



friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD

A Newsletter For Poets & Poetry
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"Some time when the river is ice..."

by Greg Simon

My discourse today, "Some time when the river is ice..." may well be part of a grander scheme I have in mind about poets and rivers. Coffee table sized book, illustrated with color photographs and hydrological charts. So imagine you are holding that, if you will, as we proceed, or better yet think of your own favorite river. And in the meantime I've brought along mine, an etching of the view from my living room windows of the Willamette River. My friend Stephen Leflar created it, and it may seem a little strange to those of you familiar with Portland. The etching process reverses the image when it is pressed onto paper, wrong becoming right and left becoming right (that is really wrong), and so Tad's work looks backwards and is perhaps best appreciated by glancing at it over your shoulder. But when the rain clouds are an inch above the ground, and everything in Portland is the color of steel wool, anyone in my house can look at the etching and still have a marvelous view of the river.

The dictionaries tell us the word *river* was imported to England by the Saxons, who had previously shortened (and, I think, beautified) the Latin word they had inherited. *Riparius* became *riviere*, more familiar to us in the sister language, Italian: *riviera*, representing a mythical, almost unobtainable and luxurious waterside Mediterranean paradise. Those insensitive, lazy English louts cut out one of its eyes and one of its e's, and left us with riv-er. (The verb to *rive* means to tear apart or rend; one who rives is a ri-ver.)

I don't know where words come from. I don't know where poets come from. Really, most of us usually only know about what poets leave behind. William Stafford left an enormous legacy – of good will in our hearts – of abandoned, unfinished, or unpublished writing, now at Lewis & Clark. I hope one of the poets cataloging his archives is working on an alphabetical list of all the words Bill used and where they occurred in his poems – a concordance. What a wonderful word – it means harmony – and having one would have made my task easier: just go to 'r', river...

And consider this definition of river: a vertical channel of white space resulting from the alignment in several lines of spaces between words ... According to my friend Tess Gallagher, that is one of the ways a poem can be improved: rive the poem, render it more open, put in additional white space, like a typographical river.

A poem is a river of words temporarily turned to ice.

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.

(cont. on p. 2)

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Stafford in Kansas, possibly after working in a refinery

(cont. from p. 1)

At a certain point in time, an audacious editor asked Bill to paraphrase "Ask Me." This was his response:

"I think my poem can be paraphrased – and that any poem can be paraphrased. But every pass through the material, using other words, would have to be achieved at certain costs, either in momentum, or nuance, or dangerously explicit (and therefore misleading in tone) adjustments. I'll try one such pass through the poem: When it's



PHOTO BY ILKA KUZNIK

Greg Simon

quiet and cold and we have some chance to interchange without hurry, confront me if you like with a challenge about whether to me my life is actually the sequence of events or exploits others would see. Well, those others tag along in my living, and some of them in fact have played significant roles in the narrative run of my world; they have intended either helping or hurting (but by implication in the way I am saying this you will know that neither effort is conclusive). So – ask me how important their good or bad intentions have been (both intentions get a drastic leveling judgment from this cool stating of it all.) You, too, will be entering that realm of maybe-help-maybe-hurt, by entering that far into my life by asking this serious question – so: I will stay still and consider. Out there will be the world confronting us both; we will both know we are surrounded by mystery, tremendous things that do not reveal themselves to us. That river, that world – and our lives – all share the depth and stillness of much more significance than our talk, or intentions. There is a steadiness and somehow a solace in knowing that what is around us so greatly surpasses our human concerns." [1977]

That is an astonishing paraphrase.

We know the current is there, hidden...

I know, beneath the sunset, a great river surges, even if I never see it.

That's a line from a Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, who died in 1935. He left the world a tremendous legacy – a steamer trunk found in his apartment after his death, stuffed full of 25,000 manuscript pages: abandoned, unfinished, unpublished. After spending his formative years in Durban, on the eastern coast of Africa, learning English, Pessoa went back to Portugal, and never left. Isolated from but not unaware of world culture, living with a succession of aunties or in lonely rented rooms, Pessoa translated contracts and business letters during the day, and at night pressed the unrelenting voices he heard, late hour after hour, into an inclusive army in his literary war against solitude. He had dreams of empire – colonies of words with the Portuguese language leading the way to enlightenment. Those ink-stained, coffee-stained, wine-stained, tobacco-stained pages populated the Lisbon of his mind, and its Morocco, its Brazil...

I grow calmer & calmer.
I think I'm going to die –

Young, tender tiredness to
quench desire I once desired.

My spirit astonishes me –
acquiescent to this feeling.

Suddenly, in the green grove,
a river shines beyond it.

Circling me now, this is real –
Tejo, sunlight, almond trees.

"Traveling Through the Dark," arguably William Stafford's best-known poem, takes place on the bank of a river, like Pessoa's Tejo, which flows through the environs of Lisbon. Perhaps Bill's river is the Trask, near Tillamook, or the Wilson, or the not so imaginary river in which Ken Kesey's imaginary brother drowned in *Sometimes A Great Notion*. What Stafford and Kesey and Pessoa have in common: knowing that a river was there if they needed it, for better or for worse, still and quiet, or surging dangerously.

Like Bill, I once packed everything I owned into a small car and drove out west from the Mississippi. In my case it was a return to what was familiar: the Pacific Ocean, the fruit and fir trees, mountains and rivers without end, the Umpqua, the Tualatin, the McKenzie, the Willamette, the Columbia.

I've spent sixty years on the banks of a river.
Only those who are living here can see it.
People heading toward the outdoor market
look at us with fear. They don't understand
why the dampness clings to our clothing
or how we reel in those fish for them,
the color of blood oranges,
from the invisible water.

One day a man falls in and does not reappear.
Passersby, interrupting errands to the market,
exclaim, "Where did he go?"

"When is he coming back?"
and "How marvelous, those fiery yellow fish!"
Those of us born to the river keep quiet.
Smile enigmatically. Say nothing. Give no sign.
The language of our tribe is silence.
We want to protect our invisible river.

On its banks
the world belongs to us –
as does its mystery.

That's a poem by Gastón Baquero, a Cuban writer who was exiled to Spain after the revolution of Castro and Guevara in 1959. He took everything he was allowed to take, which probably wasn't very much, and had to reinvent himself in a foreign country – learn to write again in a language that suddenly sounded strange to him, translate his own life. Baquero's language certainly sounded exotic to me, the first time I heard it, on the bullet train going back to

Madrid. Steve White and I had just spent an incredibly hot yet satisfying day in Sevilla. The day before we had been presented a copy of Baquero's *Collected Poetry* by Pio E. Serranno, the editor who preserved it from oblivion, who was also a Cuban exile in Spain. And in the air-conditioned train that was trying to rock me to sleep at 300 miles an hour, Steve was reading Baquero, and poking me in the ribs with it, saying, "You have to hear this, you have to hear this!" That is what poetry should be – something that knocks insistently in the middle of the night at a door that you cannot help but open. And what river was Baquero talking about? What river, indeed.

Let's pretend we are all curators and examine our recent acquisitions. We have a river, a silent, mysterious river. It travels through the dark, and through the sunlight. It is among the trees, beyond the trees. We know it is there even when it isn't there. It nourishes; it takes things away. It surges. It is quiet. We only have to stand still long enough to become aware of its existence, and wait. And get a little tired, and hungry for light, for the yellow fish.

Be a person here. Stand by the river,
invoke the owls. Invoke winter, then spring.
Let any season that wants to come here
make its own call.
After that sound goes away, wait.

A slow bubble rises through the earth
and begins to include sky, stars, all space,
even the outracing, expanding thought.
Come back and hear the little sound again.

Suddenly this dream you are having
matches everyone's dream,
and the result is the world.

If a different call came
there wouldn't be any world,
or you, or the river, or the owls calling.

How you stand here is important.
How you listen for the next things to happen.
How you breathe.

Notes & Sources

Presented at Multnomah County Central Library, Portland, Oregon, on Sunday, January 30, 2011. Composed in the garden courtyard of the Ritz Carlton Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana, on September 24, 2010. The discourse is an attempt on the part of the author to integrate poetry and prose into a seamless garment that would wrap itself around the subject matter of poets and rivers. Certain liberties have been taken in the delineation of the two poems by William Stafford for purposes of emphasis and breathing.

