. A haiku in support would not be wasted. Send letters of support to the address at the top of the proposal, not to FWS.

## A Story That Could Be True

by Don Colburn

On a Sunday in June, 1992, my wife and I visited Bill and Dorothy Stafford at their home in Lake Oswego. I had alerted Bill we were coming to Portland from Washington, D.C., and when I called from a pay phone downtown, he invited us out to the house and gave me directions.

We "toured" the Staffords' lovely back yard garden. Bill wore a white shirt, baggy pants and black Reeboks. He showed us the redwood he cut down before it reached 5-inch thickness, so he wouldn't have to do battle with the zoning board. Also the Port Orford cedar. Bill noted that the poet Stanley Kunitz had been quite taken with that cedar and had bought one for himself. "How tall is yours?" Kunitz later asked Bill. "About 10 feet," Bill replied. "Oh," Kunitz said, "mine's 15."

Bill smiled as he recounted this, bemused by Kunitz's competitiveness.

Then we sat at the dining room table to have tea and lemon cakes and fresh strawberries, and talk.

"Tell us about Washington," Bill said. "What are your lives like back there?"

We talked about the brewing presidential campaign, our newspaper and library jobs, and poetry. At one point, Bill cocked his head, glanced back outside and said: "Isn't that good? Some kind of song sparrow." At another: "Look at that Douglas fir across the way. Isn't that a beauty? In the morning it's full of crows." These weren't interruptions, just lucky noticings.

Bill had driven home from Bremerton the night before after teaching a poetry workshop with Marvin Bell. "I'd forgotten how big Mount Rainier is!" he said.

We may have been the only folks in "Rip City" not glued to the Blazers game – it was the NBA finals against the dreaded Lakers. Dorothy did step out of the dining room at one point to check on the score and came back with news that the Blazers were down, 42-28.

Later, Bill showed me his workplace, off the kitchen next to the garage. With his table-top desk and book shelves and the Olivetti word processor and carefully labeled folders all over and his bicycle leaning against the wall.

I asked him to sign *Stories That Could Be True*, the first edition hardback I had picked up at a used bookstore in Bethesda, Maryland. He opened it and looked startled.

"This looks like my book," he said.

"I know," I said. "That's why I want you to sign it."

"No, I mean *my* book," he said.

Now I was puzzled.

"That's just the way I do it before a reading," Bill said. He had noticed the list of page numbers jotted in pencil on the inside front cover: 9, 32, 52 and so on. "Let's check – we can tell by which poems I chose." He paged through. "Yes, that's it," he said. "Yep."

Apparently, he had left the book behind after a reading at Georgetown University, and somehow it had made its way to the secondhand bookstore where I found it.

"Well it's my book now," I said. "So you have to sign it for me." And he did.

**Editor's Note:** Don told this story at a poetry reading held at the Lake Oswego Public Library on June 21st of this year.

### American Poet, William Stafford, 1914-1993

If he were a landscape, we'd call him ordinary:  
plain and dusty, flat, except for a few low hills,  
a few surviving pines, a scatter of yellow rabbitbush,  
in several shades of brown—  
the sort of place we'd hardly call a place  
in our hurry down the highway,  
never to wonder how it was  
the trees got placed just so.

If we got out and walked around,  
we'd find, in season, marvelous belly flowers  
echoing the stars, but in Technicolor  
and full of seeds, and there,  
behind that slope of tawny grass,  
a spring up-welling, clear and cold!  
So cold it stings our hands and lips to life.  
When the light sinks low, we'd see  
sharp shadows of the Cascade Range  
perfect their peaks across his back.

If there were miners wandering by,  
those who knew how to dig and where,  
they'd discover for us  
what we might have found for ourselves:  
imperishable rivers of gold below.

DON EMBLEN

## Introduction to *Rapport från en avlägsen plats* [Report from a far place] 60 William Stafford poems in Swedish,

Translated by Lars Nordström

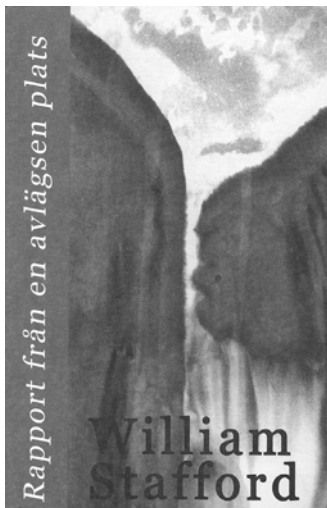
William Stafford (1914 – 1993) was—in many ways—a unique voice in the post-war poetry of the United States. The first time I read what he had to say about poetry and creativity, I suddenly realized why I felt so much vitality and generosity in his writings:

“A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them. That is, he does not draw on a reservoir; instead he engages in an activity that brings to him a whole succession of unforeseen stories, poems, essays, plays, laws, philosophies, religions, ...”

“I believe that the so-called ‘writing-block’ is a product of some kind of disproportion between your standards and your performance. ... [The poet] should lower his standards until there is no felt threshold to go over in writing. It’s *easy* to write. You just shouldn’t have standards that inhibit you from writing. After all, writing is a creative thing and you ought to get into action.”

This was a view of the poet’s vocation that I had never encountered before. Stafford did not suggest that he was privy to some special knowledge; the only thing he had, he said, was an openness and a willingness to engage with language and see where it would take him. It was mainly a question of being receptive to what the process of writing had to offer, of keeping a certain readiness. No impulse was too trivial or inessential, and for Stafford it resulted in a poetry that continuously crossed the line between the written and the spoken word. He simply made the case for the democratization of poetry and for the universal right to write.

In Stafford’s early poetry one quickly becomes aware of the prominent role his formative years in the Midwest play: there are memories from his childhood and family life (especially his father), the landscape and the small towns, the people and their morality. But considerably more important than the external surroundings—which in his later poetry became increasingly colored by living in Oregon for more than four decades—were the guiding principles William Stafford had received from his parents’ lives as Quakers. For them, it was a question of honoring the unpretentious and the unobtrusive, to firmly affirm human equality, to consistently repudiate violence as an alternative in conflicts, and to always listen for the voice of God. It is probably true to say that these four convictions constituted the footings that sustained his work as a poet.



