Just Begun to Write: A Call to Creative Nonviolence as Pedagogy for the “9/11 Generation”

By Becca J.R. Lachman

In 1944, my then eighteen-year-old Grandpa Ivan became a smokejumper in the American West. He joined 12,000 other conscientious objector WWII draftees in Civilian Public Service (or CPS), a groundbreaking compromise between historic peace churches and the U.S. Selective Service.1 While conducting interviews with Mennonite CPS veterans still living near my hometown, I felt drawn to the life and work of William Stafford—poet, educator, and CPS serviceman. During research, I stumbled upon the oral history collection We Have Just Begun to Not Fight. Besides offering a long interview with Stafford, this library book held a gem of a surprise: a 12-page interview with my Grandpa Ivan conducted in the ‘80s, long before dementia would siphon off his memories. No one in my family knew this oral history existed, and it revealed that William Stafford had worked in a CPS California forest service camp approximately four hours from where my Grandpa had been stationed.

Did they ever meet? Did they work at opposite ends of the same fire?

Though conscription is missing from American life today, my dedication to writing and teaching asks me to confront a different kind of fire. The U.S. military budget now approximates those of all other nations combined, and2 I sometimes wonder how this learned trust in force trickles down into everyday life, even into the education we offer developing writers. What layers of violence might our creative writing programs subconsciously or knowingly nurture? A growing culture of debt, entitlement, or elitism? An atmosphere where racism and sexism can flourish? A lack of funding, jobs, and health insurance for our students and graduates? Or perhaps, as teachers of creative writing, our violence can play out in the form of omission: failing to share our own stories about walls papered with rejection letters, or neglecting to convince our students that no, in fact they don’t need an MFA or PhD to be a poet.

In a way, I’m also teaching myself that a life of making art is a daily, daring act with no diploma. Now in my thirties, I, too, am a product of the creative writing boom in American academia that offers just over 800 programs.3 Holding three degrees related to poetry, I adjunct at a large university, hoping that my students’ lives will be extraordinary—and not just as future writers. I anticipate an American generation that will re-learn revolutionary nonviolence as the best fuel for social change, and however I can be a part of that ongoing education, I want to offer up my best energies. I want to salvage the idea of “occupation” from its otherwise violent and entitled definition. And like many of the American Occupy Movement participants, ask it to embody something bigger than ourselves, a greater good that we are constantly reshaping. After all, writers are ultimately dedicated to the writing life,” that mirage-like occupation we work so hard to define in our own terms.

“Occupying” poetry workshops within corporate academia can sometimes feel like everyday peacemaking—or working for the military industrial complex itself. In her book The Peaceable Classroom (1993), Mary Rose O’Reilley points out that academia does not train us to be nonviolent: “We learn to win arguments, defend positions, attack opponents, demonstrate that we are not stupid,” she says.4 “If we teach our students to be ninja critics, that pedagogy supports a certain quality of consciousness on the planet,” she continues.

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But “[i]f we teach them to live part time in the house of art, we create a different future.” As a relatively new teacher and MFA graduate, I’m most interested in this “different future.”

Processing what seems like daily news stories about gun violence in the U.S., I can’t help pondering an unreported connection between the 2011 Arizona shootings and those at Virginia Tech in 2007: both college-age gunmen had experienced a creative writing workshop at one time or another. Their unthinkable actions, coupled with society’s reaction (more denial of our addiction to violence) have both asked me to see my writing classrooms in a different light. Now let me be clear: I don’t believe that poetry workshops can cure mental health issues, let alone the injustices that may fuel greater acts of violence. But I do believe that “peaceable workshops” offer focused experimentation in mediation, mentorship, discernment, and even forgiveness.

When I use the term peace today, I hope to reclaim it from old stereotypes that keep pacifists in a strictly religious, anti-soldier, or apathetic box. Nonviolent pedagogy in my undergraduate classrooms springs from a humanist core. And though I don’t support war in any form, I have great sympathy for individual soldiers asked to put our government’s plans into action—more and more of whom I see looking to the military as the only way to afford a college education or a sense of valuable worth. So in the face of this, my definition for “creative nonviolence” is anything but passive. It exists because of action, one life at a time, a form of civil disobedience that asks for “cooperative conflict resolution among privilege and authority.”

Traditional students stepping into their first undergrad poetry workshop today claim September 11, 2001 as their first collective memory of importance. Commonly called “Millennials” or “the 9/11 Generation,” they were typically born between 1982-95 and “are the most diverse generation that higher learning has ever welcomed.”

Studies, however, choose to stress their over-dependency on technology and multi-tasking, or to describe them with adjectives like “impatient” or “resentful.” It’s true that since Millennials adapted to the learning system known as “banking,” they most likely received a weaker public education than generations before them, and that after a “tightly organized youth, they respond well to structure and rules.” When self-esteem gets threatened, they “may react with depression, anxiety, defensiveness.”

A popular Millennial response to the polling question, What do you want to be when you grow up? is “Famous.”

So asking Millennials to define and discuss terms like “violence” or “peace,” even within a poetry workshop, gets complicated. After all, their generation helped elect a president who defended just war theory while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, and Millennials have watched American taxpayers support over a decade of wars. Yet William Stafford once mused, “Everyone’s a conscientious objector…Are there things you wouldn’t do?”

In WWII CPS work camps, Stafford began his six-decade habit of “doing the hardest thing first,” writing before dawn, partly for what he called “the unknown good in our enemies” and also to dismiss unrealistic pressures tied to only writing publishable work. Is it possible to teach poetry workshops with the same mentality, modeling for college students that “peace makers and artists, they’re in it for life”? Stafford’s first poetry book wasn’t published until his late 40s, yet he went on to become a poet laureate. How might Millennial students respond to this atypical example of “fame,” or to another of Stafford’s journal entries that cheekily asks, “To a successful, bustling, triumphant accomplisher: what’s your problem?”

For Millennials, who reserve little time for reflection (and take more mood-enhancing meds for stress than any other generation), the idea of mindfulness—a shedding of the excess, a constant and unjudging acceptance of the now—may sound fictional. In his book You Must Revise Your Life, William Stafford offers the following advice for both new writers and teachers:

We can all learn technique and then improvise … but without a certain security of character we cannot sustain the vision … You can’t earn it, or calculate how to get it. But it may come, when you enter the life of writing with patience and trust.

How might today’s poetry workshops encourage students toward this “security of character”? Stafford’s goal was often “to disappear as teacher...”—to be, in his own words, ‘the quiet in the land’ (also a nickname for early Mennonite and Amish immigrants who refused assimilation into mainstream society). Stafford even tried not to publicly evaluate a student’s poem as “good” or “bad,” a consistent neutrality that takes as much (or more!) energy than quick evaluation. Stafford ultimately reshaped the academic goals of his workshops through the following springboard questions:

1) When we look at someone’s manuscript, are we trying to correct it so as to make it the best possible piece of literature?
2) Are we trying to make the manuscript before us change so as to become the most likely to achieve publication?
3) Are we allowing ourselves merely to adjust a manuscript toward being less vulnerable to criticism?

“But...” you writers and teachers might be thinking, “I don’t want a bland workshop!” “[W]ar (like grading) is not part of the academic system; it is the system,” cautions O’Reilley. Yet, if a workshop teacher refuses the constant role of “fixer,” real moments of nonviolent education act as koans, riddles or complications that make us pause, that can “break up our usual routines in order to push past barriers.” O’Reilley ultimately proposes an “Inner Peace Studies” that starts with the teacher and calls for continuous self-forgiveness for mistakes and failures.

