



# friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD

A Newsletter For Poets & Poetry  
Volume 17, Issue 2 - Fall 2012

## Looking for William Stafford on the Yard

by Shaun T. Griffin

The late Thomas Ferte introduced me to William Stafford. Tom was the founding editor of *Calapooya Collage*, the eclectic journal that emanated from Western Oregon State College every August. Tom was very close to William, Dorothy, and their children—as were so many Oregonians—but it was through Tom's eyes that I got to know William Stafford. Late in Stafford's life, Tom edited and printed two beautiful books by and for William Stafford from Adrienne Lee Press: *The Long Sigh the Wind Makes* and *Stafford's Road*. The latter were poems to his dear friend from many poets and it is hard not to think of both men as being here still—in fact I often do. I say hello to them and share their stories freely, especially when I'm teaching the prison poetry workshop where such things are ephemeral and for many of the men, this life, the life you and I partake in, has not existed for some time. Anything I can do to make poetry relevant to what they experience is worth doing. I shared these books, I shared them repeatedly, as I did all of the good journals that Tom produced.

I have been looking for William Stafford with the men in the workshop for more than twenty years. Every year we make a concerted effort to find him. We return to one of his essays, read it aloud and try to implement what he said about the process of writing. We read his poems to discover what it means to keep writing, especially when we run into difficulty, which on the yard is everywhere. Reading Stafford in the workshop is a paradox. I remind the men he was a pacifist, a conscientious objector when it was not cool—and still he found his way to poetry. Maybe it is the example of his life I want them to emulate: write, whatever the consequence. Then of course, I paraphrase his admonition: lower your standards and keep writing because to write poetry in prison is just as radical a choice as he made to choose peace over war.

I have taught this poetry workshop for nearly twenty-five years. Two of the men just went up for parole—again for the fifth or sixth time—and may or may not be granted parole by the time I return. They have been with me for the duration. This

requires infinite patience—to practice an art form inside when there is little chance of release. It is almost a Buddhist principle to rid oneself of all things save this kind of deliberate practice. Something in Stafford's poetry and essays defies the logic of the outside world and embraces this patience, this willingness to be vulnerable among people and things, to observe or say what must be said. This quality of being a resilient observer is yet another part of Stafford's character to emulate.

Stafford's ideas are antithetical to being in prison because they require personal risk, something that takes months and years to develop in the workshop. The two men who have been with me the longest are now teachers. They lead the others; they show them how to approach this incredibly demanding art of poetry with patience. I listen to them and think they have more knowledge than most who study this subject in college. But I am biased: I have watched them sift through years of practice set in this place where hope, even the hope of finding release, is an anathema.

What saves them, just as I imagine what saved Stafford, is the imagination: they see the particles of light beyond the chapel where we meet and try to absorb what he and so many others have written. They lean on these writers for instruction, exposure to technique, and for a critical perspective on the melancholy journey through much of what passes as poetry. Occasionally we get fresh perspectives: a young Iraq Vet has joined the workshop. His work reminds me of an early Brian Turner. He has every reason to be

(cont. on p. 2)



This wood engraving by Elizabeth Coberly is in the display on the making of *The Design of the Oriole*, a chapbook published in 1977 by Night Heron Press. It is part of *Poet's Letters: The Correspondence of William Stafford* now on exhibition at the Multnomah Country Library's main branch. See News, Notes, and Opportunities for more information.

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*Friends of William Stafford is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness of poetry and literature in the spirit of the legacy, life and works of the late award-winning poet William Stafford.*

(cont. from p. 1)

angry, to be a witness when the thought of war is foreign to most of his generation and yet, he is a witness inside, which it seems is also the perspective of the poet. Last week I shared with the men the late Vietnamese poet, Nguyen Chi Thien, who was shackled for most of his adult life before finally being granted asylum in the United States. It was the imagination that kept him alive. He talked often about being in conversation with the French poets and then did the unthinkable: memorized all of his poems because he had no hope of being released. This is an old story in many languages—memorizing poetry to stay alive.

William Stafford came to Nevada in July, 1989, for a writer's conference. He worked tirelessly over the two days. My good friend Bill Cowee, the conference organizer, was beaming because Stafford had made the trip from Oregon to little Carson City. What struck me was Stafford's vision of poetry in the American grain: wrought from particulars, he wove a universe of localities far beyond the Pacific Northwest. When I started the workshop a few months later, I tried to relate the many anecdotes and memories of other Stafford encounters. What finally emerged was a poet of disciplined awareness and joy—the man who woke early to write every day and the poet who articulated the experience of his senses. It was not unusual unless, of course, you tried to do it. Before he left for home, Stafford wrote Bill Cowee a poem on the conference letterhead. It was an evocation of the high desert where we live and more—an unspoken urge to uncover its beauty. When I shared that poem with the men in the workshop, they were awed because they felt like it was their poem, too. It transcended landscape to behold, as a child would, this place.

When Bill Cowee died, the poem was given to a family member or friend. I had not seen it for years. All I had was the memory of those Stafford lines written in his hand, almost effortlessly. It took seven years to find the poem in Stafford's posthumous collection, *Even in Quiet Places*, but that doesn't surprise me. Stafford didn't write for the literary lights so a poem—even a really good one, which it was, could be left in Carson City as a gift. When I began to work on this essay I called Bill Cowee's indefatigable caregiver, Terry Forde, to ask if she knew where the poem might be. It was stored in her garage with Bill Cowee's papers. She gave me the poem, which I cherish because of Stafford's presence in this place, then and now. Here is the last stanza from "Looking Out in the Morning: Carson City":

But the universe turned over once and stayed,  
when I looked up and my child across all  
that ever happened or would happen was staring  
everything that there is into my eyes.

In 1991, the year Tom Ferté published his two-volume set, Michael Markee and Vincent Wixon produced two videos on William Stafford: *The Life of the Poem* and *What the River Says* with the helpful teaching notes inside. When we watched these videos in the workshop, I no longer had to transcribe who William Stafford was. The men could see that he cared deeply for his craft and gave them repeated examples of how to do it. They followed his practice of observation and careful movement beyond simple description.

When the proverbial question arose about how Stafford sprang from the deer to all of us when we read "Traveling through the Dark," I deferred because there is something unanswerable about that poem—just as there is in so many of his poems. That's how it should remain. I am not here to dissect—Wordsworth said this long before—but I challenged them to pay attention, to listen to the reverberations in his lines, the tension, the apparent ease with which line followed line, and the deceptively uncertain quality of their revelations.

These are poetic qualities to aspire to but Stafford made them seem *possible*. That's why I turned to him: on the yard so little is possible. The workshop is the last station before feeling shuts down.

I ask the men to return to the language of feeling, "the membrane/ between violence and desire," to quote Richard Shelton, himself a veteran of over three decades of teaching prison workshops. Only at this most vulnerable place can the men begin to say what hell has become for them. Stafford made writing this down possible. He never veered from what was just beyond cognition—that well of unconscious belief and foment. Like him, they had to trust the process of writing, to reflect upon their situation, and then proceed outward. This gray-haired man who kept telling them they could validate their struggle. This is a powerful tool when you have so few tools to believe in. The young guys in the workshop don't know that I have shared Stafford for years, but they will hear him soon. They will hear him when we read his work again

this January in honor of his birth. They will follow the example of the older men in the workshop who understand him to be a mentor. They will read his poems when I leave the yard.

Tom Ferté did something else for my understanding of William Stafford: he opened up an entire galaxy of writers from the Pacific Northwest, people who made good books in Stafford country. They were drawn to the annual publication of his journal that took place at Powell's Bookstore. It was something to behold: Grey Elliot reciting a Dickinson poem on demand, Dorothy Stafford watching William or Kim read, Tom Ferté heralding most everyone including the unofficial king of Portland, Bud Clark, Carolyn Kizer shining her light on the next young poet or poetess, and readings by Ingrid Wendt, Ralph Salisbury, John Daniel, Joseph Soldati, Paulann Petersen, Carlos Reyes, Vern Rutsala, Ursula K. Le Guin, Lisa Steinman, Jane Glazer, Madeline DeFrees and how many more—people for whom poetry was necessary like rain. I learned that Stafford came from this shared conviction that you could write and belong to a place. And for reasons I will never understand, Tom invited me into this community so that by the time Stafford finally reached Nevada, I could not help but think of him in this context. There was the man I knew, to be sure, a poet of many minds, never easy to pin down or explain, but a poet who nonetheless was a member of a community of writers and readers. These people were friends and colleagues and had one thing in common: the written word.

