‘Ask Me: Poetry In Public Places’

Confluence Press of Lewiston, Idaho and Asotin County Library in Clarkston, Washington, teamed up for the debut of the Press’ literary arts project, “Ask Me: Poetry in Public Places.” Confluence Press chose April to launch their project in celebration of National Poetry Month. A reading and culmination of a month-long poetry contest were held April 21 at the library.

The project is composed of six 3-by-6-foot cloth panels created by textile designer Arin Arthur. The silk-screened panels feature poems by William Stafford that encourage world peace, harmony, justice and humor.

“The idea behind the project was to bring poetry to places underexposed to the arts,” said Confluence Press Director Jim Hepworth. The non-profit press commissioned the six twill and silk panels about a year ago. A $500 grant from FWS provided the materials.

Arthur said she just lived with the poems, “I wrote them out by hand. I just really got them into my system.” Each panel, painted with four or more separate screens, took between 40 and 50 hours to complete. Arthur chose a different font for each poem, and hand mixed the inks for the screens, adding new colors into the old batch each time. “So they are all different, but they are connected,” she said.

Since their debut, the panels have been shown at various places: libraries, schools, hospitals and community agencies. The six panels will likely travel to other places in Oregon and Washington after they make their way around the Lewiston area.

Stafford often published with small presses like Confluence, which printed two of his books, *Even in Quiet Places* and *My Name is William Tell* as well as the chapbook *The Methow River Poems*.

Ask Me

Some time when the river is ice ask me mistakes I have made. Ask me whether what I have done is my life. Others have come in their slow way into my thought, and some have tried to help or to hurt: ask me what difference their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say. You and I can turn and look at the silent river and wait. We know the current is there, hidden; and there are comings and goings from miles away that hold the stillness exactly before us.

What the river says, that is what I say.

William Stafford

A brief history of ‘Spirit of Place’

Back in 1986, when Bud Clark was Mayor of Portland, urban naturalist Mike Houck talked with him about the blue herons that live along the Willamette River. Soon the City Council designated the Great Blue Heron as Portland’s official city bird. Houck invited William Stafford to write a poem about the heron, thus he wrote “Spirit of Place” in 1987 for Great Blue Heron Week, when he presented it before the City Council. In June 1996, Stafford’s poem appeared in *The Audubon Warbler*. In that same issue, Houck wrote “The heron is an icon for Portland’s commitment to protect fish and wildlife habitat in the heart of the city. The poem captures our intent marvelously.” Each year in June, the Audubon Society of Portland continues to celebrate Great Blue Heron Week with a variety of events.

**Spirit of Place: Great Blue Heron**

Out of their loneliness for each other two reeds, or maybe two shadows, lurch forward and become suddenly a life lifted from dawn or the rain. It is the wilderness come back again, a lagoon with our city reflected in its eye. We live by faith in such presences.

It is a test for us, that thin but real, undulating figure that promises, “If you keep faith I will exist at the edge, where your vision joins the sunlight and the rain: heads in the light, feet that go down in the mud where the truth is.”

William Stafford


OSPA members sweep poetry awards

Oregon State Poetry Association poets scored a clean sweep in the 2003 Founders Awards competition, sponsored by the National Federation of State Poetry Societies Inc.

Ruth Harrison of Waldport captured first place and a prize of $1,500; Christine Delea of Lexington, KY (formerly of Tualatin) took second and $500, and David Hedges of West Linn won third and $250. This is the first time Oregonians have claimed prizes in the annual contest. Harrison received the first honorable mention in 2002.

Delea moved to Lexington last year to take a teaching position at the University of Kentucky. Still an Oregonian at heart, she organized the first William Stafford Birthday Celebration outside the Northwest, this past January. She also served on the OSPA Board of Directors for all of three weeks before learning that she had been hired by Kentucky. Hedges, and OSPA President-emeritus, was on hand to accept his award and read his poem at the 44th Annual NFSPS convention June 5-9 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Also honored at the convention was OSPA president Marianne Klekacz of Eddyville, who won the 2003 Edna Meudt Memorial Award. A senior at Marylhurst University, she received a $500 scholarship and publication of her chapbook, *Life Science*. She is the recipient of a Binford Writing Scholarship at Marylhurst, and has been invited to edit the college’s online literary magazine, *M Review*, this coming year. Next year’s NFSPS Conference will be held in Ohio.

