



friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD

A Journal & Newsletter For Poets & Poetry
Volume 20, Issue 1 - Spring/Summer 2015

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Threads in the Cloth, Part 1

By Tim Barnes

Teaching with Fire: Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Teach. Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner, eds. Introduction by Parker J. Palmer and Tom Vander Ark. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Leading from Within: Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Lead. Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner, eds. Foreword by Madeline K. Albright. Introduction by Parker J. Palmer. Afterword by David Whyte. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

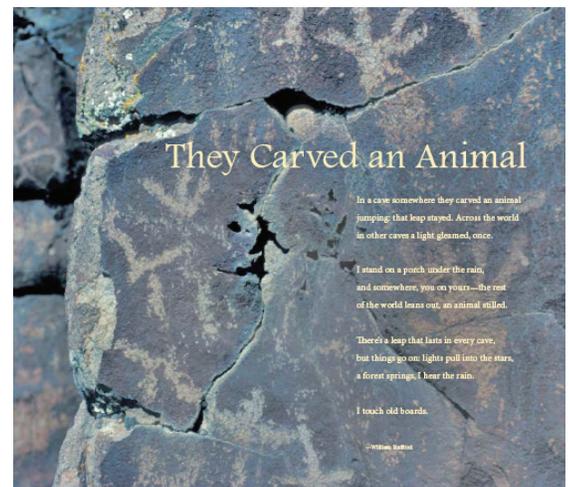
Teaching with Heart: Poetry That Speaks to the Courage to Teach. Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner, eds. Foreword by Parker J. Palmer. Introduction by Taylor Mali. Afterword by Sarah Brown Wessling. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014.

People follow threads when they read, a weave. That weave makes literature. Writers and poets are woven into the culture by how they are collected and used. Stafford has been well-woven into the anthologies, an important part of what is known as the canon. According to his annotated bibliography, published in 2013, "Traveling through the Dark" has been anthologized over 142 times and "Fifteen" at least 45 times. This is one of the ways in which he threads himself into the intellectual life of our culture. A parallel way is to appear in essays and books that develop various ideas. What follows is a meditation on the ways Stafford's legacy is being woven into our literary and cultural fabric. This weave tells us something about what is valuable and lasting in his work.

"Traveling through the Dark," wonderful as it is, seems to be the default poem for anthologists who lack imagination, resources, or resourcefulness when collecting Stafford's work. A recent illustration of this would be that both *The Penguin Anthology of 20th Century American Poetry* (2011), edited by Rita Dove, and *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013), edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Grey Street, collect "Traveling through the Dark" and "At the Bomb Testing Site." Unlike *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, which seems particularly unimaginative given Stafford's ecological perspective, anthologies with

themes often discover other Stafford poems. After all, he wrote quite a few. *Poets of World War II* (2003), edited by Harvey Shapiro, uses "At the Grave of My Brother: Bomber Pilot," "Explaining the Big One," "Some Remarks When Richard Hugo Came," and "Men." None of these poems has appeared in another anthology according to the annotated bibliography, *Dancing with Joy: 99 Poems* (2007), edited by Roger Housendon, reprints "Why I Am Happy" and "Cutting Loose." Besides in *Dancing with Joy*, these poems have been reprinted thrice and none, respectively.

Some anthologists would seem to go to other anthologies when it comes to representing Stafford, while others appear to have read through his work for their particular purposes. Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner are the editors of three anthologies (listed above) published by Jossey-Bass in partnership with The Center for Courage and Renewal. The organizational idea for these anthologies was to have teachers and leaders, depending on the book, send a 250-word piece on why and how a particular poem has affected their professional and personal lives. Besides some wonderful poems by the likes of Neruda, Whitman, Frost, Kinnell, Billy Collins, Blake, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Langston Hughes, Rilke, Lao-Tzu, and Szyborska, there is ample front and back matter. Parker Palmer, the founder and senior partner of the Center for Courage and Renewal, writes two intros and a foreword. Each volume has a closing essay by the editors that develops ways to use and



One of the five Stafford signs at Hells Gulch In Idaho. See News, Notes, and Opportunities for more information.

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

(cont. from p. 1)

explore its contents. The overall idea of the books, that poetry can authenticate, valorize, and energize the vocations of teaching and leading, is consistent with the mission of the Center. This group believes poetry to be closely connected with their mission of creating “a more just, compassionate and healing world by nurturing personal and professional integrity and the courage to act on it.” The book makes large and encouraging claims for poetry. In the front matter of *Teaching with Fire*, the editors write, “The genesis of this book can be traced to the capacity of poetry to energize visions and stir us to imagine what could be possible.” The essay in the back matter of the book declares, “Poetry challenges us to examine whether we are living the life we most want to live,” and “Poetry can be a force in sustaining our courage to create more just and human institutions.” The notion that poetry can stir the imagination to discover how one can live more fully and justly certainly seems consonant with



Stafford's sense of it. At the beginning of *Teaching with Fire*, the editors tell us, “We asked teachers to send us these cherished poems... to write of their special relationship to the poems, to describe how they turn to them for companionship, solace, wisdom.” For the second book, *Leading from Within*, they asked leaders to select a “cherished” poem and describe “what happens when they reflect on the poem.” The assignment for *Teaching with Heart* seems to have been similar to the first book, “how teachers use poetry in their own lives and in the practice of being a teacher,” but “the general tenor of responses suggested that conditions have changed for teachers.” In the first book, Palmer and Tom Vander Ark warn that the “obsession du jour” of high-stakes testing is “diverting much of our educational energies into test-taking rather than meaning making” and is “irresponsible, self-defeating, and ultimately tragic.” The selections and essays in the third book, *Teaching with Heart*, would seem to confirm this. In a “Note to Teachers,” Intrator and Scribner write, “The writing we received described how mandates and prescriptions at school and district levels have affected how teachers teach and how they experience the profession.” Much of this has to do with what we now call “big data.” They continue, “The process of collecting and analyzing data has become ubiquitous in our lives.” In addition, they say, “More and more teachers feel that they are expected to make up for the ills of society and the flagging ability of many of our nation's children to achieve.” This is the issue of performance-based compensation, teachers' salaries being based on student test scores. Part of this is because high-stakes testing and outcomes based teaching leave the inner lives and desires of teachers and students behind. In his foreword to *Teaching with Heart*, Palmer describes it this way, “A culture of ‘teaching to the test’...leaves no room for the open-ended exploring that real education requires.”

In 1967, Stafford wrote a long essay for the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) called “Friends to This Ground: A Statement for Readers, Teachers, and Writers of Literature.” It is a

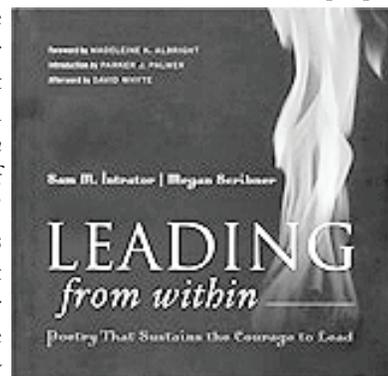
defense of literature written in response to the space race and an educational system that was emphasizing “mathematics and sciences and the skills which can be measured and used for economic and social advancement.” It would seem that, essentially, little has changed. Today, we have STEM and the high-stakes testing ushered in by the No-Child-Left-Behind movement. At the close of the first section of the NCTE essay, “Literature in the Super Market,” Stafford writes,

The young of our time are hustled into activities and states appropriate for aims other than their own; they lack the immersion in leisure and opportunity for spontaneous impulse characteristic of earlier times. Literature offered for such people a chance to relive experiences, to distance them and compare them. In that kind of leisurely reading one could find the dimensions and harmonies natural to one's individual self.

Stafford approaches here the goal the editors articulate in *Teaching with Fire* of “living the life we most want to live.” It is no wonder then that in *Teaching with Heart* we learn that “After Emily Dickinson, the poet most submitted to the selection process was Mary Oliver, and then William Stafford.” These three poets fall into the category of wisdom poets for whom the felt life of the individual takes precedence.

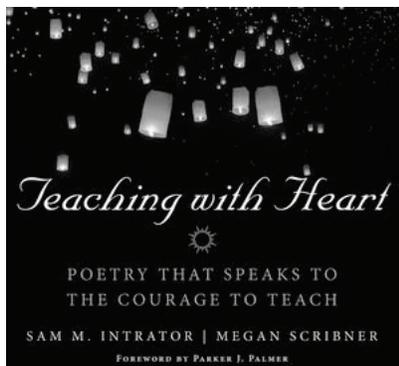
Interestingly enough, Stafford's “The Way It Is” appears in all three collections and is the most anthologized of any of the poems in them, fourteen. The idea of holding onto a thread, a key dimension of the self that harmonizes with the whole self and allows one to live out the true self, to be an authentic being, is available in this poem. It is also consistent with the ethical import of these books. Good poetry, authenticity, truth-telling, and a sense of the possible gives teachers the courage and heart to be the kind of people who create an atmosphere where learners can discover their calling, “the self most centrally theirs,” as Stafford says in *Writing the Australian Crawl*. Toward the close of “Friends to This Ground,” Stafford writes, “there has come to be a constant struggle to maintain for students, the fullest possible freedom for individual, fully adaptable development into an adulthood most consonant with the potential of the self.” This is the issue these three books, the two connected with teaching more so than *Leading from Within*, are most concerned with for teachers and by implication for students.