Much as Stafford made writing seem possible for the men in the workshop, his community helped me to imagine there could be a similar community of writers here in Nevada. Something must



Shaun Griffin

be said for this: this is seed planting. This is not a riddle; it is the cultivation of a place in which we can write and co-exist as writers. Poetry requires supreme, isolating effort and hence my desire for such a community. Nevada does not have a poet of Stafford's stature and this place surely cannot be the green one that he came from. But his personal commitment to his family and friends, his involvement in the political landscape, his willingness to be an emissary for poetry: these are what I remember when I stoke the fires of community here at home. I'm grateful for his lesson. So are the men in the workshop. Above all Stafford taught us to pay attention: the poems cannot wait.

**Editor's note:** Shaun Griffin is the co-founder and director of Community Chest, a rural social justice agency serving northwestern Nevada since 1991. For over twenty years he has taught a poetry workshop at Northern Nevada Correctional Center, and published a journal of their work, *Razor Wire*. He recently completed editing a book of essays on the late poet and critic, *Hayden Carruth: From Sorrow's Well*, to be published by the U. of Michigan Press in the spring of 2013. *This Is What the Desert Surrenders, New and Selected Poems*, came out from Black Rock Press in 2012.

Shortly after Shaun submitted this essay, one of the two men who has been in his workshop for over two decades was granted parole.

## Kooser and Stafford: A Literary Friendship

by Shelley Reece

When in the fall of 2011 Ted Kooser, American poet laureate 2004-2006, presented his manuscripts and papers to the Love Memorial Library, he commented on their value this way: "correspondence with literary figures like William Stafford . . . is likely to be the most important and enduring aspect of [this] collection" (*Lincoln Journal Star* 2011). Mind you, he was speaking of fifty bound volumes of manuscripts and correspondence between him and others that he kept between 1966 and 2010.

This public acknowledgement of Stafford gives just a hint of a long-time friendship between the two, beginning in the early seventies when Stafford and Kooser met at a writing conference at South Dakota State University in Brookings, South Dakota. Kooser remembers "especially how gracious [Stafford] was toward us younger writers, and how he sat in the front row during our readings and paid close attention and asked thoughtful questions." In a subsequent letter, Kooser writes, "You have had my ear for at least ten years now and I am listening for your new work" (October 1975).

In the sampling of their correspondence I have seen between 1975 and 1984, perhaps the most interesting exchange between the two came when Robert Bly was in Lincoln giving readings and doing workshops, and he discussed "Traveling through the Dark." In his reading of the poem, Bly considered that Stafford's family or other people were in the car, and he defended that reading by Stafford's use of the word "group" and the line "that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead." But Kooser read the poem that the speaker was alone, and though other readers have the right to their own interpretation of the poem,

Kooser writes, "I really would like to know if I am misreading the poem" (February 13, 1978).

In response, Stafford offers his own reading, which I quote in its entirety here, and I offer the whole paragraph, and more, because this is quite unlike his responses when I have heard him asked and have read what he wrote about interpreting his own work. He is often more oblique. Here is what he says:

About my poem "Traveling through the Dark," my own feeling (though I'm ready for anyone to fish out their own any time) is that the speaker is alone in the car, and that when he says "our group" he is saying two things, the immediate one being just whatever is suddenly preciously there—deer, fawn, car, engine, exhaust—whatever can hurriedly be clustered together by someone feeling abruptly scarily alone. The other part of a meaning, or shade of a meaning I feel is that the speaker feels a kind of representative, suddenly, for all those others who must depend on isolated individuals carrying out their obligations even when alone—so that our group hears the wilderness listen any time we become aware of how alone we sentient beings are in a world with cliffs, rocks, death around.

Well—I hadn't tried before to spell it out for myself. By the way, I plead with Bly to keep on feeling kindly toward my poem, no matter how mistaken I am in my fumbling back toward it . . .

This passage is iconically modest and straightforward. It speaks eloquently for itself.

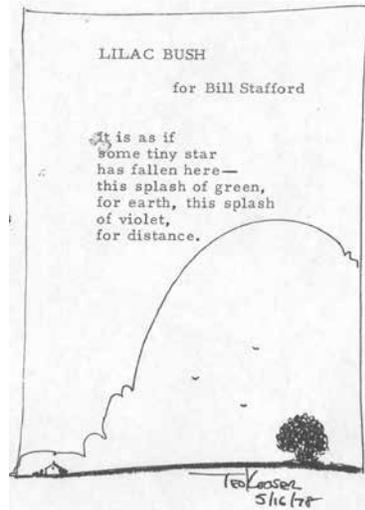
The affinity between these two poets shows up in more ways than exchanges of letters. When Kooser's *The Poetry Home Repair Manual* came out in 2005 (University of Nebraska Press), one passage shows a more pertinent, though less explicit connection between the two poets. Kooser uses Stafford's fishing analogy to say something about where poetry comes from:

The poet William Stafford described it [the source of poetry] as being like fishing: you throw out your line and wait for a little tug. Maybe all you get is a minnow, three or four words that seem to have a little magic, but even that can be enough to get the writing started. And a minnow can be pretty good bait for bigger fish.

Anyone who has read from Stafford's four books about writing published by the University of Michigan Press, will find that passage sounding familiar. And that is partly, I think, because Kooser and Stafford share a firm grass rootedness and fundamental belief in the plain style.

As a fitting finish to these short notes about a literary friendship, I include from their correspondence Ted Kooser's poem "Lilac Bush" for Bill Stafford.

Special thanks goes to a long-time friend in Lincoln, Nebraska—Morrie Tuttle, who describes himself as "a back office insurance employee" and who was a professional colleague of Ted Kooser. They ate lunch together weekly for a number of years. Morrie has told me any number of times how at those lunches and casually otherwise Kooser spoke with affection about William Stafford. Without Morrie sending me the *Lincoln Journal Star* articles about the Kooser archive, I would not have had the information that led to this piece of work.



## Susan McKee Reese, Now Boarding

Susan McKee Reese, poet and assistant professor of English at Portland State University, has joined the board of the Friends of William Stafford. Susan was born in Tillamook, OR, and grew up in White Salmon, WA, where she was the valedictorian of Columbia High School. She attended Lewis and Clark College and was briefly in one of Bill's classes. She took Greek dancing with Kit Stafford and has a vague memory of visiting Bill's house and seeing the couch he wrote on but thinks this might also be mythology at work. She remembers thinking he was part leprechaun when she would see him stopping to look at something as he walked about the campus.

After graduation, Susan worked a while in insurance and then got a job as a teaching assistant and Jill of all trades at St. Francis

Parish School. Though bitten by the teaching bug, she went on to work for nine years in real estate. Toward the end of those years, she found herself watching *Dead Poets Society* one night with her husband Dave. She said to him, "That's what I want to do." He responded, "Then do it."

So she did, taking a couple of classes at PSU in the early 90s, encouraged she makes clear, by

former PSU professor and FWS board member, Shelley Reece. She went on to earn a masters degree in English. She then worked in the PSU writing center and was a "roads scholar," meaning she taught classes at three different colleges. In 1996, she was given a one year full-time contract at PSU and has been teaching in that capacity ever since. In 2006, she received an MFA from Pacific University and was awarded an assistant professorship. At Pacific she studied with Dorianne Laux, Joseph Millar, Vern Rutsala (a colleague of Bill's at Lewis & Clark for many years), and Peter Sears (an original member of the board of FWS).

At PSU Susan has taught Irish literature, poetry, fiction, drama, and Canadian literature. She has a special interest in writing and healing and finds an affinity with Bill in this. "My theology has become poetry," she told this editor, and recited lines from "Why I Am Happy," "There's a lake somewhere / so blue and far nobody owns it . . . / and I know where it is." The poem reminds her of a lake she loves near Kamloops, where she goes with her family to replenish her spirit. Besides Dave, Susan's family includes their twenty-eight-year-old daughter Brin, a surfer, snow-boarder, and lover of the outdoors who lives in Seaside, OR.

Susan took great pleasure in telling of attending a reading by Seamus Heaney when she was in Ireland some years ago. She spoke with him afterward, and when he heard where she was from, he said, "There's a poet in Oregon I quite admire, William Stafford." Susan is inspired by Stafford's "words powerful for peace, understanding—and nature." "There are people," she said toward the close of our talk, with a generous smile, "that you connect with and want to go on a journey with." The Friends of William Stafford are delighted to be on that journey with her.

### Paradise

Before we ever enjoyed it,  
before we noticed the breeze  
lightly spanking the aspen groves,  
or the red berry wreaths 'round the bases of the pines,  
before the wild daisies emerged  
from the soft mosses beneath our feet,  
before breathlessness became awe,

the loons, who had a head start on knowing,  
continued to provide the soundtrack,  
filled the nights as our heads touched our pillows.