Even though William Stafford was the recipient of a number of awards and recognitions over the years, and served as Oregon’s Poet Laureate for many years until his death, success never went to his head. One notices an unassuming stance in his recurring appreciation of insignificant things (as, for example, in the poem “In Passing”). That same tendency was probably also linked to Stafford’s predilection towards a regional impulse, which becomes noticeable from the fact that he rarely hesitated to include small, local places in a poem. His unpretentiousness was, as the opening quote clearly shows, also part of his approach to the process of writing. Stafford was (perhaps as another expression of that general principle of equality) always open to the impulses that listening resulted in, because everything could lead to poetry. As a result, his poetic oeuvre was significant, and that critics sometimes claimed that his poems were uneven was not something that worried him too much; his view was that they all had equal value.

The Quaker belief that anyone in the congregation had the authority to speak is also an expression of the belief in a basic human equality independent of, for example, social position, skin color, or ethnic identity. In this respect Quaker traditions stretch far back in American history, and sometimes remain independent of the generally accepted morality of the day; as an example one can point to their well-known efforts to assist escaping black slaves before the American Civil War. One expression of that conviction in William Stafford can be found in his involvement in the student protests against the segregation policies at the University of Kansas where he studied in the 1930s. One clearly sees it in a poem such as “Serving with Gideon,” where the narrator of the poem honors the colored elevator boy, but indirectly it is also present in all the poems that ridicule conceit and pretension.

Long before it became popular in the late 1960s to identify with the Native Americans, one finds that interest in William Stafford’s poetry. Stafford was not particularly interested in the contemporary situation of the Native Americans. Instead, he has said that he was fascinated by the Native Americans because they—as a metaphor—gave him a possibility to explore both that which was originally American (a kind of indigenous pre-European ecological harmony with the landscape), as well as something which was authentically regional (the wealth of cultures among the different tribes). Perhaps Stafford’s interest in the Native Americans can be seen as a part of a greater cultural re-evaluation in the US that seeks to reconnect with native cultures, in an attempt to break the European cultural monopoly which has systematically tried to ignore those indigenous cultures.

And what is meant by “listening to the voice of God”? Quakers do not have any designated priests or ministers to lead their religious gatherings, instead, anyone inspired by God to speak, may do so. To be able to hear the voice of God requires that one has learned to listen “within,” and “listening” itself was absolutely central to William Stafford. In his case, however, this activity was transformed to the source of inspiration for the poems, and the congregation, well, that’s everyone who reads poetry.

Early in life William Stafford had to face the consequences of calling himself a pacifist. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, most voices who had argued for American neutrality in the war grew silent, and in the wave of patriotism that followed it

took a great deal of courage to stand up for the pacifist belief that war was not the way to resolve human conflicts. In that entire generation of American poets, only two other well-known poets—Robert Lowell and William Everson—became conscientious objectors. Stafford spent the years 1942–46 in different labor camps, which is documented in his literary debut, *Down in My Heart*, a collection of stories from 1947. Even if it turned out to be his only literary prose book, one discovers in it many of the values that came to permeate so much of his poetry: protests against war, nuclear weapons, and militarism.

During his years in the camps, Stafford married, and in 1948 he got a job at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, where he eventually became a Professor of English and where he remained until his retirement. In the early 50s he went through the famous creative writing program at the University of Iowa, but as a poet he did not have his first book published until 1960. William Stafford was 46 years old when *West of Your City* was released. Two years later his second volume, *Traveling Through the Dark*, won the prestigious National Book Award. In the years that followed William Stafford published a steady stream of books until his death in 1993, and he was a frequently invited and much appreciated reader and teacher of poetry.

\* \* \*

Finally I would like to thank William Stafford's son, the author Kim Stafford, in charge of the literary estate and involved in the work of compiling the William Stafford Archive at Lewis & Clark College. Kim Stafford always promptly answered all my textual queries at great length and often provided useful backgrounds to individual poems. In addition, I would also like to thank Lennart Nyberg, Gunnar Balgård, Bo Gustavsson, and Magnus Ringgren—without their editorial assistance this would have become a much less readable book.

Lars Nordström,  
Beavercreek, the summer of 2003

**Editor's Note:** *Rapport från en avlägsen plats* was published by Edition Edda in an edition of 750 copies and received a number of positive reviews. Lars has another manuscript of Stafford poems translated into Swedish that is looking for a publisher.

## Blue River Night: September

We walked out in the dark to call for owls.  
No owls answered  
but the darkness and silence were sweet,

and we fell in love with the shadows  
that surrounded us like big black bears  
sniffing our hair, fondly petting our faces.

BARBARA DRAKE

## Barbara Drake, On Board

New FWS board member Barbara Drake lives on a twenty-acre farm in Yamhill Valley with her husband Bill Beckman, two border collies, a butterscotch cat, lots of grey squirrels, several owls, and one sheep, the last of a flock whose wool her husband uses for weaving. Their one-story ranch house is filled with paintings, photographs, objects de art, books and books, and dozens of Bill's beautiful, hand-woven blankets. Outside are oak groves, ash swales, grassy pastures with wild rose bushes, pear trees, apple trees, and a two-acre family vineyard. A visit to their farm tucked away on Lilac Hill near wineries, farms, and show horse stables would give one the impression they have found a place close to paradise.

Barbara taught writing and literature at Linfield College for a number of years. Before that she was at Michigan State University. She has an M.F.A. from the University of Oregon, where she studied with Ralph Salisbury and James B. Hall. It was in Eugene she first met Bill Stafford, who gave frequent readings there. She has been retired for several years, if one can



PHOTO BY IUKA KUZNIK

accurately use that word since she is busier than ever. Among other things, she teaches a creative writing class at the Chehalem Cultural Center and helps organize the Terroir Creative Writing Festival, an annual event that takes place in April in McMinnville.

She has published several books of poetry: *Love at the Egyptian Theatre* (1978), *Life in a Gothic Novel* (1981), *What We Say to Strangers* (1986), *Bees in Wet Weather* (1992), and *Driving One Hundred* (2009). She is also author of two books of prose: *Writing Poetry* (1983, 1994), and *Peace At Heart: An Oregon Country Life* (1998). *Writing Poetry* uses several of Bill Stafford's poems to develop and illustrate writing ideas. Originally published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich it is now under the imprint of Heinle.