As poet-teacher Jeff Gundy reminds us, “Teaching nonviolence is important though difficult work. Practicing and modeling nonviolence in the classroom may be even more important and more difficult.”

Mennonite-raised poet-teacher Julia Spicher Kasdorf describes how some people have been taught that in order to be peacemakers, we must “absorb the violence of the world into our bodies.” As a young female adjunct whose next semester of teaching often depends on good student evaluations, I sometimes think of this quote when attempting to utilize Stafford-inspired teaching, especially when I walk away from
a class wondering if my students would react differently if a wizened (and tenured) male professor were sitting at the workshop table.

In 2011, I attempted my first experiment with creative nonviolence in an undergraduate poetry workshop of 19-to-21-year-olds at a large public university, hopeful that my students would experience a realistic and compassionate intro to the writing life so many of them longed to enter. To encourage a robust and self-driven practice, I assigned weekly journal entries and reading responses to be handed in at the end of the term. I met with students individually three times during the ten weeks and, at the end of our time together, sent a snail-mail letter to each participant discussing his/her original work (one of the most time-consuming and challenging things I have ever done). During workshops, we also "centered down" with poem-drafts, allowing a few minutes of silence after the poem's initial reading—complete agony at first.

Reflecting back on this time, my overall goal was to model things I associated with the life of William Stafford: an honest, consistent mentorship and a daily drive to create—without a necessary goal or prize. Poems were not treated as completed treasures; they were, instead, ongoing experiments. And by the end of the quarter, my students were left with eight workshoped poems-in-the-making. Out of 14 students, I’d say two of them “got it.” The remaining ones were a little confused; they’d signed up for an “easy” class, meaning, not much critical thinking or outside homework; they expected a workshop that could “train them in debating skills for MFA programs” to quote one student, a gifted writer already in debt from undergraduate loans who broke out in hives while talking about the future pressures of publishing and grad school.

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Living out a life of letters—a “house of art”—can mean facing isolation, doubt, poverty, constant critics, and the glaring imperfections of the self. These are realities new poetry grads will most likely face, and the more tools of creative nonviolence we can give them, the better—even if they rebel while in our classrooms. If a workshop can encourage radical community mentorship, mediation, and self-forgiveness, young writers might be more willing to seek out the life-long accountability necessary for building a writing life. At least, that is my hope as a college English instructor.

A mentor and peace-worker once advised me: “Be half activist, half monk.” At times, I’m able to incorporate this mantra into my craft and even into my syllabus. As creative writing programs continue to thrive, I believe workshops have an opportunity to react to the War on Terror with a pedagogy grounded in humanist peacemaking. Perhaps how we teach creative writing can reflect our visions for a different world.

Footnotes and bibliography can be found on page 17.
William Stafford, Ronald Bayes, and Chapel Hill Gravel

The poet Ron Bayes was a good friend of Stafford's. Over the phone, he told me that Stafford was the first writer who gave him a break. In the sixties, Stafford urged the editor of an anthology (Bayes does not remember its title) to ask Bayes for some poems. Bill had apparently told the editor, “This guy’s got it.”

Bayes was born in Umapine in 1932 and taught at Eastern Oregon College, leaving in 1968 to become the writer-in-residence at St. Andrews University in Laurinberg, North Carolina. Bayes said Stafford came to EOC a number of times and visited St. Andrews twice. He considered Bill a close friend and told me that they would “meet and talk” whenever he would visit Oregon. “Traveling through the Dark” is his favorite Stafford poem.

Their friendship is probably the reason Stafford’s poem “Inscription to be Found on an Island” appears in Chapel Hill Gravel, a gorgeous portfolio of poems published at Chapel Hill University in North Carolina in 1972. Stafford and Bayes have poems in it, as well as Carolyn Kizer, Lewis Leary, and Jonathan Williams. The five poems are silk screened in gothic uncial and separated by five colorful serigraphs done by Marvin Saltzman, a Chapel Hill artist and professor who was and is a good friend of Bayes’. Fifty copies were printed and Saltzman tells me that the portfolio (66 x 50 cm and enclosed in green boards) is quite rare (though a few are still available) and priced at one thousand dollars. The title comes from the fact that the paths at Chapel Hill University are made of a distinctively colored type of gravel. Saltzman remembers Bill as “modest and non self serving, a pleasure to have as a house guest.” He also told me there is a bench along one of the walks at Chapel Hill that is dedicated to William Stafford. I happen to have a copy of Chapel Hill Gravel, lent to me by Saltzman’s nephew Joel Heidel. Chapel Hill Gravel is dedicated to the artist Florence Saltzman, Heidel’s mother and Saltzman’s sister, who died in 1972.

Bayes taught at St. Andrews University for many years and now is an Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Literature and Creative Writing. He received the North Carolina Writer’s Lifetime Achievement Award and is, as well, an honorary lifetime member of the Oregon Poetry Association. Bayes has published thirteen books, including The Casket Maker, Selected Shorter Poems, 1960-70, two plays, a chapbook of short fiction, and a work of criticism, “John Reed and the Limits of Idealism.”

Sections from two of the five serigraph interleavings by Marvin Saltzman in Chapel Hill Gravel.

for Bill and Dorothy Stafford

On the signing of letters it can be said that where I come from we all sign our letters “love” because failing like who doesn’t we try to nevertheless to.

RONALD H. BAYES

KS: We celebrate the life and work of a poet with a strong moral compass. William Stafford shared his beliefs, triumphs, and failures in his work for us all. And I woke up this morning thinking about a strong moral compass. Now I remember my father one time took a compass to class. We were talking about Naomi’s archive that she brought to the podium last night. My father, in a three-hour class, took a compass to class and put it on the table, and he just stared at it. And the students all kind of stared at him and he said, “How does this know to point this way?” You know you shake it and then the needle … And then they had a discussion about ethics and poetry and everything. When I was thinking about that, I connected to a line in his book *Every War Has Two Losers*, “I must learn to waver.” So one thing about the compass, yes, it knows something but it also needs to waver to find that, needs to respond, needs to be sensitive. So this idea about a strong moral compass, I’m not sure that’s it. I think it is an unfolding; it’s a finding; it’s a listening; it’s a responding. I copied down some aphorisms from *Every War Has Two Losers*, “One of the consistent impulses of my life is to reduce uncertainties”—you know we all want to have answers—but I find myself disquieted by expressions of certainty, or even by the manner of those who give off the sense of relying on their distinctive possession of truth. At any given moment, even a cloud is certain.”

PS: I have just a couple of thoughts about what I think is really special about Bill’s work and what it means. I’ll just read them; they don’t last long. Many of us are readers of poetry and many of us are poets. You are a poet if you write poems. We hear of the family of poets. Within the family poets speak of a poet providing permission to other poets. Permission is not an academic term. [audience laughter] Permission is enabling. You can provide permission without influencing a poet. Bill Stafford gives permission to poets to write poems that directly seek to enter the large conversation of the spirit world. This world is infinitely larger than the individual. [pause] Felt good. Bill’s here. KS: Oh ya.

NSN: I think about how Bill loved the word *considerations*. When he would gather with a group, he would say, “What are some of your considerations this weekend?” I think it’s a helpful word to keep near to us when we work because our considerations shift and change. It’s also very very open. It’s not something that only belongs to you, but it could be a wide horizon sort of consideration. It’s also like that compass, kind of shifting and changing, moving different ways. I remember him also really liking the term *portable principles*. And I think a lot of the things you’re talking about become these—like giving permission to others to work in an open-ended way that has a kind of mental portability about it. You don’t have to take only one intention and only work on that project for one year and nothing else. There was an openness. To have a portable principle is one that your own mind carries from day to day and allows other things in and out. Those are two very useful terms that Bill liked and he felt, I think, kept a room of people more open together.