Flying squirrels dropped like paratroopers at dusk,  
scrambled into treetops,  
and one very blue heron greeted every sunrise,  
knitted himself from tree to tree.

If we can only stay awake long enough,  
it becomes clear;  
we were never expelled from the garden.

SUSAN MCKEE REESE

### Valedictory

for any graduating class

If you were not meant  
to follow:

Be unconventional,  
in a mild-mannered way

Put yourself at risk, emotionally  
and intellectually, simultaneously

Take a leadership role:  
say unpopular things

while nodding insistently,  
and lending a hand.

SCOT SIEGEL



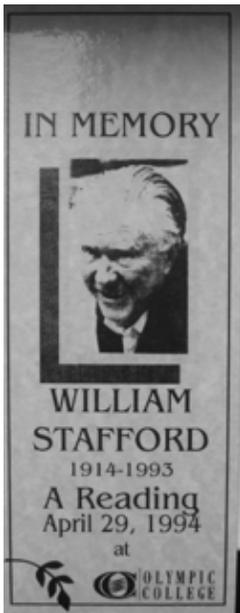
PHOTO BY IRKA KUZNIK

## Scot Siegel, Deboards

Scot Siegel has stepped down from the board of FWS. He joined the board in 2008 and served as treasurer most selflessly and proficiently for four years. Since he came onto the board, Scot has published two full-length collections of poetry, *Some Weather* (Plainview Press, 2008) and *Thousands Flee California Wildflowers* (Salmon Poetry, 2012), and two chapbooks, *Untitled Country* (Pudding House, 2009) and *Skeleton Says* (Finishing Line, 2010). He has also been the editor of the online literary magazine *Untitled Country*, which has just posted its final issue. "The Way It Is Among Your Friends Since You've Gone," dedicated to FWS, can be found in issue 12.3 of this newsletter. "Valedictory" is from *Some Weather*. We wish Scot the very best and thank him for his contributions to keeping the legacy of William Stafford vibrant.

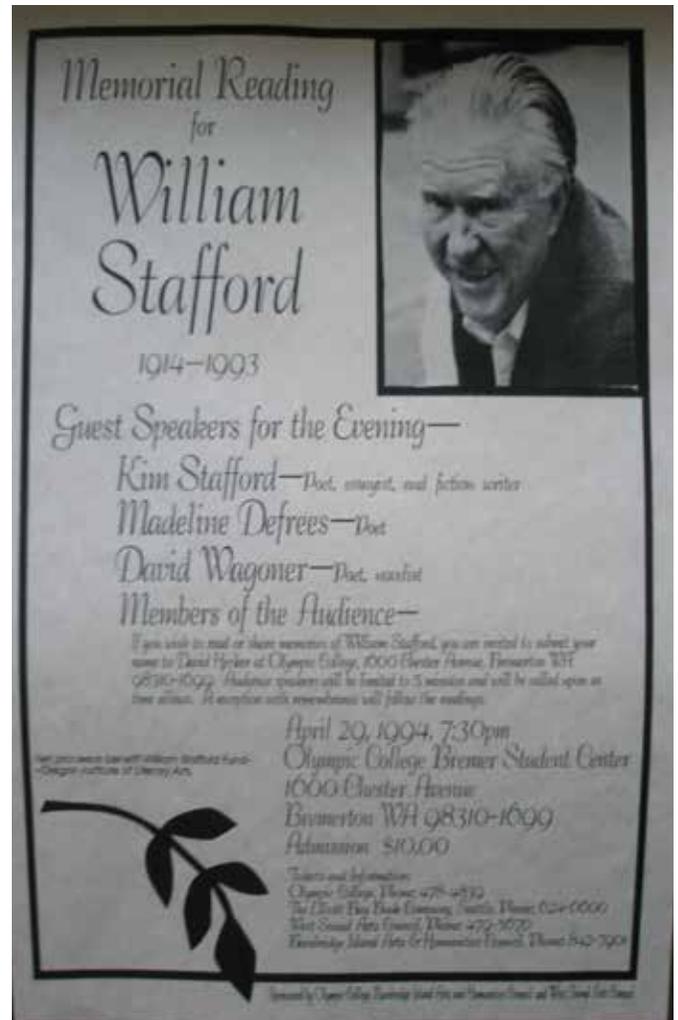
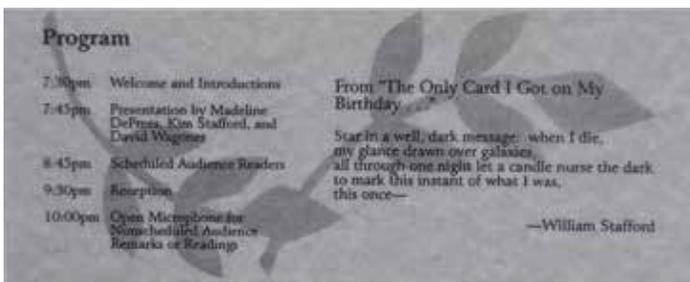
## Host and Organizer, David Hecker

David Hecker, poet, novelist, and memoirist, will take over in 2013 from Neal Baker as the host of the William Stafford birthday celebration at the Bainbridge Island Public Library. Hecker hosted and organized a Stafford memorial on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1994, a few months after Bill's death. In an email to this editor he wrote this about the event and his reasons for organizing it:



"I organized and hosted the event because I felt strongly that William Stafford had advanced the cause of poetry in the State of Washington. I co-founded and directed the Olympic College Writers' Conference from 1992-1997. I asked William Stafford to give the keynote address at the 1992 conference, and he agreed to do so as well as to lead a poetry workshop. His presence gave the conference full attendance by writers of poetry and prose and made it easy for me to get other session presenters in both poetry and prose writing. It also made it easy for me to attract other keynoters for subsequent conferences. Denise Levertov, Madeline DeFrees, Craig Lesley, and Marvin Bell were the others."

David sent along the accompanying graphics of the poster and the bookmark that were part of the 1992 event.



### Reading with Little Sister: A Recollection

The stars have died overhead in their great cold.  
Beneath us the sled whispers along. Back there  
our mother is gone. They tell us, "If you hold on  
the dogs will take you home." And they tell us never  
to cry. We'll die too, they say, if we  
are ever afraid. All night we hold on.  
The stars go down. We are never afraid.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

**Editor's note:** This poem is reprinted in Scot Siegel's online literary journal, *Untitled Country* (issue 6) in which he reviewed "First Snow," a poem by Sarah Rehfeldt. In his review he makes a comparison between the two poems; you can find the review at < <http://untitledcountry.blogspot.com/2011/10/issue-6-one-act-first-snow.html> > or just Google Untitled Country.

## FWS at Wordstock

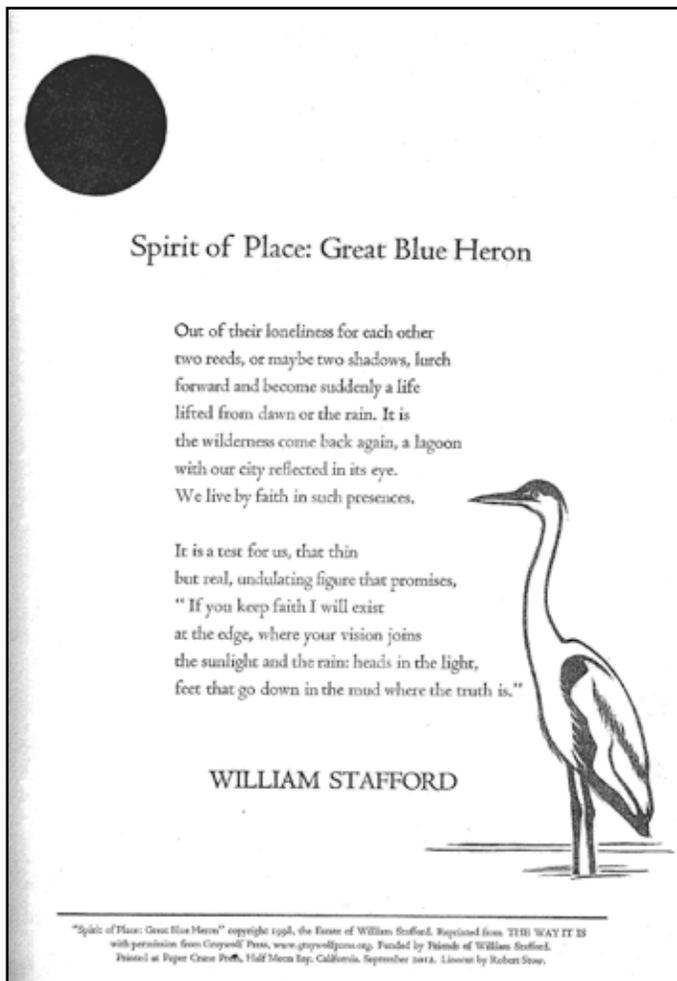


PHOTOS BY ILKA KUZNIK

Jim Scheppke, Tim Barnes, and Leah Stenson at the FWS booth



A friend of William Stafford buying a broadside and another reading one



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).