In *Teaching with Fire*, we find Lisa Drumheller Sudar, a student teacher, using “The Way It Is” to tell about “pursuing the calling to become a teacher” over many years and not letting it go. Eleven years later in *Teaching with Heart*, Donna Y. Chin writes of “Overcrowded classrooms. Shrinking budgets. Stressed-out teachers. High-stakes tests... tragedies we face each day” and uses “The Way It Is” to talk about deciding she won't, despite all this, abandon the school system, “[Education] is the thread I signed up to follow.” A parallel pattern



happens with two other poems, one from the first teaching book, “You Reading This, Be Ready,” and the other from the second, “Next Time.” Lucile Burt, a high school English teacher, writes of how she uses silence to help students realize “What can anyone give you greater than now, / starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?” She uses the poem to convey a valuable teaching moment. Leanne Grabel Sander, who teaches special education, writes of how “Next Time,” which closes with these lines, “and for every person / the body glowing inside the clothes / like a light” helps her deal with the moments of failure with the determination to “next time improve my game, to slow down, and to take a breath and a long look before I open my mouth.” Again, there is a sense of teaching being more difficult, more fraught, eleven years later.

Another contributor to *Teaching with Heart*, Michael Poutiatine, a professor of leadership, writes about Stafford’s poem “Deciding.” The poem deals with assigned value, “What’s God, what’s world, what’s gold.” Poutiatine tells of a young



student who is failing all of his classes but is filled with wonderful and incessant questions about everything he encounters. I am reminded of a book I have about animal intelligence. There is no chapter on cats, though, because they won’t take the tests. They’re too smart. Einstein said, “Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts.”

A number of years ago, while teaching argument at Portland Community College, I came across this statement by Immanuel Kant: “Man, and in general every rational being exists as an end in itself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will.” The forces guiding students into STEM classes and professions and the forces championing high-stakes testing qualify as wills. Annette Rottenberg, the author of the text using the Kant quote, writes that not subjecting people to conditions they have not freely chosen is a value most people would agree with. Stafford and the people behind these three books certainly would. They would also agree that treating individuals as ends and not means should be a primary purpose of community. In his introduction to *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep*, Robert Bly writes that “Of all the American poets of the last thirty years, I think William Stafford broods most about community—the ‘mutual life’ we share, as black people and white people, pacifists and militarists, city people and small-town people.” To support this he quotes from “A Ritual to Read to Each Other.”

It might not be surprising then that of all three of these books, Stafford has the most poems, four, and that his thoughts play the largest part in the book dealing with leadership. Palmer spends several pages of his introduction to *Leading from Within* with “A Ritual to Read to Each Other.” He uses the image of the elephants holding each other’s tails to make a vital claim about the relationship between leadership and community: “We are interconnected beings born in and for community” and so “leadership is everyone’s vocation and it is an evasion to claim that it is not. When we live

in the close-knit ecosystem called community, everyone follows and everyone leads. Leadership, I now understand, simply comes with the territory called being human.” This helps us understand why in “Vocation,” the father says to the son, “Your job is to find what the *world* is trying to be,” not “what *you* are trying to be.” (my italics) The individual and the community are one if one follows the implications of a favorite Stafford mantra borrowed from E.M. Forster, “Only connect.” Palmer continues, “with every act of leadership, large and small, we help co-create the reality in which we live, from the microcosm of personal relationships to the macrocosm of war and peace.” And now I hear that line from “Thinking for Berky,” “Justice will take us millions of intricate moves.”

Palmer finds “A Ritual to Read to Each Other” has even more to say about leadership: “the root of all cruelty” is “to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.”—war breeds war, lifestyle choices diminish the life chances of others, there are more stakeholders than shareholders—to recognize these facts, rationality and measurement falter, and we must listen to an inner voice, “a remote and important region in all who talk.” *Leading from Within* makes the claim that poetry helps leaders deliberate about “living one’s own truth” and considering “whether one’s actions in the world are intentional, authentic, and congruent with the ancient Greek imperatives, ‘Know thyself’ and ‘Become what you are.’” A glance around at the world throws the reading habits of many contemporary leaders in doubt but this book gives one hope.

It seems significant that one of the poems selected by leaders in *Leading from Within* is “Listening.” In the prose accompanying this poem, David Brooks Andrew writes of an interview he did with the Norwegian actress Liv Ullman, which was transformed by the act of mutual listening. In his afterword, the poet David Whyte writes that “William Stafford’s ‘Listening’ invites us to experience silence not as a lack of sound but as an invitation to worlds that are overwhelmed by our constant need to speak.” And so it is encouraging to read in the editors’ essay, “Leading with Fire: Using Poetry in our Life and Work” that “Many CEOs described how they need to continually discipline themselves to listen.” Not enough, it would seem. Stafford was not a competitive person, but I’m told he took pride in listening better than other people. It is the kind of leadership he believed in.

The other poems collected in *Leading from Within* are “Silver Star” and “With Kit, Age 7, at the Beach.” The first is also in *Teaching with Fire*. In both cases, difficult management decisions are rationalized in a way similar to holding on to that thread: “To be a mountain you have to climb alone” and “Great stones will...gorge your side” but “all your patience will be rewarded.” In order for the thread to hold, though, we must assume the management decisions were the right ones and in one case the reader cannot be sure, giving this reader an uneasy feeling. The holding-onto-the-thread motif also connects to the use of “With Kit, Age 7, at the Beach.” Lee Rush, a former corporate executive finds the lines “as I talked, I swam” captures his dream of starting a nonprofit called justCommunity, Inc. A just community, I’m sure Stafford would agree, is a good thread to follow. There is justice in allowing teachers and children be who they want to be and find their central selves. William Stafford and the people behind these books have tried to weave that into our culture.

(cont. on p. 13)

Addendum to Fishtrap Panel: William Stafford, His Life, Values, and Poetry.

Moderated by Kim Stafford, with Peter Sears and Naomi Shihab Nye. July 12, 2014.

Peter Sears, now Oregon's Poet Laureate, wrote this editor after reading the transcription of the William Stafford panel at the 2014 Fishtrap gathering, which appeared in the last issue of this publication. He was curious as to why two quotations from Stafford's autobiographical prose important to understanding how Bill's vision cohered had been left out. Though these quotations can be found in other places (see editor's note below), Sears, one of the founders of the FWS, is right about the essentiality of these quotations in understanding William Stafford's sensibility. The omitted section and quotations are reprinted below.

PS: I did an article for Scribners and in doing so, I wanted to find what I thought were the most telling passages from William Stafford that really gave us a sense of when and how he developed, the special moments. So I'm going to read from that, the first one. He's a young man, and he's by the Cimarron River, and it's evening:

How slow and majestic the day was, and the sunset. No person was anywhere, nothing, just space, the solid earth, gradually a star, the stars.... That encounter with the size and serenity of the earth and its neighbors in the sky has never left me. The earth was my home; I would never feel lost while it held me.

So that strength, that inner integrity and determination and fierceness was established early, early on, but he established it within himself by himself with an event. He experienced it—that's the thing that's remarkable. That's the one I like most about nature and about his development. Then the one that I found most meaningful about writing. He's a young man. He's at the University of Kansas, and he goes to the library. I don't think I went to the library as a young man (laughter):

Once in the evening in the library something happened that linked to my dream-vision night along the Cimarron.... It was winter; a strange, violet light was in the sky—a color typical of clear prairie evenings.... Something about the light, and the quiet library, and my being away from home—many influences at once—made me sit and dream in a special way. I began to write. What came to me was a poem, with phrases that caught the time, my feelings. I was as if in a shell that glowed.

It is remarkable just the way he can introduce, you know, writing to himself. It happened. He started to write. You want to know what he wrote; maybe you do know what he wrote [to Kim]. Maybe it's in the archives. But I don't think that's so important. It's his discovery of it, and also this thing is linked to the Cimarron River, to nature. So things really cohered for William Stafford in a way that few of us enjoy. Coherence is not a natural talent that we carry around, at least not to ourselves.

KS: But it can be cultivated.

PS: It can be cultivated but cultivated through the action of the voice.

Editor's Note: The first quote is on pages seven and eight of *You Must Revise Your Life*; the second is on pages nine and ten. Sears' essay on Stafford, from which he read, was published in *World Poets*, Vol. 3, (The Scribner Writers Series), Ron Padget, ed., 2000. pp. 35-44.

The Way Trees Began

Before the trees came, when only grass
and stones lived in the world, one day
Wanderer heaped up a mound of mold
from dead stems and breathed on it.

You could look for miles then; sunlight
flooded the ground, and waves in the air
combined with billowing purples of grass
when you stared over open hills.

That mound stayed still in the sun, and at night
it quivered a little in the grass-rippled wind,
but Wanderer forgot and went on over miles
where shoulders of rock hunched from the ground.

You know what began, after warm and cold,
after trembles and sighs that gradually
awakened:—a tiny furled-up leaf
spread out in the wind and waved like a hand.

Time was slow back then, a thick
slow golden syrup that flowed
over everything. It was good to the leaf
and to others that came, waved, and were gone.

Till now—trees everywhere. Wanderer
touches them in the spring, and they remember
how lonely it was. One little leaf at a time
comes out and begins all over again.

WILLIAM STAFFORD
READ AT THE STAFFORD GROVE EVENT
BY THIS EDITOR.