"Ask Me" by William Stafford, from *Even in Quiet Places* (Confluence Press, 1996).

"Ask Me" (Commentary) from *Fifty Contemporary Poets: The Creative Process*, Edited by Alberta T. Turner (David McKay

Company, 1977).

"The River" by Fernando Pessoa. Version by Greg Simon.

"The River" by Gastón Baquero, from *The Angel of Rain*, Translated by Greg Simon and Steven F. White (Eastern Washington University Press, 2006).

"Being a Person" by William Stafford, from *Even in Quiet Places* (Confluence Press, 1996).

Reflections on the Mystery of William Stafford

by Dennis McBride (epicurepdx@yahoo.com)

(Stafford was a challenge for me, and he eventually became a kind of spiritual rock in my shoe, a not entirely understood or resolved cultural and religious tic I'm still wrestling with.)

I don't necessarily want to *praise* William Stafford or to *bury* him. It's just that I've been thinking of him for some years, trying to understand my ambivalence toward him. I sometimes have this feeling when I'm reading his work that I'm in the Heathman Hotel. I'm rich and I'll never have to die. It's like I'm in a Hitchcock movie and I'm going to hear a shot ring out and someone perfectly dressed is going to be dead on the soft red carpet—and then Cary Grant and Grace Kelly run out the door, unharmed and handsome, absolutely safe. There is something about Stafford's work that affects me the same way. He is one of those writers I can't read when I'm working on a piece of writing—his voice jams my radar. Every time I opened one of his books, I heard a voice from my childhood church—would you please open your hymn books to page 123—which I didn't want to do. I wanted to be outside *sinning*. For me, spirituality doesn't change what I'm doing; it adds depth and dimension, not direction.

I've never been entirely convinced that there is any adequate response to any significant aspect of the human condition, so I'm a skeptic of theories and beliefs that are based on any kind of adaptive premise or transcendence and Stafford was, by any standard, triumphantly adaptive—and transcendent.

I first became acquainted with the Stafford name when I started writing about twelve years ago. I hadn't read any contemporary poets and then a street poet, a pusher, got me hooked on Richard Hugo, and I felt like I had been harpooned by a time release capsule of truth in images and before I knew it, I was mainlining contemporary poets, most of whose minds felt like wild horses that had knocked down the gate or jumped over the corral fence and escaped. And there was William Stafford, who seemed as if he had just walked over and unlocked the gate and sauntered out. Anyway, I wanted to see a real writer read from a real book, so I looked in the paper and found a listing of a reading by someone named Kim Stafford. When I got there, he was being introduced with his new book, *Having Everything Right*. I knew I wouldn't be able to relate to him and left to find another reading. Then, when I later stumbled onto a William Stafford book called *You Must Revise Your Life*, my body stiffened at the title, and I couldn't raise my arm to reach it. I thought of Truman Capote's statement about his firing his psychiatrist, "My god, this man wants to interfere in my private life." And then I discovered he was Kim's father. I wondered, "What's wrong with this family?"

(cont. on p. 4)

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(I sometimes think neither Kafka nor Poe ever devised a torture as subtle and ingenious as the family.) Then I found a William Stafford poem called “The Little Girl by the Fence at School”—and it stunned me. It seemed to not only render the world’s religions obsolete but to improve on them in just its few lines. I became seduced by his poems and his voice before I learned about his stature in contemporary poetry. Both his style and his poems seemed to violate the canon required of a major poet. They were informal and friendly; I didn’t have to have my best clothes on to go for a walk in them. Then I heard the word “Christian” associated with him, and a red warning flag went up inside me. I have approach/avoidance issues with certain things; it’s not the heaven/hell thing. I’m not worried about hell. I’m more worried about going to heaven and having to sit at dinner between William Buckley and Billy Graham. Also, I tend to judge poets and people partly on whether I would want to be stuck in an elevator with them. T. S. Eliot would be out, Dylan Thomas in, Bukowski and Hannibal Lecter would be in, etc., but Stafford was kind of on the borderline—I hadn’t found a satisfying way to identify with him yet. I thought maybe it was because he was a Christian, and you never know exactly what that means. I’m a mystic by default because I just don’t know anything, but I’ve always felt a little left out and suspicious around people who seem to have an inside track, especially around those formal religions that don’t want to allow your soul to fart. It seemed odd that I could be comfortable on an elevator with Hannibal Lecter, who might kill and eat me; there was something sympathetic about him I understood, whereas I was uneasy with someone who might want to save my soul.

Why was I more afraid of being saved than eaten? Then two thoughts occurred to me about Christians that lessened my concerns. The first was that one of the big differences between a Christian and an existentialist is that a Christian gets to have an invisible playmate and guardian, and the other thing is that the early Christians were originally outlaws. It was only later when they started taking Jesus’ reported higher-in-law so seriously that they abandoned being outlaws. So Stafford changed for me from being a kind spiritual Abe Lincoln of contemporary poetry to a kind of psycho-spiritual outlaw, an outlaw in reverse, teaching us that you shouldn’t always arrest people for breaking laws; sometimes you should arrest them for following them.

Literature makes for stranger bedfellows than politics, so I found myself working on a prose piece about Stafford and the Marquis de Sade, where they end up in the same holding cell for violating different laws and enter into a kind of *My Dinner with Andre* conversation in search of a common ground. In my research I learned that the Marquis was, among other things, always trying to release man from within in order to give himself back his sense of physical and mental sovereignty that is a privilege of childhood, and I realized that was what Stafford did so well. One of the things that drew me to Stafford’s poetry was the strong sense of emotional home, of sanctuary, in his work. It was like the Apollo moon landing—I wasn’t really that nervous when they touched down on the moon; it was when they were going to try ignition to lift off the lunar surface that I felt my stomach in my throat. It was all about home. However, that further thickened the plot of my dilemma because I also found the scent of home in Bukowski and Hannibal Lecter.

The Little Girl by the Fence at School

Grass that was moving found all shades of brown,
moved them along, flowed autumn away
galloping southward where summer had gone.

And that was the morning someone’s heart stopped
and all became still. A girl said, “Forever?”
And the grass: “Yes. Forever.” While the sky—

The sky—the sky—the sky.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Appropriateness is one of our most rigid and sacred psychological laws, and I saw how Stafford’s life, as most poets, certainly broke that law. All poets are outlaws in a way, but Stafford had a special way of not being on the payroll, especially in his poetry. He once said that he wanted to be on guard against writing good poems. He wasn’t a prisoner of his stature and that helped me to warm up to him because I realized that I was better at writing bad poems than he was. I began to feel better about myself and him, but these insights still didn’t really help me with Stafford’s mystery.

Finally, with some apprehension, I attended a workshop with him, and there was something about him that made a part of me want to sit on his lap. He had this sort of kindly, graceful patience. He seemed to live in places I hardly ever visit, as though he had domesticated demons that I couldn’t or hadn’t yet. I was trying to kill the acolyte inside me, and he was celebrating it.

I’ve never been really comfortable with the secularists or the spiritualists. The former don’t seem to be entirely aware that there is a blank to be filled in or the terrifying enormity of its dimensions, and the spiritualists don’t seem to be entirely aware that it is only they who are filling it in, but Stafford really seemed from the *road-less-traveled* tradition; but because I tend to distrust the *heroic* posture, I’ve always had doubts about Frost’s *fork in the road*, that *separate road that will make all the difference* because if it did, everyone would be on it and it wouldn’t be less traveled, and how could you know it was less traveled if you were at its beginning? Besides, if choice were that curative, why would anyone use a shopping cart for a house, the sidewalk for a bed, or a prison cell for a future when you could be with Monica Lewinsky in the White House. Still, Stafford’s weight brought a sort of singular-rather-than-plural focus to the road, which brings a feeling of truth to the metaphor. I even ironically sometimes thought of him as a kind of spiritual Audie Murphy, who was the most decorated soldier of WWII. So Stafford seemed to have found a real fork somehow.