KS: OK, this time instead of reading a poem, I’m going to read a little passage from what I think is the densest writing my father ever did. It’s a review of a book by Dag Hammarskjöld, secretary-general of the UN, his book *Markings*. And what Peter is saying about I and you and so on. My father says “Something has been made about the distance this book preserves between the author and the events of his life.” So here’s the secretary-general of the UN. So that is “ask me if what I’ve done is my life.” And the spirit realm Peter is talking about is that perennially available, bountiful, liquid river of interior feelings, hopes, beliefs, dreams. And so Hammarskjöld in his book *Markings*, there is no mention of world events. I mean we talk about the news. What do I bring to a world on fire? I bring the water of my own soul. And so he says, “True no ‘world events’ are named in the book, further, the jottings”—and this sounds like William Stafford describing his own work—“the jottings usually disguise the writer by saying ‘he,’ or ‘you,’ but not ‘I.’” The displacement, however, is not for disguise, but because the inner self identity is perceived as an aggregate growing from a dialogue.” You see how that works. So the self, the moral compass, one’s sense of what is right, is an aggregate developed through dialogue. “To the writer of this book, who found himself far inside intentions and judgments, Dag Hammarskjöld was he, and you, and I: his survey required a point of view inside a periphery, multiple sightings toward a completeness.” We’re getting deep now, aren’t we? [audience laughter] “To the writer of this book who found his way far inside intentions and judgments.” We all have the to-do list, what I should, what I hope to do, someday I want to do. Far inside that is what is happening now, this brimming. Far inside that, Dag Hammarskjöld was be and you and I. His survey requires a point of view inside a periphery. So you’re constantly revising your compass by being aware of what is happening everywhere, multiple sightings toward a completeness. So you don’t arrive at certainty or completeness but you’re always calibrating; your job is finding what the world is trying to be. That’s an ongoing project.

PS: I’d just like to read your quote. This is Kim in the last wonderful [FWS] newsletter. I get mine and I sell them [audience laughter]. “I think my father’s writing teaches us to savor the hidden, enriching dimensions of daily life.” [19.1, p.4] That word *daily* is the important word. It’s great.

NSN: I’m curious to talk about how these poems of your dad’s manage to feel so new and old at the same time all the time. I don’t understand that, but I think there’s a mystery in that timelessness

FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD
that we don’t always find in the poems we love. You know you may love somebody’s poems and then look at those and those are poems I loved when I was thirty or these are poems I loved over here. But his poems seem to live, abide, change, age, turn inside out in ways that I find very fascinating. Is it the sorts of images that he uses? Is it the spirit of his own openness within the poem, that he wasn’t reporting on a conclusion, that he was always meandering within and so wherever you are meandering in your life you enter the poem in a new place from that place you’re in? I’ve never found poems that do it quite so resiliently as William Stafford’s do so that you can go back to one you’ve read a thousand times and it will be a new poem for you that day. That’s a tremendous gift to all of us, that kind of befriending of poetry and I think it would be the dream of what a poem could be. But how he did it is something curious. Also my husband Michael, who loved talking to William Stafford any time he saw him, and loves talking about philosophy and different philosophers and comparing different philosophical positions, said he never met anyone with a greater appetite for doing that than William Stafford. And I think that’s interesting too because a lot of poets don’t necessarily hearken to reading a lot of philosophy. I have a rather slim appetite myself. But your dad did. And that is interesting. He loved turning those ideas. Let’s throw these things out on the table and mix them up. What do you think about them? What do I think about them today? This is what he said; this is what she said. The back and forth of it; there was always that conversation. I loved that you used the word conversation.

PS: [After hearing Naomi read “Listening”] I may be mistaken but the voice in that poem, the movement, the cadencing, seems much more direct and traditional and solid and large and rhythmic than some of the other more playful, anecdotal, kind of poems and it is startling when you read that how that moves quickly. If you’re not listening carefully, it goes right past you. And it’s because of that delicacy he’s dealing with, your father’s capacity. It was lovely, lovely. Thank you.

KS: I just want to revel for a moment in the way Peter began that last bit: “I may be mistaken but it seems to me.” To me that is the musical key we’re talking about for being a friend, being a writer, being part of the human project, a constructive part of the human project. That you know, I’m not going to deny what has come to me, yet [audience laughter]. Share.

PS: And you know all the time I was thinking of it as simply a rhetorical device [audience laughter].

KS: That’s because you’re the master Peter. It just comes naturally to you. But to me this idea—I was talking to someone here about Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography where he says as a brash young man he became an expert in argumentation, and he could just knock ’em dead with his powers of reasoning and so on. But what he figured out was that ultimately that didn’t work very well. He could overcome, but he could not come to consensus and so he adopted a more hesitant—well, I wonder if . . . you know. . . it could be. . . I read something. And that became the skill. They say an idea is something that goes to a committee to die. Imagine taking something to the Continental Congress. Like Sir Philips Sydney said, think like a philosopher but speak like an ordinary person. Most pedants think like an ordinary person and speak like a philosopher [audience laughter]. That doesn’t work as well.

NSN: Reads Snyder’s “How Poetry Comes to Me.”

PS: The notion of animal in there, that’s where the animals stay, just outside the light. You walk to the edge and try to see them but you know you’re just a human and you can’t. And they can only see you very well. And sometimes you can see their eyes. It’s startling and you stay put; you don’t move around. I pick that up in there—about poetry having a kind of animal life. That’s the imagination, [unclear] intuition.

KS: I think I quoted this earlier in the week; it’s one of the classic William Stafford lines: “I must be willingly fallible to deserve a place in the realm where miracles happen.” So this is the reticent receiver by the fire who must be so open, so unmasterful, so as to coax the wild poem out of the dark. It’s Keat’s idea of negative capability. It’s not capability of overwhelming mastery; it’s the negative. The ability to receive is what makes miracles available. This would be like the state one arrives at at the end of forty years of Zen training. So the writer is not someone who achieves a certain mastery and then goes out and gets those poems. The writer is someone who cultivates this peripheral listening, openness, uncertainty, welcome, to whom these enchanting things will come.

NSN: I’m fascinated by and would love to hear you two talk about the mixture of abundance in William Stafford, that sense that there’s so much you could write about, an enormous, endless stream of possibilities and then this ability to be so spare. It’s an interesting combination that out of this abundance you write poems which do not feel padded with any single bit of extra. They’re so spare, so clear, so stark. How do you think he did that?

PS: Oh! [audience laughter]

KS: We’re about to find out.

PS: Oh lord. Stick to your principles. Be clear. Reach down. Be open. Talk to someone that you imagine who doesn’t have any coffee yet [audience laughter]. Share.

KS: I think part of it too, Peter, and I’d be interested in what you think about this, is that daily practice. You’re not writing—this is the poem for the month; I’m going to belabor it. One sense I have about his father is he didn’t extensively revise poems. He revised his ability to write poems through daily practice so that when things came, he was prepared to receive them fully and directly.

PS: When I look at those revisions in the margin, they are not really in any way editorial. They have to do with envisioning. He doesn’t so much rework, but I think he extends the vision of the poem. He gets it out fully, and that’s not necessarily something you can do in one shot. Few of us get those. Maybe he got a bunch…

KS: Late in life he started to get those but it was after all that practice.