The OSPA Fall Conference will be Oct. 18 at Chemeketa Community College in Salem. Peter Sears will be the featured speaker and present a workshop, “Putting a Book of Poems Together.” For more information, go to www.oregonpoets.org, phone 503-655-1274 or write OSPA, PO Box 602, West Linn, OR 97068.

Submitted by David Hedges

Tang Dynasty Poetry AD 618-917

China’s Tang Dynasty was a golden age for literature and art. Poetry blossomed along with painting, ceramics and calligraphy. The invention of block printing made the written word available to a greater population. Thousands of poets contributed to many anthologies, but three collections are considered most outstanding: *The Book of Songs*, *The Songs of Ch’u* and *Three Thousand Tang Poems*. They illustrate the development of Chinese poetry from the earliest times to the full flowering of the Tang period. Tang poems are often memorized and quoted in Chinese families, as some quote the Bible or Shakespeare. For more information, go to www.cs.uiowa.edu/~yhe/poetry. (Ed. note: Thanks to Lake Oswego reference librarians for this information!)
Aside from the limitations set by the Friends of William Stafford’s bank account, the Board of Trustees has an on-going problem: how to maintain and operate the “daily business” and continuing projects (like the January readings and the “How the Ink Feels” exhibit) while at the same time create, organize, promote, sponsor, and help underwrite new programs and projects that help define the mission of FWS.

Time and energy of the 15 Board members are also limited. Most have families, jobs, and other commitments (not to mention the concerns of health, aged parents, and their own age-issues, for lack of a better term) along with their service to FWS.

As Chair, I am blessed by the hard-working, dedicated members of the current FWS Board; without them the bills would not be paid, the by-laws revised, the broadsides printed and sold, the web site maintained, the membership dues collected, the broadside exhibit insured and kept in good repair, or the newsletter written and published. And that’s only the short list of the FWS “workaday” tasks.

My concern, and the Board’s as well, is two-fold: how to keep FWS running smoothly and still have the time and energy to create, develop, and initiate new programs and projects; also, what kinds of projects and programs should we be working on?

As a poetry and all-literature and free speech advocacy organization that becomes more visible nationally every year, FWS cannot succeed in a static state; we have to move forward. Certainly our recently attained 501-c-3 non-profit status induces us to not only do more, but to do more with the same verve and class we have put into all our projects.

So, while the Board continues to operate FWS as smoothly and efficiently as possible, I am asking all members to think seriously about future projects and programs that we might undertake.

What would you like to see the Friends of William Stafford do or get involved in? And would you be willing to help with those new programs or projects? Phone or e-mail me (503-274-0884; joesol@aol.com), or get in touch with any Board member, with your ideas and suggestions. Thank you. I hope we hear from you soon.

Oregon Poets ‘Raise Their Voices’ Against War

The idea for an anthology began during a Poets Against the War reading at the Red and Black Cafe in Portland. Editors Duane Poncy and Patricia McLean and poets David Abel and Hannah Leah, and the project grew wings. *Raising Our Voices: An Anthology of Oregon Poets Against the War* is the result of their efforts.

One hundred and thirty-five Oregon poets agreed to be represented in the book. From poignant to outraged, their voices represent a diverse cross-section of Oregonians. The poems come from rural towns like Joseph, Merlin and Winston, as well as cities like Ashland, Eugene and Portland. The poets range in age from 20 to 85. From novice bard to seasoned poet, they are presented side by side, alphabetically arranged, with no biographical information other than age and city of residence. Each poem speaks for itself. FWS National Advisor Ursula K. LeGuin and poet Judith Barrington, in their introduction to the book, comment: “Response is a poet’s business … a direct response to the events of life, private or political. Poets make words to fit the situation. Homage or protest, response is their job.”