It’s always felt proper to me to resent those people whose nature and nurture have blessed them with the ability to meet life’s challenges with dignity and character. I often think there are generally two kinds of people—the mentally well who are occasionally ill and the mentally ill who are occasionally well, and I wasn’t sure where Stafford fit. He

just seemed to have a shameless lack of the tragic qualities that are a poet's birthright. He wasn't derailed by love, work, money, birth, death, sex, politics or religion and seemed without worry, fear, anger, anxiety, or inner conflict, while I had my own personal parking space in that universe. I sometimes thought Stafford was guilty of what I think of as the sin of adult-ery (being excessively adult), a premature transcendence of the flesh. I couldn't imagine him really angry or yelling at his children or being divorced. Of course, he was lucky to grow up before mainstream mandatory



PHOTO BY ILYA KUZNIK

Leanne Grabel and Steve Sander at the First Unitarian Church

therapy. If Hepburn and Tracy were together now, they would both be in therapy, and she would have left him at the first sign of a character flaw. Still, I just couldn't get away from my dis-ease with his ease, his serene, calm, unshakable center, the wonderful and easy way he had of being out of synch with the world. He just didn't appear to have a proper sense of futility in him, and I tend to feel that it's the well-balanced ones who should really be in therapy. So I finally asked his wife Dorothy if he ever lost it, got really mad, but she said, "No, he never did," but added with a secretive whisper, "We sometimes wished he would."

For me, Stafford's line "the darkness around us is deep" is the heart of him, but one of the things I respect him for is that he wouldn't take you into a dark cellar and leave you there. The fact of suicide tells me that the mind is a dangerous thing to take for a walk, but if I knew someone who was in that space, I feel I could recommend Stafford's work as one of the drugs of choice, not only because of his sense of sanctuary but also his Tom Sawyer and, occasionally, even Huck Finn style of spirituality with its soft, subversive, irreverent humor. As someone smart said, "Real religion turns anxiety into laughter."

Anyway, the aspects of that darkness that interest me are estrangement, alienation, and separation because there is this trapdoor each of us is standing on, and there is a timer on it, and we don't know what it's set for, and we act for the most part as if we're completely unaware of it, which, somewhat mercifully, for the most part, we are. So this led me to thinking about quantum physicists who have this place that they refer to as "elsewhere" where two things or events are so separated by such a great distance in the universe that even information traveling at the speed of light can't get from one to the other even though they both exist in the now, and that seemed like a good metaphor for lots of the families and relationships I've experienced and observed. I'm interested in how a once vitally important and valued relationship can end abruptly and badly, how what once felt like an eternal flame

can go out like a penny match in wind. So I found myself thinking about Mt. Vesuvius erupting and all those 60,000 people who were buried in Pompeii, and I bet a lot of them were arguing and hadn't had a chance to heal and suddenly—"bang"—it's just all over, and so I thought, well, how deep can the darkness be? Is it deep or isn't it?

Well, it seems like it is and it isn't, like the wave and particle. Maybe that's why we can often act as though the darkness isn't there. For example, a guy came to my house to plant trees, and I told him I wanted six-foot trees for cover, and he brought four-foot trees. I said, "Where are the six-foot trees?" and he said, "In a couple of years they'll grow and be up to six feet." I patiently pointed out to him that tumors can grow faster than that. He didn't get the connection, and I still can't decide in what way Stafford did, or if his easy sense of assurance was a result of possessing that cultural theological coupon that's offered to all of us; he was clearly more on the Thomas Merton end of the continuum than the Pat Robertson one and even though I still don't have my answers about Stafford, I'm getting to where I don't care. But that "The Little Girl by the Fence at School" is an amazing poem—how to do magic with metaphor.

I think it is perhaps possible that Stafford was simply an ET, a poet from the *X-Files*, and it's the X factor that makes him different, that sets his work apart. After two theologians visited Emily Dickinson's father, she wrote in her diary that evening, "They said sacred things aloud and embarrassed my dog." What makes Stafford different from the theologians is that when he says or writes sacred things, the dog's tail wags.

Stafford at the U of O

by Mark Thalman

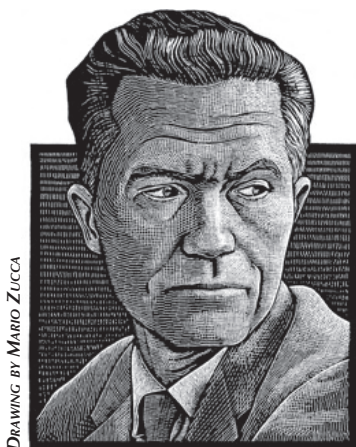
If you were at the University of Oregon back in the 70's, there were a few things you could count on: The Duck football team was in last place, the Vietnam War was being protested, and every year when William Stafford gave a reading on campus, he would draw a tremendous crowd of 300 to 400 people.

When I was sitting waiting for one of Stafford's readings to begin, there was an empty folding chair to my right. The room was filling up, and who should sit down beside me, but Ken Kesey. Every time Stafford read a poem or a line that Kesey thought was great, Kesey would rock back, balance on the back two legs of the chair, and snap both his fingers like he was a beatnik in a coffee house.

The thing was, Kesey was sitting far enough away that Bill couldn't hear him snapping his fingers, but everyone else for a few rows around sure could. It was a wonderful reading watching two of my favorite writers in the same room.

After the reading, Kesey went over and shook Bill's hand. They talked for a few minutes, until others wanted their turn to say hello. So, the next time you read or hear a Stafford poem, and you find something you think is great, feel free to snap your fingers like Kesey and honor Bill.

Editor's Note: The pieces by Greg Simon, Dennis McBride, Mark Thalman, and Robin Bagai were all a part of this January's celebration, delivered at different events. Simon's and McBride's were part of the Multnomah Central Library event on January 30th. Thalman's was delivered at the Tigard Public Library on January 22nd. Robin Bagai gave his talk at the Blackfish Gallery on January 29th.



Letting Go with Both Hands

by Robin Bagai

Good afternoon and welcome everyone to Blackfish Gallery, where I hope we will indeed have many future annual poetry readings in honor of William Stafford. A big and hearty thank you to the Blackfish collective for their generosity in hosting this event and creating this attractive space for a reading.

And what could be better this Sunday afternoon than comingling?—in this case, “word art,” language art, alongside of this great visual art. Because what is poetry if not “word art?” The power to evoke depth and poignancy of meaning, using words as sparsely as possible. Minimum words, maximum meaning, a happy synthesis of opposites.

Initially, I wanted to talk a lot about silence and the spoken word (as if that were possible), particularly, how important silence is, especially the silence in-between poems, even stanzas, and how similar to the silence at the end of a piece of classical music—you know, where your body is still reverberating, taking it in, and metabolizing all those sounds that are still hanging in the air. Well, to my mind poetry is no different. Poetry needs silence around it to bathe in, just as the songs of birds need silence as a backdrop for appreciation.

Enough about silence. Instead I will say a little something about loving the earth. Whenever I get on an airplane, I just love to look out the window and watch the landscape go by, along with the clouds or the ocean—I find them all exquisitely beautiful. (I’ll confess that Willa and I have pointed discussions over who should get the window).

And my interest in Stafford springs from his love of landscape and the natural world, more so on the ground than up in the air. As a longtime fisher person, backpacker, and wilderness lover, it’s hard not to feel an affinity with Stafford’s writing and before I read a couple of his short pieces, I want to tell you a story about “letting go with both hands”— which is a phrase from one of Stafford’s poems.

I think many of us have experienced how, after years of applying ourselves at one particular endeavor, the energy around that either strengthens or recedes, and if it recedes, we are then propelled to find other attractors, other directions for that same energy. Well, when the energy around my psychology practice started to wane due to intrusive HMOs and their restrictions, and residential treatment

centers losing all manner of funding, and my having had enough of testing and diagnosing pathology, I had the experience of “letting go with both hands” to see what would happen if I purposely created a vacuum in my life. What would occur? It was a scary process and it lasted a few years.