PS: Should we want to hurry up, or not? I don’t think so. Um, Amazing.

KS: Some other quotes of his I’ve shared before: “I don’t want to
write good poems. I want to write inevitable poems.” Given who I am, they are what I will write. So this idea of being completely liberated from comparison, from a sort of a hierarchy in the world of letters. You know, those are encumbrances. But the only direction you turn, is this coming from the deepest part of myself? Sort of like what Rilke said to young Kappus in *Letters to a Young Poet*, “You send me your poems. You ask me if they’re good. I beg you to give up all that. Go into the deepest part of yourself. That place where the first man and the first woman first breathed and looked about and if from that place poems come, it will not occur to you to ask if they are good.” Maybe we’re back to the river. The river has a source. There was a famous court case in Hawaii, Dole Pineapple Corporation versus the native Taro plantation cooperative. You know, who gets the water? There was no question that Dole had the legal right to the water. But the young people working at Taro plantation sent their pipe up to the spring. And the judge rendered this very poetic decision: No one has jurisdiction over the source. Except you, of course, in your writing.

*KS: [reads “When I Met My Muse”]* I think my father actually would relish that as a point to respond to. “I am your own way of looking at things.” So the poet, the speaker, the writer, the citizen is important but it’s the way that person sees. It’s not what that person knows. It’s the way that person sees the world that enters the realm where miracles happen. That’s a line for poetry curriculum from kindergarten on. What are we trying to do when we write—your own way of looking at things. And it’s not a hobby. It’s salvation.

*KS: Someone just told me that Buckminster Fuller said when an idea comes to you, you have about fifteen seconds to either tell it to someone or write it down and then it goes back into the ether. And so I would agree that one’s own thinking, the adventures, the meanderings, the rivers of thought are primary but writing is one way to do that. You’re not creating an artifact of that; you’re extending the opportunity. I call it hands on thinking. At least one way to do that. You’re not creating an artifact of that; you’re extending the opportunity. I call it hands on thinking. At least that’s the way it works for me. My father, his classic statement: “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.”

So by writing, new thinking becomes available. I think the world is probably full of secret poets. I miss them. Selfishly. I want to hear from them.

*NSN: I’m so glad Kim said that phenomenal quote about a writer is not so much someone who has something to say because I think that is a revelation for so many people who have maybe a slim desire to write or a long time frustrated feeling about writing. They’d like to write but they keep using as an excuse, “But I don’t know what I need to say yet.” Well, start the process, open the door. Maybe you’ll find out then. I often find people have blocked off the process before they’ve engaged in it. And they’re waiting for something to say.

PS: I think years from now people are going to say quite conclusively that Bill Stafford has done more to liberate the capacity to write for individuals than anybody else in contemporary poetry.

NSN: Amen. [applause]

KS: This is what my mom said right after my dad died. “Bill is celebrated for his poetry but I believe his lasting influence will be as a teacher by inviting everyone into the tent of writing, the school of writing.”

*KS: The thing about the archive at Lewis & Clark. You know you can go to www.williamstaffordarchives.org. You can read every revision of every poem in the first two books. You can see photographs, hear audio, click on a poem, hear him read the poem. Really wonderful things. But things keep coming in. And just a few months ago I was in Kansas and when I got home, I got this package from a retired minister in Wichita, whose parishioner had been a friend of my dad’s in the CO camp and he had died but his wife sent on this letter. And it’s an incredible document. It’s a letter young William Stafford is writing to his ex-girlfriend in 1942. A month after he’s almost hung in Magnolia, he hitchhikes back to Kansas to see Ilse and learns that she’s met someone else. She’s told him, well, I have a date this morning, come back in the afternoon, and we’ll have tea. And so they have this conversation. And so he writes this long letter to her. In the first paragraph he says, “We had a pretty good world when we were together, didn’t we? But now I see life has turned.” Then the rest of the letter, it’s a three-page letter, is what he’s really troubled about. She’s not a pacifist anymore. It’s not that she turned away from him. It’s that she turned away. So he’s writing to her, he’s searching for common ground with her: “Your brother and mine, Ilse, go to war. Our friends divide, some going into the war, some into war industries, some into peace groups. All think they are doing the right thing. All are the same persons we have known and liked before. All of us feel caught and worried. The natural thing to do is to go into action of some kind—and to blame some one or some thing if what we are working for fails or succeeds only at great cost. Shall we feel that way? Only when realizing that many of us drift along that road toward recrimination do I get really concerned about sticking by what I consider right.” So that the danger of sticking to what you consider right is that you lose the thread of community. “Does one have to call others mistaken in order to be accepted as believing himself right? Is there anything one can do besides keeping on trying for understanding? Both of us are still trying, Ilse.” So it comes down to I and thou, you and me; we’re not going to proclaim. We’re going to say we’re both struggling and if I fossilize my position toward you and say it’s right, I’ll lose my connection to you, which is the only thing I cannot lose. Ya, the cold war, the polarities. In the same letter he talks about what’s going to happen if Russia beats Germany. What’s going to happen if China beats Japan? He’s looking way down the road and yet his communication is one person to another.

NSN: “Does one have to call others mistaken in order to be accepted as believing himself right?” I mean just think how you can transfer these comments to so many situations in the world. Such wisdom. It is as if he was always right there apprehending this enormous wisdom that would be exquisitely appropriate for the moment but also have bigger resonance in the future.

The ninth annual FWS Poetry and Potluck happened on a warm, occasionally breezy, late summer afternoon. Don Colburn, our droll emcee, began by reading Bill’s poem, “With Neighbors One Afternoon.” The two new and quite beautiful Paper Crane broadsides were introduced: “Assurance” and “For the Unknown Enemy.” There are two this year because of the centennial. Jim Scheppke talked about the William Stafford Centennial Library Project (see 18.2 of this publication) which placed seven Stafford books and two videos in over seventy small, rural libraries in Oregon, thanking the donor, Betty Priddy, who was in attendance. We honored the incomparable Paulann Petersen for her service on the FWS board and as Oregon Poet Laureate with a bouquet that somehow seemed small in comparison with how much she has given. Don read from a WW II interview (so my notes say) and quoted that quatrain from Edwin Markham, another Oregon Poet Laureate, about drawing a circle to include the other (see 17.2), and I looked out toward the river and the Stafford stones. Kids splashed in the watercourse that runs under the arbor; a gull, a sail, and a couple of thoughtful cumulus floated by. And then Don introduced the guest speaker, poet, scholar, and former Stafford archivist, Paul Merchant, who Don said, and I believe it to be true, “knows Stafford’s poems better than anyone alive.”

Paul’s talk was about how Stafford revised two poems, “In Dear Detail, by Ideal Light” and “The Rescued Year.” He began, though, by reading some aphorisms from Sound of the Ax, a book he edited along with Vince Wixon. He interspersed one of his own as his notes lifted off in a gust. He recovered them with a comment on “the fugitive nature of paper.” The idea for his talk can be found in one of his Lewis & Cark student’s investigations in the Stafford archive: “William Stafford and Multiple Revisions: The Drafts and Typescripts of ‘In Dear Detail, by Ideal Light.’” Stafford was, Paul said, “a master of the short, self-contained, and aphoristic poem.” He finished these poems quickly, sometimes in only a draft or two. This was not the case for “In Dear Detail” or “The Rescued Year.”