Barbara and her husband met in the 80's when Barbara was teaching a summer writing workshop at Southwestern Oregon Community College and he taught high school English at nearby Pacific High School. They later joined up and raised eight children between them and now have a small herd of grandchildren. One of Barbara's daughters, Monica, is a successful novelist.

Like Bill Stafford, Barbara was born in Kansas (Abilene). Her father, a photographer and Kansas native, was born nineteen days before Bill Stafford and died one year earlier than he did. "It was as if they were on the same space ship," she says. "Two good men from Kansas." Her family came west when she was young but she thinks her natural interest in exploring a regional voice is influenced by her connections to Kansas. She suspects, therefore, that her favorite Stafford poem is "The Farm on the Great Plains." Barbara joined the FWS board because they looked like good people and she loved Bill and loves his work.

## Philip Levine—A Laureate for the Lingo

Philip Levine is the new poet laureate of the United States, the 44<sup>th</sup>. His grainy, lyrical, story-driven poetry has been delighting and satisfying readers since his first book, *On the Edge*, appeared in 1963. Levine's poetry ties together anger, politics, and tenderness, displaying great empathy for the working class and for radical idealists, particularly the Spanish anarchists. His collection *What Work Is* received the National Book Award in 1991 and another, *The Simple Truth*, received the Pulitzer Prize in 1995. James Billington, the Librarian of Congress who selected Levine calls him "the laureate of the industrial heartland."

Levine was born in Detroit in 1928 and worked in auto plants in the 50s. He went on to study with Robert Lowell, John Berryman, and Yvor Winters and taught at Fresno State University for many years. Levine developed a fascination for the Spanish Civil War in his youth and spent a good deal of time in Spain in the 60s and 70s, translating a number of Spanish poets. He now divides the year between Fresno and Brooklyn.

There is a mixture of love and rage in Levine's work that is emotionally stunning, and it is wrapped around the stories of peoples lives, their felt lives, the physical reality of it—rain and grease and cigarettes and sweat. His presentation of the simplicities of the courage, caring and suffering of ordinary people is so human one feels delighted to be alive. Levine's poems make the reader, this one anyway, feel real, genuine, awake.

Stafford seems, like this editor, to have felt an affinity for Levine's poetry. He wrote a review in 1978 of Levine's book, *The Names of the Lost* for *Inquiry* called "A Poet with Something to Tell You." (Reprinted in *Crossing Unmarked Snow* and *On the Poetry of Philip Levine: Stranger to Nothing*.) In this review Bill speaks of Levine's poetry in ways that could apply to his own poetry and sounds like how he talks about poetry itself (see my short piece on *Twentieth Century American Poetics* in this newsletter). Levine's poetry, he says, "quietly appropriates the direct language of prose while maintaining a readiness to gain from the frequent bonuses that lurk in syllables and cadences in the lingo of talk." Bill seems to have seen in Levine's poetry something of the surrender to language and humility toward the subject he made part of his poetics. He praises Levine's poetry for its "little, sustained satisfactions," something that might be said of his own poetry.

Bill's poetry is, as a number of readers have noticed, quite political. In his introduction to *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep*, Robert Bly speaks of the "anger at society and its moral stupidities underneath" Bill's poems. He was not afraid of the word justice and one reads in this review a clear kinship with Levine's moral outrage: "justice is a continent ... that comes into being as we read writers like Philip Levine." I can only assume Bill would be applauding Phil's wearing of the laurel wreath.



PHOTO BY JIM WILSON

### On the Corner

Standing on the corner  
until Tatum passed  
blind as the sea,  
heavy, tottering  
on the arm of the young  
bass player, and they  
both talking  
Jackie Robinson.  
It was cold, late,  
and the Flame Show Bar  
was crashing  
for the night, even  
Johnny Ray  
calling it quits.  
Tatum said, Can't  
believe how fast  
he is to first. Wait'll  
you see Mays  
the bass player said.  
Women in white furs  
spilled out of the bars  
and trickled toward  
the parking lot. Now  
it could rain, coming  
straight down. The man  
in the brown hat  
never turned his head up.  
The gutters swirled  
their heavy waters,  
the streets reflected  
the sky, which was  
nothing. Tatum  
stamped on toward  
the Bland Hotel, a wet  
newspaper stuck  
to his shoe, his mouth  
open, his vest  
drawn and darkening.  
I can't hardly wait, he said.

PHILIP LEVINE  
FROM THE NAMES OF THE LOST (1976)

## Selections from *Feeling At Home: An Interview with Dorothy Stafford*

Then he started telling me about his family, how his father worked in a job for the oil company where he had to travel around a lot, and the kids hated to leave their schools and his mother found it hard to move, but when they got to a new town they always had friends—all the books on the library shelves. His mother always got the same book, *A Lantern in Her Hand*, to make her feel at home. It was a story of the prairie [by Bess Streeter Aldrich, published in 1928].



We lived in Richmond, right near the oil wells. It smelled like the oil wells. One morning we were waiting for the bus and there was a meadowlark on the telephone wire, and Bill said: “Oh, it’s a missionary from Kansas.” [laughs]



Sometimes in dinner parties or in groups, Bill would say something that would just cut, and cut through, and some people took offense. I think he loved discussions and so he wanted to break up the banal. I miss that because often he’d ask questions that would just sort of stop people. [laughs] Like that time he said: “When did you lose your innocence? Let’s all tell.” His was when he couldn’t believe the government in Eisenhower’s time when the U2 plane went over and the President said, “It wasn’t ours.”



*When you first met Bill, he had written for some years. Did you see much of his work early on?*

Some. You know, Bill didn’t go around showing his work. But yes. I remember when we lived in Claremont that summer—we were both going to school—and he had that first poem in [1948] *Poetry*. It’s called “Supermarket,” I think. That was great cause for rejoicing.

I felt at home with his writing. I’d always liked language, and that’s why it was such a joy to be with Bill. Because he knew how to say things and keep it going. Not say the same thing twice, but always in a new way, with all the flourishes of delight.