Oregon Poets Against the War (OPAW) is an ad-hoc group of Oregon poets who responded to Sam Hamill’s call to poets worldwide (at www.poetsagainstthewar.com) to protest the Bush administration’s plans for war in Iraq. They are following in the footsteps of William Stafford, who was never afraid to comment poetically on the state of the world. Proceeds from the sale of the book will go to support peace and poetry in Oregon. To find out more, contact the publisher, The Habit of Rainy Nights Press, at 503-252-6303 or write to them at 104 NE 72nd Ave., Portland, OR 97213, or online at www.rainynightspress.com.

Writers featured in the book will read their poetry in the Marylhurst University bookstore on Thursday, Aug. 28 at 7:30 p.m. The event pays tribute to William Stafford, who died 10 years ago on August 28. Books will be available for sale and signing. The book’s editors will be joined by Diane Nova, Joan Maiers, Leah Stenson and Don Hynes. For more on the reading, phone 503-699-6245 or go to www.marylhurst.edu/calendar.
Member Profile: Joan Maiers

Just as mountains move some people, images of rivers and trees resonate through the poems of Joan Maiers. Growing up near the Potomac, the Shenandoah and the Genesee Rivers attuned her to the mystery and fluidity of her surroundings. Now she lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon and teaches at Marylhurst University, both within walking distance of the Willamette River. Her classes include Expressive Writing, a poetry seminar; Making Waves with Words, and Out There, a workshop for prospecting publishing and presentation opportunities. In 1994, she designed and taught a class called Seeing Through the Light, the first college poetry course devoted entirely to the literature of William Stafford.

Joan considers regional poets Nelson Bentley, Madeline DeFrees and Sandra McPherson as important mentors. McPherson encouraged her to study with Robert Hass, Carolyn Forché and Robert Pinsky. These contacts prepared her to serve on the board of the Portland Poetry Festival, where she assisted in bringing in major authors to read. In August 1993, William Stafford was the festival’s featured poet. Joan said William Stafford was the ideal spokesperson for the literary arts, and he was her first choice for two programs of poetry, prose and music she designed for the Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts in 1992 and 1993. Friends of William Stafford’s broadside exhibit, “How the Ink Feels,” inspired Joan to coordinate two readings at Marylhurst’s Shoen Library, in the midst of poems by Stafford and dozens of his friends and colleagues.

As a volunteer for OPB Radio, Joan has interviewed numerous Northwest authors for the Golden Hours poetry program. This opportunity allowed her to ask Jerry Delaunay of OPB to record William Stafford’s reading at Portland State University in August 1993.

Joan’s freelance prose has been published in several books and periodicals, and more than 50 of her poems have appeared in such publications as Sojourners, The Other Side, Seattle Review, Nebo, Fireweed, Hubub, Windfall, and Raising Our Voices. Her full-length poetry manuscript, Specific Gravity, is nearing completion. A river runs through much of her work, a conduit for exploration, as her poem, “Willamette,” suggests. Joan is a member of FWS, OSPA, Pen USA West, and WILPF. She promotes local literary events and is a dedicated advocate for poetry in the Portland area.

Willamette

Always on the river
something happening:
clouds’ bare bones foretelling
sketch of light rain
fiberglass crafts hovering
over swarms of salmon
late morning vapor
rinsing color from evergreen heights
heron alighting creases sky

from Honoring Our Rivers, 2003
Used with permission of the author

Writers on the Edge: Poetry and More on the Coast

Writers on the Edge, Inc., a new nonprofit corporation, is now the sponsoring organization of the Nye Beach Writers’ Series, which has been in continuous monthly production since June 1997. So far, 165 writers have performed at more than 60 events.

An open mike, with literary prizes, follows intermission at all regular events. The mission of Writers On The Edge is to foster a writing community and the artistic development of individual writers. It is dedicated to the literary arts education and enrichment of the general public and public school students.