"Stafford is marvelous. I love his poems."

Robert Bly to Tomas Tranströmer
in *Airmail: The Letters of Robert Bly
and Tomas Tranströmer*, 2013.

Winter News: The January Celebrations

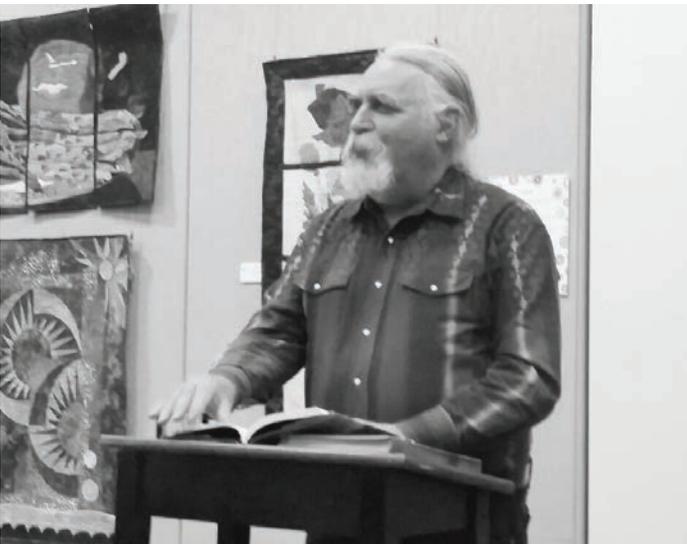
West Linn Celebration, Jan. 14th.

This celebration was held at the West Linn Library and hosted by FWS board member Susan Mckee Reese. The readers were Doug Erickson, former head of Special Collections at the Watzek Library at Lewis & Clark College and now director of the West Linn Library; David Hedges; Susanna Lundgren; West Linn High School student Anna-Maria Hartner; Walt Curtis, the unofficial poet laureate of Portland and cultural historian; Linda Appell; Scottie Sterret; David Milholland, president of the Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission; and West Linn High School teacher and former student of Paulann Petersen, Jessica Wray. Milholland distributed copies of *Bear Deluxe* 36, which contains Casey Bush's review, "Poet of This Place: Three New Books by William Stafford." (See News, Notes, and Opportunities).

—from a report by Susan Reese.



Doug Erickson.



David Milholland.

Lake Oswego Celebration, Jan. 18th.

Part of the Peregrine Library Series and hosted by Joan Maiers, a new FWS board member, the Lake Oswego event featured FWS board member Don Colburn reading from *Tomorrow Too: The Brenda Monologues*. Colburn and other readers described how their lives as readers, writers, colleagues, neighbors or friends were influenced by knowing William Stafford. Letterpress broadsides of Stafford poems, DVDs of *Every War Has Two Losers*, and publications by Colburn were available for browsing and purchase.

—from a report by Joan Maiers

A Quick Note from the Bluff

Bill, it worried me.
You'd keep saying "emergency"
and I'd think "Alarms bells! Sirens! Help!"
Red lights would flash, and I'd get ready to duck.

But this morning, early,
gulls fringe the tideline yelling
"Look look look!" the way they do,
and the sun comes up
red on the water, quiet.
A breeze is dusting along through the grass,
and the Sound keeps on reflecting the sky.
A dog trots by.
A goldfinch tilts on a thistle.
From the beach, somebody waves, and then runs on.

It's morning.
Everything arriving.
Look out.

MARTHA GATCHELL

READ AT THE MULTNOMAH CENTRAL LIBRARY
ON JAN. 25TH AS A PART OF "OLD FRIENDS OF BILL:
POEMS AND MEMORIES."
FIRST PRINTED IN *STAFFORD'S ROAD, AN ANTHOLOGY
OF POEMS FOR WILLIAM STAFFORD.*

"The poem is easy to find. It is everywhere."

Jan Priddy, "Teaching the Dead Deer
Poem." *Oregon English Journal* 37.1
(Spring 2015).

(cont. on p. 6)

(cont. from p. 5)

Multnomah Central Library, Jan. 25th

The “Old Friends of Bill: Poems and Memories” event, hosted by former FWS president Joe Soldati, gathered a number of people who knew Bill to talk about their friendships with him and to read their favorite poems. The readers were Ralph Salisbury, Patty Wixon, Martha Gatchell, Shelley Reece, Ingrid Wendt, Ann Staley, Vince Wixon, and Paulann Petersen. The two pieces below are the talks (slightly edited) given by Vince and Patty Wixon. The poem that Martha Gatchell read is on p. 5.

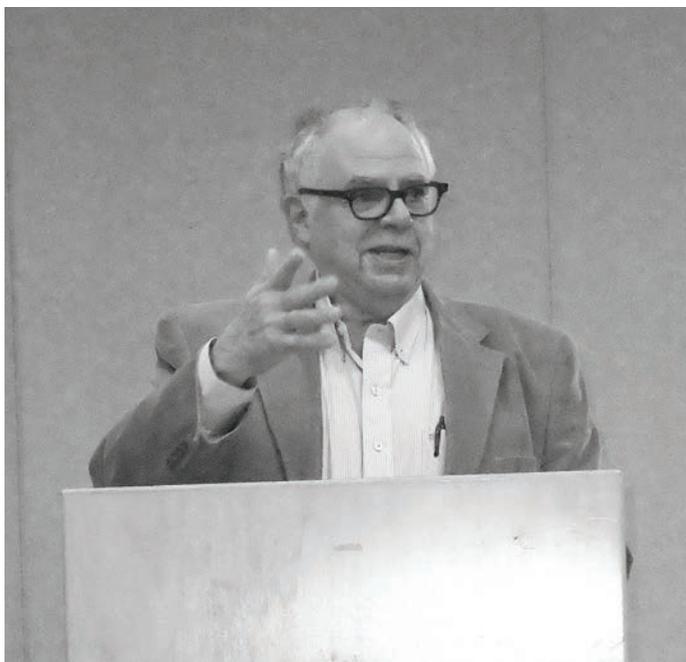


PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Joe Soldati.

Letters from a Friend

By Patty Wixon

The summer of 1990, I was standing in Dorothy and Bill Stafford's kitchen fixing deviled eggs for our son's wedding reception. I'd crept quietly from what had been Barbara & Kit's bedroom where Vince and I had spent the night, hoping not to disturb Bill stretched out on the couch with his paper and pen.

I was mixing egg centers with light from the dawn coming in the window, when Bill stepped around the corner, reached for the light switch and said, “Edison made a wonderful invention.” Then he went back to the couch.

I've been thinking about what makes so many people—many of you here—who knew Bill Stafford think of him as a close friend. Bill always kept that “close friend” quality of being an attentive listener. Whenever he was in conversation with you—no matter the size of the crowd around—Bill listened. If you asked him a yes or no question, he'd respond, “That sounds about right,” then immediately ask, “What about you?” Yes, Bill was our model. I never heard him say, “To start a poem, listen.” But he'd describe how to stay attuned to whatever might pass by. I never heard him say, “If you want to be a writer, you should write every day.” He'd tell us how he tried to

“keep my mind open for the next thing that comes along.” We knew what writing every day did for him. He was awake.

Bill also reminded many of us how important receiving a letter can be. These days of email and text messaging, I've been thinking how important it might be for us to respond to our grown children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren with words written on paper, a real letter. Bill's habit of writing a personal response to every letter he received still means a great deal to us, even decades later. Like the one Vince and I received written Sept. 20, 1979, in response to our request for Bill to be a keynoter at a teachers' conference that included a Teachers As Writers contest. He said, in part....

I'd like to come to North Salem [High School] Oct 12 and do my act. You may be sure that I'll be on hand in good time for my stint, 12:30 to 2 or so. You can now relax about my part and just count on our converging—unless you have some further advice etc. I'm ready and eager.

I think your plan to have Peter [Sears] M. C. the contest is a good one. Because Dorothy had already scheduled some guests for our place out near Sisters, the night of Oct 12, I'll have to slope on out there, but I'll just ease out—thought I'd tell you now so you won't think I've just passed out from sociability, when you glance around, perhaps, and find me missing later in the day.

Whenever we read Bill's letters, we hear his voice, and that's part of their importance—reminding ourselves of what his voice sounded like. Isn't that part of any letter's importance?

Editor's note: Patty read the poem below during her remembrance.



PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Patty Wixon and David Jarecki.

William Stafford: July 1, 1990

In the dark living room, he stretched out on the couch, rested his head on his worn-flat pillow, held the paper to catch street light from Sunningdale Drive.

His pen nib inked the top left corner of the page:

1 July 1990

In my dream I had acquired an airedale... Sentence ended, he paused,

then a poem took life, stopped with leaders... leading us cliffward.

Paused again. A second poem walked its way down the page. Two titles wandered in, settled in the margin.

Dorothy's tea kettle signaled breakfast. He held the crusty loaf, sliced pieces for toast—his second favorite part of making bread. First, his palms warmed by kneading dough smooth.

He spread kitchen scraps on the brewing compost, shoveled mulch, breathed deep the rich smell of loam.

Today was Sunday. He wouldn't bring in mail, answer letters, open a journal's reply, not write on a poem's back a rejection date. He wouldn't watch "Perry Mason" or take a nap. He drove to Kim's, helped reroof the shed until Kim stepped onto air instead of a rung, then off to ER.