Paul gave this editor Charles Macquarie’s paper and copies from the archives of drafts of both poems. The idea of them and the language that ends up in them comes from daily writings and handwritten typescript revisions covering two months for “In Dear Detail” and one month for “The Rescued Year.” For the former, there were twelve drafts on twelve days and six typescripts; for the latter, eleven drafts on eight days and nine typescripts. The mixture of taking lines from daily writings and the penciled revisions in typescripts show a shift into another kind of focus. Macquarie thinks that with “In Dear Detail,” that focus comes from something Stafford asks himself on May 13th, 1958, “What is place? Why do I ask why?” It appears that in order to answer this question, he slips out of his normal compositional rhythm and writes a longer, more embedded, more concentrated, more mysterious poem than usual. “In Dear Detail” is fifteen quatrains evenly divided into three stanzas, when published in Poetry in 1959. “The Rescued Year” is eight stanzas of between seven and eleven four to five beat lines. These are dense poems.

In one of the daily writings, July 9th, Bill thinks about how to write a longer poem: “Ways to build a long writing: 1 + 1 + 1. And then and then and then. Because this, this, which brought this.” On this same day, he lists the first lines for three sections of “a long poem: In Dear Detail, by Ideal Light,” though two of them change later. Stafford has articulated how to construct a longer poem written over a span of time.

Why didn’t he do this more often? Paul thought it might be because Bill liked to challenge his unconscious every morning. His revising, then, shouldn’t intervene with the next morning’s writing. The two poems have a distinctive complexity, mystery and depth to them. In his daily writings, Paul said, we see “an encouragingly uncertain person.” But his poetic seems to have favored the certainty of closure over the more open-ended accumulation of mystery and complexity we see in ‘In Dear Detail” and “The Rescued Year.” It was a fascinating, informative, illuminating talk. I have only given it fair justice here.

Afterward we ate and then had the open reading. Thirteen people read, closed by Ralph Salisbury’s poems and reminiscences of Bill. The always exciting lottery followed. And then some of us tidied up and lingered to talk under the enlightened sky.
Seamless, that's what Paulann called the life and poems of Mr. William Stafford. Her truth and passion opened wide within me—a recognition, and memories of days long past: first as novice, later as Sister Barbara, washing, drying and folding, scrubbing bathrooms until they gleamed, keeping the holy in hand and mind as best I could, the hard work of it all, the ease of the work, the chapel everywhere inside and out.

Those days and nights I was first to wake, last to sleep, protected well by grace and light. I was young, unschooled in the world's ways, the darkness from which our greed and deadly deeds arise.

Today I'm still an optimist, also a pessimist. Also neither. I find observation a lighter weight than judgment. And I watch the world (perhaps too much), the stars and river, myself, the way I slide from one to another. My life and poems also some kind of seamless.
The publicity card for the Collins Gallery Show at the Multnomah County Central Library. "You and Art," Anita Bigelow.

"Ask Me," Rebecca Read.

"Our Story," Susan Cole.

"Mr. Conscience," Barbara Sheahan Arzt.
Sightings


A review by Tim Barnes

Stafford has a wonderful poem called, “A Story That Could Be True.” Here on the Edge tells a story that is true of how what happened at the Waldport Fine Arts Camp in Oregon influenced American culture. There were twelve thousand conscientious objectors in WW II who did alternative service in around one hundred and fifty public service camps. William Stafford was one of them. One of the camps, also called Camp Angel, was on the Oregon coast at Waldport. The COs who refused to participate in the “Good War” did so because they believed in a story that could be true—humankind can survive and thrive without war. The fine arts camp at Waldport developed this further by attempting to demonstrate that the arts offer a way to live in peace. The idea of human community that reconciles conflict through peaceful means led these COs to the camps and at Camp Angel a group of people tried to make the fine arts: poetry, theater, painting, printing, music, a vehicle for a community that resolved differences without violence through the practice of peace. Here on the Edge is their story, an illuminating one, and true as good history can be, of what happened in Oregon while William Stafford was fighting fires, cutting trees, building trails, and writing poetry a thousand miles south.

“A Story That Could Be True” is about a child, a foundling, who has lost his parents and doesn’t know who they are. The child wonders, then, if maybe he is a king. The COs in World War II were rejected by their society and but found community, a kingdom. Stafford writes about this in Down in My Heart, his memoir of his CO years (1942-46): “It was unnerving to wake up in a barracks and find ourselves almost totally alien, proscribed, lost, tagged, orphaned, outlawed.” In Early Morning: Remembering My Father, his son Kim writes “[W]hen he was with someone from CPS camp, a ‘Saint from the Kingdom’ as they used to say, he felt a golden light come into the room.” For Stafford, and for the COs at Camp Angel, a story that could be true, nonviolence combined with the practice of the arts, created a moral glow and aesthetic energy that had far-reaching effects.

McQuiddy wraps his history around the poet William Everson, later known as Brother Antoninus, the “Beat Friar.” Everson was essential to the creation of a fine arts component at Camp Angel and its one and only director. His book X War Elegies, published by Untide Press, was very popular in the CPS camps. Stafford was quite interested in Everson’s work and wrote his only book of criticism, The Achievement of Brother Antoninus (1967) about Everson. Stafford calls him Brother Antoninus because after the war, Everson became a Dominican Brother. Two years after the publication of The Achievement, Everson threw off his clerical robes at a reading in Davis, California, and married the much younger Susan Rickson, a landmark moment in the history of the Beat Generation and the literary history of the sixties.

McQuiddy’s thesis, conveyed in the subtitle to the book, is articulated to a certain extent by Stafford in The Achievement: “[T]he literary renaissance in San Francisco, as well as later campus and political events of the Bay Area, stems partly from the kind of position exemplified by this poet.” McQuiddy, though, illuminates the causal chain that connects this small CPS camp on the southern Oregon coast with the Beat movement of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg in a book that is engrossing, magnificently researched, well-written, vivid, filled with fascinating people, and focused on the values intrinsic to William Stafford’s life and poetry.

In their introduction to A Ritual to Read Together: Poems in Conversation with William Stafford (reviewed in the previous issue of this publication), Kim Stafford and Fred Marchant write, “at the core of Stafford’s poetry was an ethical and aesthetic commitment to peace-making.” This describes the moral and artistic belief system that underlies the creation of the Waldport Fine Arts Camp and why this book is about William Stafford though he is only a small part of the narrative. William Stafford shared the values expressed by the fine arts group and in reading this book, one draws closer to the intellectual, ethical, artistic, and emotional source of Stafford’s work.

The story of how art and peace flourished on the Oregon coast in the forties begins with Everson getting off a bus in the rain, hoping “to marry poetry and pacifism.” He and a few others, Glen Coffield (a good friend of Stafford’s), Harold Hackett, Kemper Nomland, started the Untide Press, which published The Illiterati, a literary magazine in which Stafford’s work appears. It also printed X War Elegies, Everson’s book of poems about the struggle of peace and war in the human heart. In The Achievement of Brother Antoninus, Stafford writes, “[E]verson found himself a spokesman for a kind of being from whom modern warriors cannot be fashioned.” The artistic activity around the press and the book led to the idea of a camp devoted to the fine arts. Waldport became that camp in early 1944. The prose in the fine arts prospectus from the camp (written by Everson) inviting artists and those interested in art from other camps to the Waldport Fine Arts Camp reads in part:

Pacifism can be the most powerful motivating factor in the post-war world; its seeds are everywhere in the unrest, the terrible agony and fear and weariness of the people. Given the articulation of an earnest and serious movement, a movement that could make whole and poignant the longing of the people, what might not be accomplished?