### Brian Booth Memorial—Addendum

by Tim Barnes

I have become aware of several things that should have been included in the “Friends Memorial” I wrote for the last issue of the newsletter (17.1). The first things come from Patti Wixon. I quote an email she sent when I asked her about Brian’s connection to FWS:

“While an active Trustee of FWS, Brian was key to three large events honoring William Stafford’s legacy. 1) He helped organize the first annual gathering of Friends of William Stafford, on August 24, 1997, held at Lewis & Clark College, where Brian gave a testimonial honoring William Stafford’s importance. 2) In preparation of the National Council of Teachers of English holding their Northwest Regional Conference in Portland, OR, the board of FWS approached the hosting organization—Oregon Teachers of English—for permission to have a room set aside as a hospitality room dedicated to “the spirit of William Stafford” in which conference participants could find solitude away from the thousand conference attendees—a quiet room with large framed broadsides of Stafford’s poems (a touring exhibit presented by Visual Arts Resources in Eugene, OR) where participants could read Stafford’s words, could write on a yellow tablet or computer notes about Stafford’s influence in their lives, or just think in a quiet space for awhile. FWS was turned down twice for use of a conference room in this way until Brian Booth convinced the co-chairs and boards of the conference that this would provide a unique and important component to the conference for many teachers from many states. The conference feedback and evaluations proved Brian’s stance was accurate well beyond even FWS’ hopes. 3) While Brian was chairman of the Oregon Parks Commission, he met with Chris Friend, Interpretive Program Coordinator, Tillamook State Forest, who was awarded funds to build an Interpretive Center at Gales Creek Overlook. Brian convinced Chris he should include Stafford’s poem “The Tillamook Burn” at the Center, in the manner Stafford’s poems were used at sites along the Methow River in Washington. Friend worked with the FWS president for several months to select several poems (and permissions to use) in addition to “The Tillamook Burn” for

the Interpretive Center. The Board of FWS and members at large were invited to the June 19, 1999, dedication of the Gales Creek Overlook Interpretive Center with Stafford's poem. While Brian was out of the state on that date so could not speak at the dedication, his influence in both the funding and the importance of including poetry at that site was noted by Chris Friend."

I received this note from Doug Stow of Paper Crane Press in response to the last issue of the newsletter. He had told me the following story, and I just plain forgot it. I hope this makes amends: "Brian Booth's passing is sad. I never knew him very well but he's the one who is responsible for my involvement with the Friends. I was at the California Antiquarian Book Fair in 1997 (I think) and was in Mark Wessell's booth. I was looking for books on William Stafford. Mark didn't have anything I didn't have but recommended I check out Charlie Seluzicki's booth. As I approached Charlie's booth, he was talking with a dapper gentleman who turned out to be Brian Booth. (I'd never met Charlie before either.) When I revealed that I was looking for Stafford books, Brian asked if I knew about the Friends of William Stafford. I didn't. Brian gave me an address (I think it was Vince and Patty Wixon's) and I soon received an application in the mail. When I filled it out, there were options for various forms of participation. After "other" I wrote I'd like to print broadsides. You know the rest of the story. Patty called and asked if I was serious. I said yes and the first broadside I did was 'A Ritual to Read to Each Other.' A broadside I had been wanting to print."

Finally, I'd like to mention that Bill left \$1500 to the Oregon Institute for the Literary Arts (OILA), now Literary Arts, Inc., in his will, and FWS recently gave \$100 to Literary Arts to honor Brian and his legacy. There may be more addenda to come since Brian's contributions to Oregon literature were legion.

## On Turned Backs at the Poets' Table

In memory of William Stafford

It's nothing personal, I'm sure. Why should they concern themselves with me—an intrusion into already too full lives—late with the rent—again—an unwelcome diagnosis—a dear friend's troubles—a career on the move.

My poems unknown but to a small circle of friends, no other accomplishments to speak of, well beneath the notice of the Stars. I eat my soup in silence, eavesdrop as best I can.

Then the famous poet sits down, sees I am alone, gives me his generous attention, gentle questions, even as the bodies swivel in our direction.

May I be as kind as he, attentive to the least and the alone.

ELIZABETH RABY

## Cutting Loose

for James Dickey

Sometimes from sorrow, for no reason, you sing. For no reason, you accept the way of being lost, cutting loose from all else and electing a world where you go where you want to.

Arbitrary, sound comes, a reminder that a steady center is holding all else. If you listen, that sound will tell where it is, and you can slide your way past trouble.

Certain twisted monsters always bar the path—but that's when you get going best, glad to be lost, learning how real it is here on the earth, again and again.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

**Editor's note:** Daniel Sperry performed this poem at this year's poetry and potluck and it can be found on his CD, *When Your Life Becomes Poetry*, which also includes "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," as well as poems by Kabir, Rumi, Robert Bly, Billy Collins, Jane Kenyon, and Naomi Shihab Nye.



## Why We Dropped the Bombs

To win the war, of course, assured the grandmother. An invasion would've cost a million American lives, put in her brother

and they started it, insisted his wife.

Showed the Russians we had it, pointed out the father and would use it, added his cousin.

Because they were Japanese, offered the son.

A lack of imagination, murmured the wind, again.

GEORGE STALEY

## At Our Best: The Poetry Potluck

The sun was glad to lean into our pavilion on this fine day in mid-September. Foothills Park was ripe with families and grass and trees fully engaged in translating the light. The Willamette moved approvingly past the Stafford Stones that winked in and out of the corners of our eyes. We gathered our best selves in Bill's name once again.

Don Colburn, master of ceremonies and master of introductions, began by reading short selections from Bill's daily writings collected in *Every War Has Two Losers*, one of which, at least, follows:

One must learn to waver.

Seeing one side at a time, we blunder. Truth has no perspective.  
Sure, there is darkness in the world, but when I read I use the light.

A champion is just someone who hasn't met a live lion.

On a battlefield the flies don't care who wins.



PHOTOS BY ILKA KUZNIK

Daniel Sperry

Don's introduction to Paulann was a flourish of local genius, ending with a short poem by one of her predecessors as Oregon Poet Laureate, Edwin Markham. I quote it below because it fits Paulann's way of being, and Bill's, and because the man who wrote one of the most famous poems of the Progressive Era, "The Man with the Hoe," has almost completely vanished from the 21<sup>st</sup> century anthologies of American literature. (See facing page) Paulann read the newest FWS broadside from Paper Crane Press, "Spirit of Place: Great Blue Heron," thanking Doug and Margaret Stow, who were on their annual northern pilgrimage and in attendance.

Paulann, thinking about the role of a poet laureate, the endeavor of being an ambassador of poetry—her job and Bill's—asked rhetorically, why poetry? Why a poetry month, a poet laureate? Why did Bill write poetry? Why do we? The answer: "Because poetry speaks the language of us at our best."



David Hedges reading "Escaping from Eddyville"



Karen Braucher

The special guest of the day was Daniel Sperry, cellist and poet and, in Don Colburn's word, an "evocateur" extraordinaire. Sperry, based in Ashland, travels the country performing a mixture of music and poetry in houses and halls and, as was richly evident, city parks. Sperry interpreted a suite of Stafford poems, including "Cutting Loose," "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," "Spirit of Place," and "You Reading This, Be Ready." As he read and stroked his cello, the deep pull of the strings vibrated in our collective chests and a spiritual sense grasped the pavilion. The sunlight swam in the arbor



The assembled after salad

and the cottonwoods trembled down by the Stafford Stones along the river. The wind lifted our hair and the skin of our blouses and shirts. Tears warmed some eyes and more than one person felt the room widen and thought they saw Bill out of the watery corner of an eye, maybe because Dorothy was there, too, and that was good.

And then it was over and Dennis Schmidling and Jim Scheppeke, a new FWS board member, spoke about the plans for the Stafford Centennial in 2014, encouraging people to involve themselves in organizing events. They also spoke of two other projects, a writing contest sponsored by Ooligan Press (see News, Notes and Opportunities) and the Oregon Reads recommendations of several Stafford books in 2014.

