FIREWEED

Poetry of Western Oregon

WILLIAM STAFFORD ISSUE

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William Stafford Issue

FIREWEED: POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON is published quarterly in October, January, April and July. *FIREWEED* publishes poets living in the western half of Oregon, though poems need not be regional in subject. Manuscripts should include a return envelope with sufficient postage. We also need a biographical note. Inquiries about submission of reviews or essays are welcome. Subscriptions are $10 for four issues. 1330 E. 25th Ave., Eugene, OR 97403.

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INTRODUCTION

In Volume One, Number One of *FIREWEED* we wrote:

> It's our habit to mythologize journeys west, to Oregon.... Stafford, we thought, invited us to a "state," part land, part language. "Stafford country" is one name for what we inhabit, our place unnamed yet in its variety.

Now, in our fifth year, we would like to reaffirm this statement. We continue to explore "our place," with all those who appear in these pages and with those who read them as well. This issue is for William Stafford, whom none of us will ever forget.

The Editors

William Stafford

PASSING REMARK

In scenery I like flat country.
In life I don't like much to happen.

In personalities I like mild colorless people.
And in colors I prefer gray and brown.

My wife, a vivid girl from the mountains,
says, "Then why did you chose me?"

Mildly I lower my brown eyes--
there are so many things admirable people do not understand.

from *THE RESCUED YEAR*
(Harper & Row, 1966); most recent
publication in *THE DARKNESS*
AROUND US IS DEEP/SELECTED
POEMS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD
(Harper Perennial, 1993)

Barbara Stafford

This drawing [facing page] is part of a collection of work which Dad and I put together last spring, entitled *CONNECTING EARTH AND SKY.* Mostly the drawings are little explorations--glimpses of worlds that want to live in the company of his poems.

Dad was always ready and eager to collaborate, and his enthusiasm brought joy and life to our projects together.

I cherish the ease with which his work invited mine. "Passing Remark" [the poem paired with the drawing in the collection] is a poem that always made him smile.

Kim R. Stafford

THE SANCTUARY: WILLIAM STAFFORD AS HORIZONTAL VAGABOND

When I think of my father's writing practice, his daily habit before dawn with a fountain pen and a few scribbled sheets, I remember the time I went to break into the Presbyterian church at midnight, and met my father at first light. We held a meeting of two worlds, and all we said was hello.

It was along in the spring of 1967, probably May, when one night I had to hear my clarinet in the sanctuary alone. I had to hear my own breath wail past the reed and fill the room that had contained our silence weekly for years. I wanted to pray this way.

Our church was several miles from home. Beyond where Iron Mountain Boulevard ended in a whiff of swamp, across the dark hills of the golf course, a hospitable railroad track curved through the dark toward church, and by midnight, my clarinet in a shoulder bag, I had traversed the route and staggered up a path I knew between dark clouds of bramble to the church's southeast wall. I had shimmied up a drainpipe to stand on the flat roof over the fellowship hall, and I was prying at a skylight with my boy scout knife, certain I could find a way to flip it open, drop to the floor, thread my way to the double doors, with their brass-plated handles, and into the sanctuary. There I would fit the ebony sections of my clarinet together and play some Mozart with God.

Kneeling in roof gravel that glimmered pale, I tried the screwdriver blade on the rivets through plexiglass, then the can-opener blade against the tin flashing. The skylight was well made, and in the dark I cut my fingers on the tin. Then I tried the leather awl here and there, then the whittling blade. Nothing worked. My knife had no saw, so I was stumped. I sat back.

Streetlights had me in a crossfire. In my mind I saw the face of my assistant pastor, thundering through his Vietnam sermon, his last. He was my hero, the way he told us about hypocrisy. I had no sermon to match that man, but I did have a scale toward the infinite, notes made of silver in the dark. I wanted them to climb the silence and take me.

But after trudging around the roof, trying the windows of the Sunday School wing and the padlocked portal of the roof access lid, I saw the stars had turned, it was late toward morning, and clambered down the drainpipe and scurried along my blackberry path toward the tracks. Halfway home, at the wide belly of a long curve, I lay down to sleep on the gravel just below the rails and was startled awake when a freight thundered to me and past. I shivered, waited.

When the caboose dwindled with its red light away, in the quiet, I plodded on, climbed past the clubhouse out onto the dewy grass of the golf course, and dragged my way up along Sunningdale Road just as the first light came up in the east.