Artists, poets, writers, musicians, actors began to transfer. Stafford did not, though he did suggest that maybe his camp, Camp Belden in southern California, would be a good place for a fine arts...
camp. McQuiddy tells their stories and the story of the concerts, plays, performances, and publications that followed as well as the friendships, conflicts, visitors, hardships, that ensued.

One of the reasons the book is fascinating is that one meets such interesting people. Everson, poet, Dominican Brother, printer, literary scholar, mystic, and protégé of Kenneth Rexroth, seminal figure in the San Francisco renaissance. Glen Coffield, poet, anarchist, and free spirit, whose books, Ultimatum and Horned Moon were some of the first published by the Untide Press. Coffield founded the Gruntvig Folk School in the Cascade foothills. A photo shows Coffield and the Stafford family on a visit to the ramshackle schoolhouse on the Gruntvig grounds. Kermit Sheets, an editor of The Illiterati and an actor, adapted The Mikado into a satire of the CO life. It was great fun and a big hit. Adrian Wilson, who later received a MacArthur genius grant for his work as a printer, got his start in printing with the Untide Press but also involved himself in musical performances and theatrical productions.

Here on the Edge reads like a novel. There were arguments, scandals, affairs, triumphs, triangles and even interlopers attracted to the energy and ideals of Camp Angel. An adjunct community grew up near the camp at the Shore Pines Cottages, a tourist motel across the highway. The wives of some of the COs lived there, as did Manche Langely, a single, free-spirited woman from Portland who also believed in nonviolence and the peace-making possibilities of art. Langely worked for the executive secretary of the Fine Arts component of the Waldport Camp, Vlad Dupre. She was later asked to leave her job and the town for reasons you will have to read the book to find out.

The mystical painter Morris Graves passed through. He did not live at the Shore Pines “Tillie the Whale” cabins but built a driftwood lean-to where the fine arts COs would gather to talk and drink wine. He had an exhibition in July of 1944 where paintings that later sold for thousands could be bought for ten dollars.

An appendix to the book contains pictures and brief biographies and also lists the creative work produced at Waldport: eleven books and nine other publications, including The Illiterati and the literary arts magazine The Compass, edited by Waldport CO Martin Ponch (in which Stafford’s essay “Education” was published). There were five full theatrical productions, among them Ibsen’s Ghosts and Chekhov’s The Seagull. In addition, there were a number of dramatic readings and performances based on work by Shakespeare, Saroyan, G.B. Shaw, Thornton Wilder, and Everson. A number of musicians transferred in, and there were eight full concerts of works by Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, Verdi, and Ernest Bloch. McQuiddy recounts some of these in rich detail.

At the heart of it, though, is this dedication to “the creative man” and the arts as an alternative to war. The fine arts camp COs at Waldport took this and developed skills that they carried into the rest of their lives—just as Bill Stafford rooted pacifism into his poetry and made a poetic that sustained his genius. The Untide Press group, especially after they replaced its tabletop Kelsey Press with a full-sized press they found in Waldport, learned to make beautiful books.

Lawrence Ferlingetti borrowed the cover design from An Astonished Eye Looks Out of the Air by Kenneth Patchen for its Pocket Poet Series in which Allen Ginsberg’s Howl was the fourth book.

Kermit Sheets, Adrian and Joyce Wilson, Manche Langely, and Martin Ponch moved down to San Francisco after the war and started the Interplayers. Their performance of Jean-Paul Sartre’s No Exit, according to McQuiddy, established them as “a pioneer force in the resurgence of San Francisco theater.” Their commitment was “to the show, the art, the group” and producing works that “challenged and rewarded audiences and performers alike.” The idea that the process of creating art could be rewarding, not agonizing, not painful, but open to bonuses, discoveries, that feel good, that reconcile product and process, seems consistent with Stafford’s ideas about writing. In an interview in Writing the Australian Crawl, he says, “I am most unready to be hustled by those people around me who say that suffering is more authentic than love.” The process of loving to make art and believing in it embeds caring and good relations into its challenges. One feels this in Stafford’s poetry. It seems clear that he felt amably challenged and rewarded by writing early every morning (think of the photos of him writing on his couch) and readers feel the same as they read his poems. I know I do.

McQuiddy puts the last link in the causal chain—Waldport to the Beats—in his final chapter, “Unscrew the Locks from the Doors” (a line from Whitman and epigraph to Howl) by including a picture of Whitman’s 20th century counterpart, Allen Ginsberg dancing at a Be-in in San Francisco. Just before we see this picture and just before he describes the famous 1955 Six Gallery reading where Ginsberg first read Howl, often thought the beginning of the Beat era, McQuiddy presents a poem by Stafford that seems to see it all coming, “Report from an Unappointed Committee,” which appeared in the sixth issue of the Illiterati, published in 1955. McQuiddy compares Stafford’s poem to W. B. Yeat’s “meditation on revolution,” “The Second Coming.” “Report” begins, “The uncounted are counting / and the unseen are looking around.”

Any autobiographer of William Stafford would need this book to understand the influence of the CO years. One would also need Down in My Heart, We Have Just Begun to Not Fight, Ron Kovac’s Refusing War, Affirming Peace, and Kim Stafford’s fine chapter in Early Morning, “Objector,” at the very least. Everson and the fine arts group at Waldport attracted Stafford. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political philosopher, said, “The ideal illuminates.” In a 1993 interview, Stafford says, “[G]oing to war shows a lack of imagination.” A bit later, “They [the COs] had the imagination. They spent all their time thinking and talking about it.” This fascination with and moral commitment to a story that could be true—the salvific alchemy of nonviolence and the arts—is the subject of Here on the Edge. It’s an uplifting, sobering, compelling, and true story that connects to something deeply woven into American culture and the life work of William Stafford. The book truly is, to borrow a term from the book arts, an illuminated manuscript.

Friends of William Stafford
Review of North Dakota Quarterly
Volume 79.2: “Celebrating William Stafford at 100”
by Becca J.R. Lachman

This past spring, the North Dakota Quarterly, an interdisciplinary and peer-reviewed journal, joined the choir of publications that “recognizes and celebrates [William] Stafford’s continuing influence.” Guest edited by poet and lecturer Israel Wasserstein, Volume 79.2 offers work by poets, singer-songwriters, essayists, and short story writers responding to Stafford and his centennial year. Many of the contributors knew Stafford or had met him, and so there is a sense of Stafford “haunting” these literary artists and their larger lives. However, this haunting is of the best kind in many cases—a much-needed mentor, kindred spirit, or rascal available to us whenever we open his books or call forth memories of him as a reader, teacher, and friend.

If one major theme surfaces in this edited volume, it is the everyday continuation of Stafford’s legacy, whether through fresh close-readings of Stafford’s work (as in Denise Low’s essay “‘The Way It Is’: Second Sight in William Stafford’s Poetry”); by critically examining our own lives, often alongside Stafford’s complex example (as in the essays “A Way of Listening: William Stafford as Teacher” by Philip Metres, “Fixing Myself at Broken Kettle” by Ryan Allen, and Jeff Gundy’s “Five Memories and Four Refusals: Thinking Again about William Stafford”); or, finally, through carrying perseverance into larger creative communities (as in Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg’s nonfiction piece “The Whole Wide World Rains Down: William Stafford, Writing in Community, and Serious Illness”). As is especially evident in the volume’s strongest content—its selected nonfiction pieces—William Stafford still has a great influence on how many today put a long-term vision for what is possible into action, both within themselves and in the greater natural and social world.