Then we broke for lunch and it seemed most people's best idea was a salad. There



Tom Lavoie

were potato salads, broccoli salads, and fruit salads in profusion. There were squash salads, pepper salads, and tomato salads galore. There were polenta salads, pea salads, cucumber salads, and pasta salads aplenty. There was conversation, crunching, and good cheer.



Zahra Mehdikhan

We regrouped for the open reading, graciously emceed by Paulann. Readers included Karen Braucher, David Hedges, Jerry and Martha Gatchell, Shelley Peters, Rosemary Lombard, George Staley, Joan Maiers, Margot and Tom Lavoie, Jim Fleming, Helen Schmidling, Willa Schneberg, John Fiedler, and two surprise readers, Alfredo Ferranté, who

happened to be passing by with his son and read a poem he wrote in 1974, and Zahra Mehdikhan, who recited a poem about love and wine written by Fereydoon Moshiri, a twentieth century Persian poet noted for bringing together classical and contemporary Persian poetry.

And then it was time for the lottery but this editor's head was so full of poems he does not remember the winners. They won some wonderful baskets of books and some beautiful broadsides and are probably so busy reading they don't need recognition.



PHOTOS BY ILKA KUZNIK

The salad table

## Outwitted

He drew a circle to shut me out—  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in.

EDWIN MARKHAM  
1852-1940

## A Telephone Line Grows Cold

In Memory of William Stafford

I.  
Second month after your death,  
from dog-days to frost-on-the-gourd already,  
I arrived in my rental car unannounced  
on your sidling street above Lake Oswego.  
Home and home, Bill, we kept in touch  
over the years, "intersecting" the best we could,  
but now all the news I brought seemed cold,  
and of all the questions I never asked you,  
only the silliest remained:

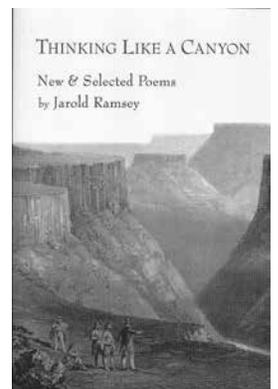
"When you write before dawn  
enrolled on that famous sofa  
how can your ballpoint pen function properly  
writing uphill like that?"

Once, friend, I really wanted to know.

II.  
Both cars gone, yours and Dorothy's,  
a week's newspapers piled behind the screendoor.  
Why had I come here? What  
would I say, or ask?  
Your kindly house, once full of books and flowers,  
humped on its lawn, impenetrable as stone.  
And yet, as I turned to go, in some dark interior,  
a phone began to ring, and rang, and rang,  
emptying room after room with its ignorant summons  
from someone who did not know you'd gone—  
and in the silence after the ringing,  
inside that house grown vast as the Great Plains,  
I swear I heard your calm voice answering us all:  
*"All writing is uphill, friends,  
and the words must percolate up, like love"*

JAROLD RAMSEY

**Editor's note:** This poem was read by Helen Schmidling at the poetry potluck. It is from Bill's long-time friend Jarold Ramsey's new collection, *Thinking Like a Canyon: New and Selected Poems, 1973-2010* published this year by Antrim House. It's a lovely collection and includes a poem dedicated to Dorothy. The poem above was printed in a previous newsletter but is worth reprinting on the occasion of Ramsey's new collection.



## Poetry, Pastoral Care, and a Few Other Things

by Tim Barnes

*The Poet's Gift: Toward the Renewal of Pastoral Care.* By Donald Capps. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

At the 2010 William Stafford birthday celebration at the Multnomah Central Library, a handsome, dark-haired young man named Joel Nightingale Berning, a student at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, gave a talk called "William Stafford as Minister." Now a chaplain of pastoral care and education at New York Presbyterian Hospital, Berning spoke of how he used Bill's poetry as a touchstone in writing his essays on aspects of chaplaincy. In essence, his understanding of the meaning and purpose of pastoral care was shaped by Stafford's thought, the wisdom in his work.

A strict definition of pastoral care would be "the ministry of care and counseling provided by pastors, chaplains, and other religious leaders to members of their church or congregation." A broader definition would be "where people offer help and caring to others" and can be applied to "listening, supporting, encouraging, befriending."<sup>1</sup> In an interview in *You Must Revise Your Life*, "The Poet as Religious Moralizer," Stafford tells Clinton Larsen, a professor at Brigham Young University, "Religion is serious poetry.... at its highest it turns important; and important involvement with language, use of language for significant human experience, merges inevitably into poetry." Stafford knew that the line between scripture and literature, like the line between prayer and poetry, is sometimes hard to draw. The root of the word *religion* means to link or bind, as in ligament. If one takes the capital R out of religion, it is easy to see how poetry is relevant to spiritual care, to the shepherding of souls, to the care and guidance of humans being.

This is why one finds poetry, Stafford's in particular, at the center of *The Poet's Gift*. Along with the poetry of Denise Levertov, Donald Capps, a professor of pastoral theology at the Princeton Theological Seminary, uses Stafford's poetry to present perceptions and insights into how those involved in pastoral care can do their work well, perhaps even better than before. His purpose is to focus on contemporary poets in order to "explore the relevance and significance of their work for pastoral care" because he believes "poetry can inform our understanding of what pastoral care is all about." His thesis is that the poetry of Stafford and Levertov "speaks to the same life issues that pastors are concerned with and that poetry's manner of addressing these issues can be instructive for pastors."

The book develops in six parts, an introduction and five chapters richly textured with poems, mostly in their entirety. His goal is not a literary analysis but a consideration of how the perceptions presented by the poems offer ways to further more effective means

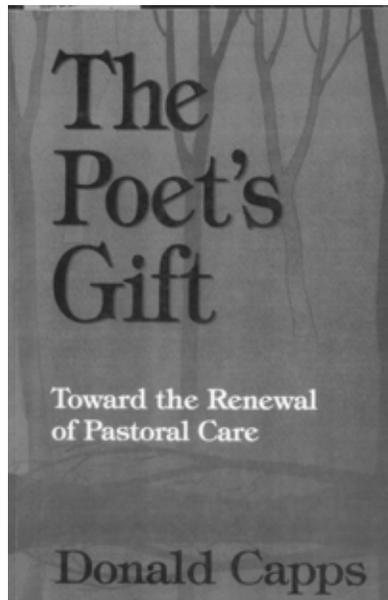
of approaching fundamental issues of pastoral care. Three of the chapters use Stafford's poetry and two use Levertov's. The chapters engaging Stafford's poems explore vocational self-awareness, the nonjudgmental acceptance of loss, and the relationship between freedom and wisdom. Those working with Levertov's poetry concern listening to the physicality of the body and listening to unheard voices, particularly those of women. The reasons why Capps uses Levertov's poetry for certain issues is revealing, but first let's focus on two of the Stafford chapters.

Chapter one, "The Self We Bring to Our Vocation," is based on the idea that "one's pastoral care is profoundly informed by one's awareness of who he or she is" and that "most difficulties pastors face...arise when the pastor forgets that he or she is a person." In other words, self-awareness directly connects to the quality of pastoral care one gives. How one see oneself affects how one cares for others. The problem would seem to be, particularly because pastoral care so often involves being a representative of a church, a faith, and therefore God, that the pastor misunderstands and perhaps abuses his or her notion of how to do God's work out of a lack of understanding of the limits and location of the self.

This chapter features a number of poems about Stafford's childhood: "Thinking for Berky," "My Mother Was a Soldier," "Listening," "Remembering Brother Bob," "Aunt Mabel," "The Wanderer Awaiting Preferment," among them, drawn mostly from *Traveling through the Dark*, *The Rescued Year*, and *A Glass Face in the Rain*. Capps makes several thoughtful observations in this chapter. He finds the tension between Stafford's father, Earl, and his mother, Ruby, instructive as the "two forces" from which Stafford's vocation is born. From his father, he learned the value of attentive listening to the world, to the "soft wild night." From his

mother, he learned to accept himself and how to lose, "to embrace the freedom of being who one really and truly is." This is a clear tension in Stafford's poetry and a number of poems show his awareness of it. These feelings, these forces, are part of who he is as a poet.