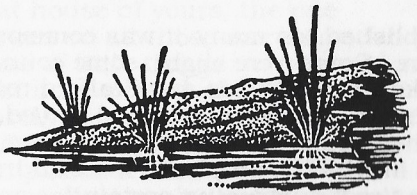
There is a way you can turn that front door knob so it makes no sound. You pull it toward your belly, and lift slightly, and then lean forward. I turned, and lifted, and leaned, and there was my father stretched out on the couch, looking at me over the top of his writing pad.

"Hello," he whispered.

"Hello," I whispered.

No questions, no stories, only his wide gaze, his smile, his hospitality and trust. I turned away sleepy, went on down the hall toward my room. I slept a while in my clothes, then rose with the household, gathered with the others at the table for breakfast, then drifted in my trance to school. I said nothing. My father said nothing. We had met at a safe place, before others.

Before dawn, as I wandered, he had been on his own journey, carrying only a few things. As he did each day, he had walked the dark with his hand, followed the track that led him across the page. He had threaded the thicket, climbed to the roof. His knife grew keen in the Great Depression, his courage in the War. And when we met at first light, he had already pried away the skylight and dropped to the floor. Or maybe that morning the poem had eluded him. Maybe that day's puzzle of the hand, the sky, the world, and a few electric sparks of recollection had eluded him. But the hand held his sanctuary. The sky was his sanctuary, the whole world. He was in the sanctuary already the moment he lay down to write, the moment he turned on the lamp and raised his left hand to begin.



John Daniel

WILLIAM STAFFORD
1914 - 1993

Earlier this year I asked Bill Stafford if he would send me some poems to consider for *WILDERNESS* Magazine, then asked for another batch when none of the first rang my bell. He gladly sent more, and wrote: "Please don't hover overlong on any of what I send, for I know you must juggle many considerations when selecting for publication. And I always have hopes of rallying something overwhelming, sooner or later." I was reminded of a comment he'd made at a reading years ago. He had confessed a chief regret about his work-- nothing vast, nothing of Tolstoyan proportions, seemed to emerge from his early morning jottings.

The regret may have been genuine, but it seems to me that the overwhelming, in life and literature, is exactly what Bill Stafford distrusted. He had little use for the heroic, the revolutionary, the rhetorically loud. He placed his faith in little things, in subtle clues and slight changes. He believed in dandelions, an extended hand, sunlight sliding across the floor-- he believed in the lucky hunches that will rise to words, given a chance, in the still interval before dawn. The world was a rich place to Bill Stafford. He repaid it with a lifetime of alertness, and in the lively quiet of his poems he calls forth ours.

Conversation with Bill had a way of easy glancing, of roving many fields. His talk was as ready and welcoming as his verse. It never failed to refresh me, to leave me more centered, as if he were some magnet that could realign me with the genuine. Bill was the kind of houseguest who hardly made a ripple. Once in our tiny cottage he refused the one bed-- this was a man in his seventies-- and insisted on the livingroom floor. "This is luxury," he said. "I've slept in coal cars, you know." A bowl of cereal in the morning, a cup of tea, and "So long"-- he was off like a seed in the wind to plant his gospel elsewhere, to talk about trust and fertile errors, to read his poems from their small folded sheets.

He published too many, it was commonly said. I wish he'd published more. Some were slight, some sounded like others, a few veered past like UFOs. But in any Stafford reading, any book, there were poems that lit like butterflies and stayed, slowly fanning their wings. And there were poems quiet in their means but meant to shock, poems in which a prophetic voice addressed us, calling us to wake from our tired, destructive certainties and look again. Poems that told us, "We live in an occupied country, misunderstood." Poems that told us, "Your job is to find what the world is trying to be."

Bill Stafford had something better to do than to exhibit his sensibility. He understood and did not shrink from the poet's ancient

responsibility to think hard for us all. As my mother said, one evening after I'd read to her from *SOMEDAY, MAYBE*: "He tells us things we need to know, without preaching." Like Thoreau, Bill Stafford made an uncompromising witness of his life. Like Robinson Jeffers, he tried to deflate our obsessive sense of our own importance and show us to ourselves in actual scale. More tolerant and generous than either, he stands in their tradition and his best work will last with theirs.