Near evening, he gathered poems for a reading, hesitated, glanced again at the morning's second one
So together we venture along... staying right with whatever allowance we get. Kindly, we give each other our faces after a lightning strike and the thunder's long apologies.

He pulled on a beige shirt, its pocket waiting for his folded poems.

PATRICIA WIXON

"Deciding to be objective is a subjective decision."

William Stafford, Sound of the Ax, Aphorisms and Poems

"Your Life": El Dorado, Kansas, November 7, 1986

By Vince Wixon

At 8:00 AM my video partner Mike Markee, our videographer Jeff Hart, and I stumbled out of our motel room and into a dense, cold fog, worried about whether we would be able to videotape that day. We had a \$5,000 grant from the Oregon Arts Commission to make a film on William Stafford, and we'd already spend a lot of it to get to Kansas.

We walked across the parking lot into the cafe where Stafford was already in a booth drinking coffee. "Where have you fellas been? The best part of the day is over," he said, though he knew we had taken the redeye from Portland to Wichita and then driven the half-hour to El Dorado. Later that day and the next we were able to tape him in town and in the countryside near a farm house by the Walnut River. You can see some of that footage in *What the River Says*, mainly when he reads "The Farm on the Great Plains" and also in Haydn Reiss' film *Every War Has Two Losers*.

The next day, in his reading at Butler County Community College, where he studied before attending the University of Kansas, Bill announced one poem with: "When I travel I try to keep from being the kind of person who used to write and now travels. So I write. I'm down here in the motel yesterday morning waiting for my lazy friends to wake up so we can go have breakfast. I see this mirror..."

Then he read "Your Life"

You will walk toward the mirror,
closer and closer, then flow
into the glass. You will disappear
some day like that, being
more real, more true, at the last.

You learn what you are, but slowly,
a child, a woman, a man,
a self often shattered, and pieces
put together again, till the end:
you halt, the glass opens—

A surface, an image, a past.

That poem, "Your Life," with very few changes after the morning draft ("a child, a woman, a man" replaced "a baby, a boy, a man"—a typical move of Stafford to make the poem more inclusive) appeared in the 75th anniversary issue of *Poetry* in the fall of 1987, then in *Passwords* in 1991, and in his new and selected poems, *The Way It Is*, in 1998.

When he read "Your Life" that afternoon, I pictured him in a motel room like ours, lying on the bed, curtains open to gray light, head propped on a pillow, gazing at the mirror, accepting, as usual, the materials at hand. Then he would begin writing with a pen on a spiral notebook, which he took on trips. (At home he wrote on loose sheets of typing paper.)

(cont. on p. 8)

(cont. from p. 7)

First he wrote the date, “7 Nov. 86, Motel in El Dorado, Kansas,” then “Dinner last night at Lois & Joe Friesen’s farm. Also present...” followed by the names of others attending the dinner. Then “Here to make video—Vince Wixon, Mike Markee, Jeff Hart.” (It still feels good being mentioned in the warm-up in his journal! Like feeling you’re present just before the creation.)

Then,

“Someone walks toward the mirror,
closer and closer, then flows
into glass.”

What could be simpler, he might say? William Stafford didn’t need to be in Kansas to write those lines. (In fact, he told us he was once embarrassed when a host in Pakistan asked him what he had written about that morning. He’d written about the cracks in the ceiling of his room.) Any ceiling or mirror would do for William Stafford’s imagination. But being in one of his hometowns in Kansas, less than one hundred miles from his birthplace, had something to do with what he saw in the mirror that morning. Kansas was his past, where he grew up, and was still present for him.

That’s the charge I felt. Mike, Jeff, and I were beginning the great adventure of making a video with William Stafford. We had to be real and true. It was our lives he was writing about, too.

Ashland Celebration, Jan. 29th.

Vince and Patty Wixon, hosts for the event, report that there were over 130 people at the Hannon Library on the campus of Southern Oregon University. They think the larger numbers may be attributable to the reading of an unpublished Stafford poem, “At Laysr Cave,” and an article in the *Ashland Daily Tidings* called “Following Stafford’s Threads.” The poem was read by Earl Showerman, who received it from a friend in the Park Service who went on a one-day retreat with Bill in 1990 to visit the cave, one of the most significant archeological sites in Western Washington. The cave, discovered by Tim Laysr in 1982, was used by native Americans as long as seven thousand years ago. Bill apparently wrote the poem while in the cave and then gave it to Showerman’s friend.

“Every person should save a part of each day—at least a half-hour, and an hour would be better—for what could be labeled just looking out the window, that is, a time for turning away from immediate outer demands that wear away the self.”

*William Stafford, Sound of the Ax,
Aphorisms and Poems*



Ashland high school student Samara Diab and her brother Jack.

At Laysr Cave

Our heads bent over the floor, so rich
it had been in the lives of those people before,
thousands of years. Our hands felt
that cold rock wall, so noncommittal a gray.
We tried to reach that far; we wanted
to ask the stone—those people before us,
how tall in their dreams did they stand? When they peered
as we do past a wintry day did their eyes,
as ours do, try to squint farther than the sun?
And is there a cave somewhere more hidden
than this, with a fire, and all the spirits
gathered at last waiting for us?
We huddled close in their cave and peered out
at their world. For a moment their silence came.

WILLIAM STAFFORD, JUNE 8TH, 1990



Audience at the Hannon Library.

Tree Planting and Poetry Reading at Stafford Grove, April 9th



Head of the First Addition/Forest Hills Neighborhood Association, Carole Ockert.



PHOTOS BY MIKE MARKEE

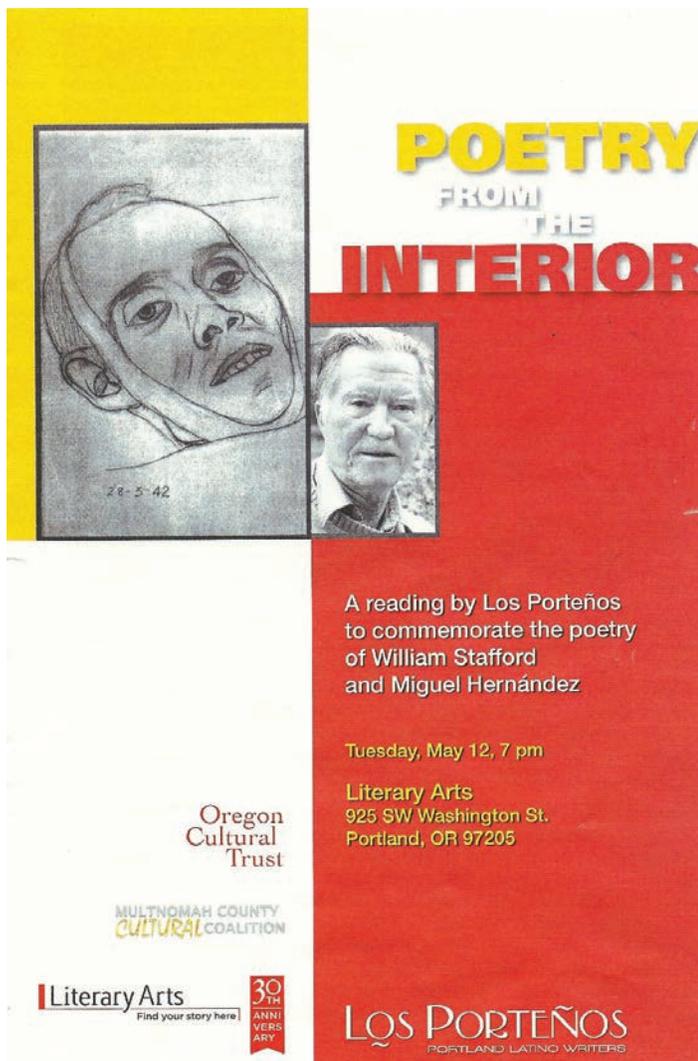
Paulann Petersen reading "With Neighbors One Afternoon."



The planting of a Western Hemlock. The event was part of celebrating Arbor Week.

Poetry from the Interior

Los Porteños, a group of Portland Latino writers, gave a reading of their poems responding to two poems, one by Stafford and one by the Spanish poet Miguel Hernández (1910-1942) who died of tuberculosis in prison following the end of the Spanish Civil War. The reading was held at Literary Arts on Washington Street in downtown Portland on May 12th. Stafford's poem was "Review" and Hernández's "Hoy Me Sobra El Corazón / Today I Have Plenty of Heart," which can be found in *Selected Poems: Miguel Hernández and Blas De Otero*, Baland & St. Martin, eds., a Seventies Press Book (1972). The reading was organized by Olga Sánchez; other readers were Joaquín Lopez, Octaviano Mereciás-Cuevas, Juan Antonio Trujillo, Enrique Patlán, Ivonne Saed, and byron José Sun. Saed, a scholar with impressive credentials, said that both poems were "written from a place of incarceration." "Review" appears in *Another World Instead* and was written while in the CO camps during WWII; Hernández's was written not in prison but at the outbreak of that tragic and ruinous civil war and appears in Hernández' first book *El Rayo Que No Cesa / The Lightning That Never Stops* (1936). The drawing of Hernández was done just after his death in a prison in Alicante.



**POETRY
FROM
THE
INTERIOR**

A reading by Los Porteños
to commemorate the poetry
of William Stafford
and Miguel Hernández

Tuesday, May 12, 7 pm

Literary Arts
925 SW Washington St.
Portland, OR 97205

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LOS PORTEÑOS
PORTLAND LATINO WRITERS



Olga Sánchez.

PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Review

The arm is bayonet good
and the feet for marching.
The eyes can lick over a blasted town
and then read a menu.
The voice can sing anthems for action
and then pray.

But the heart is not fit enough.
It can't arm itself.
It can't march.
It cannot even beat near a blasted town
and then sing.

The heart is rejected for military service
or for essential civilian duty.

What are we doing here, heart?
Heart? whose side are you on?

WILLIAM STAFFORD



Joaquín Lopez.

PHOTO BY IKA KUZNIK

Stafford Centennial Quilt by Claire Kellog of "You Reading This, Be Ready."



The front (above) and detail from the back (below).

Methow River Sign, Restored

“Is This Feeling About the West Real?” was originally located along the Methow River between Winthrop and Mazama. Shooters used the interpretive sign, “Pattern of Life,” that companioned the poetry sign for target practice. The interpretive sign ended up with 18 bullet holes (see below) before the shooters left the scene. No bullets were fired at the poetry sign, which sat within 6 feet of the interpretive sign. Sadly, one of the 18 bullets fired into the interpretive sign managed to ricochet across the face of the poetry sign, causing the porcelain surface to chip out, thereby obliterating part of the poem. The interpretive sign will, at some point, rejoin its companion as soon as funds are available to replace the sign panel. The artist who created the original interpretive sign, Linda Feltner, will make the artwork available as a donation when funds to reproduce the damaged sign panel are secured. New location: 305 N Lincoln St, Twisp, WA 98856; GPS Location: 48.367560, -120.119878

Editor’s Note: This information was provided by Dennis Schmidling.



Threads in the Cloth, Part 2

“A Spiral Walk through the Golden Mean: A Foray into the Structure of Thought and Invention.” Leslie Ullman. *The Writer’s Chronicle* 46.2 (Oct./Nov.) 2013.

“Shine in That Vivid Isolation’: A Case Study of the Ghazal in the Contemporary Lyric.” Tyler Mills. *Writer’s Chronicle* 45.6 (May/Summer 2013).

Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from Urdu by Aijaz Ahmad, W.S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich, William Stafford, David Ray, Thomas Fitzsimmons, Mark Strand, and William Hunt. Aijaz Ahmad, ed. Oxford Press, 1994.

These two essays from *The Writer’s Chronicle*, a publication of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, make use of Stafford’s work. The connection to Stafford, the thread, also leads to some interesting thoughts on two venerable forms of poetry, the sonnet and the ghazal, as well as about nature and culture.

“A Spiral Walk through the Golden Mean” explores the relationship between the Divine Proportion, the Golden Mean, and the sonnet. Leslie Ullman, a well-respected and accomplished poet, begins with her fascination with the ammonite, ancestor of the chambered nautilus. The chambers of both grow at the golden ratio, .618, and create a logarithmic spiral of great beauty, one that can be replicated by continually dividing a golden rectangle by .618 and following the intersecting lines. This spiral can be found in “the movement of hurricanes, the swirls of planets in galaxies, the patterns of seeds on the head of a sunflower, [and] the proliferation of leaves in numerous plants.” The Divine Proportion can also be found in the eight-six, octave-sestet, structure of the sonnet, most clearly in the Petrarchan sonnet but also in the Shakespearean sonnet. Following Phyllis Levin’s introduction to *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet*, Ullman focuses on the volta, “the turn” between the octave and the sestet, which occurs at the Golden Mean, approximately .618 through the fourteen lines. It is, Ullman says, paraphrasing Levin, “a rhetorical change in strategy that dramatically informs the shape and trajectory of thought in the sonnet.” The English sonnet, Ullman points out, modifies this structure somewhat with its final couplet, though the shift at the ninth line usually remains. The volta at the octave creates a top-heavy equation that has an intrinsic dynamic engendering a rhetorical shift arising from “the poet’s instinctive sense of proportion in the flow of argument or revelation.” Levin considers the volta “the seat of [the sonnet’s] soul.”

In order to illustrate the instinctive structural quality of the Golden Mean in the volta, Ullman uses Stafford’s unrhymed and unmetred sonnet “Time.” (see p. 14) She explains it this way, “I am using the sonnet to illustrate how the lyric mind may be tuned, via registers it may be only subliminally aware of, to the dynamics of Divine Proportion.” Stafford is a good choice for this, she says, because his “[t]rust in the associative process, free of convention or intent, is legend.”

Ullman finds in Stafford’s sonnet “the flow and physical appearance of a Petrarchan sonnet” with the turn after eight and a half lines to the flashback and the epiphany of lost innocence. The final two lines, she notes, also have the quick couplet closure of an

English sonnet. All this, she continues, is from a poet noted for his “intuitive approach to the writing process.” She goes on to speak of how his sense of “trust,” “forgiveness,” and daily writing “have become cornerstones of the pedagogy for teaching composition as well as creative writing.” This last comment seems a little casual given the attack on the unmeasurable going on in schools today. It also neglects to consider that Stafford’s methods were a means to an end, “the discovery of the essential self.”

She finds Stafford’s poem useful for the qualities he practiced: receptivity, willingness to fail, intuition, adventurousness, and quiet confidence. Stafford’s poem, she says, “[O]ffers an illustration of how nature’s forms may well reside with us and make their way, unbidden or quasi-bidden, into poems.”

I thought I might test this natural sense of the sonnet and the volta, the turn, in Stafford’s work. I choose *There’s a Thread You Follow*, his last poems (found in *The Way It Is*) because it has the word *thread* and because it seems that natural proclivities would certainly be apparent in a poet’s last works. It might be that some of these last poems were still in handwritten form when he died but whoever transcribed them, maybe his son Kim, felt their natural forms, which would bolster the weight of the evidence. As I leaf through *The Way It Is*, I realize that Stafford’s use of form and formal structures is pretty consistent, though in his middle years it loosens a bit. Of the thirty-nine poems in *There’s a Thread You Follow*, there are seven sonnets. Five are Shakespearean (three quatrains and a couplet), the best known of which is “You Reading This, Be Ready,” and two are two stanzas of seven lines each, “Afterwards” and “Having It Be Tomorrow.” There are seven others that are sonnet-like, for example, an eight-line poem with two tercets and a couplet, as in “Charades” or two quatrains and a couplet, as in “Crossing Our Campground.” There seems an organic structural relationship of these sonnet-like poems to the sonnet that supports Ullman’s argument that composition organizes itself into emergent forms that follow deep structural principles connected to proportions inherent in nature.

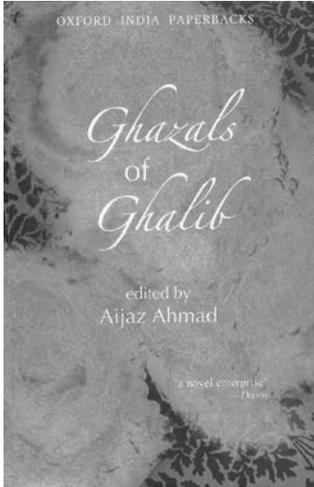
Ullman develops this in a discussion of how poets “replicate golden proportions” in the way “they create stanzaic structures out of an instinctive awareness of ‘continuous proportion.’” “Continuous proportion” is a phrase she borrows from *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*, edited by John Frederick Nims and David Mason. It is easy to see in Stafford’s work the use of regular stanzas, from couplets to five-line stanzas (quintains), with quatrains probably the most frequent stanza form. Eleven of the thirty-nine poems in *There’s a Thread You Follow* have regular stanzas. Fourteen of the poems are sonnets or sonnet-like. Well over half of the poems in *There’s a Thread You Follow* have this kind of organic form, though none have regular rhyme schemes. It is a sense of form Ullman would say is connected to patterns of growth inherent in natural forms: trees, clouds, coastlines, seed swirls—emergent forms. A poem for Stafford was a natural form made from impulses and intuitions, an emergent form, an expression of the world’s intrinsic proportions. He writes in *Writing the Australian Crawl*: “Sometimes it seems to me that a writer habitually touches the earth, touches home, clings to all that passes.”

Another thread in the way Stafford is being woven into the literary and cultural cloth of our enlightenment can be found in Tyler

(cont. on p. 14)

(cont. from p. 13)

Mills' essay in *The Writer's Chronicle* on the ghazal in contemporary American poetry. Brief mention is made of Stafford for his contribution to a fascinating book published in hardback in 1971 and then as a paperback in 1994, the *Ghazals of Ghalib*. My copy is a fifteenth impression of the paperback, done in 2011, so this book seems to have a certain attraction. In Stafford's annotated bibliography, Paul Merchant calls it Stafford's "most successful association" in translation with another poet. The idea for the book was to have several poets translate the same ghazals, though some of the ghazals have only one translation. Often, though, there are three. Of the seven poets involved, Stafford, Merwin, and Rich are the busiest—fifteen, eighteen, and eighteen translations, respectively. Aijaz Ahmad sent the poets a literal translation and definitions and explanations for key words and concepts. The poets took it from there, some approximating the ghazal form—couplets (from four to ten usually, though most in this book have five) with a single word/rhyme (aa, xa, xa, etc.). None of the poets replicate the rhyme scheme; most keep with couplets, as do Stafford, Rich, and Strand; Merwin and Ray often leave the couplet structure behind.