Although the Writers’ Series continues to hold featured author events the third Saturday of every month, there is an emphasis on “performance” as opposed to “reading.” Program expansion includes more special events with singet/songwriters, theatrical shows, plays and musicals, and adult workshops targeted at writers seeking to improve their writing skills.

A four-week Youth Poetry Writing & Poetry Performance workshop was held in July and all participants received full scholarships. It culminated in an anthology of student work and a public performance. Grants paid for student scholarships and free admission for high school students to all Writers’ Series events.

A schedule of events, individual pages linking to all past authors, and information for applying for consideration as a future performer can be found on the website: www.writersontheedge.org. Carla Perry, winner of the Stewart Holbrook Special Award at the 2002 Oregon Book Awards, is the contact person at 541-574-7708 or cperry@pioneer.net.
Poetry has always been an essential part of Li-Young Lee’s life. When he was very young, his parents taught him the poetry from the Tang Dynasty era. They knew by heart thousands of lines, and poetry was often recited around the dinner table. Lee now lives in Chicago with his wife, Donna, and two sons, but his early years were spent in Southeast Asia. He was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1957. In his memoir, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* (1995, Simon & Schuster) Lee writes about his youth and the history of his mother, the daughter of Chinese royalty, and his father, a former physician for Mao Tse-Tung. The family fled the political turmoil of China in the early 1950s, only to be persecuted in Indonesia for their Christian beliefs and for being Chinese. The family escaped to Hong Kong, and then to Japan, before coming to the United States. Lee’s father, now deceased, attended seminary and became a pastor in a Presbyterian church in Pennsylvania, where the family settled into a new lifestyle.

Lee received his higher education at the University of Pittsburgh, University of Arizona and State University of New York at Brockport. He has taught at several universities, including Northwestern and the University of Iowa. He continues to teach at various writing conferences and workshops around the country. This past June, he was the keynote speaker at the National Federation of State Poetry Societies in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He is the author of three books of poetry, all published by BOA Editions, a non-profit press that publishes only poetry. The books are *Rose* (1986), *The City In Which I Love You* (1990), and *Book of My Nights* (2001). He has won numerous awards including the Delmore Schwartz Award for *Rose*, the Lannan Foundation Literary Award and the PEN Oakland/ Josephine Award.

Lee does most of his writing at night, when it is quiet and he has time to ponder his spiritual beliefs and his family and cultural heritage, and to integrate his musings into his poetry. Gerald Stern writes in the introduction to *Rose*, “… what characterizes Lee’s poetry is a certain humility … a search for wisdom and understanding … a belief in holiness, and a pursuit of certain Chinese memories. The art of the simple is full of peril. I think we are in the presence of true spirit.”

In a recent interview with Amy Pence for *Poets & Writers* (Nov. 2001), Lee comments on his ideas of writing as a religious enterprise. He said, “In the ancient Chinese poetry, there has to be a moment in the poem where one needs to raise the consciousness to see the universe in the context of the poem. The ancient poets saw the poem as an object through which you come to know the Tao or God.” In the interview, Lee also talks about the service of art “… that it integrates and reconciles all the parts of our psyche: the conscious and the unconscious, the stuff we’ve hidden.” Lee believes that images are gifts for the writer, that the image is a revelation of sorts. Reading his poetry, one can readily see the richness of his images and metaphors.

In a recent phone conversation, Lee said that he fell in love with William Stafford’s poetry early on, and considers Stafford one of his literary heroes. “It seems to me that Stafford’s poems come from a deep space – his poetic voice inflects a feeling of primordial silence. There is spaciousness in his poems, a primal space. Stafford is like a Chinese poet; his poems contemplate the universe, the cosmos, just as Chinese poetry does.”