In a letter last summer, Bill mentioned that he would be 80 in January. "No big deal," he wrote. I can hear him saying the same thing about his death, and I can hear him meaning it. "Secure in where you have been," he wrote in *PASSWORDS*, "you turn to the open sea and let go." When my wife came to my study door, her face stricken, a chickadee flew from the feeder outside the window. The empty feeder swayed. A breeze stirred the birch leaves into a chorus of lit moments. I'd been drinking a mug of tea, and after a while I did what Bill Stafford described in one of his poems, "With Neighbors One Afternoon." I took the past into my mouth and "swallowed it, warm, thin, bitter, and good."

TO WILLIAM STAFFORD

Some would call it luck, I guess.
Stop to watch geese on the misty marsh
and something rises, just beyond--
flash of head and tail, the great wings
shouldering slowly away. You said it
faithfully, with all your voices,
as you built the house of everything
your alertness could call forth--
geese on the marsh, the eagle rising,
it's a luck we can rely on
if we give ourselves to what's here.
Be ready, you said. *Out of the mist*
of all indifferences, the world speaks.
And that house of yours, the one
you worked on all those mornings,
the house of little things
we might have missed, the house
that stands by your allegiances
and walls nothing out-- we're lucky
that you placed it here around us,
this home where you've welcomed us to live.

Lex Runciman

ART AND LIFE AND WILLIAM STAFFORD

In his essay "The Second Life of Art," Nobel prize winner Eugenio Montale emphasizes that art lives beyond its origin (its first life) only in its "obscure pilgrimage through the conscience and memory" of those who apprehend it. And Montale suggests that art achieves its true form only in the mind of others: "any expression at all which has had a miraculous, liberating effect on someone-- an effect of liberation and of understanding the world-- has attained its goal and achieved form."

Montale's essay comes to mind as a way to account for my first reading of William Stafford's "Traveling Through the Dark" sometime during my junior year in high school. For as long as I've been able to read, I've read often. In eighth grade I read the entire *oeuvre* of Ian Fleming. Sometime during those same years I ran through all the historical novels of Samuel Shellabarger and Mary Renault. In grade school I took out-- though certainly did not finish-- every book in the library (I'll admit it was a small library). I read anything and everything that presented itself, and whenever a new author surfaced (I recall A.J. Cronin in this context), I read everything by that author I could find. When I had nothing better to do, I read the *WORLD BOOK* encyclopedia-- it didn't matter what letter. I tended not to remember any of this reading in any specific way; it all went into what Madeline DeFrees has referred to as "the cement mixer" called memory.

What I want to say about all this reading are two things: 1) it was at best half-conscious and certainly it was unreflective, and 2) my reading experience had no connection-- none whatsoever-- with my daily, lived life. Reading provided a separate life. It was that separate life which I'd sometimes try to increase by rationing pages and thus stretch out the number of hours or days it would take me to finish a particularly good book. But those hours or days affected not one whit my routine chores, my school work (so far as I could tell), nor my interactions with my parents or my brother or my friends. If they knew that I read a lot (and my parents certainly knew it and occasionally resented it), this fact wasn't a topic for any discussion; it didn't connect with anything because reading was its own world.

Reading was its own world until I read "Traveling Through the Dark." Even as I finished that poem (it was in some junior year anthology and there's a good chance I was reading it to fill time in a class other than English), I knew something major had happened. Because I knew that road, the Wilson River Road. I'd actually driven it and I'd worried about the vision of a deer looming up out of the dark as I drove. So I had in my own life some direct, lived connection with something I was reading. I knew the setting; I'd traveled that ground, breathed that air. And I didn't know-- didn't grasp even the possibility

that anything in a book could actually be so connected to my own life.

Not even the transparent overlays of the human body in the *WORLD BOOK* made such an insistent and vibrant connection. In Montale's words, reading "Traveling Through the Dark" had a "miraculous, liberating effect." But it also scared me. If this William Stafford poem could actually mirror, articulate, illuminate some of my own lived experience-- if it could talk about my life-- then perhaps other things I was reading could make similar claims. The safe, unjudged, wholly other world of reading disappeared. It was replaced by a much dicier, more threatening and more rewarding and certainly more complicated world. Once "Traveling Through the Dark" established the connection, anything might come in over the wires.

The first writing I ever did was a story about astronauts. The second was a story about a dying man, a very elderly man who had outlived all his family and friends and who spent his days in bed unable to move or speak. A kindly nurse attended this man. The story was really concerned with what went on in this man's mind. Since he was so near to death, he had access to another reality that included his dead mother, dead father and various dead friends. Whenever the man closed his eyes, he could mentally talk with these presences. In fact, in some unexplained way he could be in their place. But when he opened his eyes, he always found himself bedridden, attended to by the nurse. She would speak to him and express sympathy for his frustrations-- his inability to feed himself or speak, his loneliness. And he would be unable to tell her that he was fine, that any time he wished he could talk with the dead, who were ready to receive him and welcome him. He became more and more frustrated that he could not tell the nurse any of this.