I think about Bill with such a mix of humor, and lightheartedness, and darkness, and mystery. Lovable and complicated. I mean the fact that I don’t know—living with him all the time—what he believed about the big questions in life. Do you think he was like that?

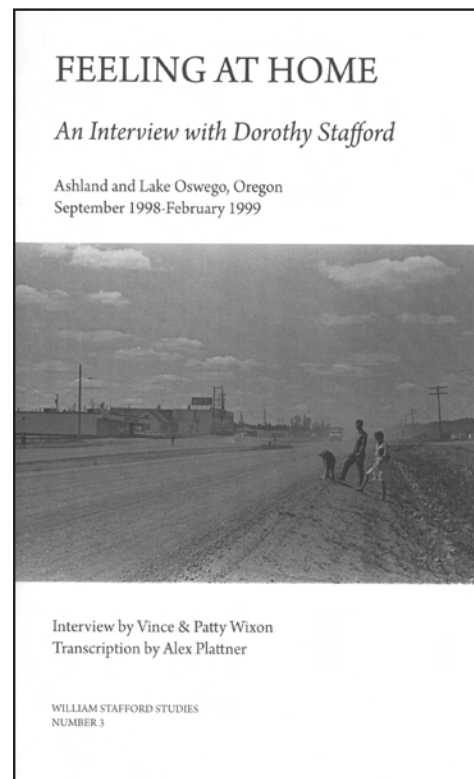
*Yes. I think that was all in the poems, don’t you?*

I do

*I mean all those things you’ve said: the lightness, and humor, and mystery and the darkness.*

They’re all one poem.

**Editor’s Note:** *Feeling at Home* was published in 2011 by Berberis Press in an edition of 150 copies at the Lewis & Clark College Special Collections division of the Watzek Library. The interview was done in 1998-1999 by Vince and Patty Wixon and transcribed by Alex Plattner.



### Super Market

Every bit of yellow cheese in the market  
was wrapped in cellophane.

Every morsel of fruit was,  
every sprig of celery, every tomato.

All the prepared meat was in cellophane  
with a ribbon around it.

Around the room were clear troughs  
made of glass and chromium.

The neon sign rippled through glass.

Everyone in the market had on shined shoes,  
pressed clothes with cuffs and pleats.

The men all wore ties, wrapped over  
left to right, pulled up snug.

The women all had permanents;  
their mouths were coated with rouge.

When you carried your cellophaned food  
past the automatic adding machine  
and paid legal dollars and cents,

A girl said cellophaned thanks;  
the big machine added more dollars.

The bell rang, the line moved, the gate clicked;  
and you blinked out into darkness.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

# A Little Bit of All Right, the Potluck

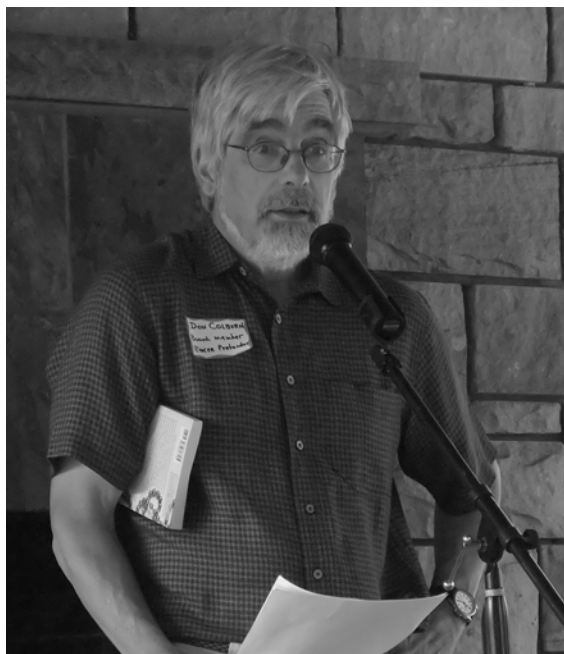


PHOTO BY LIKA KUZNIK

Don Colburn, master of unceremony

It was a shorts, short sleeves, and shade day, a day of abundant food, books, broadsides, good cheer, good poetry, and if you walked down to see the Stafford Stones, sweat. It was also the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Host Don Colburn quoted board member and picnic organizer Pat Carver's response to that coincidence: "Aren't we sort of an alternative to all that, poetry I mean?" Don underlined that idea by reading a poem from *Every War Has Two Losers*, "Pretend You Live in a Room." (See next column)

Dorothy stayed home because of the heat but sent a wonderful message in which she said events like this one are, using one of Bill's favorite phrases, "a bit of all right." And it was. Doug Stow of Paper Crane Press read from the latest Stafford broadside, "Smoke Signals," beautifully illustrated (by his son Robert) with three fires, each of which, Doug noted, has different smoke rising from the flames. Leanne Grabel (on keyboard and voice) and Steve Sander (on voice) performed lively renderings of four of Bill's poems. Paulann Peterson read a wonderful essay/meditation on the word *place* that uses Bill's poem "West of Here." (See p. 10) Don Colburn then spoke about the FWS board's proposal to petition the postal service to print a William Stafford stamp for the 2014 centennial of his birth. Paulann graciously presided over the open mic and, in a crystallization of what our inner lives are like, Bill's words blended with our words and were one for a while. Two poems from those read are printed in these pages.



## Pretend You Live in a Room

Play like you had a war. Hardly anyone  
got killed except thousands of the enemy,  
and many go around starving, holding  
their hands out in pictures, begging.

Their houses, even the concrete and iron,  
they've disappeared. These people  
now live camped in the open. Overhead  
stars keep telling their old, old story.

You have this world. You wander the earth.  
You can't live in a room.

WILLIAM STAFFORD



PHOTO BY LIKA KUZNIK

The assembled at leisure

## Close

August 2004

As we walk along the Mall,  
a jetliner banks beyond the Lincoln Memorial  
slows in descent  
looms larger  
as it follows the slow-moving Potomac.

Powerful, massive, loud, moving yet slower,  
the United jet passes close on our left  
in its approach to Reagan National  
unimpeded by city skyscrapers,  
the passengers ready for the landing  
and, this time, their lives waiting beyond.