Capps also finds Stafford's "self designation" as a wanderer enlightening. It seems to have allowed Stafford to see his town, his family, his life, from a distance that enabled him to escape the strictures and bromides of small-town Kansas. "His life in the Stafford family home and in the small Kansas towns where he spent his childhood and youth," Capps believes, "was very much a prison from which he sought escape." Stafford valued freedom over success, "the capacity to listen to imperceptible sounds" over being one of the good old boys. Seeing himself as a wanderer gave him the perspective, the stance, to see more clearly his position in the world, to be aware of who he was, his unique self, so he could "devote his attention to what the world is trying to be." In this way, he apprehended and clarified his vocation: "Stafford is saying through his poetry that he has faith in this self and trusts it because, after all, it is his primary source of inspiration. And so is the self that we bring to our vocation as pastors." The consequence of self-awareness as it is applied to one's



vocation, one's calling, solves the problem Capps establishes at the beginning of the chapter—pastors who lose track of who they are—and to “A Ritual to Read to Each Other,” which closes this chapter in which Stafford tells us that knowing who we are, being awake, could keep “our mutual life” from getting “lost in the dark.”

“Inviting the Grieving Back to Life,” chapter three, concerns the acceptance of loss. Capps defines six types of loss: *material*, the loss of a physical object or familiar surroundings; *relationship*, the ending of the opportunity to be in the physical and/or emotional presence of someone—death, divorce; *intrapsychic*, losing an emotionally important image of oneself; *functional*, loss of some physical function of the body; *role*, loss of a specific social role or accustomed position in a social group; and *systemic*, loss of a system that sustains— young adult leaving the family. Capps uses poems like “Bess,” “Murder Bridge,” “A Gesture Toward an Unfound Renaissance,” “Consolations,” “Waiting for God,” and “Circle of Breath,” drawn mostly from *Allegiances*, *An Oregon Message*, and *Passwords*, to look into a furthering attitude toward the confounding and complex fact of grief.

It is worth noting that two poems from this chapter, “Consolations,” and “Circle of Breath,” are part of *Black Milk: Literary Sources for Learning Pastoral Care*, a website connected with New York's Bellevue Hospital and its Clinical Pastoral Education Program.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, the *Black Milk* bibliography lists more Stafford books than any other poet, five, Levertov having four. Other poets include Jane Kenyon, Jane Hirshfield, Wendell Berry, and Sharon Olds.

Stafford's poems, Capps observes, have a common approach to grief— acceptance by “making the lost object a memory.” The memory becomes a poem but in the making of the poem, Stafford does not fall into the trap of offering reasons for acceptance—the *it's god's will* and/or *all for the best* position. Rather, Stafford's poems that work with the varieties of grief show “the world's ability to reach out and embrace us in unanticipated and unexpectedly gracious ways.” One could say the source for this comes in Stafford's gift for closure in a poem. At the end of these poems of loss, there is often an expansion that is a visionary embrace, a twist of wisdom. I was reminded recently that a favorite saying in the Stafford house was E. M. Forester's, “Only connect.” This is what Stafford's poems do, Capps suggests. They accept by deepening the felt connection to the complex resonances of the world. “Disposal,” a poem about a parent who rejects a daughter, ends: “Now slowly release her name. It spins / miles along like a thread in the wind.” The daughter's furniture has been thrown out but something will always connect parent and child. Acceptance, loss, and the complexity of connection float together at the end of the poem, a kind of grace that does not offer false consolation. “The pastor's role,” as imagined by Stafford, “is to invite the other—when ready—to accept the hospitality the world offers all of its guests, most of the time.”

A discussion of Levertov's chapters is significant because the choice

to use her poetry to explore aspects of pastoral care tells us something about the nature and circumference of Stafford's vision. After, I'll return to the final chapter of the book, which uses Stafford's poetry.

Chapter two, “Pastoral Conversation as Embodied Language,” employs Levertov's poetry as a corrective to the misuse of psychologist Carl Roger's client-centered therapy, a method often taught to pastoral care givers. Roger's “nondirective” technique has become, according to Capps, “largely a matter of paraphrasing the parishioner or client's words, as though one is engaged in a kind of wordplay.” Pastoral care givers are repeating verbatim words said and not listening to the body language and emotive whole of the client. We can recover, Capps claims, “the spirit of the nondirective or client-centered for pastoral conversation by attending to how poets exhibit empathetic understanding...and locate language in the body, or the total organismic experience.” Using a number of poems and generous sections of poems, Capps shows how Levertov's poetry exemplifies how to listen to the language of the body and “to the heart and its desires.”

In his recent memoir of his brother Brett, who committed suicide

at the age of forty, *100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do: How My Brother Disappeared*, Kim Stafford writes this about his parents: “the early love of our parents was not simple. There was negotiation between them about how to live and for our father, what he was allowed to write about...” This would seem to relate to Stafford's reticence to write about the body, the erotic, food, the sensual. All poets select a range of reference, imagery, subject, and Stafford

has a puritanical dimension to his

poetry that leaves Levertov a better choice to approach the “total organismic experience.”

The other chapter utilizing Levertov's poetry, “Learning to Heed the Unheard Voices” focuses on apprehending the lives of women. Capps begins with a transcription of a counseling session in which a male counselor demonstrates a failure to understand and help a female client with marital problems. The poems presented are about Levertov's mother, her sister, a male mentor, and men. Her poetry, Capps observes, “Welcomes the male reader into the world of women's experience and makes every effort to put him at ease.” Clearly, Stafford's poetry cannot and does not do this and the reasons for this help us see his work more clearly.

Stafford's poetry, as well, has received criticism by some for its presentation of women. In her essay, “Pax Femina: Women in William Stafford's West,”<sup>3</sup> Sally Bishop Shigley asserts that Stafford's “willingness to explore the deep and complicated darkness of the human condition does not seem to extend to women.” The personae in Stafford's work, she argues, are “plagued by serious ambivalence toward women.” Stafford seems to have the same archetypal generalities about women that mark many American males writers of the West. Women are stultifying homemakers who represent society's attempt to tame them or symbols of the virgin land on the western

(cont. on p. 12)



*There is a Thread*, Barbara Allen Burke

(cont. from p. 11)

horizon they wish to explore and subdue. This dichotomy, according to Shigley, is most clearly represented in Stafford's depiction of his fearful mother and adventurous father. Shigley's essay, though convincingly argued, has a one-dimensional aspect to its analysis. One could also claim that his father's listening is feminine, yin, and his mother's strident rejections are masculine, yang. The essay, nonetheless, does hold a hard grain of truth.

This returns us to the final chapter, "Pastoral Care and the Yearning for Freedom," in which Capps explores Stafford's synthesis of wisdom and freedom. Here, in his desire to consider what those gifted with poetic genius, the muse's blessing, can give to the renewal of pastoral care, the revivification of the field where the flock feeds, Capps reaches an understanding that gets to the heart of why Stafford's poetry is so powerful and profound—freedom and wisdom are interwoven and so foster each other's development. The titles of some of the poems Capps presents give a sense of the ideas at play in the chapter: "Allegiances," "Listening," "Freedom," "Ultimate Problems," "Earth Dweller," "Traveling through the Dark," "Bifocal." The poems are drawn from the spectrum of Stafford's books but might favor *Someday, Maybe*; *Allegiances*, and *A Glass Face in the Rain*.

Capps returns to the wisdom books of the Bible and Job to develop this chapter. As you may recall, toward the end of the Book of Job, after his so-called friends have harangued him to see the logic of divine retribution and accept his culpability in his circumstance, God breaks in and says, essentially, there's more to this than meets the eye, more to this than humans can grasp—divine wisdom is beyond human understanding; humankind cannot grasp the freedom exercised by God. "The order of life is quietly relaxed," Capps notes about this moment, "revealing the Presence of God." Stafford's vision, Capps continues, is like this; he is "a defender of a kind of relaxed order in which there is ample room for freedom."

Readers of Stafford's work would agree, I think, with Capps that "virtually all of his poems that have reference to God are situated in the world of nature." Stafford is a Transcendentalist; the natural world speaks of the divine. Stafford's images of God (and Jesus) "are images of the beyond, of the eternal, of that which survives and lasts." The apprehension of this, the wisdom to connect with this is a gift of poetry, richly gifted to Stafford, and presents a way of feeling deeply and resonantly free:

Stafford's poetry...is the poet's gift to those of us who have long believed that the fundamental purpose of pastoral care is to help others gain a new margin of freedom...freedom is what enables us to experience life as a web, not a tether, much less a chain.