The book and Mills' essay are wonderful introductions to the ghazal. The book also has an introduction which tells about Ghalib's life and his cultural milieu. Ghalib (1797-1869) wrote in Urdu and lived in Delhi during the demise of the Moghul Empire. He is recognized as one of the great masters of the ghazal, a love poem written to an unattainable beauty; he is compared by Ahmad to Baudelaire and Wallace Stevens. Issues of translation arise, of course, and Ahmad makes the point in his introduction that "translation is approximation," something that the comparative format of the book makes quite evident. To move from one translation of the same poem to another is quite a pleasure. Not all of Stafford's translations are preferable, but there are times when his sense of things, his characteristic way of phrasing, comes gleaming through. Overall, the book proves again and again that poetry is not what is lost in translation.

Mills' essay has a formalist thrust. She makes it clear a ghazal is written in couplets that "shine in ...vivid isolation," independent, self-contained, and find unity in the repetition of the word/rhyme. She is particularly suspicious of American translations, especially those of Robert Bly, Stafford's good friend, whose book *My Sentence Is a Thousand Years of Joy*, is written in tercets to follow the syllabic count of the couplet. Mills finds Bly's ghazals "successful and beautiful" but "not true ghazals." The *Ghazals of Ghalib* come under criticism for paving "the way for a kind of risky appropriation" that Bly's ghazals represent. Mills claims convincingly that the form of the ghazal and some of its satisfactions are lost in some translations. Poetry, though, is in all of the translations in *Ghazals of Ghalib*.

Be that as it may, Stafford's ghazals are quite lovely, as are Rich's and Merwin's and Strand's. The *Ghazals of Ghalib* is an adventure

into Stafford as a translator, translation, and another culture. Literature from other cultures and languages can enlighten, partly because they have words we don't that express feelings and ideas our language does not. Ahmad explicates the Urdu word *naz* for the first ghazal in the book. It means "conceit, elegance, authority.... an attitude ...an air assumed by those who are loved, know they are loved, and that they can over-extend without running the risk of losing their lover." *Lost in Translation: An Illustrated Compendium of Untranslatable Words Around the World* by Ella Frances Sander translates *naz* as "The pride and assurance that comes from knowing you are loved unconditionally." This idea that one's sense of freedom is enhanced and furthered by love is a concept that, according to Ahmad, is not "strong or pervasive enough in Anglo-Saxon cultures for the language to yield and crystallize the meaning in a single word." This is too bad but Ahmad's book and Mills' essay shine a light on a fascinating and complex literary form and the culture that created it. We see, as well, Stafford at work, making certain choices that reveal his singular vision.

Time

The years to come (empty boxcars
waiting on a siding while someone forgets
and the tall grass tickles their bellies)
will sometime stay, rusted still;
and a little boy who clammers up,
saved by his bare feet, will run
along the top, jump to the last car,
and gaze down at the end into that river
near every town.

Once when I was a boy
I took that kind of walk,
beyond the last houses, out where the grass
lived, then the tired siding where trains whistled.
The river was choked with old Chevies and Fords.
And that was the day the world ended.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Ghazal XV by Ghalib

Only the survivors come forth in the rose, the tulip.
What faces have gone down under the dust!

All the star children curtained in the day—
how their hearts flooded, naked in the night!

Sleep comes, peace, quiet of rest,
for one who holds an arm under your hair.

We poets break through custom, find our way to life;
old ways die, and weave themselves into faith.

If the poet mourns this well, you dwellers in the world,
you will find your cities drifting back into the wild.

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM STAFFORD

Threads in the Cloth, Part 3

“Living Medicine: Stephen Harrod Buhner and Planet Intelligence, Natural Medicine, and the Trouble with Pharmaceuticals.” Interview with Akshay Ahuja. *The Sun* 418 (Dec. 2014).

Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm: Beyond the Doors of Perception into the Dreaming Earth. By Stephen Harrod Buhner. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 2014.

Another filament of the thread in which Stafford is stitched into our culture can be found in a recent issue of *The Sun*, an ad-free, independent magazine of personal essays, short stories, interviews, poetry, and photography that has been edited by Sy Safransky for over forty years. Steve Almond calls it “One of the last true independent sources in a world of corporate-sponsored magazines.” It is a handsome, intriguing, and satisfying magazine. Its interviews are invariably in-depth and interesting. The interview with Stephen Harrod Buhner, writer, herbalist, and “bardic naturalist” makes thoughtful mention of Stafford. Buhner is the author of a number of books, including *The Lost Language of Plants: The Ecological Importance of Plant Medicine to Life on Earth* and *Plant Intelligence*, the latter of which I will say more about in a minute.

Buhner, responding to a question about observing a large and venerable maple self-prune by trembling over a period of days to dislodge a large limb, says:

The poet William Stafford once said that it was not through extraordinary experiences that he created his poetry but through everyday experiences that he paid attention to. Amazing things are happening around us all the time; we just need to notice them.

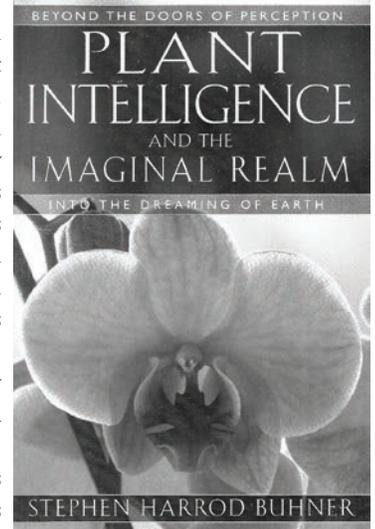
Buhner has been noticing, researching, and writing about plants for many years. His next statement involving Stafford tells us what he has learned:

The experience of a world filled with soul and intelligence naturally engenders deep spirituality. As we feel more deeply into the world, we become aware of what Stafford called the “golden threads” that run through the world and connect everything.

In the Jossey-Bass/Center for Courage and Renewal anthologies, teachers and leaders use the idea of following a thread to keep you from getting lost and give your life unity and coherence. Buhner takes this idea into the world of plants and patterns, utilizing some of Stafford’s key ideas to do it.

Plant Intelligence is a book that could be called mind-expanding but might, considering the times, better be termed an excursion into the complexity, wisdom, and connectedness of the sentient world. He writes in a chapter called “Following Golden Threads”: “We find, always, when we follow golden threads, the metaphysical background of the world.” Buhner begins *Plant Intelligence* with a childhood memory of being with his grandfather, just being together, not talking, in which everything took on “a kind of intelligent awareness and caring and each and everything in that room was gently companionship in that single, suspended moment.” He connects this moment to a moment Stafford describes in the biographical essay that opens *You Must Revise Your Life* (see also page 4). Stafford is reading in the library at the University of Kansas one

winter and feels as if he is in “a shell that glowed.” Buhner calls this and other transcendental moments “the response of the heart to what is presented to the senses” that leads one to experience “the world as it really is: alive, aware, interactive, communicative, filled with soul and very, very intelligent.” I think of Bill’s aphorism, “Water is always ready to learn,” and how his poetry is so rich, so golden with personification, that act of connection, friendship, respect. Stafford stuck with personification in his poetry even during literary times when the “pathetic fallacy” was considered presumptuous, even arrogant, an attitude that still prospers around the sciences and the STEM advocates. Buhner quotes Mary Midgley to give a sense of why Stafford might have been loyal to it: “What personification does is to attack the central, disastrous failure of the mechanistic paradigm... the conviction that the physical world is inert and lifeless.”



In order to develop this idea of a web of intelligent sentience, Buhner tries to establish the existence of invisible relationships. A song, for example, when performed is an invisible entity to the performers, the parts of it woven together by the musicians who sense something invisible together or the song would be just noise. Buhner compares it to Stafford’s metaphor in *Writing the Australian Crawl* of the swimmer/writer “propelled by a medium too thin and all-pervasive for the perceptions of nonbelievers who try to stay on the bank and fathom his accomplishment.”

The glowing shell, the creative trance, the sense of deep invisible webs of significance are enabled by following the golden thread. This is the aspect of Stafford’s thought that Buhner finds most furthering. He zeros in on it in the chapter called “Following Golden Threads,” which begins with an epigraph from Stafford: “When you find you have a response—trust it. It has meaning.” Buhner goes on to quote Blake’s famous quatrain:

I give you the end of a golden string
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven’s Gate
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.

Blake is describing, Buhner says, the “movement *through* the doors of perception... *into* the metaphysical background of the world.” The door is the thread and the willingness to place oneself in the position to listen and to feel, to be response-able:

The writer is feeling his way along the string that has emerged into his awareness. He is using that capacity for nonphysical touch to follow a particular meaning that has touched him and captured his attention, trusting it to lead him where he needs to go to be itself, to emerge complete and whole in language. “Any little impulse is accepted and enhanced,” Stafford remarks. Over time you learn to trust

(cont. on p. 16)

(cont. from p. 15)

the process, the experience, for, as Stafford continues, “only the golden string knows where it is going, and the role for a writer or reader is one of following, not imposing.”

Following the golden thread involves receptivity, an openness to emerging forms, to what occurs. Both Buhner and Leslie Ullman and, I think, Stafford, would say that the forms that emerge are natural, self-organizing, like plants, animals, rivers, the world.