GEORGE STALEY





PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Leanne Grabel, Steve Sander, Barbara Drake, Nancy Winklesky, Shelley Reese



## Lemons

When first there were lemons, fat and yellow lemons,  
we cut them in half and squeezed them  
in strong steel juicers with graceful gooseneck handles  
or reamed them on ribbed glass cones.

We poured the juice into clean glass pitchers  
(or later, with more confidence in what we could not see,  
into rough earthenware or fluted flowered china)  
and stirred in sugar with a wooden spoon,

listening and feeling for the crystalline crunch  
to go silky, the spoon a wand  
turning sand to cream. The merest splash of water  
at the end, and then we emptied ice

from a bowl, the shards and nuggets  
chipped from the block and rattling, shining,  
shimmering in a sweet sea, chilling fast,  
a fine sweat forming on the outside

of the pitcher, and it was ready. And we  
poured it into tall glasses, and we drank it.  
This was before there were frozen cylinders,  
or boxes with straws. There were only lemons.

JANE ELDER WULFF  
JUNE, 2011



PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Rosemary Lombard



PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Leon Aliski

# Place

by Paulann Petersen

First: consider the place of the word “place” in our language, our native tongue, if we are native speakers of English. What is it that’s occurred when we can state everything is *in its place*? What do we mean when we say things *fall into place*? What are we conveying about memory, about cognition, when we can *place something*?

“Place” is obviously central to, essential to cognition and vision. With the word “place” we’re saying this world—our world—is as it should be, the world as intended. In its place, fallen into place. Everything’s at home.

This word “place” helps us say we’ve found in this world—for even a moment—a bit of balance, a distilled yet immense glimpse of the absolute—a groundedness, an epiphany of place. To *know our place*. To *have a place*.

Would it be fair to say we carry with us the imprint of every place we’ve experienced, we’ve known? Yes. Would it be fair to say that the imprint created by a place such as Sitka, or a place such as Foothills Park that’s graced by the Stafford Stones sculpted by Frank Boyden, the very founder of Sitka, would it be fair to say that the imprints created by such places might assume significance, assume radiance in our lives? Yes, it would certainly be fair to say that.

This imprint of place, how do we convey it to others? By how we move in the world? How carefully or carelessly? By the words we speak? By the words we write?

Those words we write. The poems we write. What about them? A poem can be a vehicle, a way to re-create, to embody that imprint of place, a way to convey the imprint in such a way that others might experience it, or some part of it. A poem of place could look very much like one of Bill Stafford’s poems, one called “West of Here.”

In October of 1975, Bill was approached by Donald Erceg and Michael Lowell to see if he’d be interested in providing poems for a book of poems and photographs relating to Cascade Head. Bill’s first reply suggested that they might all meet when he did his next class at Sitka on November 15 and 16 of that year. Bill ended up sending a total of thirty poems for consideration, two of them unpublished, seven published in journals only, and the remainder published in journals and gathered in collections big and small. “West of Here” is one of the Cascade Head poems that Bill suggested for the book, a book that—sadly—never materialized.

West of Here

The road goes down. It stops at the sea.  
The sea goes on. It stops at the sky.  
The sky goes on.

At the end of the road—picnickers,  
rocks. We stand and look out:

Another sky where this one ends?  
And another sea?  
And a world, and a road?

And what about you?  
And what about me?

Yes, this is a Cascade Head poem, a poem about the hinge between land and sea. A poem of cessation, endings, a poem of continuation, beginnings. “And what about you?/ And what about me?” Where do *we* end? Where do *we* go on? What place do *we* occupy, in this place? Within this world we think we know, how many other worlds exist? Here. Beyond. Maybe “beyond” is simply another way to say “inside.”

Bill’s poem is a good place to begin thinking about poems of place, because a poem of place is much more than words that merely describe a particular location. A poem of place creates, by its very existence, that place we readers/listeners can enter, inhabit, exit, linger at the edges of, then enter again. And again.

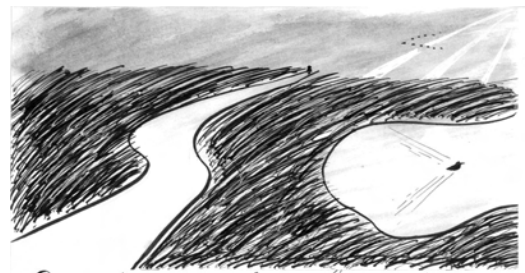
Not a poem merely *about* place. But a poem *as* place. Both *about* and *as*.

As in: a poem about the sun that *is* the sun.  
As in: a poem about light that itself gleams.  
As in: a poem about fire that, itself, gives off heat.

A poem about that verge between the land and the sea that is, itself, a hinge. Such a poem carries the imprint of place with it everywhere, all the time. Bill’s poem “West of Here” is a hinge to connect two worlds. A hinge to allow us passage from one world to another. From Bill’s world into my world? From Bill’s world into your world? From Bill’s world into every world?

This poem, *all* of Bill’s poems make all these worlds seamless.

(From a presentation on “The Importance of Place” presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sitka Reunion, September 3, 2011, and then reprised for the Friends of William Stafford Annual Poetry & Potluck, September 11, 2011)



*Some day like this might save the world.*  
Ayumi Mikuriya

## Sightings

*The Poets Laureate Anthology*. Edited and with introduction by Elizabeth Hun Schmidt. Foreword by Billy Collins. W.W. Norton and the Library of Congress, 2010.

This hefty volume contains generous selections from all forty-three of the poets laureate of the United States, including, of course, William Stafford, who served from 1970-71, when the office was called the Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress.

The office was created in 1937 by Archibald MacLeish, Schmidt's introduction tells us, and the first laureate was Joseph Auslander (1937-41). In 1986, the office became the Poet Laureate in order to increase its visibility, an accomplishment championed by Spark Matsunaga, a war hero and democratic senator from Hawaii.