Freedom exercised wisely allows us to see the interconnectedness of all things. By listening to what the world is trying to be and having the wisdom not to be overwhelmed by life, the individual can feel a responsible, caring sense of freedom. "Pastoral care," Capps affirms, "needs to be grounded in earth care." Recall the line, "I could hear the wilderness listening," from "Traveling through the Dark" and it is easy to see Capps' point—the wisdom to listen helps us be free. This is because in listening well we become wise to the way that famous thread, the golden thread, connects us together and to the world and allows us to be free, some of the time:

freedom is not a matter of cutting the thread that binds us but

of holding the thread lightly, letting it lighten and loosen as it will. Freedom also comes with knowing that the thread, like telephone wires on the Midwestern plains, reaches all the way to Paradise.

And pastors, Capps concludes, could do more "at present to teach and encourage others to live wisely." Here, we arrive, acknowledging the boundaries of his vision, at what makes Stafford's poems, his adventures in language, so sustaining. His poetry enables a reader to respond to the world with a deep, resonant sense of freedom because freedom wisely exercised allows us to truly care for others.

<sup>1</sup> These definitions are from *Wikipedia*.

<sup>2</sup> <http://bellevuecpe.wordpress.com/2007/06/29/hello-world/>

<sup>3</sup> *Rocky Mountain E-Review*. 54.2 (2000) Rocky Mountain Modern

**Editor's note:** *There is a Thread* (p.11) is part of an project Burke did for an art class. You can see two other sculptures and read about the class and the assignment at *There is a thread / I am story* (URL: [iamstory.com/art/there-is-a-thread/](http://iamstory.com/art/there-is-a-thread/)).

## Briefing Bill Stafford, 7 A.M.

Sorry to say we've had—have—  
two new wars since you died, our  
longest ever, with at least three  
losers. Labor has also lost, to greed  
in Wisconsin, Davis to the needle  
in Georgia. Pols are saying slaughter  
in the Middle East is an Arab Spring;  
slaughter of Darfur isn't genocide.  
And it appears this President may be  
bought, too. Meanwhile, the wind  
you say *bends over* never has settled  
its secrets, and I'm tired before I start,  
my pile of should's stacking up like  
dead leaves catching against walls,  
foundations. Once I sat in a room  
where a beginner's timid lines drew  
your no-praise attention, the shy  
crinkles smiling from your eyes  
a gift, immense capacity to care.  
I saw how anything can matter. But  
by now you'd have finished your  
morning run, written a little something  
that might, might not, measure up  
to your lowered standards. And Oregon?  
Just like my wife said it would be,  
biggest rhododendrons I've ever seen.  
I felt like her mother, "Suzy, it's so  
green!" And all that rain.

D.R. JAMES

## I'd Do It Again

by Tim Barnes

*"We Have Just Begun to Not Fight": An Oral History of Conscientious Objectors in Civilian Public Service During World War II.* By Heather T. Frazer and John O'Sullivan. Twayne Publishers, 1996.

"once the earth shakes, it's never that firm again."  
--William Stafford

This book is about those 12,000 men who, like William Stafford, served in the Civilian Public Service (CPS) during the second world war. There were over 40,000 men, out of close to 12 million Americans who took up arms, who were conscientious objectors. Around 25,000 served as noncombatants. Another 6,000 went to prison. And 12,000 did alternative service in a variety of ways—as soil conservationists, road builders, fire fighters, guinea pigs in medical experiments, aides in mental hospitals. They did brave, tedious, grueling, trivial, and dangerous things. Some fought fires, some starved themselves, some were infected with diseases, and some served in hospitals for the criminally insane.

Frazer and O'Sullivan present interviews with eighteen men and two women (CO wives) who represent people who served in various aspects of the CPS program and had experiences representative of the character of the program. The book opens and closes with Stafford. The title is his rephrasing of John Paul Jones' famous declaration during a revolutionary war naval battle and his interview reflecting on his CPS experience, from which the above epigraph is drawn, closes the book.

There are interviews with administrators of the 151 camps that were overseen by the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO). Religious objectors came, broadly, from two groups. There were those connected to the Historic Peace Churches—the Mennonites, Brethren, and Friends; and those outside that tradition, like Stafford, who came to their convictions by belonging to organizations like the War Resisters League and the Fellowship for Reconciliation and/or by personal study and inner conviction. Frazer and Sullivan interview people from both of these groups. One learns that among the peace churches, community pressure worked in reverse—young men felt they had to be COs.

Some of those who went to CPS camps, more often those not connected to peace churches, became discouraged with the CPS program and ended up leaving their camps and going to prison. There is a chapter devoted to these men, too. George, Stafford's friend in *Down in My Heart*, though not interviewed, was one of these.

One of the fascinating aspects of the experience of men in the CPS was their desire to be peacefully brave, nonviolently heroic—to use their service to be of value. Frazer and O'Sullivan talk with smoke jumpers who parachuted out of planes into wild terrain to snuff out

forest fires. They interview men who wore lice-infested underwear while doing their forestry work to test typhus control methods; men who went through starvation experiments to see how long people survive without eating; men who worked as aides in mental hospitals with aide/patient ratios of one to one hundred. Some of the latter were instrumental in reforming the cruel practices that were standard during the time. It's all rather appalling and inspiring.

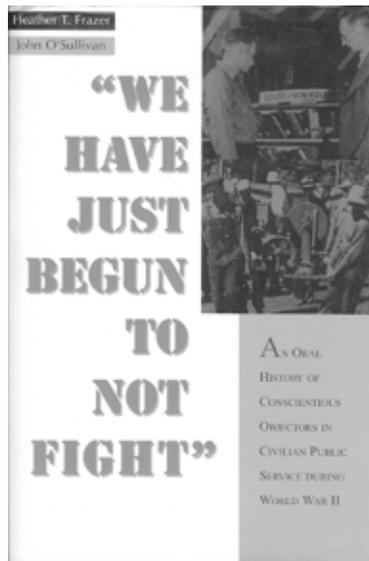
An interview with Bill, as I said, closes the closing chapter of the book, "Reflections on the CPS Experience." There is very little about poetry here but he does list some of what he was reading in the thirties, "Henry George, *The Grapes of Wrath*... *Les Miserable* to *War and Peace*, all of Tolstoy, all of Thoreau." He was a member, even then, of the Fellowship for Reconciliation. Stafford was, clearly one of those COs influenced by personal studies and organizational affiliations. It seems to have been the case that, he says, "it was everybody else who changed at that moment the war came."

The epigraph to this review takes on resonance when he talks of the prison-like character of the camps he was in and the loss of his Kansas friendships. Though Bill did not dwell on his CO years—at one point he says he doesn't think about them much—he says, in response to a question about the moral character of his fellow COs, "their circumstances force them to examine their inner philosophies so there was a lot of ... 'tough inner self' kind of people." He could be speaking of himself here. There is a toughness, a solid fist of conviction, to Stafford's vision. Kim Stafford once said to me, "There's a fist in the word *pacifist*."

This toughness was supported by another thing he talks about in this interview—the relentless, soul-searching discussions in the camps about how to conduct a nonviolent life. Stafford talks of the bleakness of the CPS life as the worst part but of the "great company" as the "most satisfying aspect." This interview points to something that may be hinted at in the title of one of his books about writing, *You Must Revise Your Life*. Stafford's poetry comes out of a deep and sophisticated moral position that his gifts as a poet have permitted him to make into beautiful lyrics. In the CPS camps, he revised, with the help of some very thoughtful people, his life. It was a real workshop for the soul, not one where poets tinker with phrasing, but where one considers in circumstances that are life changing the reasons why one believes what one believes and how words are tried to one's convictions.

At the end of the interview, he says, "I still think, as a world citizen, I did the right things in CPS. I'd do it again." One receives the sense from reading this book that all the COs feel that way—that they did something good by not participating in the "good" war.

**Editor's note:** I learned about this book thanks to Becca Lachman, who is working on an anthology of poems written in the spirit of William Stafford for the 2014 centennial of his birth. (See News, Notes, and Opportunities for a call for submissions.) Lachman's grandfather, Ivan Amstutz, is also interviewed in *"We Have Just Begun to Not Fight."* She is, as well, at work on an essay/lecture on the pedagogy of creative nonviolence in which Stafford's ideas are prominent.