But the result has been my growing work as a board director with a young start-up company that is trying to make a big impact on plastic pollution problems (by transforming plastic waste back into its original hydro-carbon molecule, cheaply and efficiently). I love work that feels both exciting and meaningful, and I have found both of those in JBI, Inc.

So, by “letting go with both hands,” and trusting that nature abhors a vacuum, I now find myself in a real world situation with JBI that may make a difference in how we deal with our growing plastic problem. To be able to help clean up, among other things, the ocean garbage patches that are swirling with plastic refuse, would be a real contribution. It is one we are working towards.



Robin Bagai

The lesson for me was to be patient during the time of “nothing going on” and to remain alert... but to wait... and wait... until something felt right. And how does one know when it feels right? The gravitational forces tell you because your energy and interest naturally go there, like water seeking its course.

Why I Keep a Diary

While I follow the wind
there is no wind. Because
my wings are silent. I follow
the coast and find these pines
wrapped in their wind, those old believers.

And I know that I am alive
and this is the world’s trail
a day, a day, a day
much on its own track.
Where did the others go?

Pacemaker sun, persuader,
and heart that wants to beat
(and then the soul’s one stride):
my destiny is to find
this coast I follow.

*For Sandy on July 16, 1974
because he asked on July 15

WILLIAM STAFFORD

January Dispatches

Los Porteños Host Inaugural Stafford Birthday Reading

Los Porteños, Portland's Latino writers' group, sponsored their first William Stafford Birthday Reading on Wednesday, January 19th, at 7 pm at the Milagro/Miracle Theatre. Against a theatrical backdrop on which floated the face of Federico García Lorca (famed Spanish poet executed for his beliefs during the Spanish Civil War), six Porteños celebrated Stafford's life and work as artist and pacifist.

Hosted by Cindy Williams Gutiérrez, the reading opened with her tribute to Stafford's uncanny ability "to listen deeply with his eyes wide open." Quoting from Stafford's poems "Listening" and "Exile II," Cindy went on to say:

Despite his love for the natural world, William Stafford did not spend his life as a hermit in the woods. He remained vigilant to the social and political world in which he lived. William Stafford was a conscientious objector, a C.O. in World War II, the "good war," the popular war. It is in a C.O. camp...where he developed his habit of rising early to write. This was his private rebellion.

The featured readers shared both poetry and prose written in direct response to Stafford poems. Readings ranged from Ivonne Saed's short story, "The Trouble with Being Read," written from the point of view of a Spanish translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, in response to Stafford's "The Trouble with Reading" to Olga Sanchez Saltveit's response to Stafford's "Why I Keep a Diary" in the form of two linked poems, "Why I almost keep a Diary" and "Why I almost keep a Diary, # 2." And in what may be the first trilingual poem written in response to a Stafford poem, Octaviano Merceñas-Cuevas read his English-Spanish-Mixtec response to "An Oregon Message." The reading also featured works by multi-genre writer Joann Farías and novelist Emma Oliver, along with FWS Board Member Don Colburn.

In the communal tradition of the birthday reading series, the evening culminated with readings of favorite Stafford poems by the audience, including FWS Board member and Oregon Poet Laureate Paulann Petersen.

Why I almost keep a Diary

For the moments that are for real
when a young girl I know
but not that well
reveals her infinite kindness
and unfathomable self-absorption.

If you could make your own town, she asks,
what would it be like?
She can't wait for my reply—
Can I tell you my idea?
Everyone would share their stuff.

Another day she says, it's annoying,
when people tell me I should be
happy for what I have,

it doesn't help anything.
I want to remember what she said.

Why I almost keep a Diary, #2

An older girl I know even less well
than her younger sister
is on the brink of womanhood
daily testing my patience
and trustworthiness.

Will I get her a glass of milk
even without the magic word?
Will I watch her adolescent pranks
and television and laugh?
Can I, like, get over myself?

A long time ago I was a girl.
Now I watch all of us growing up.
Resisting while yearning for change
I want to capture these moments,
answer the questions,
stop the aging.

by Olga Sanchez Saltveit

The Trouble with Being Read (excerpt)
"When a goat likes a book, the whole book is gone,
and the meaning has to go find an author again."
—William Stafford

The tome waits. Fearful, hesitant and cautious, it tries to go unnoticed between so many other volumes, bound in leather and hard covers. Days pass, occasionally weeks or even months without being touched. Crouched in partial darkness, only contradicted by a weak lamp on the librarian's desk—the librarian who dozes in conspiracy with some yellow-page vacant volume protecting his jaundiced specter—the tome lurks from its shelf and conjures up the tenacious spirit of its words. It stands by with the desolate feeling of one who, after endless nights, has been left with no partners and survived all its accomplices.

...

The leather bound tome is an integral part of the story told, the words printed on its pages are exactly those that Scheherazade invents every night, also fearful, also cautious, and subjugated by a pleasure that does not differentiate between the sexual and the intellectual.

Thus, the one lurking from the bookcase is not the tome but the Book: each one of those thousand and one nights told and imbibed like a vital ink in the paper fibers...

by Ivonne Saed

Rockjack

For David, who told me the word

A staveless barrel,
it holds tense
some hundred yards of
barbed wire fence.

Four steel posts
wound with wire
to make a cage
three feet or higher

for a pile of rocks,
a stump of stone,
in Harney County,
Oregon.

A rockjack keeps
places apart.
A good place
for a thought to start.

URSULA K. LE GUIN

Read at the Beaverton City Library on January 9th

The Eugene Celebration, January 15th

by Ingrid Wendt

We tried something new this year. Our two-part program was titled “The Unknown Good in Our Enemies: A Celebration of the Poetry of William Stafford and Poetry from the Middle East.” A standing-room only crowd of 80+ gathered at Tsunami Books for a Saturday afternoon program scheduled to run two hours but lasted almost three.

Based on a phrase from Stafford’s poem “For the Unknown Enemy,” part one featured six Eugene-area poets and writers reading poems in translation from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Eugene poet Joan Dobbie read poems from the (forthcoming) anthology she has co-edited, *Before We Have Nowhere to Stand: Israel/Palestine: Poets Respond to the Struggle*. UO Professor Ibrahim Muhawi read from his translation of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*. The second half of the program was audience participation: an open mic reading of favorite Stafford poems and poems written in the spirit of his pacifism. Our program concluded with hearing “For the Unknown Enemy” in Bill’s voice, on the (posthumous) CD also titled “The Unknown Good in Our Enemies.”

In addition to Dobbie and Muhawi, scheduled first-half readers were event planners Ingrid Wendt, FWS board member Martha Gatchell, Jerry Gatchell, Ralph Salisbury, Brian Salisbury, and Quinton Hallett. We owe a tremendous debt from Facebook friends who responded to our call, by providing a wide range of personal contacts and the names of anthologies and special-issue journals containing Middle East poets. From these suggestions we compiled

a six-page handout, which included four Stafford poems, several poems from part one of the program, and a list of recommended reading and viewing: anthologies of poetry and films from the Middle East. Quinton Hallett has gone one step further: she’s established a correspondence and poetry-exchange with Afghani woman poet Fatema Arian. William Stafford is now being read in Kabul.

Also noteworthy: In addition to the usual publicity outlets, posters and announcements for newsletters went out to ten area churches known for their progressive, pacifist stance. We think this may have had a positive effect on the unusually large audience.

Heidelberg University’s Second Annual Celebration

On January 27, Herbster Chapel of Heidelberg University was filled with members of the Heidelberg University/Tiffin, Ohio, community gathered to celebrate the poetry and life of William Stafford. Hosted by President Rob Huntington and English Department Chair Bill Reyer, this was the first time Heidelberg joined with other communities for such a commemoration.

The program was rich and varied: Dr. Huntington shared greetings and biographical insights based on his family’s friendship with the Stafford family, and Heidelberg University students, staff, and faculty read favorite Stafford poems. Three student-focused segments of the evening added greatly to the event. Members of the Heidelberg Black Student Union shared poems of the African-American struggle for justice. Senior English/Theatre double-major Ray Ouellette offered an interpretive reading of five poems woven together in a piece entitled “Tell Me, Doctor.” In addition, the three winners of the Stafford First-Line Student Poem Competition read their prize-winning pieces. After a brief break for refreshments and conversation, the evening concluded with an open-microphone session.