One learns that the actual office where the laureates work (there are no specifically required duties) is located in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, which seems quite fitting since, as Schmidt rather astutely points out, "Our very sense of state emerged from the deft and memorable use of language" Thomas Jefferson created in the Declaration of Independence. We also learn two other things about the office space, the juxtaposition of which probably amused Bill. The first is that the office itself has a view Conrad Aiken (consultant from 1950-52) called "the best in Washington." The second is that it is on a "high floor" of a "remote wing" at the end of a hallway lined with rooms used by the teenage pages for the House of Representatives. This seems emblematic of the situation of poetry in America. It has a great vision, a panoramic vista, but is quite difficult to access. American poetry, it would seem, enjoys a spectacular view of the center of power behind a door that is hard to find, much less open.

Billy Collins's predictably amusing foreword contains one sentence about Bill, "[He] raises his voice against the murderous policies of the government, vowing in one poem 'to never kill and call it fate.'" Not a bad legacy.

The entries are arranged in reverse chronological order so the book begins with W.S. Merwin, the laureate before Phil Levine, and ends with Auslander, whose poetry, apparently, was used to sell war bonds. Each laureate's contribution begins with a photograph and a quotation; a biography of several hundred words follows. Bill looks into the reader's eyes, hand on his chin, and says, "I don't have any big or sustained project or any ending revelation that I can tell

you about." We find, a bit to our surprise, that Bill lived in "rural Oregon," where Lewis & Clark College seems to be located. The misapprehension becomes understandable when one looks at the editor's biography in which the only place name mentioned is New York, repeated three times).

Bill, not surprisingly, spent a lot of his time keeping up on the consultant's correspondence, the mail. He wrote a two-page letter to a teacher who had asked him about her young students in doubt about their poetic abilities: "We should not feel competitive, but just right, near, congenial. When we feel right, near, congenial with the next circle outward, we should attempt to move there...." This is sage advice—down to earth, mildly encouraging, possibly helpful.

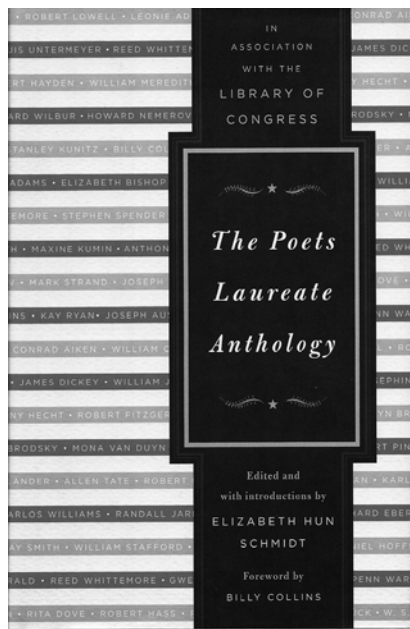
Each poet has a signature poem set in italics at the beginning of his or her selection. Bill's is "Objector." His other poems include "Ask Me," "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," and, of course, "Traveling Through the Dark." One of the decisions the editor made was to include the chestnuts of the laureates, so we find Robert Frost's (1958-59) "The Road Not Taken," William Carlos Williams's (1952) "The Red Wheelbarrow," Elizabeth Bishop's (1949-50) "The Fish," Robert Hayden's (1976-78) "Those Winter Sundays," Mark Strand's (1990-1991) "Eating Poetry." This is a rich volume, old-fashioned in the best sense, one to have on the shelf as a collection of fine American poetry. One could, as well, use it as a classroom anthology, enhanced perhaps by the web of history it spins. I have found turning its pages quite satisfying, comforted, of course, by coming across Bill gazing out at me.

*Twentieth-Century American Poetics: Poets on the Art of Poetry*. Edited by Dana Gioia, David Mason, and Meg Schoerke, with D. C. Stone. McGraw-Hill, 2005.

I found this book on the shelves of the Portland Community College bookstore, where I, among other things, teach poetry and poetry writing. Inside are some of the classic twentieth century pronouncements on poetics, fifty three in all, ones that I grew up with as a poet: Wallace Stevens' "The Nobel Rider and the Sound of Words," Ezra Pound's "A Retrospect," T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Denise Levertov's "Some Notes on Organic Form," Charles Olson's "Projective Verse." These were a kind of gospel for me at one time. Among these is Bill's "Some Arguments Against Good Diction."

In this essay, as many of you know, Bill carries out a raid on the concept of the *le mot juste*, the perfect word in the perfect place, espoused by none other than Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary*. This is the notion that the writer consciously selects from clearly marked slots the exact words and then fits them together just so—the best words in the best order, as Coleridge said. Instead, Bill suggests that in writing a poem, one should surrender to the syllable that reverberates with "many other syllables in contexts that reinforce what the immediate word is doing" and that will, perhaps, create "powerful language." It is a matter of allowing the "successive distortions of language" to "volunteer" "their own kind of cumulative potential" by discovering the "futures" of words. As one might expect, the process is crucial, as is a certain mistrust of the received meanings of words. "*Le mot juste* does not exist," Bill avers, because "For people, the truth does not exist." This is a tough claim but he

(cont. on p. 12)

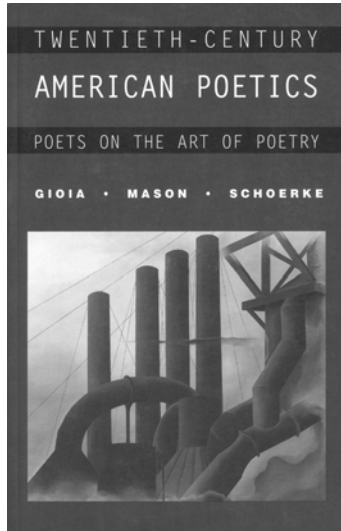


(cont. from p. 11)

means that a single truth, one that fits all, one that is self evident and predetermined, does not exist. If it did, words could not discover new contexts and refresh our individual and contingent sense of the truth, which at times, Bill notes, becomes poetry. Words come in communities and are defined by context, provisionally, not by their innate and fixed meanings. One can see Bill's vision, his democratic, welcoming, nonjudgmental sensibility quite clearly here. His poetics are, in the end, political.

This trenchant, almost mutinous, essay is not out of place in this book. Some of the other essays also sharply question received wisdoms. Mary Kinzie questions the "aimless prosaic experimentation" of much contemporary poetry. Ron Silliman's "The Economy of Poetry" questions the new critical assumptions about the contexts of poetry. Dana Gioia's rather controversial essay, "Can Poetry Matter?" in which Bill's poetry is mentioned as able "to hold its own against anything in the national literature," is an incisive questioning of the poetry subculture, the poebiz, as some say.