How that story ended, I don't remember; I'm pretty sure I never finished the astronaut story at all. Up until reading "Traveling Through the Dark," whatever writing I'd done was just another frequent if aimless habit, like reading. Afterwards, I had to start considering the possibility that what writers wrote came not so much from imagining entirely other lives in entirely other places as from imagining one's own life in this time and this place. Writing became more than just fooling around.

I didn't actually meet William Stafford until years later when he visited Dick Hugo's graduate workshop where I was a student at the University of Montana. I remember making sure I had a poem up for discussion the day Stafford was due, and I recall that he had little to say about it by way of direct judgment. Instead, the poem became a springboard for a generalized discussion (not what I was looking for). I left that class a little disappointed to be still on my own (as anyone who writes poems always is).

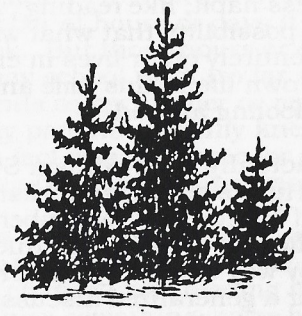
In the years since that workshop (which was sometime in 1976 or '77), I had the pleasure of attending several William Stafford readings including one at the inaugural of Corvallis's new public library. I've

counted on his presence as an Oregon writer, the first person whose work ever suggested to me that *Oregon* and *writer* could go together. We have his books, we have him on videotape, still I'm unreasonably angry that ownership of his work has passed from him to us.

I felt the same unreasonable anger on seeing the two volume *COLLECTED POEMS* of William Carlos Williams. Now somehow I fear the poems become the exclusive property of editors and critics however well-meaning. The work has passed from the writer's hands and now the writer holds no place in the discussion that work provokes; now the industry can gear up and tell us what we're supposed to think. I realize in a way this is foolishness, but still I'm angry.

And I'm greedy too. As Douglas Crase says in the January issue of *POETRY*, when a poet dies we suffer because of every possible poem that we don't have, every poem that did not get written. I didn't really know William Stafford the private person. But I know that since late August, Oregon has seemed less eloquent, less capable of eloquence. When that feeling becomes oppressive, at least I can participate again in that "obscure pilgrimage through conscience and memory"; I can turn to *ALLEGIANCES* or *SMOKE'S WAY* or *AN OREGON MESSAGE*; I can at least-- no small thing-- read as I was taught.

Note: The Montale quotations are taken from *THE SECOND LIFE OF ART: SELECTED ESSAYS OF EUGENIO MONTALE*, edited and translated by Jonathan Galassi (The Ecco Press, 1982).



Barbara La Morticella

CHERRIES
for William Stafford

Fireweed loves the yard
and the fire that conjured it
into the light.

And the scarlet elderberry
loves the old junkpile
it leans against.

The morning glory smothers everything
in an embrace: the fence,
the wood workbench,
the rusted steel.

Here's a summer day that's so slow
even the light
moves like honey.

Daisies jump fences,
and then just mill around.

Here's a cherry tree that's so rich
that it offers its heart to the birds,
and every cherry is a
year of cherries.

Christopher Howell

THE BELL FROM SOMEWHERE

--for Bill

Scientists tell us Earth is young
and we are a flash of light
trying to glimpse itself
before it disappears.
Here in Kansas, as darkness blows
over grass lakes and orchards
of the prairie, I look for us.
Have we been here
since footprints of the days began
passing us
as we pass them?

I listen for us, too, and the leaves
disguise what might be voices
changing color,
drifting along some cut
by the Smoky Hill
where turtles doze, awake,
with no instructions from the god
we say is ours.

Sometimes the bell from somewhere
is inside my hat
and I shake it and it says,
"One day you just ring,
see what I mean? One day
you come along a path with your voice
or your hat and a light gets into you
or dark
and you ring
because it is your time
and the wind moved."

Science leaves this behind
in its blaze to see exactly
what is, exactly, there
beside us
in the heaps of bright smoke or the rivers
trailing by, waving.
But whatever it sees is not our life, the dark

and the wind and the bells in our hats
there, softly held
and our hands full of pathways and names.