Celebrating nature, justice, conscience, and poetry—all those in attendance left feeling warmer and more uplifted after sharing the work of William Stafford.

Los Prietos Fifth Annual Celebration, January 29th

by Paul Willis

We had 45 in attendance at the outdoor picnic area. Featured readers were Kristin George and Erland Anderson, who took the place of Dennis Schmidling, unable to make the trip from Portland because of illness. The oldest and perhaps healthiest person there was Erland’s mother, 103, who walked unassisted down the path to the old swimming hole on the river and listened intently to every poem. (She would, of course, have been Stafford’s elder.) Highlight of the reading for me was the participation of one of the rangers who has come every year. He read “Choosing a Dog,” and then told me afterwards that he has dyslexia and had never read a poem in public in his life.

Editor’s Note: Los Prietos, as many of you know, is the location of one of the Civilian Public Service camps Bill spent time in during WWII.

Hermiston Celebration, January 24th

At our reading in Hermiston, we had over 25 people, most of them Blue Mountain Community College students. Bette Husted gave a lovely reading from her new book of poems, *At This Distance*. For me, the most poignant moment was the reading of “An Oregon Message” by one of my students who immigrated from Mexico. The poem took on a whole new meaning.



Lars Nordström

The Stockholm Stafford Reading

by Lars Nordström

On January 19, an enthusiastic group of Swedish poets, translators, academics, and poetry lovers braved the cold and snowy streets of Stockholm and crowded into a small poetry bookshop to listen to an hour of William Stafford's poetry. Unfortunately, the American Professor at the University of Uppsala who was going to read some of the poems in English was unable to come, so it turned out to be an evening entirely in Swedish. Lars Nordström, who in 2003 published a volume of 60 of William Stafford's poems in Swedish, read twenty poems from a manuscript of new translations. These included Swedish versions of such well-known poems as “Sending These Messages,” “Ask Me,” “People of the South Wind,” “The Animal That Drank Up Sound,” as well as many other great but perhaps lesser known poems. A reading of Stafford's poem “Meditation,” as a commentary on a very controversial Swedish government decision a few days earlier to allow limited hunting of wild wolves, was especially well received. Many thanks to the bookshop owner, Anneli Ljung-Nordenskiöld, who generously opened her doors after-hours for this special event.

Meditation

Djur fyllda av ljus
vandrar genom skogen mot
någon som siktar med ett gevär
laddat med mörker.
Världen är sådan: Gud
rör sig inte och
låter det hända
om och om igen.

Editor's Note: “Meditation” was first collected in *Smoke's Way*; it also appears in *The Way It Is*; a beautiful broadside of it, done by Peasandcues Press, can be acquired from the Friends of William Stafford (see the FWS website: <http://www.williamstafford.org/>). Lars Nordström's book of Swedish translations of Bill's poems is entitled *Rapport från en avlägsen plats* (Report from a Far Place).

Hillsboro, January 30th

by Mark Thalman

The Hillsboro celebration was a great success. There were about 35 people, and there was a birthday party atmosphere to it. Everyone was very happy and excited to read together, and all the readers gave wonderful presentations. After people from the community read, we all settled down to the serious business of eating chocolate cake and drinking coffee. The only thing missing was the ice-cream.



Glory Schulze and Claire Hammond at the Harney County Library

The Burns Celebration

by MJ Wallis

Local poets and poetry fanciers gathered on Jan. 20 at the Harney County Library's coffee house-style commemoration of Oregon's famed poet, William Stafford.

The Harney County Writer-in-Residence committee and members of the Harney Basin Writers group read selections from Stafford's poetry and shared their own poems written in his spirit.

A student contingent from the Frenchglen Elementary School read three favorite Stafford poems, discovered as part of a literature study teacher Carolyn Koskela promoted during the month of January.

Bill Howe, a long-time friend of the Stafford family, came to Burns from Lake Oswego to share in the “birthday party” festivities. He read some of his favorite Stafford poems and related personal stories and anecdotes about the Staffords.

Howe introduced the audience via cell phone to Dorothy Stafford, the 90+-year-old widow of the famous writer and hosted a lively discussion between Mrs. Stafford and the audience. Dorothy, a poet in her own right, read a poem she'd penned for her famous husband, and delighted listeners with her advice and insights concerning life with poets.

Excerpted from the *Burns Times-Herald*, January 26, 2011

Kansas Patriotism and the Tang of the Moon

by Tim Barnes

Kansas Poems of William Stafford: Poems, Essays, & Interviews. Second edition. Edited by Denise Low. Woodley Memorial Press, 2010.

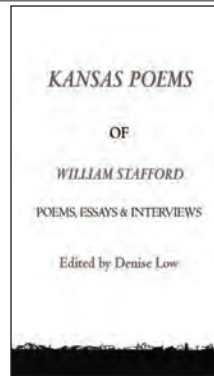
His Kansas patriotism saturated our childhoods. Any topic that arose in family conversation would—like water seeking the sea—arrive eventually at some comparison with Kansas...My father's Kansas legends were behind all we did as a family, the places we went, the people we met."

—Kim Stafford, *Early Morning: Remembering My Father*

Bill's Kansas roots and moons go deep. For proof, we can return to 1990 when Woodley Press published a collection of Bill's Kansas poems. In her introduction to the first edition, Denise Low, a poet laureate of Kansas, writes that the poems collected were "mostly connected" to Bill's Kansas beginnings. Now, twenty years later, Woodley Press, "the only literary press in the nation devoted to Kansas themes and Kansas authors," has come out with a much-expanded edition that adds salt and savor to the claims of the Kansas connection. This second edition adds seven poems to the original forty-nine and also includes essays, interviews, reminiscences, tributes, and poems relating to Bill by others. This is a thicker, substantially changed book, glowing with material for people interested in Bill's life and work and, as well, for those who would like to meet him.

In this reader's humble opinion, this edition of *Kansas Poems* is a significant contribution to the understanding and appreciation of Bill's contribution to American literature and Kansas culture. Thomas Fox Averill's essay, "The Earth Says Have a Place: William Stafford and a *Place of Language*," has as its thesis the centrality of Kansas to Bill's poetic sensibility. We find Averill saying, "Stafford's use of language is like the landscape of Kansas, spare but incredibly full of subtle beauty and the remnants of the historical past." Or, "his unique way of looking at the world is spoken like a Kansan." Averill places Bill's love of Kansas at the heart of what readers find so satisfying in his poetry: "His lifelong celebration of little things, common things, real things, comes from a deep respect for the place he grew up." It is at the heart of Bill's gift for making poems out of anything, of being able to lower his standards with such equanimity: "Being satisfied with humble materials is part of what the earth says in Kansas." Thank god for Kansas, one is tempted to say. In the third and final section ("Stafford as Place") of this substantial and insightful essay, Averill makes an interesting leap. It would seem that the seed that is the Kansas sensibility flowered so profoundly in Bill it enabled him to create a poetic landscape that readers now recognize as Kansas, the real Kansas. Kansas has created Kansas. As Averill says, "in some way, he has become Kansas, his life and work are a kind of landscape." I think of Robert Frost's New England, Gary Snyder's Sierras, Robinson Jeffers' Big Sur, and John Steinbeck's California.

As Low suggests in her introduction, there are some poems that don't seem to be that firmly connected with Kansas but most are. You can feel it in the way the words *Cimarron*, *Cheyenne*, and *Coronado* weave through the first sections ("The Land Would Hold Us Up" and "Back Home") of the book and in the mid-western scenes in poems like "Out Through a Church Window," "In a Country Cemetery," and "Prairie Town." The latter poem, the last poem in the second



section, begins, "There was a river under First and Main" and continues, "At the north edge there were the sand hills. / I used to stare for hours at prairie dogs." In these poems, the reader is taken to the places in the Kansas of Bill's richly felt life.