Lee met Stafford only twice, but knows him through his writing. In a sense, they are spiritual companions through their poetry. Lee is grounded and balanced by his beliefs, just as Stafford was, and writes with honesty from his heart.
News and Notes

‘The Sleep of Grass’ Pays Tribute to Stafford
Early in 1993, writer Mark Mitchell began composing a tribute for William Stafford’s 80th birthday, which would have been the following January. After Stafford’s death in August 1993, “the shape changed some, but not the intention or destination,” said Mitchell. “What you have now is a piece of lost mail pursuing an elusive address. One that is nowhere and, as Dorothy Stafford says, ‘is everywhere now.’ Mitchell’s tribute to Stafford is called “The Sleep of Grass,” and it is part of his website, www.newsfromnowhere.com. There are 13 poems on the site, including works by Robert Bly, Linda Pastan, Cynthia Kuhn and Barbara LaMorticella. “So around this little gathering, we want to notice again with you how Stafford’s poems are all around us, and in the way we pay attention, to do our part,” Mitchell said.

Eugene Poet Wins Tor House Prize
Eugene Poet Howard W. Robertson has been named the winner of this year’s Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize for Poetry for his poem, “Not Far From the Source.” The prize includes a cash award of $1,000. It is given in honor of American poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962). Robertson’s work was chosen from among more than 2,600 poems from the United States and 6 foreign countries. To read his poem, go to www.torhouse.org/prize.htm.

Stafford Symposium Postponed
The annual William Stafford Symposium will not be held in October. Instead, the Northwest Writing Institute and the Estate of William Stafford will hold the event on the Lewis and Clark College Campus on Jan. 17, 2003, which would have been Stafford’s 90th birthday.

Ken Kesey Statue to be Unveiled in Eugene
The Eugene Celebration is always fun, and this September, there’s another reason for writers to celebrate: a statue of Ken Kesey will be unveiled as part of the festivities. Poet and sculptor Pete Helzer is sculpting the well-loved author in bronze. The statue, which depicts Kesey reading to three children, will be placed in downtown Eugene. Photographer Brian Lanker is leading this project, which is supported by UO President Dave Frohnmayer and musician Mason Williams. Kesey used to say that when you told people you were from Oregon, it was like you got five gold stars after your name. Kesey, who died in November 2001, is the author of One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Sometimes a Great Notion.

Poets Against the War
Sam Hamill’s book Poets Against The War is now available at libraries and bookstores. Published by Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books with an introduction by Sam Hamill, it is an anthology of the best poems submitted to the website. (see April FWS Newsletter). Sam Hamill is the editor and cofounder of Copper Canyon Press and the author of 13 volumes of poetry.

Poetry Workshop
Vancouver Public Library’s monthly drop-in poetry workshop, taught by FWS member Cabydere Redmond, focuses on stimulating creativity and imagination. The class also explores the craft of poetry, how to use sound, rhythm, rhyme and other devices to play with words. Each class is self-contained, so sequential attendance is not required. The workshop is held on the first Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. in Library Hall.

Oregon Shakespeare Festival
Ashland is the home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the nation’s oldest repertory theater. OSF is presenting 11 plays this season, including Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, Richard II and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The company is also staging a new play by Pulitzer Prize winning author Nilo Cruz, Lorca in a Green Dress. The play takes a lyrical look at Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca. One of the 20th century’s greatest poets, Lorca was born in 1898, and was executed at the age of 38, during the Spanish Civil War. He died for his political and intellectual beliefs. His poetry was banned for many years, and not until 1975 was he once again openly read, studied and admired. For more information on OSF, call 541-482-4331 or go to www.osfashland.org. Tickets may be purchased online.

Literary Arts Fall Schedule

More News & Notes, Page 8
MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide ongoing education in literature, particularly in poetry, in a way that will encourage and enrich a broad community of readers and writers. In the spirit of William Stafford’s gifts as a teacher, we are also devoted to the free expression of literature and conscience. We seek ways to share his work and advance the spirit of his teaching and literary witness. We direct our work toward education in local communities, to contribute to the poet’s legacy for generations to come.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

William Stafford’s direct work as a writer ended with his death in 1993, but through the Friends of William Stafford, his gifts as a teacher continue. He traveled widely in pursuit of the free expression of literature and conscience. We aim to continue to spread his work, “a plain unmarked envelope passing through the world,” by advancing the spirit of his teaching. By joining the Friends of William Stafford, you will be contributing to his legacy for generations to come. Annual membership includes:

• Newsletters that let you know about activities of Friends of William Stafford
• A forum to promote poetry in your community
• Opportunities to volunteer for Friends of William Stafford projects
• A network of other poets, writers, and poetry organizations

Your membership dollars support our newsletter and web site and the traveling broadside exhibit, How The Ink Feels, as well as the reading, writing and enjoyment of poetry.