How we are of
the planet
and sky going on and on like someone walking,
dreaming what he didn't know
and didn't know he loved,
is a long wandering answer Science cannot say.
Tell God, if you want to, how thought
became a place
where He was possible and everything
could be better than it is, more like bells.
See what I mean?
Tell God how
the world is Kansas and all of us
are dreaming.

THROUGH LIGHT RAIN I WAVE GOOD-BYE

for William Stafford, 1914-1993

The long, deep fluting of a train
comes through my sleep, leaving tracks
and ragged men with bed rolls slung
like banjos on their backs. They're going
somewhere, all these years at the hour
before doves mourn what was, once, the sea
with its wavering small stars and choruses
of perfect night.

I'm awake and by those shores now, waiting
for my friend who has gone on
over oceans of train and prairie dark
sprinkled with lamps. "Now we give you
back the twinkling world," they say.
"Now we walk beside you like a song
or sack packed simply
with little articles of praise."

Ah, here he comes toward me whistling
a little, waving to something the air believes
and smiling to think it might be true.

Barbara Drake

BENSON POND
for William Stafford

Willow so light and long and
leaves lisping like that--
the whisper the whisper.
More light. More light than anything.
Sometimes the halfway-here-and-there opens.
Long yellow shadow slices
and an owl in it.
Did you see it? Did you see it?
I did. We did.
We all saw it.

One of the wonderful things about Stafford's poetry is the way he conjures amazing things out of quiet places. He had the gift of making remarkable things evident and once he showed them to you, you could see them thereafter. This poem is based on a time when we happened to cross paths at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. My husband and I had seen a horned owl in the willow grove at Benson Pond and that night at supper, when we ran into Bill and Dorothy at the field station, of course we told them about it and where it was. Next day they said they had also seen the owl.

It gave me great pleasure to have shared the sighting with Stafford the conjurer, but I wanted the poem to be more than a reminiscence about a particular occasion. Remembering the quality of October grasses and willow leaves by Benson Pond that day, the golden light and strong shadow, the dry whisper of the leaves and grass when the air moved, I felt there was something like Stafford's poetry in the scene. You can look a long time at an owl in a willow and not see it, but once you see it, you can see it again. A biologist friend tells me this is called getting a "search image." Stafford had the gift of the search image.

I also intended to suggest that Stafford himself was a rare bird. I never ran into him somewhere without that lifting of the heart that is like what one experiences in birdwatching. One wants always to share such experiences with others and, now that he is gone, to confirm that we saw him and knew him and are grateful for it.

James B. Hall

AFTER HIS POETRY READING

Shortly past midnight Stafford left the party
Their questions not answered, but his poetry read.
Alone, he walked down the rained-on steps
And Kester Svendsen's house lights shook,
Then burned like brandy flames behind the shrubbery.

At the curb, rat-grey in the moonlight,
The car waits patiently as an old dray horse,
Moves at last, then goes stomping away
Towards the Portland Freeway where trucks
Bore holes through ground fogs as they go.

To the north the towns are crusts of light,
And off there no doubt some stranded tourist
Might identify himself and with his wife
Claim shelter in Tangent or beyond Sweet Home
The hour and a credit card notwithstanding.

Ahead, above a hillock's moonlit woods,
Stafford sees this floating, windshield vision:
A great white barn, opulent beneath clouds,
Hip-roofed, corporate, fat as any ram,
But he believes this thing is only a version

Of Kansas where the men's work all that summer
Brought only the sky's own slave-whip lightning,
Flayed joists, sills, roof, and their mowed hay
Until flames scorched even the women with water buckets--
Yes, eight brood sows lost, and two fine horses.

But Kansas, that burned-out recollection of barns,
Is not Oswego: home now, this side of sunrise,
Stafford parks at the curb of their paid-off house,
And thinks Dorothy no doubt is still awake
And is-- in fact-- one end to every reading;

There beneath the porch light, but beyond
The reprieve of ashes, Stafford looks into the sky,
Sees the black stallion belly of our northwest
Weather running, sees a starlit, terrible dynasty
Well harnessed, and good enough to work tomorrow.

Ingrid Wendt

THINGS NOT TO UNLEARN: REMEMBERING WILLIAM STAFFORD

To do writing one must unlearn many things learned from educated people.