The third section, "At the Family Album," has a number of family poems, including a fascinating depiction of his mother, "How My Mother Carried On Her Argument with the World." Here one gets a sense of how Bill might have developed his famously withering surmise of self-aggrandizing sorts: "She thought the aggressive were losers. They had to use / methods only the desperate would use." This section also contains "Thinking for Berky," not in the first edition, with its wise line: "Justice will take us millions of intricate moves."

The fourth section seems the least connected to the physical actualities of Kansas. Instead, these poems enact the plain-spoken personification that seems so intrinsic to Bill's style and his Kansas roots and moons. In the final poem in the book, "Oak," there is this line, "the long wind coming home." That is how the poems in the final section feel. Indeed, reading the first half of this book, the poems gave me a sense of returning to the source, of visiting the home from which first rose that long wind of quiet inspiration that is the poetry of William Stafford.

As wonderful as the journey through the poems is, the back matter—the four essays, three interviews (one with Bill, one with Kim, and another with Robert Day about Bill), the ten reminiscences and tributes (could these be called witnessings? one of Bill's frequent phrasings)—is the reason this book is such a treasure. This is a serious, significant, and delightful contribution to understanding Bill Stafford. Some of the material came out of the William Stafford Memorial Rendezvous, held in and around Hutchinson in April 2008, probably where the idea for the book was born. Essentially, this is a group of Kansas poets (with a few outliers) writing about a Kansas poet. They do it very well, enriching the rest of us.

Ralph Salisbury, Eugene poet, outlier, and old friend of Bill's, reminisces about him in "Bill Stafford and the Mutton Chop." Salisbury touches on one of the puzzles of Bill's background, his Indian ancestry, his professed connection to the Crowsfoot tribe. In *Early Morning*, Kim says his father was Native American by conversion, by fascination, but Salisbury did some research and, indeed, there was a band of Seneca called the Crowsfoot who came from near where Bill's father grew up in upstate New York. Bill had Native-American blood, Salisbury contends, and writes that, though "writing as an Indian" was only an aspect of Bill's writing, "it does [connect] with the themes of social justice and harmony with nature" that are so vital to his work.

Low weighs in on this issue in her 2010 afterward to the second edition, quoting from a letter she received from Bill, "Yes, my father told me we do have Indian ancestry . . ." Low writes that Kim told her the Native American relatives were part of some eastern tribes that came west to Ohio during the mid-nineteenth century. It would seem that Bill did have some Indian blood. Salisbury tells us that Robert Bly's response to his research was to note that Bill's face did not seem totally European.

A discussion of Bill's poetry often turns to his use of personification. Averill raises it in his essay: "His poems go beyond personification..."

in the same way belief goes beyond technical explanation.” He then offers a slant but telling gloss on the question of Bill’s Indian ancestry: “When Native Americans, for example, pay attention to animals, to grass, to wind and leaf, we don’t call it personification, we call it religion.” Perhaps Bill’s numinous and pervasive use of personification comes from something in an ancestral spirituality. Or it might be a conversion that took a strong hold. Like Kim, I waver, but lean toward the former.

Another motif in the new material in *Kansas Poems* involves a family story that I’ve always loved. Robert Day’s short reminiscence of Bill is called, “Talk to Strangers and Stop on By,” referring to two of Bill’s favorite bits of advice. Bill and Dorothy would encourage their children to do the opposite of what most parents advise. “Talk to strangers,” they would say. In his interview with Kirsten Bosnak, Kim explains, “[I]f you don’t talk to strangers, how can you find your way, how can you learn anything?” When we are lost, we stop and talk to a stranger, asking for directions to help us find our way. Plus, if you talk to strangers, they could become friends. This bit of advice has resonated with lots of people, including several in this book. It may have its roots in the friendly wave of a Kansan or it may be a practical application of pacifist principles of reconciliation, probably both.

The second edition of *Kansas Poems of William Stafford* is a serious contribution to William Stafford scholarship. It does the kind of thing that scholarship should do—explore the possibilities presented by a writer’s work. Robert Stewart’s essay, “On Swerving: The Way of William Stafford,” links Bill’s humility, his welcoming stance, and his enthusiasm, to the “directness and emotional restraint” associated with Taoism, the Chinese philosophy presented in *Tao Tê Ching* by Lao Tzu, often called The Way. Stewart writes that “The way of William Stafford starts with excitement, as a spiritual way of engaging in the world.” It is, though, a certain kind of excitement, one “that values discovery over certainty, wonder over wanting.” The Way is like water, one of Bill’s favorite symbols; it swerves and yields. Stewart doesn’t claim Bill as a Chinese Taoist but says that “the struggle of a human being to illustrate our connection to the harmonious oneness of the universe” is a Taoist impulse that resonates rather profoundly with Bill’s poetic vision, the river of his imagination. To this reader, the Taoist connection seems quite intriguing, and Stewart’s essay surveys some of this rich territory.

Steven Hind, a quintessentially Kansan poet, and an attendee of the 2008 William Stafford Memorial Rendezvous, has three pieces in *Kansas Poems*, two of prose (“William Stafford Memorial Rendezvous & Other Writings” and “The Road to Conviction: William Stafford”) and a 1984 interview he did with Bill for the *Cottonwood Review*. In all three, the name of Gerald Heard, a British writer, philosopher, novelist, educator, and pacifist, appears. Bill and several other conscientious objectors from the Civilian Public Service camps spent a week at Trabuco College in California in January 1943, where Heard was teaching. Bill writes about his stay with Heard in the “We Built a Bridge” chapter of *Down in My Heart*. Hind talks about Heard’s idea of the “specious present,” “the notion that an individual cannot be expected, nor expect himself, to enter into the moment’s irresistible momentum and redirect an inevitable disaster not of his own making.” In the interview, Bill discusses the “specious present” in relationship to his most famous poem, “Traveling Through the Dark.” He tells Hind,

Well, you know the idea of the “specious present”?...the

example I heard someone say is, you’re standing on board the *Queen Mary*. It’s going full speed. About fifty yards from the dock the captain turns to you and says, “You take over.” (Laughter) According to some people’s way of thinking, okay, there’s time to do something. But the Captain knows and you know and God knows there is no time. It’s all over. So it was all over for the deer.

It could be said that a conversation with Gerald Heard lies at the heart of that wrenching aspect of “Traveling Through the Dark” that has caused readers such anguish but is, as well, intrinsic to the poem’s power. In “The Road to Conviction,” Hind writes that “the basic tenets of his stance through a great many poems, among them some of the best known poems of our time,” are found in the “We Built a Bridge” chapter of *Down in My Heart*.

A number of fascinating moments shimmer out of the memories of the contributors to the new material in the second edition of *Kansas Poems*. Kim tells Kirsten Bosnak that his father’s first word was moon. In Ingrid Wendt’s “New Doors: Lessons from Bill,” we see him reach up into a light fixture at a restaurant and unscrew an uncomfortably bright light bulb. In her afterward, Low remembers that in the thirties Bill and a friend had a truck farm. When their mule died, Bill strapped himself into the harness and pulled the plow. These moments and a number of others make this book delightful, illuminating reading.

Affirmed here, as well, are some areas worth exploring. William Stafford, as it is with great writers, offers whole territories, entire watersheds, for discovery. There’s the Native American influence, the Taoist aspect, the influence of Gerald Heard, and the seminal role of the “To Build a Bridge” chapter in *Down in My Heart*. Perhaps the trail most clearly blazed in this second edition of *Kansas Poems* is the Kansas connection, of which Steven Hind writes: “In person, in his advice and counsel on writing, and in the spare, modest, and often witty brilliance of his work—Stafford raised the Plains voice, let us say, to a level of authentic expression that places him among the best American voices.” This is a fine claim and one supported by this book. *Kansas Poems* also explores crucial aspects of Bill’s endeavor, his sense of personification, his sense of place and diction, his teaching, his pacifism, and, perhaps most satisfying, the way he continues to influence lovers of his work to think, feel, write, and simply be more human—the tang of the moon he first saluted in Kansas.