In an introductory note, guest editor Wasserstein reminds readers that a sense of wanting to evolve beyond hopelessness has often led readers to Stafford’s life and writing. “But where others might have bent toward despair, or just given up on humanity” he says, “Stafford maintained a generosity of spirit [...] not by ignoring the horrors of the world, but by facing them.”

We (re)meet this “generosity of spirit” in various ways inside this themed issue: at the site of a former WWII Civilian Public Work camp (Paulann Petersen’s poem “Your Glass Face in the Rain”), in published collaboration (a poem co-written by Regina and Tim Gort), and also in a fascinating piece by Thomas Fox Averill showing how Stafford’s poetry inspires fiction, too.

While not wanting to give away all the treasures, themes, and trails within this volume, it is important to note how many of its pieces interact with Stafford’s words: phrases from poems, aphorisms, and lines from long-ago campus lectures, which now inspire and braid together new work. The issue’s cover art, an evocative “painted silk wrap, woven, cut, and sewn” by artist James Bassler titled Rib Shield, demonstrates how creative work can change after exposure to new teachers and environments. For Bassler, Rib Shield represents a shift influenced by Navajo wedge weaving and a chance to bring ancient cultures into conversation with contemporary issues (cover notes). For even more evidence of Stafford’s ever-evolving and ongoing influence on a growing population of readers, teachers, artists, and thinkers, order a copy of this special issue of the North Dakota Quarterly.

To order a copy of this issue: email und.ndq@email.und.edu or phone 701-777-3322.
**Trail Signs**

Remember to follow the poem, not lead.

Don't forget the seasoning, the marinade and the oils in the idea.

Respect the language like it's fire, inattention can be costly.

Love the simple stories. Mighty oaks from acorns grow.

When cooking the poem, use your senses to marry the flavors.

Make it new not customary; remember the lyric is about delight.

As a rule, check your equipment before skydiving. Writing is that kind of adventure.

Follow your curiosity; it's the taproot to your creativity.

Read a lot and read widely, for nutrition.

If you have a duty as a writer, it is to interrogate history, certainty and mystery.

Use solitude to get far enough away from it all to get close to it.

Don't be tame about establishing and preserving your writing time. Kiss the family and say goodbye for a while.

When you can't write, write anyway. Failure is overrated.

Don't worry about your politics, others will be glad to do that for you.

Remember this writing stuff is just falling in love with the world's passions, and trying them out in words.

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**Stafford Poems in *Light***

The poet, Friend, and activist David Hedges recently published a poem in *Light: A Quarterly of Light Verse* and saw that Bill had also published there. He asked Jeremy Skinner, formerly at the Lewis & Clark Archives, about Bill’s publishing history in *Light*. Stafford published seventeen poems in five different issues of *Light* in the last eighteen months of his life. “Humanities 101,” published in issue eleven, appeared after his death. He was the featured poet in issue seven, which included thirteen poems and an appreciation by David Galef. A few of the poems went on further than *Light*, “From Tombstones Back Home,” “The Way I Do It,” and “Put These in Your Pipe,” but the rest have remain uncollected—unseen light and lightness. You will find three of them below. It is interesting that he should have sent so many poems to a magazine of light verse right at the end of his life.

**Nine**

Nine was looking toward the right, the way it does. Ten just stood there; and eight, that double-crosser, couldn't be bothered.

You know how numbers are—all different but each almost somebody else. Nine, though, has a secret destiny, hiding its threes and waiting to spring its little joke just when infinity come near. (You'll see what happens then.) That's why nine won't really look at you—it's thinking of a decimal, near, hurrying near.

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**One Little Witness**

A sparrow might get depressed if it weren't for gravel and such, those goodies mixed in dirt.

As long as you can hop, even a little, you meet some other sparrow for lunch.

And gray looks good on a bird in winter—it's what I like, and a holiday in the city—

All that music and lights.

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**Writing**

You rub two words together till they ignite; then you lay others words carefully one at a time just where the flames begin to come up.

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**PRIMUS ST.JOHN**

ST. JOHN READ THIS POEM AT THE STAFFORD AT 100 CONFERENCE AT LEWIS & CLARK ON MARCH 15TH, 2014.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AS A BROADSIDE BY LITTLE CHICK PRESS.

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**WILLIAM STAFFORD**
Jeremy Skinner: Finding Aide Extraordinaire

The winter 2013 issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly contains a fascinating essay: “A Rich Darkness: Discovering the William Stafford Archives at Lewis & Clark College” by Doug Erickson and Jeremy Skinner. The essay is a biography of Stafford’s life as a writer and how the archives are organized. One of the interesting things is that Stafford’s way of organizing his work distinctly influenced and assisted in the shaping of his archive.

Along with Paul Merchant, until recently the head of the Stafford archives, and Doug Erickson, head of the Watzek Library Special Collections, Skinner was essential in making the writings and other materials Stafford left behind physically and electronically available to anyone interested. Skinner has left Lewis and Clark to work at the Curry Public Library, where he recently completed a series of public William Stafford programs for Oregon Reads, and so I wanted to ask him about his experience and about how he came to be in the position to make such a significant contribution to William Stafford scholarship.

We talked on a wet, blowzy day last December in a Watzek Library conference room with large windows dark with fir trees. Skinner grew up in Gold Beach in Curry County. His father was a surgical equipment supplier and his mother worked for the municipal court. Studying near the history section in the library, he guesses, may have led him to the realization that history was all around. Discovering the work of southern Oregon historian Kay Atwood helped him realize the connection between local history and his immediate community, something he found surprising and engaging.

Skinner came to Lewis & Clark in 1996 and took classes from the historian Stephen Dow Beckham and was excited by Beckham’s enthusiasm for history and his way of taking history outside of academia. During this time, he worked part time in the Special Collections. Skinner earned a B.A in history and went on to study with David Johnson at PSU, where he earned an M.A. in history.

He returned to Lewis & Clark in 2002, taking a full-time position in Special Collections as an assistant archivist. The work for the Lewis and Clark expedition bicentennial was in full swing at the time and Skinner helped curate the college’s exhibits and contributed to its publications and programs. He also worked with the Charles Erskine Scott Wood collection, the Civilian Public Service materials and the papers of a number of Oregon poets: Vern Rutsala, Paulann Petersen, and Edwin Markham.

From 2003-2006, he traveled with the college’s Lewis and Clark exhibition, which went all over the country: Boston, Seattle, Monticello. Soon after this he received a Rose Tucker Fellowship to do work at the Oregon Historical Society. He also took online classes in library science from the University of Washington, receiving his MLIS in 2010. During this time he developed an interest in the history of books and book publishing, writing his thesis on the Portland publishing company Binfords and Mort and how its success suggests Oregon’s taste in literature was deeply rooted in the pioneer experience and did not evolve to become modern in the early mid-twentieth century like many literary historians suggest.

The Stafford material came to the Lewis & Clark archives in 2008, and Skinner became heavily involved with the cataloging, organization, and digitalization of that material. The work involved making the finding aids for the 20,000 pages of Stafford’s daily writing available online, cataloging his voluminous correspondence, digitizing and cataloging his 16,000 negatives, among many other things. A look at “A Rich Darkness” or the Stafford Archive website will clarify the extent of the labors. One can also see Skinner’s hand in the design of many of the publications connected to Special Collections, the four-panel timeline that was in the Centennial newsletter would be a good example.