Date: ____________________________
Name: ____________________________
Address: __________________________
City: ____________________________ State: __________ Zip: __________ Country: __________
e-mail: ____________________________ Phone (with area code): __________________________

Business/Institutional Address OR Gift (Send to) Address:
Name: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________
City: ____________________________ State: __________ Zip: __________ Country: __________
e-mail: ____________________________ Phone (with area code): __________________________

Membership:

(Please check ALL appropriate boxes!) [ ] New [ ] Renewal [ ] Gift
[ ] Standard $25 [ ] Retired $10
[ ] Student: $10 [ ] Lifetime $150

Volunteer Opportunities:

( Check any you’re interested in)
[ ] Organize Poetry Readings in your community
[ ] Help with Refreshments/Set-up
[ ] Publicize Events

How did you learn about Friends of William Stafford? ____________________________

Payment: Please make check payable to “Friends of William Stafford” Mail to: Friends of William Stafford, PO Box 592, Lake Oswego, OR 97034.

Memberships (except for Lifetime) are due and renewable each January.

Please copy or use this form to renew and let us know if you change your address.

Consider a gift membership to someone else. Thank you!

Thank you to all of our members!

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Send comments, letters, news, and info on poetry events, etc. to: FWS, PO. Box 592, Lake Oswego, OR 97034 or by e-mail to friends@williamstafford.org
**How the Ink Feels visits Enterprise**

“How the Ink Feels: A Traveling Exhibit of Letterpress Broadsides by Distinguished Artists and Writers” has been at Fishtrap in Enterprise. The exhibit, sponsored by Friends of William Stafford, was in the Coffin House through July 20. At a reading June 19, Fishtrap poets read selections from the broadsides by writers such as William Stafford, Wendell Berry, Ivan Doig, Ursula LeGuin, Barry Lopez, Gary Snyder, Li-Young Lee, Robert Hass and others.

**FWS Broadsides make excellent gifts**

When was the last time you rushed around looking for a special gift for a birthday, graduation or other occasion? Consider giving the gift of poetry, in the form of one of several FWS Letterpress Broadsides, suitable for framing. The newest broadside, “You Reading This, Be Ready,” is available along with “Note,” “Earth Dweller” and “A Story That Could Be True.” Mail orders may be placed with Nan Atzen, 29365 NE Putnam Road, Newberg, OR 97123. The cost is $10 each, plus $3.85 shipping. Other broadsides in the series (sold out) were “Why I Am Happy” and “A Ritual To Read To Each Other.” Each of these six poems was written in a different decade of Stafford’s life, from the 1940s to the 1990s. Proceeds from the sale of the broadside poems support the work and mission of Friends of William Stafford.

**Oregon Book Awards features Carolyn Kizer**

Award-winning Poet Carolyn Kizer is hosting the 17th annual Oregon Book Awards on Nov. 13 at the Scottish Rite Center, 1512 SW Morrison St. in Portland. This Literary Arts program honors the state’s best writers of poetry, fiction, literary nonfiction, drama and young readers literature. Tickets are $25 and can be reserved by calling the Literary Arts box office at 503-227-2583. Kizer, author of eight books of poetry, founded Poetry Northwest in 1959, and served as its editor for six years, and was the first director of the literature program at the National Endowment for the Arts. She has received an American Academy of the Arts and Letters award, the Frost Medal, the John Masefield Memorial Award and the Theodore Roethke Memorial Poetry Award. She is a former chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.