Stafford Ball Back Home

We never report our scores.
No one in our league does.
Our uniforms are camouflage
jerseys and shorts. We play
in the old cow lot and change
the rules, once we know them.
It’s exciting, in a curious way.
The lazy give up and go pro,
if they’re big enough. Sometimes,
we all get a trophy: Least Valuable
Player. I won again last week.

STEVEN HIND

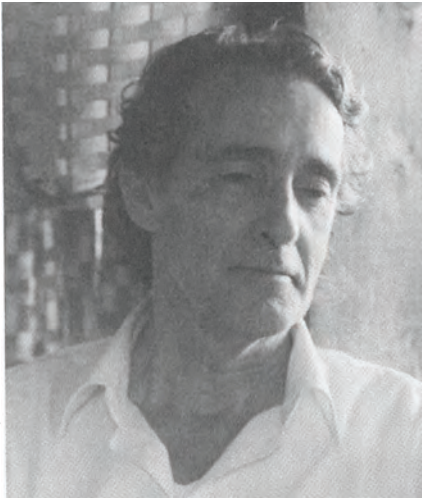


PHOTO BY JO GOING

John Haines, A Friend

John Haines (b. 1924), a friend of Bill's, died this March. Bill admired Haines' work and his life. Haines lived in Alaska for much of his career, a homesteader who wrote dark, elemental poems in which the concerns of city dwellers fade into distances of ice and snow, the howl of wind and wolf.

Bill visited Haines at his homestead on milepost 68 on the Richardson Highway outside of Fairbanks. They wrote about each other's work. In a review entitled "The Self-Contained Traveler," Bill wrote of Haines' book *News from the Glacier: New and Selected Poems, 1982*: "This vision behind these poems illuminates a judgment upon civilization: Before it came, and hovering at its edges now, ready to come again, is primitive life—a life that, though brutal, satisfies the reader through its clear hard focus." This is a good characterization of Haines' work and also tells us why Bill liked it. It was, like Bill's, a "report from a far place." Haines, a rather crusty fellow, manages to say in an essay somewhat critical of Bill's "way of writing" that Bill's best poems "tell us something beyond what we already know."

Haines taught in many colleges and universities in his later years and received a number of accolades, among them a Western States Arts Federation Award in 1990 for *New Poems, 1980-88* and an Aiken Taylor Award for Modern Poetry. Among his other books are *Winter News* (1966), *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer: Collected Poems* (1996), and a memoir, *The Stars, The Snow, The Fire: Twenty-Five Years in the Northern Wilderness* (1989).

In an essay, "A Walk in the Snow," that appeared in *A Gradual Twilight: An Appreciation of John Haines* (2003), the poet Greg Orfaea remembers a dinner party with John and Bill in 1977. After the party at his Alaska cabin, because of heavy snow and an unplowed road, he walked with them about a mile through the cold to the highway. They shared certain themes, Orfaea writes: "the relentlessness of fate, the grim beauty of nature, life's stubborn limits against which the heart beats, often senselessly, a feel for the underdog, genetic, societal, or otherwise. Death. They shared a fascination with death, though Stafford had a way of dancing with it that Haines did not."

He also mentions that in the essay that Haines "clearly envied" Bill's "settled" life and university position. Haines wrote about this and Bill's life, Orfaea says, in the poem "The Whale in the Blue Washing Machine."

The Whale in the Blue Washing Machine

There are depths in a household
where a whale can live. . . .

His warm bulk swims from room
to room, floating by on the stairway,
searching the drafts, the cold
currents that lap at the sills.

He comes to the surface hungry,
sniffs at the table,
and sinks, his wake rocking the chairs.

His pulsebeat sounds at night
when the washer spins, and the dryer
clanks on stray buttons. . . .

Alone in the kitchen darkness,
looking through steamy windows
at the streets draining away in fog;

watching and listening,
for the wail of an unchained buoy,
the steep fall of his wave.

JOHN HAINES

Every Mink Has a Mink Coat and Other Archival Animations

by Paul Merchant and Vince Wixon

William Stafford was born in January 1914, so staff at the William Stafford Archives have begun to think ahead to the centenary of his birth, and to suitable ways of commemorating that milestone. It seems to us at the Archives that our best contribution to his memory would be to make public those aspects of William Stafford's creative life that have been less fully explored. His daily commitment to his own poetry, and his lifetime of encouragement of other poets, are well represented in the sixty or so volumes of poetry and essays, and in the William Stafford Archives website where all the drafts from his first two collections are displayed digitally, but important aspects of his career are still barely represented. Over the next four years, ending in the centenary year, we plan a small series of key presentations that should expand the already impressive portrait of a life lived to the full.

Our first commitment is already scheduled: Jim Carmin (Director of the John Wilson Special Collections at Multnomah County Library) has been working closely with the Archives at Lewis & Clark College to select a comprehensive exhibit of Stafford's correspondence, to be displayed in the downtown library's Collins Gallery in September and October of 2012. There is no shortage

of materials in Stafford's fifty thousand pages of correspondence between 1964 and 1993. The challenge will be in making a selection that fully represents the range and variety of his contacts.

Our three other commitments have been in progress for many years. Stafford's seventeen thousand photo negatives have now been fully digitized, and can be viewed by researchers at the Archives. We hope to make exhibit-quality prints of the forty to sixty best images, with the intention of showing them locally and perhaps in a traveling exhibit, possibly accompanied by a catalog of the prints.

We are also close to finalizing a ten-year project to expand and publish the bibliography of Stafford's work begun by James Pirie, former Director of the Lewis & Clark College library, and left uncompleted by him in 1980. As college colleagues, Pirie and Stafford shared materials and knowledge, and the unpublished bibliography is impressive in its accuracy and comprehensiveness. A team of staff and students at the college has followed Pirie's lead in documenting Stafford's work from 1980 to the present, and we hope to find a publisher soon for the completed text.

The last of our four projects, and perhaps the longest in preparation, is a selection of William Stafford's aphorisms. We have been charmed, amused, and enlightened by William Stafford's aphorisms since almost our first day of working together at the Archives in 1996. Commentaries on the aphorisms have appeared earlier in these pages, and topical selections have been printed in volumes of the Michigan Poets on Poetry series, in *The Poet's Notebook* (ed. Kuusisto, Tall, and Weiss, 1995), in *Every War Has Two Losers* (ed. Kim Stafford, 2003), and in *In Pieces* (ed. Olivia Dresher, 2006), but we feel the moment has come for a selection from the whole range.

We are still selecting entries, deciding about their arrangement, and even discussing what kind of entries (epigrammatic statements only? longer philosophic statements also? poems?) but we have a working title: *Every Mink Has a Mink Coat*. We are committed to a completed manuscript by the end of this year.

What are we choosing from? We have a transcript of every prose utterance from the daily writings, and we will select rather radically from that large collection. To give a hint of the task involved, here is a run of five aphorisms taken at random from around 1980. From these five we might expect to choose (on average) perhaps one. But which one?

I would like to erase many difficulties and underline others.
Erase the name of the author but underline the story.

By the sound a pen makes you can't tell where it is going.

Poetry is the music of ideas as well as the music of sound.

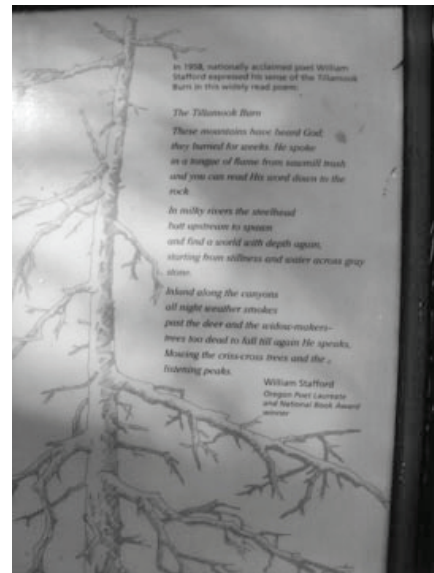
Joseph Conrad and the sea. Van Gogh and the sun. Henry James and the talk. Willa Cather and civilization. Shakespeare and decision.

Entering a book is letting a book change you.