These words, with others spoken by William Stafford, I lift today from notes taken nearly twenty years ago, in August of 1975, when (with only a few years of teaching under my belt) I found myself working with Bill, together leading a two-week poetry workshop in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Like so much of Bill's everyday speech, these words seemed instantly right, and comforting. Except for one problem. What did I-- as much a student as anyone there-- learn in those two weeks I'd ever want to forget?

Our classes met five mornings a week in a windowless conference room in the basement of a bank. Afternoons, our group linked up with the fiction team, led by novelist John Williams and my husband, Ralph Salisbury. We'd meet again in the bank, or, as we all got more acquainted, out in the woods or in a nearby meadow.

Doing a poem is like letting the words do all the work, like being on the sled behind Eskimo dogs, finding where the eagerness wants to lead.

Those weeks, words-- in class and out-- led us places I'd never imagined. Somehow, we also managed to work on the daily writing assignments Bill and I took turns inventing. My favorite was one of Bill's: to see who could write the worst poem and what that attempt might teach us. (Or *was* this Bill's invention? My notes remind me that Bill gave the credit to Richard Hugo and Ann Stanford, who once assigned students to write a "meaningless poem." Yet how like Bill this was, throughout his life, to be clear and deliberate in passing ideas along, demonstrating, always, the meaning of "community," drawing attention to others, rather than to himself.) And how like Bill that, for all his instruction on lowering standards, he failed to win our contest. None of us could find anything wrong with his poem (which later got published, with almost no revision). Nor did Bill let me forget, in the years to come, about that contest: the fact that I'd won.

We're always operating at the edge of consciousness where something is trying to tell us something.

And Jackson Hole, with the Staffords, was where I saw-- with indelible clarity-- that our daily life and our writing life not only can stay in balance; they need not be separate at all. I'll never forget the class we held one morning in the ski lodge on top of a nearby mountain (a break from our usual routine). Most of us took the chair lift up; it was steep! But who was there ahead of us? Bill and

Dorothy, who'd gotten up early and hiked up on foot. Nor will I forget the late afternoon I knocked on the Staffords' door ("Time for supper!") and found Bill poised behind the free-standing TV, which Dorothy was watching, using its top surface as a writing table on which he was finishing that day's poetry assignment.

Always ready, always alert to the moment, Bill was doing then what I've come to believe he did every day of his life: living each moment "at the edge of consciousness," listening to the inner and outer worlds at once, keeping them in harmony, reassuring us by his living example of wholeness. And never putting things off. When, in 1979, Bill was asked by Al Poulin, of BOA Editions, to write the introduction to my first book of poems, I sent Bill the manuscript and he had the essay drafted within a few days.

For years I admired the way he'd answer not only my own letters promptly, but how he juggled armloads of poetry "business," giving readings all over the country yet never hesitating to accept an invitation from the Lane Literary Guild or the Lane Arts Council; giving benefits; judging contests. I remember once visiting with Bill and Dorothy at their Lake Oswego home and seeing the work waiting for Bill in his garage-study: boxes and boxes of literary magazines, sent to him by the Pushcart Awards people. Did Bill complain? No, when he showed me those boxes, his face showed wonder: "Look," it seemed to say, "How much is going on these days!"

"We are always alert for chances to see you," Bill wrote at the end of one of his letters. At the end of another, "Here's to another soon meeting." Our last meetings, last August, were at Powell's Books, for the Portland Poetry Festival celebration in his honor; following that, at Cassidy's. Two nights later, Bill gave his last reading, at Portland State. How could any of us at that reading ever have dreamed it was our last time with him? Had we imagined, how could we have ever left that room?

For it is important that awake people be awake, Bill wrote in one of my favorite poems, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other." [See next page-- Eds.] These words I say to myself at least once a day. They are my prayer, words I try to live by. One of countless writers whose lives Bill's own life touched, I try to keep true to the faith Bill had in me and in us all-- to listen to that "edge of consciousness where something is trying to tell us something." To remember how much we can not, must not unlearn.

GUEST POEM

William Stafford

A RITUAL TO READ TO EACH OTHER

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider--
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give-- yes or no, or maybe--
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

from *WEST OF YOUR CITY*
(The Talisman Press, 1960);
most recently published in
THE DARKNESS AROUND US IS DEEP/SELECTED POEMS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD
(Harper Perennial, 1993)

Vincent Wixon

COMMENT AND REVIEW: *THE DARKNESS AROUND US IS DEEP/ SELECTED POEMS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD.* Edited and with an introduction by Robert Bly (Harper Perennial, 1993).