Stafford, Buhner says, was a master of following threads, “Deep meaning touched him and as soon as he felt it, he turned toward it, focusing on it with the whole of his attention.” Saying this leads Buhner, like Parker Palmer in his introduction to *Leading from Within* and Robert Bly in his introduction to *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep*, “William Stafford’s Golden Thread,” to “A Ritual to Read to Each Other.” For Buhner, this poem represents the way following a golden thread—in this case how “our mutual life” could “get lost in the dark”—leads to “deeper meanings,” “hidden glimmerings.” “That part of the self,” he says, “that is intimate with meanings flows along the line of meaning—the golden thread that has touched the self—heading toward its depths.”

In the last chapter of *Plant Intelligence*, Buhner returns to Stafford. He is thinking about the “[d]issociated mentation,” also known as objectivity, that has “become the hallmark” of western civilization. Many people, Buhner claims, have lost “the ability to speak of the heart’s response to the touch of the world upon them.” We don’t ask ourselves how things feel but “it is our feeling sense that tells us the nature of the environment in which we find ourselves.” The flavorless tomatoes in the supermarket are saying something. One of Buhner’s essential contentions is that “the mind can never find the way; it is in our capacity to feel that we can find the heart of the world.” By activating the feeling sense we can grasp the intelligence and interconnectedness of things. Buhner goes to the introduction of *A Scripture of Leaves* to find a description of this feeling sense that is “the interior of your own life”:

In your life—the center of it, not the part for earning a living, or the part that gains you notice and credit, or even the part that leads others to like you—but in the central self are feelings so important and personal the rest of the world cannot glimpse who you are and what is happening, deep in there, where it is you alone.

Buhner, like Stafford, argues for a reconnection with the larger, deeper, wiser world through the touch of the imagination and recognition of the true self. To read Stafford through *Plant Intelligence* is an enlightening experience that gives his work a particularly pleasing aspect and shimmer.

Buhner’s thesis can be summarized in his epigraph to chapter four, a quotation from Pythagoras, “Astonishing! Everything is intelligent!” This is an illuminating, complex, stirring book, one in which I am delighted to see Stafford participate. Another summary might be, the earth sings, or to paraphrase Theodore Roethke, it is a “steady storm of correspondences.” You can read here of the flowerlike quality of whale songs, the correspondence between the reproductive systems of flowers and humans, and the similarity of neural networks and the roots of plants. This, though, might be its essential claim:

Every living organism on the planet (including such self-

organized systems as the white blood cells in our bodies) has the capacity to analyze the nature of outside forces that touch them, determine their intent, and then to exercise judgment on determining form among a number of potential responses which one to implement....Our intelligence is only a special instance of a general condition.

In many ways Stafford knew this and his poetry *knows* it. A little evidence to end with:

The great story weaves closer and closer, millions of touches, wide spaces lying out in the open, huddles of brush and grass, all the little lives.

from “Over in Montana”

The world speaks everything to us.

It is our only friend.

from “Earth Dweller”

What the river says, that is what I say.

from “Ask Me”

Threads in the Cloth: A Coda

The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics defines *canon* as a group of texts whose formulators see as especially valuable to its culture. There are many other definitions, but I’d like to go with this one. It’s clear that a number of formulators, in this case anthologists, value the machine-in-the-garden theme of “Traveling through the Dark.” I think of that scene in *The Grapes of Wrath* when, just as the Joads get on the road, their dog is killed by a car. Formulators value as well the when-men-are-dangerous theme in “At the Bomb Testing Site.” Stafford asks the question, “When are men dangerous?” at the beginning of the first chapter of *Down in My Heart* in which he is almost lynched. Interestingly enough, Stafford is not collected in the most influential of anthologies, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, though these two poems and several other rather obscure ones are in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*.

Be that as it may, the anthologists and scholars whose work is discussed in this meditation have found something valuable in Stafford’s work, his poetry and prose. What is it? The Center for Courage and Renewal/Jossey-Bass books and Stephen Buhner find the idea of the thread, the golden thread, important, but for somewhat different, though related, reasons. For the Jossey-Bass books, it seems that Stafford’s metaphor is closely related to an aphorism of Joseph Campbell, “Follow your bliss,” and another by Schiller, “Be true to the dreams of your youth.” For Buhner, a gold thread is the one that leads to the intelligence and interconnectedness of things. The thread is a thread in the great web of being. The first related to keeping faith with one’s true self and the second to what the true self is, “what the world is trying to be.”

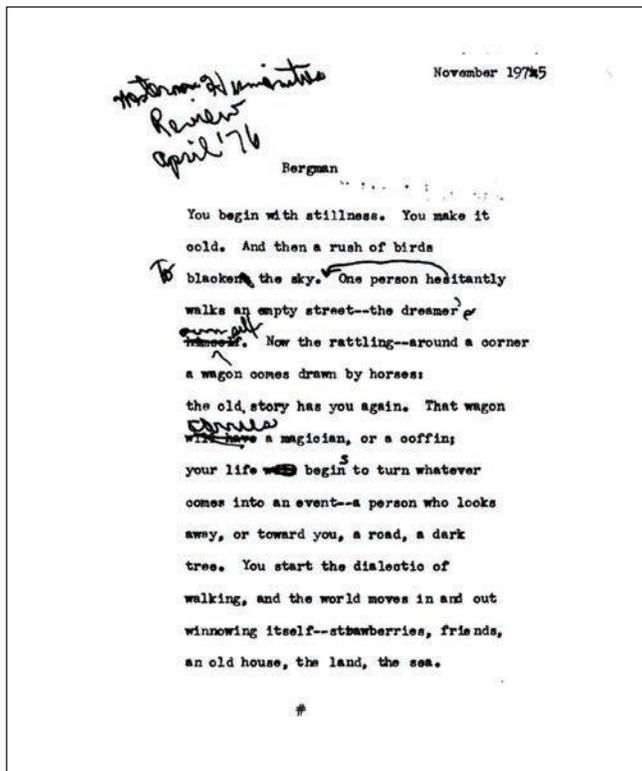
The teachers and leaders in the Jossey-Bass anthologies also value Stafford’s sense of attention to the luminosity of the ordinary—the room one is in, the body before one. This is closely connected to something Ullman and Buhner appreciate in Stafford, his intuitiveness and belief in his own responses. There is a child-like healthiness in Stafford’s approach to poetry and the making of it that harkens back to the Romantics: “Trailing clouds of glory we come into this world.” I am reminded that Stafford would respond to the question of when he became a poet by saying that the question

wasn't when he became a poet but when everyone else stopped being one. This natural willingness to discover is probably why he took on the Ghalib translations.

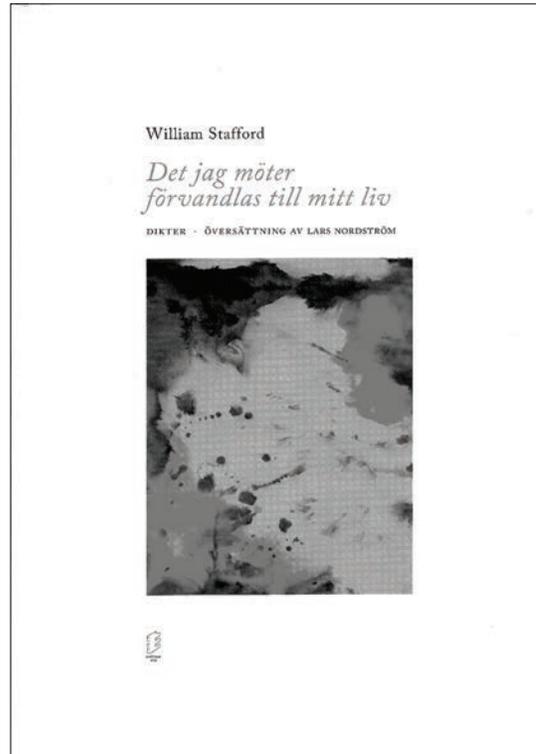
Some formulators, some influential readers, of the canon, the literary fabric of the culture, seem to have a narrow, though important, use for Stafford. The works discussed here, however, would suggest that Stafford offers a much more comprehensive sense to influential and ordinary readers that human beings can be whole and true to themselves because they know the world is a brilliantly complex community woven together with wonder. I think of that Buddhist saying, "Where there is veneration, even an old dog's tooth emits light."

Stafford in Sweden

Lars Nordström, Swedish poet, farmer, and scholar, who lives around Beavercreek, Oregon, has just published a book of his translations of Stafford's poems, his second. The book contains 61 poems. All except one, "Bergman," are found in Stafford's major collections. This poem appeared in the *Western Humanities Review* in 1976 but Nordström's translation is based on Stafford's revision of the original poem, sent to him by Kim Stafford. "Bergman" is a response to Bill's seeing Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*. The title of the book is from "Evolution" and in English is "what comes before me / transforms into my life." Nordström told this editor that if one were to retranslate the title back into English, it would read more like this: "What I meet is transformed into my life." Nordström and Kim Stafford read from the new translations together at the West Linn Library on May 18th.



This is the typescript of "Bergman" that Kim Stafford sent to Nordström.



At the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

Inside the gate, facing the jumble of gravestones
I wipe my forehead.
My pupils contract into almost nothing,
the cicadas saw frenetically
from the green darkness of the cypresses.

It is like remembering a dream very clearly—
everything is so familiar
yet totally strange.