Gales Creek Canyon Overlook



Bill's poem "Tillamook Burn" is part of the interpretive exhibit at the Gales Creek Canyon Overlook, a wayside with a spectacular view of the area of the famous forest fire.



It's located along the Wilson River Highway (Hwy 6), just past the Gales Creek Campground, a rather lovely campground strung along Gales Creek in a fir and alder forest. From Portland, you could be there in an hour and a half.



PHOTOS BY ILKA KUZNIK

News, Notes, and Opportunities

“The Unknown Good in Our Enemies: The Poetry of William Stafford and Poetry from the Middle East.” This is the title of a wonderful essay (based on this year’s January celebration event in Eugene) by Ingrid Wendt, a Friend and a poetry consultant to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) that appeared this spring in *The Online Council Chronicle*. Wendt uses Bill’s poetry, particularly “For the Unknown Enemy” to call for teaching understanding of other cultures, especially the Arab cultures of the Middle East as a way of furthering reconciliation, trust, and peace. She includes a generous sampling of Middle Eastern poetry, hoping thereby to assist teachers and students to enter into understanding people and become “aware” of the felt lives of those we often call the enemy. She includes an array of resources: films, video, books, articles, websites, for those interested in helping students overcome the “failure of imagination” that Bill thought a central source of violence. Google NCTE + Stafford + Wendt for the full essay.

A Map of Kansas Literature has a very good entry for Bill. There is a lengthy and thoughtful biography, more of an essay, written by Thomas Averill. Included, as well, is a selected bibliography, some of Bill’s poems, a slew of book covers, links, and some primary documents—seven letters to Averill, a signed typescript of the poem, “They Suffer for Us,” and an introduction he wrote for a book of short stories, *To All the Islands Now*, by Kansas teacher and writer, Edgar Wolfe. URL: <http://www.washburn.edu/reference/cks/mapping/stafford/index.html> or google map of Kansas literature + William Stafford.

The William Stafford Online Reader. This website, created by Travis Poling, a poet and student at Bethany Theological Seminary, is a treasure trove, a rich resource for things Staffordian. The site has these menu items: Poems, Books, Art, Media, Scholarship, FAQ, Bio, Connections, News, About. Some highlights:

- A first line and title index for over a thousand poems
- An Instapaper function that connects to e-readers
- Music, drawings, sculptures based on Bill’s work, including a clip of a reading of the end of “A Story That Could Be True” that was featured on the TV series *The Riches*
- Video interviews, including the 1984 Skookum’s Tongue interview with Bill done by your loyal editor
- Essays on Bill’s work by Poling, Jeff Gundy, and Sally Bishop Shigly
- An answer to the question: Did William Stafford really kill the fawn in “Traveling Through the Dark”?
- A William Stafford Facebook Page
- A link to Travis Poling’s Master of Arts Thesis “Poetic Worship: A Liturgical Theology & Practice,” which features a discussion of Bill’s work

The online reader is closely linked to the Stafford Archives at Lewis & Clark, the Friends of William Stafford website, and to Amazon Books. Surfing this site should give anyone with an appetite for Bill’s life and work plenty of nourishment. Posted this January, this website is a real contribution to the appreciation of Stafford’s work, and Poling should be congratulated for his knowledge and enterprise. URL: <http://www.williamstaffordreader.com/>.

Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts Poetry Reading. Paulann Petersen, present poet laureate of Oregon, Lawson Inada, past poet laureate of Oregon, and Don Colburn, poet and journalist, will read at the Lake Oswego Library (corner of 4th Ave. and A St.) on June 21st at 7:00. Colburn will also say a few words about the history of poets laureate in Oregon. Bill, of course, was laureate from 1975 to 1989. You can find an article Don wrote about the history of Oregon’s laureates at <http://www.oregonpoetlaureate.org/oregon-poet-laureate-history.html> or google Oregon Poets Laureate + Don Colburn. The reading is part of the Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts, June 24th through 26th; events take place at the Lakewood Center and Rogers Park.

Poetry Potluck. The sixth annual Friends of William Stafford Poetry and Potluck will take place on September 11th at Foothills Park in Lake Oswego between noon and five. Special guests include Leanne Grabel and Steve Sander, who will perform musical arrangements of some of Bill’s poems.

John Laursen, designer, typographer, writer, editor, publisher, and the owner/operator of Press-22 received the Steward Holbrook Legacy Award at the Oregon Book Awards. Laursen is designer and co-author of *Wild Beauty: Photographs of the Columbia River Gorge, 1867-1957*, an exceptionally beautiful book published by the Northwest Photography Archive and Oregon State University Press. He also designed the Lake Oswego Centennial broadside, produced in conjunction with the Friends of William Stafford, which features Bill’s poem “Climbing Along the River.”

David Biespiel won the Stafford/Hall Award for Poetry at the 24th annual 2011 Oregon Book Awards for his collection *The Book of Men and Women*.

Playwright Gretchen Icenogle won the 2010 Friends of the Lake Oswego Library William Stafford Fellowship, awarded by Oregon Literary Arts, Inc. Her play *Trailing Colors* just finished a successful run at the Headwaters Theater in North Portland.

Fishtrap: Summer 2011. This year’s gathering takes place between July 14-17, preceded by workshops that run July 10-15. Among the special guests are Pico Iyer and curandera Eva Castellanoz. Workshop leaders include poet Henry Hughes, novelist Debra Early, and essayist Beth Taylor. For more information, www.fishtrap.org

PERMISSIONS

“Why I Keep a Diary,” “Staring at Souvenirs of the West,” “The Little Girl by the Fence at School,” © 1975, 1985, 1977 by the Estate of William Stafford. “The Little Girl by the Fence at School” reprinted from *The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems*, with permission from Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, Minnesota. “Staring at Souvenirs of the West” is reprinted from *Wyoming*, 1985.

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The drawing of Bill on p. 6 is used by permission of Mario Zucca. Other drawings by Mario may be found at <http://mariozucca.com/>.

ERRATA

In the previous issue, 15.2, Bill’s poem “Tuned in Late One Night” was attributed to Dr. Pierre Rioux. Dr. Rioux read a poem in response to Bill’s poem, the name of which your editor does not know.



BECOME A *Friend of William Stafford*

MISSION OF FWS

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

WHY JOIN?

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

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

JOIN OR RENEW:

(Please check ALL appropriate boxes)

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

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

Name* _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Country** _____

Email _____ Phone () _____

May we list this information (or any part of it) in a "friends-only" directory of which you will receive a copy? _____

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

Giver's Name & Address: _____

How did you hear of FWS?

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

Welcome New Friends January 2011 – May 2011

Gary & Karen Anderson
 Betty Bezzerides
 Ella-Marie Christensen
 Carl B. Clapp
 Debbie Dobbs
 Denise H. DuMaurier
 Deborah Golden
 Charles Goodrich
 Chris M. Hefty
 Daniel Jones
 Judith Kleinstein
 Judith Thompson

FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD
 NEWSLETTER©
 is published three times
 a year.

EDITOR: Tim Barnes
 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

Renew Your Friendship!

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

friends of **WILLIAM STAFFORD**

P.O. Box 592 Lake Oswego, OR 97034
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Stafford, Pessoa, and Baquero



Bill and Ken at the U of O



Kansas Patriotism and the Tang
of the Moon



Dispatches from January

Please notify sender of change of address

Staring at Souvenirs of the West

What if a buffalo eye, big
as the wrongs done them, looked
into the lodges and hotels of Indians
and Whites? What if Buffalo Bill
stared into his own gun barrel and
saw what his victim saw—if the mountains
came down to attend a memorial service
for their shaggy, mistreated citizens?

In parlors and lunchrooms let's have
crocheted work, and beads, a decorative bundle,
straw flowers, many sacred things
heaped over the guns and hard-eyed portraits
these warriors awarded themselves. Take your
winchesters and war bonnets into that cold
you claimed, heroes. Here is a cross that
the wife of Sitting Bull hid: she held it
close in her hand when the shouting died.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Reprinted in the interview with Steven Hind in *Kansas Poems*, 2nd ed.



A billboard in Madison, Wisconsin