One could question, too, why other pieces of Bill's were not used, say, "Writing: The Discovery of Daily Experience," or "What It is Like," or "Writing and Literature: Some Opinions." Perhaps the editors thought Bill's raid on *le mot juste* might stir up the egalitarian aesthetic in some budding poets. I think they're right. Bill's democratic, anti-authoritarian critique of one of the bromides of the writing process, espoused by many of the saints of writing, some of whom companion Bill in this volume, is edifying and essential.



Throngs of birds campaigned,  
their music a tent of sound.

Miho Harada

**Editor's Note:** The two woodcuts on pp. 10 & 12 were done as part of a three-day workshop facilitated by Barbara Schramm and Paul Merchant. The artists are Japanese students at the Academy of International Education based in Osaka, Japan. The 30 or so students in the class illustrated "Malheur Before Dawn." For a look at more woodcuts, go to [williamstaffordarchives.blogspot.com](http://williamstaffordarchives.blogspot.com).

## William Stafford

February 4, 1974

A teacher-poet came today  
And sat at the edge of an unclosed circle.  
He tried to create exchange of language,  
But the twenty of us sat on the fence surrounding  
Like sparrows chilled in winter--  
He probably felt alone in gentle voice,  
But he was implanting warm thoughts  
That grow...

and grow...

and grow....

MICHAEL WENDT

**Editor's Note:** Michael wrote this poem after Bill came to an in-service of Lake Oswego High, Lake Oswego Junior High, and Walugo Junior High English departments in 1974. He sent this poem to Bill as an appreciation. He says that Bill "generously responded in a gentle way." He calls the event "rather memorable" in his forty-five years of teaching and thinks of the poem as a "tribute to a fine gentleman poet."



## On a Church Lawn

Dandelion cavalry, light little saviors,  
baffle the wind, they ride so light.  
They surround a church and outside the window  
utter their deaf little cry: "If you listen  
well, music won't have to happen."

After service they depart singly  
to mention in the world their dandelion faith:  
"God is not big; He is right."

WILLIAM STAFFORD



PHOTO BY LIKA KUZNIK

Margaret Malone and Nicholas (eight weeks old) at Wordstock. Margaret, a writer of fiction and memoir, stopped by the FWS booth, having recently returned from a trip to the Methow River Valley and Bill's poems there. The phrase above her heart is from "Being a Person," published in Even in Quiet Places and reprinted in issue 14.1 of this newsletter.

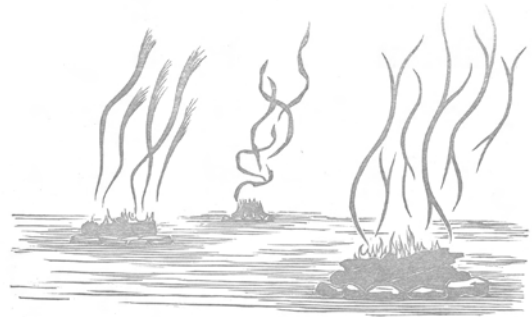
## Smoke Signals

—a dedication—

William Stafford

There are people on a parallel way. We do not see them often, or even think of them often, but it is precious to us that they are sharing the world. Something about how they have accepted their lives, or how the sunlight happens to them, helps us to hold the strange, enigmatic days in line for our own living. It is important that these people know this recognition, but it is also important that no purpose or obligation related to this be intruded into their lives.

This book intends to be for anyone, but especially for those on that parallel way: here is a smoke signal, unmistakable but unobtrusive—we are following what comes, going through the world, knowing each other, building our little fires.



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This is the latest Stafford broadside done by Doug Stow of Paper Crane Press. It costs \$10.00 and can be purchased at our website. You could also contact Leah Stenson, our board member in charge of broadside sales, at [leahstenson@comcast.net](mailto:leahstenson@comcast.net).



PHOTO BY LIKA KUZNIK

Leah Stenson, Tim Barnes, and Joan Maiers at the FWS booth at Wordstock 2011



## News, Notes, and Opportunities

**Planning Summit for William Stafford Centennial in 2014.** There will be a meeting at the US Bank Room at the Central Library in Portland on March 5<sup>th</sup> from 1-4 pm to formulate plans for ways to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of William Stafford's birth. Interested organizations and individuals are encouraged, even implored, to attend.

**Dale Biron**, an executive leadership coach and promotional speaker, has done an **hour and fifteen minute talk/reading/slide show about William Stafford.** He gave it at a Mill Valley, California, community church on August 27<sup>th</sup> of this year and sent Paulann Petersen a link to it. It's quite well done and engaging. He plans to hone it more but this rough-cut version can be viewed and you will see Biron, a handsome fellow with grey at the temples, talking about Bill's life and work, reading quite dynamically some of Bill's poems, and showing slides of Bill with family and friends. The filming is a bit stiff and so the viewer doesn't see some of the slides but this editor found Biron's show quite riveting and thinks any Stafford enthusiast would, too. URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czRbv9D36IM>

Portland poet **Carl Adamshick** has a piece about Bill in *Tin House*, one of the country's finest and most lively literary magazines, published right here in river city. The essay, "**On William Stafford: Conscripted in the Kingdom**," is featured in an ongoing section of the magazine called "Lost and Found." The idea of this section is for contemporary writers to discuss books, writers and even films that have fallen out of the gaze of the current culture, even, god forbid, forgotten. For those who might not know about Stafford, Adamshick offers a lyrical remembrance that concentrates on Bill's experience as a conscientious objector and Adamshick's experience being in the Stafford archives in the Special Collections department at the Lewis & Clark College library. Adamshick conveys rather wonderfully the magic of being among the papers of the prolific and generous genius that was Bill Stafford. Being there is an enabling experience for any writer. A special highlight of the essay is a poem about rocking chairs that Adamshick found among Bill's 20,000 pages of daily writings. You will have to find a copy of *Tin House* to read it and should. This editor extends a hand of thanks to Adamshick for this beautiful piece of writing.