I knew Robert Bly's *SELECTED POEMS* was in the works for about a year and a half before it appeared, and I was pleased when Bly decided its title was to be *THE DARKNESS AROUND US IS DEEP*, the last line of one of my favorite Stafford poems-- "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" [See opposite page-- Eds.]-- an important poem, even to William Stafford. In 1988, when Mike Markee and I were making *WILLIAM STAFFORD: WHAT THE RIVER SAYS*, we videotaped Bill reading this poem in Newport at an art gallery show on the nuclear age. Bill had read two other poems, and when we asked him to read "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," he said, "I'd like to do this right."

So I looked forward to Bly's *SELECTED POEMS* with its title letting us know that this collection would not only include the comfortable Bill Stafford poems but would also emphasize the fierce, bleak vision as well-- "the darkness around us is deep," "I place my feet/ with care in such a world," "the hands gripped hard on the desert," "The world says, 'Dog eat dog.' "

I also had some dread of this book coming out. After all, Bly's *SELECTED POEMS* probably wouldn't be my *SELECTED POEMS* or your *SELECTED POEMS* or the *SELECTED POEMS* of any of the thousands who've read many of Bill's poems and feel Bill is their poet. How can an editor please everyone when the poet has published more poems than any other American poet?

Robert Bly has made good choices in the nearly 100 poems in the book. I knew that when I opened the book to see "With Kit, Age Seven, At the Beach" leading off, and skipped to the back to see "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" as the final poem. Many of the familiar poems are here: "Traveling Through the Dark," "Fifteen," "Ask Me," as well as some personal favorites which are not as well known-- "Listening," "The Light by the Barn," "Looking Across the Water." And I was pleased to see some of the humorous poems: "Our Kind," "Adults Only," "Passing Remark," "First Grade."

In the sixteen page introduction, Robert Bly discusses briefly and well Stafford's philosophy about writing-- the "theme of the golden thread," and following our impulses within our limitations. It is not surprising, given his interests, that Bly would write about parents, ritual, and Bill's Indian poems, but the most interesting comments to me are the ones that make me think in new ways about specific poems-- about refusing aggression in "Clash" (Bly's final sentence in the Introduction is "I believe William Stafford will be read with even greater attention in the next hundred years, because this subject of restraining aggression is the most important problem we

face"), and thinking about community in "A Ritual to Read to Each Other."

Bly writes, "Of all 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." "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" has to do with "including many people in your world"; a "small betrayal" is strong enough to "destroy the mutual agreements on which a just society depends."

Midway in the poem, Stafford introduces "an astounding image"-- the "elephants parade holding each elephant's tail," and Bly comments that it is the park, the center of the community, they are in danger of not finding "if one wanders." Bly continues, the "root of all cruelty lies in refusing to recognize what we all know as facts-- that others are different from me, that we need to speak who we are, that one person 'wandering' can have enormous harmful results."

Bly completes his discussion of "A Ritual" by pointing out that Stafford wants to "talk to people who are awake," instead of shouting at people who are asleep; William Stafford gives honor "to the intelligence of those who read poetry." To me, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" is a great poem that, like many Stafford poems, reminds us that the connections between people are fragile, "shadowy," and we need to be alert and honest in our dealings with each other.

Bly has divided the book into six sections: Family and Children, Traveling Through the Dark, Speaking the Native American Part in Him, Mother's Voice and Father's Voice, Rescuing Some Years in Kansas, The Refusal to Serve War. And he has made interesting groupings within those sections. Bly's choices and groupings allow me to bring new attention to poems such as "Clash," "The Rescued Year," and "How It Is," poems I read in the past but had not returned to. When a poet or editor creates sections and groups poems, there's more interaction between the poems. (Bill said, "It's easier for me to comprehend a reading experience if I have groups of poems smaller than a whole book.")

But I wonder if, at some point in editing, the sections began to drive the choices. For example, after choosing poems and grouping, if Bly went back to Bill's books to select more poems to bring the Speaking the Native American Part in Him to a full section. If Bly had decided on different or additional sections, would those choices have brought other strong Stafford poems to the collection?

For example, a section called "The Animal World" could have added "Coyote," "Starting With Little Things," "Coming Back," and others. A section called "The Writing and Teaching Life" could have added "The Way I Write," "What's in My Journal," and "A Course in

Creative Writing" ("they want wilderness with a map"). Other poems I looked for but didn't find in Bly's book include "At Cove on the Crooked River," "The Animal That Drank Up Sound," "A Memorial for My Mother," "Witness," and "Accountability."