I asked Skinner what part of working with the Stafford material he found most engaging. He said he thought it might be the photographs. They have, he said, a Rosetta Stone aspect to them because as historical sources, they provide a history that Stafford’s textual manuscripts don’t about friendships, the family dynamic (half of the photos are of his kids). The self portraits, the “selfies,” he took, Skinner said, show Stafford in a variety of moods—angry, depressed, silly, wild, zen—that reveal a layer of him that lies below his poetry.

The friends of William Stafford and the Friends owe Jeremy Skinner a great debt of gratitude for lending his considerable skills to illuminating the life and work of William Stafford. 

Editor’s Note: This article is reprinted from 19.1 because of revisions from Skinner that arrived after the journal went to press. My apologies to readers and thanks to Jeremy.

Lake Oswego Library William Stafford Reading, June 17th

Featured readers: Vince and Patty Wixon.

The William Stafford Literary Landmark plaque at the LO Library.
Footnotes


5 Ibid.


9 Ibid., 11.


13 Every War Has Two Losers, film, directed by Haydn Reiss, starring Alice Walker, Robert Rly, Maxine Hong Kingston, et al. (2009, Zinc Films), DVD.


16 Kim Stafford, Early Morning. (St. Paul: Graywolf, 2002).


20 Ibid, 92, 21, 74-76.


23 Mary Rose O’Reilley, The Peacable Classroom, 95.


Bibliography


Every War Has Two Losers. Directed by Haydn Reiss. 2009. Zinc Films. DVD.


---. The Peaceable Classroom (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1993), 92.


**News, Notes, and Opportunities**

**Website Calendar for January Celebrations: Stafford100.org.** Any person or group organizing a January William Stafford birthday event is encouraged to put their event on this website. It is overseen by the Friends of William Stafford and is the only site where people can go to find out about celebration events. Go to Stafford100.org>Submit an Event>Submission Form>follow this link to request a password>fill out Calendar Password Request.

**Call for Manuscripts: Teachers Who Teach Stafford.** Jennifer Roberts, guest editor for the Oregon English Journal, sent an email asking if this editor would use this publication to “connect with teachers who use William Stafford’s work in their classrooms.” The OEJ is “specifically interested in how they help their students connect with Stafford’s work.” The theme for the spring issue of the OEJ is “Using Oregon Literature in the Classroom.” The deadline is Feb. 1, 2015. For more info see this URL: www.octe.org/oej-call-for-manuscripts.

**Reviews of Ask Me: 100 Essential Poems**: Two major reviews of Ask Me, as far as I know, have appeared this year. Maggie Milner posted a review, “Living With Others and the Earth” on the Zyzzva website in January. William Logan has a review in Poetry 204.4 (July/August 2014). They couldn’t be more different. Milner writes this at the beginning of her review: “That Stafford is among the most important poets of the twentieth century is beyond question…. [His poems] are consistently concerned with moments of what Emerson calls ‘delicious awakenings of higher powers,’ when attention is so finely attuned to experience that the perceiving ego is radically diminished.” Logan opens with “William Stafford was a minor figure in American poetry thirty or forty years ago, neither famous or infamous, just a hardworking poet who wrote too much and had a poem in most anthologies—almost always ‘Traveling through the Dark,’ which most readers remember as the dead deer poem.” Milner writes of Stafford’s “distinctive environmental vision.” Logan calls Stafford “half crazy” for listening “to what a place was trying to say.” There seems an east/west divide in these reviews. But more essentially, there is a divide in what is considered valuable in poetry. Logan thinks Stafford wrote too much out of a “darkly psychological…desperate need.” Milner doesn’t even mention Stafford’s output, being more interested in his “uncompromising idealism” and “vision for peaceful co-existence with each other and the earth.” Issues of ecology and an ethical life do not occur to Logan, who closes his review with these troubling analogies: “Writing poetry is not like standing in traffic until you get hit by a truck; it’s like standing in hell waiting to get knocked down by a snowball.” This reader finds it hard to take seriously anyone whose idea of poetry is as lethal and hopeless to get knocked down by a snowball.” This reader finds it hard to these troubling analogies: “Writing poetry is not like standing in


**Stafford Exhibit at Fishtrap Website:** This is a digital exhibit documenting Stafford’s visit to Summer Fishtrap 1989. The exhibit displays Stafford’s notes in four distinct parts: Stafford’s early morning writing from July 7, 1989 as he travels to Summer Fishtrap, in which he drafts, revises, and completes a poem; the notes he took at that year’s presentations and panels; a draft for his own closing remarks; three pages of his personal broodings on what it means to be a writer and a writer’s role in society. Integrated into this exhibit are photographs that William Stafford took that year, as well as the recording of Stafford’s 1989 closing remarks. You can click on the audio player and simultaneously read his notes while listening to the speech. URL: fishtrap.org/william-stafford-exhibit.

**William Stafford Favorite Poem Project:** Five thoughtful people have been asked to talk about their favorite William Stafford poem. These brief, insightful meditations can be found at WillametteLive.com. Four have appeared and you can read them by googling the five words at the top of this notice. R.S. Stewart talks about “Watching a Candle” in a piece called “Watching Words.” Kelley Morehouse looks into “You and Art.” Steve Selmenda wonders about “Scars.” Mike Shuler thinks about “At the Un-National Monument along the Canadian Border” and being a Vietnam veteran. The fifth poem should come soon. The project is associated with Linebreak, a partnership between Salem Weekly and the Mid Valley Poetry Society.

**AWP 2015 Stafford Panel:** “Non-Violence in the Creative Writing Workshop” (Fred Marchant, Maxine Hong Kingston, Becca J.R. Lachman, Kim Stafford, Joshua Folmar). Toxic critique often wounds writers. How might some principles of non-violent engagement transform the creative writing workshop? What happens when writers listen well? How can deeply receptive listening—to texts and to writers—kindle dialogue about new work? Despite diversity of perspectives, how do we seek common ground as writers helping writers? The panelists will explore these and related questions about how non-violent ethics can be profoundly practical in the creative writing workshop. The Associated Writing Programs Conference will be held in April in Minneapolis, MN.

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Thanks to Joel Heidel, Marvin Saltzman and Ron Bayes for helping with William Stafford, Ron Bayes, and Chapel Hill Gravel.

Thanks also to Janis Carper and Eric Greenwell of Fishtrap for access to the audio of the William Stafford panel.
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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, the annual September poetry and potluck picnic, 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.”

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Welcome New Friends
June–November 2014

Joan Elizabeth Chantler
John E. Heintz
Terri Kiminsky
Allison Winningstad
Marilyn Stablein
Bernie A Smith
Leigh & David Rodriguez

If you have any questions about your membership status, please contact Helen Schmidling, helen@dsagroup.net

The FWS banner at the Fellowship for Reconciliation conference at Seabeck, WA, this July, for which FWS sponsored several scholarships.

Friends of William Stafford Newsletter© is published three times a year.

Editor: Tim Barnes
tim.barnes63@gmail.com

Note: Anything in this newsletter that does not have a byline was written by the editor.

Webmaster: Dennis Schmidling

Special thanks to Ilka Kuznik

Please email comments, letters, news, and information on poetry events, awards, etc. to news@WilliamStafford.org or mail to Friends of William Stafford P.O. Box 592 Lake Oswego, OR 97034
Just Begun to Write: A Call to Creative Nonviolence as Pedagogy for the “9/11 Generation” By Becca J.R. Lachman

William Stafford, Ron Bayes, and Chapel Hill Gravel

William Stafford Calligraphy Project

Fishtrap Panel: William Stafford, His Life, Values, and Poetry (excerpts)

PHOTOS SENT BY DENNIS SCHMIDLING