### "Touching A New Kingdom: On William Stafford and Peace."

Poet and essayist **Jeff Gundy**, who has written thoughtfully and often about Bill, gave this piece as a talk at the First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11. This was the same day the Friends of William Stafford had its annual potluck and picnic and struggled to connect that event to the tragedy of the twin towers: poetry and terror, Stafford and premeditated mass murder. Well, Gundy was thinking along the same lines. How might we respond to that event? Not with what David Rothkopf (quoted by Gundy) calls "one of the most profound overreactions in military history," but with the recognition "God does not sort us out according to the political system under which we happen to live." Gundy offers the notion of having "a certain courtesy of the heart," a phrase he heard Bill use, to his Mennonite audience as a response to how the memory

of 9/11 might bring us together in a way that would be good for us all. You can read the whole talk in the Center for Mennonite Writing (CMW) journal. URL: <http://www.mennonitewriting.org/journal/3/5/touching-new-kingdom> or google William Stafford + CMW Journal.

**"Reading with Little Sister: A Reflection."** FWS board member **Scot Siegel** edits an online magazine called "The Untitled Country Review." In the most recent issue (#6), Siegel reviews a poem by Sarah Rehfeldt, "First Snow," using Bill's poem "Reading with Little Sister: A Reflection" as a finding aid, a lense, a helping hand. URL: <http://untitlecountry.blogspot.com>.

**"Light in the Picture: The Gift of William Stafford."** This is a piece by **Naomi Shihab Nye**, a poet and close friend of Bill's, about when Bill invited her to read with him at the Library of Congress as part of a special reading in honor of Robert Penn Warren. Interestingly enough, Nye closes her piece with "West of Here," the same poem Paulann Petersen uses in her piece in this issue, "The Importance of Place."

### Lighting the Fire at 4 AM

In the beginning  
each day  
is the Word:

Kindling upon paper,  
sparked by the heart's  
alchemy of effort

each day in the beginning...

SAM MULLER  
20 FEB.'11

### PERMISSIONS

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Vignette of William Stafford on pages 8, 9, 12, and 13 is from the title page of *You and Some Other Characters*, Honey Brook Press, 1987, and used by permission of the artist, Barbara Stafford.



# BECOME A *Friend of William Stafford*

## MISSION OF FWS

IN THE SPIRIT OF WILLIAM STAFFORD, *we are committed to the free expression of literature and conscience. We seek to share Stafford's work and advance the spirit of his teaching and literary witness. We strive to provide ongoing education in poetry and literature in local schools and communities in ways that will encourage and enrich a broad spectrum of readers and writers. In doing so, we hope to contribute to William Stafford's legacy for generations to come.*

## WHY JOIN?

BY JOINING THE FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD, *you become part of an international community of poetry lovers and writers with broad access to other poetry organizations and events. As a Friend, you'll receive a subscription to our triannual newsletter, filled with poetry and poetry news. In addition, your contribution supports the annual William Stafford Birthday Celebration Readings, maintains our web site, www.williamstafford.org, and helps initiate new projects. We always welcome your volunteer services.*

To join the Friends of William Stafford, renew your friendship, or make a donation, please fill out this form and mail to: FWS, P.O. Box 592, Lake Oswego, OR 97034. Checks payable to "Friends of William Stafford."

### JOIN OR RENEW:

*(Please check ALL appropriate boxes)*

- New     Renewal     Gift  
 Patron \$100/yr     Individual \$35/yr  
 Family \$50/yr     Retired/Student \$20/yr  
 Lifetime \$500

Please add \$5.00/year outside the U.S.

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\*If this *friendship* is a gift, please add your name and address on the line below so that we may send an acknowledgement to the recipient and to you. \*\*If you reside outside the United States, please add any additional postal codes we may need to ensure that you receive your mail.

Giver's Name & Address: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear of FWS?

Volunteer opportunities  Organize poetry readings in your community;  Event help;  Distribute posters/flyers;  Publicize events;  Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome New Friends  
June 2011 – November 2011

Felicia Elam

Jolynn H. Free

Colette Volkema DeNooyer

Quinton Hallet

Bill Young

Joel Nightingale Berning

Steven Hind

FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD  
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Special thanks to Ilka Kuznik

Please email comments, letters,  
news, and information on poetry  
events, awards, etc. to  
[news@WilliamStafford.org](mailto:news@WilliamStafford.org)  
or mail to  
Friends of William Stafford  
P.O. Box 592  
Lake Oswego, OR 97034

## Renew Your Friendship!

Please take a look at the renewal date on your address label. If it is 2011 or earlier, that means your "friendship" contributions are past due. Your contributions help to sustain the mission of Friends of William Stafford, which is to promote the spirit of William Stafford through the annual Birthday Readings, maintain the web site, and other projects. Failure to renew at this time will result in being dropped from the roster, and you will no longer receive the newsletter and other member rewards.

## Stafford Stamp Proposal



### The Importance of Place, by Paulann Peterson



### Scenes from September, the Potluck

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Please notify sender of change of address

## The Grove of Trees

after the Friends of William Stafford meeting

We're trying, Bill, to be your friends.  
Today, seven of us sat in a semicircle  
in a lounge with bookshelves and a Persian rug  
debating how. We've got bylaws and a board,  
a Web site, dues and several ad hoc  
subcommittees. The IRS signed off  
on our lack of profit. But the mission statement  
clunks, it's harder than you think.

We hired a facilitator – a word I bet  
you never in a thousand poems wrote.  
She helped us try to be a grove of trees,  
not a silo or a box. We called out  
core values that sounded fine  
until big words scrawled in black  
on butcher paper had to stand for us.  
Authenticity, someone said. Yes,

and groundedness. And what is it called  
when you stay awake to the world all day?  
*How about failure?* I imagined you saying.  
Or doubt about the heft of big words.  
Please, Bill, don't think less of us  
for trying. We begin each meeting  
by reading aloud one of your poems.  
Sometimes that's the best part

of the day. Remember what you said  
about that yellow flower beside the road?  
The one you admired for its patience  
and its "one great virtue, being only itself."  
Fourteen years, friend. Your one great virtue  
holds. And I side with the facilitator  
about the grove of trees. Just standing there,  
not trying to look like us, or be our friends.

DON COLBURN