## News, Notes, and Opportunities

### William Stafford Poet of the Month on Swedish Public Radio.

This August, Stafford was the featured poet on the Swedish radio program, *Today's Poem*. This information comes from Lars Nordstrom, poet, scholar, translator, and winemaker, who says that at noon every day but Sunday, a church bell is rung twelve times, a poem is read, and then a piece of music played. The six poems of Bill's that were read are "Listening," "Being a Person," "Glimpse Between Buildings," "Being an American," "Freedom," and "An Archival Print." Lars, who translated the poems, wrote this to FWS about the event:

"Serendipitously, I, the translator of these poems, happened to be in Scandinavia during the first week of August. It was a wonderful experience to hear Stafford being read in Swedish by a trained voice, and I immediately started receiving congratulatory emails, phone calls, and text messages alerting me to Stafford's status as 'Poet of the Month.' When one thinks about how many good poets there are in the world, and a mere twelve months every year, the fact that someone picked William Stafford is a tribute to his stature on this

**Call for poems written "in the spirit of" Stafford** that reflect on his life example and upcoming Centennial; that are challenged by his writing life & teaching philosophy; or that explore themes characteristic of his work. Poems chosen will be included in the anthology *A Ritual to Read Together: Poems in Conversation with William Stafford* (press yet to be determined) with an intro by Fred Marchant. Send 1-3 poems, applicable info for reprinting rights, and a concise author bio (60 words or less) to editor Becca J.R. Lachman at [ms.rossiter@gmail.com](mailto:ms.rossiter@gmail.com) by Jan. 15, 2013.

**William Stafford Writing Contest:** In honor of William Stafford's centennial birthday, Ooligan Press is organizing a statewide writing competition for seventh through twelfth grade students. Participating teachers will use Stafford's writing to inspire students to create and revise their own poems and essays. Ooligan Press will accept submissions of student writing from now through April, 2013. Some submissions will be selected for publication in an anthology to be released in January of 2014, at the beginning of the yearlong celebration of William Stafford's birth. Please find contest materials and more information at <http://ooligan.pdx.edu/poetry/william-stafford-project/>.

**Panel for AWP 2013—Lower Your Standards:** William Stafford in the Workshop. (James Armstrong, Philip Metres, Alissa Nutting, Jeff Gundy, Fred Marchant). This panel considers how William Stafford's complex and still-controversial approach to the poetry workshop can help overcome some of the pitfalls of that system (such as writing for the teacher, or writing the safe poem). Panelists recount their own experience using Stafford's ideas in the classroom; they discuss how Stafford's no praise, no blame stance towards the imagination, his notion of the centrality of daily practice and his insistence on overcoming writer's block through lowered standards can help students become fluent practitioners.

**If you have moved recently,** please let us know by sending a forwarding address to Helen Schmidling at [helen@dsagroup.net](mailto:helen@dsagroup.net). Thank you.

**Poet's Letters: The Correspondence of William Stafford.** This is an exhibition at the downtown library that puts on display significant examples of Stafford's correspondence, of which there are 30,000 original letters, to and from. The exhibition includes full displays of letters from Richard Hugo, John Haines, Marvin Bell, Gerald Burns, and his forty-year correspondence with his Lewis and Clark Colleague, Kenny Johnson. Two displays include the correspondence (as well as broadsides and books) with two of his most interesting and loyal publishers, Walter Hamady of Perishable Press and Honeybrook Press. The broadsides of Stafford poems done by woodcut artist, pacifist and translator of Chinese poetry, Wang Hui-Ming are especially stunning, as is the display of the correspondence, woodcuts and presswork connected to *The Design of the Oriole* (Night Heron Press, 1977), designed by Elizabeth Coberly. Other correspondents include Gary Snyder, Robert Bly, James Dickey, W.S. Merwin, James Wright, and Naomi Shihab Nye. The exhibition is in the Collins Gallery on the third floor of the main branch of the Multnomah library until December 16<sup>th</sup>.

**"An Untitled Waltz for the Poet William Stafford."** This is a song written by singer/songwriter Kevin Welch. You can find numerous clips of him singing at as his 25<sup>th</sup> Blue Door show in Oklahoma on July 19, 2008, if you type the title into Google. It's quite a delightful performance.

**Errata:** The quotation from Bill's journals at the bottom of the last Poetry and Potluck postcard is incorrect. It should read, "The world is a long poem I am falling through—I just tell about it." Not, "I just write it down."

**Original Stafford Poem Discovered in APSU Library.** A holograph copy of "The Land Between the Rivers" was recently found in the Austin Peay State University Library in the papers of a teacher who was doing research in a local area called "The Land Between the Lakes." Stafford, apparently, had visited the college a number of times. For the full story type in the headline above in Google or use this URL: <http://www.apsu.edu/news/original-william-stafford-poem-discovered-apsu-library>.

### PERMISSIONS

"Reading with Little Sister: A Recollection" is reprinted from *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* and used with permission of Graywolf Press.

"Cutting Loose" is reprinted by permission of Estate of William Stafford.

The poems "Paradise," "Valedictory," "On Turned Back at the Poet's Table," "Why We Dropped the Bomb," "A Telephone Line Grows Cold," and "Briefing Bill Stafford, 7 A.M." are used by permission of the authors.

The essays "Looking for William Stafford on the Yard" and "Kooser and Stafford: A Literary Friendship" are used by permission of the authors.

The drawing of William Stafford on page 7 is from the cover of *You and Some Other Characters*, Honey Brook Press, 1987; the vignette of William Stafford on 15 is from the title page. Both are used by permission of the artist, Barbara Stafford.

"Paradise" by Susan McKee Reese first appeared in *Oregon English Journal*.

"Briefing Bill Stafford, 7 A.M." by D.R. James first appeared in *Toad*.

"A Telephone Line Grows Cold" by Jarold Ramsey first appeared in *Poetry Northwest*.

"On Turned Back at the Poet's Table" by Elizabeth Raby first appeared in *The Enigmatist*.



## 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?

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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."

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July 2012-December 2012

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Edwin Wirkala

Sally Fisher

Becca J.R. Lachman

Barbara Ford

Alfredo Ferranté

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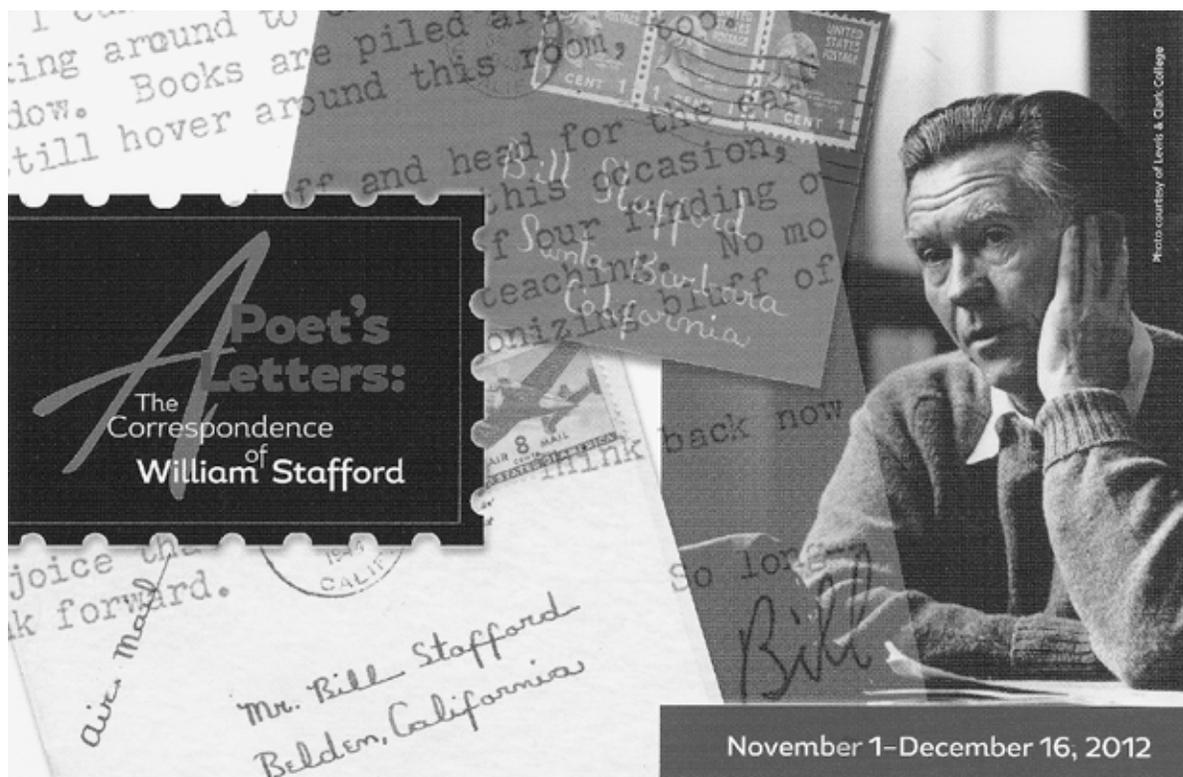
The Poetry Potluck



Poetry, Pastoral Care,  
and a Few Other Things

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