I quickly find my way back to Shelley,
but I have to search for Keats.
Placing my hand on their stones I silently greet them,
but neither of them answer.
Two small pieces of paper, faded by sunlight, lie tucked
under a terracotta shard by Shelley's marble headstone.
I find nothing to say.

I drift wordless in a crowd of strangers,
where scattered compatriots suddenly turn their unknown
lives toward me and eagerly call out:
"Friend, here's my hand!"

LARS NORDSTRÖM

THIS POEM IS FROM NORDSTRÖM'S LATEST BOOK OF POEMS,
DOING LIFE ON PLANET EARTH, POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS.

News, Notes, and Opportunities

Tenth Annual William Stafford Poetry & Potluck at Foothills Park in Lake Oswego, September 13th, noon to five. The featured reader this year will be Oregon Poet Laureate Peter Sears. There will be a raffle, the unveiling of the latest Paper Crane broadside, "The Way It Is," broadside sales, an open mic, and good conversation with a friendly band of poets, poetry lovers, and believers in the legacy of William Stafford. FWS board members Jim Scheppke and Leah Stenson will emcee. The stunning Stafford Stones are within sight and easy walking distance. All Friends of William Stafford are cordially invited to join the festivities.

Oregonlive: Vince and Patty Wixon. In an article by Kirstin Rian, they said this: "[Bill's] influence is still huge -- he was a great poet, yes, and what comes through is his wisdom and morality, the expression that we are all in this life together. His poetry is very much about society and people's responsibilities to others. Also, his attitude about writing poetry -- all can do it if they want to, write for yourself first, and so on -- is liberating. His presence is in the air here." Google [Oregonlive Wixons](http://www.oregonlive.com/books/index.ssf/2015/03/vince_and_patty_wixon_are_lead.html) for the full article; URL: http://www.oregonlive.com/books/index.ssf/2015/03/vince_and_patty_wixon_are_lead.html.

Bear Deluxe Review: Three Stafford books.

Casey Bush reviews *Winterward*, *Ask Me*, and *The Osage Orange Tree* in *Bear Deluxe* 36, a progressive, environmental/literary magazine edited by Tom Webb. In the review Bush notes that Kelly Reichardt's latest movie *Night Moves* (2013) has a scene in which Jesse Eisenberg and Dakota Fanning stop on a road to clear away a dead doe with a warm abdomen, eventually pushing her into a ravine. The movie is about three environmentalists on their way to blow up a hydroelectric dam. It is not surprising that Jon Raymond, Portland writer and editor, was involved with the screenplay. Bush concludes his thoughtful review with these words: "In this America of today, still engaged in seemingly endless conflict with other nations and tragically bent on the destruction of the environment in the name of unchecked consumerism, it is refreshing and perhaps necessary, to read the work of a poet who sat out WWII and stayed home to tend the field and forest."

The 28th Annual Summer Fishtrap, A Gathering of Writers, July 6-12. Theme: Hidden from History: Stories We Haven't Told, Stories We Haven't Heard. Keynote Speaker: Timothy Egan. Faculty: Sherwin Bitsui, Alison Hedge Coke, Perrin Kearns, Tom Kizzia, Page Lambert, Kim Stafford, Jane Vandenburg, Ericka T. Wurth. Closing Address: Winona LaDuke.

Stafford Poetry Signs—Hills Gulch Recreation Trail.

Six poetry signs, five by Stafford and one by Robert Wrigley, can be found along the Hills Gulch interpretive trail just northwest of Boise, Idaho. This editor has not been there but from what he can tell the signs are located at bridges where the trail crosses a year-around stream. The poems one finds at the crossings are "They Carved an Animal," (see cover), "Spirit of Place: Great Blue Heron," "Cave Painting," "Fall Wind," and "Coyote."

Stafford Poems at the Thirteenth Annual "Poetry and the Creative Mind" Benefit. Sam Beam sang a song and then recited several Stafford poems at the New York City event. Other readers were Gloria Steinem, Nick Cannon, Holly Hunter, and Vanessa Williams. Other poets read: Allen Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou. The April 15th event celebrated National Poetry Month and raised money for the Academy of American Poets. This editor could not ferret out which poems Beam read.

Stafford Road

1. Love the weeds.

Let them have the garden;
water seeks them out.

And let the cobwebs drift;
they soften angles, swim
gentle in the corners of our eyes.

2. Quiet is forgetful.
You just sit there.
Then a sound
sneaks in your ear.

You look around:
it's water

dripping from a leaf
you've just met.

3. After you're gone,
the dust settles.
Sunlight settles too.

Stumps collect their ants.
Cows look around.

Roads still lead
when left alone.

TIM BARNES

PERMISSIONS

"The Way Trees Began," "At Laysan Cave," and "Ghazal XV by Ghalib" "Bergman" are reprinted with permission of the Estate of William Stafford.

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The drawing by Barbara Stafford of William Stafford on the first page is from the cover of *You and Some Other Characters*, Honey Brook Press, 1987 and is used by permission of the artist, as is the line drawing on page 19.



BECOME A *Friend of William Stafford*

MISSION OF FWS

Our mission is to share William Stafford's work and further the spirit of his teaching.

WHY JOIN?

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

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

JOIN OR RENEW:

(Please check ALL appropriate boxes)

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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–June 2015

Meg Larson
 Joan Tenney and Virginia Gibson
 Cathy Murphy
 Susan and John Watson
 Eric Anderson
 Jim Bronson
 Melissa M. Skelton

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



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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

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Threads in the Cloth,
A Meditation in Four Parts
By Tim Barnes

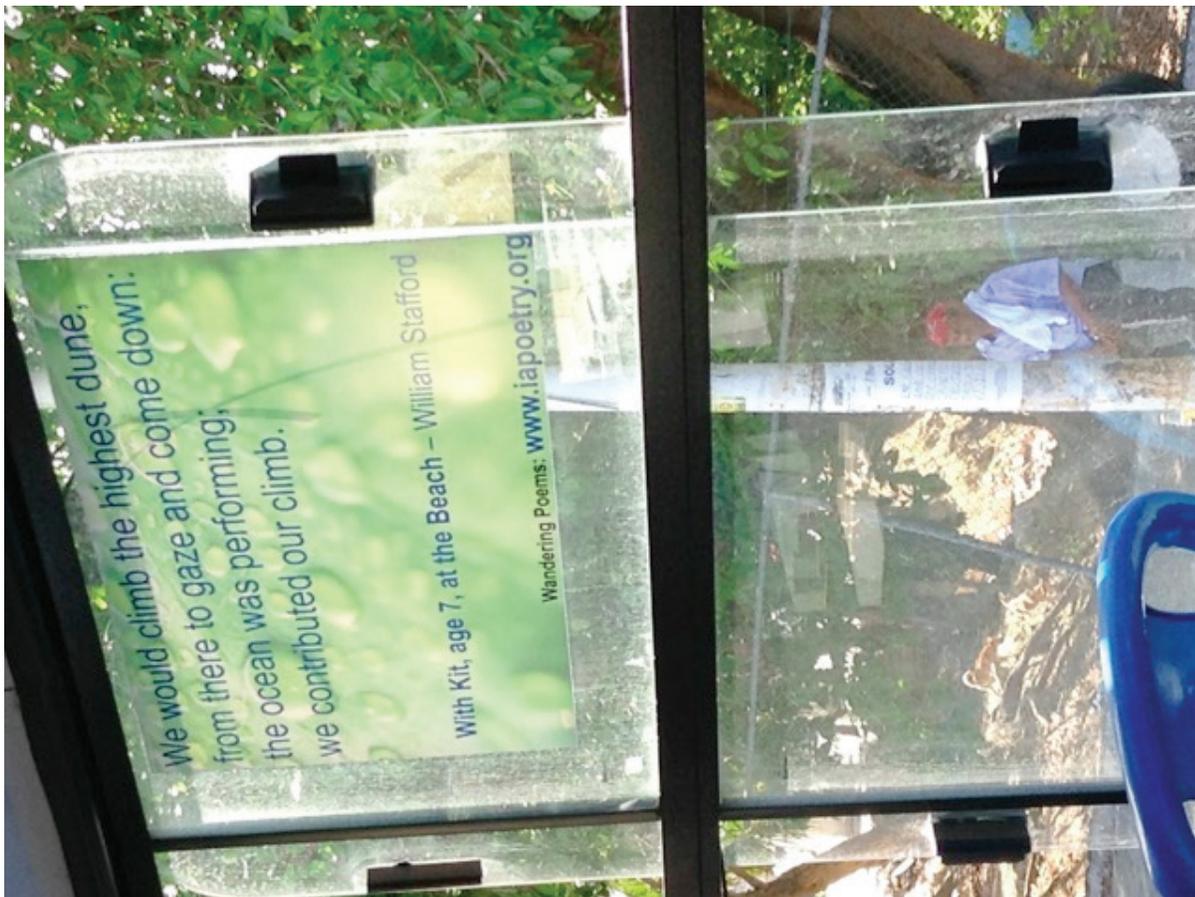


Winter News:
The January Celebrations



Stafford in Sweden

Please notify sender of change of address



Sally Cheriell, a former editor at the Oregonian, sent this photo from Cancun to FWS board member Don Colburn, and he sent it along. It was on a city bus going to Isla Mujeres in the Yucatan. The website listed under the excerpt from "With Kit, Age 7, At the Beach," belongs to the International Academy for Poetry Therapy, a group that believes in "therapeutic writing and nonviolent communication."