Once sections are chosen, compromises are inevitable, whether for a book or a video. After all, Mike Markee and I, in the end, did not use "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" in *What the River Says* because we couldn't decide how to visualize it-- a reason having nothing to do with the importance of the poem. One unfortunate compromise in the paperback copy of *THE DARKNESS AROUND US IS DEEP* is the poor quality of the paper; it's thinner than the paper in *PASSWORDS*, Bill's last book for HarperCollins, and likely to disintegrate within the decade. And, unfortunately, the poem "My Father: October 1942" (page 79) is not complete; only the first stanza of the three stanza poem appears. You can read the complete poem in *STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE* or *THE RESCUED YEAR*.

In the end, though, I am grateful to Robert Bly for putting together this book, which will widen the community of readers of William Stafford's poems. That's what we want. I am also grateful that *THE DARKNESS AROUND US IS DEEP* will not replace but will be a rich addition to the other books of poems by William Stafford.

Erik Muller

WILLIAM STAFFORD'S REGION AND REASON

While his work illustrates for Oregon poets many ways to represent locality, William Stafford opened more than one state for the imagination. His journey from Kansas to Oregon, returned to in numerous poems about both places, opened the region west of the Mississippi to a culture of poetry too occupied with the Northeast, with Frost, Wilbur, Lowell, and Sexton. Roethke, a Midwesterner gone east to teach, then staking a claim in the Northwest, and Wright and Bly permitted the American imagination to step westward.

Even though versions of the West had for decades been available from Jeffers, Rexroth and Miles, William Stafford, of all the recognized poets of 1960 to 1990, most thoroughly recapitulated the westward move as the settlement of promised land, as the old world people ("plain black hats rode the thoughts that made our code") gave way to the new ("We are looking for a sign./ Our moccasins do not mark the ground"). Stafford pitched the invitation to move west to those of us geographically and imaginatively behind him ("west of your city outside your lives/ in the ultimate wind").

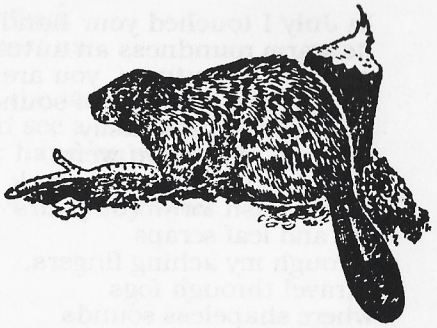
As a young New Yorker come to San Francisco in 1962, I felt the excitement of discovering a poet working on my new ground. I read *TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK*, a late-fortyish Stafford catapulted to attention by the National Book Award, and *WEST OF YOUR CITY*, published by a small California press in 1960. My wife and I, before Xerox, copied out that rare first collection by hand!

For us newcomers, Stafford applied a familiar myth to an unfamiliar land. Its sweep was Biblical, across space and time, toward the Western edges and an apocalyptic event ("some deathless meeting involving a crust of bread"). He accomplished freshly the wedding of reason and region that Emerson preached, Whitman attempted, Thoreau achieved. Stafford appealed to our enlarged sense of American space, which commonly sparks real estate deals and a family's serial moves, yet establishes outposts, too, for commercial prospectors and artists. Ishmael in *MOBY DICK* sailed away from New England, his crow's nest overlooking an enlarged Walden Pond. Representing far places, Stafford positioned himself to report back fresh sightings.

For us new to the West, exactly where we might live seemed the central question, more important than what we might do or become. My wife Ann and I and David Laing, under the influence of Stafford's vividly imagined land and the red wine of a North Beach Italian restaurant, chose Oregon ("gorged with yew trees that were good for bows," "a river of wind, a hawk on a stick").

How true a guide was Stafford? Did his fictive prospectus stand up to the real thing? Thirty years later, I'd have to say, "Yes, a trusty guide, a good place." Oregon is that place where "cars wander along/in the canyons they make with their lights maintaining the worth/of local things," where "finally the way the world feels/ really means how things are,/in dear detail,/by ideal light all around us." And where:

I've known something I should have said one time:
"If we hadn't met, then everything would have to change."



Stephanie Van Horn

REMEMBERING STAFFORD-- HIS HANDS

I remember Oregon mornings when our hands
like slow cars traveling through the dark
crawled in unison over pages
two hundred miles apart
bringing light to 5 a.m.
You never knew who I was--
finding that out, I wrote my way
through a lost and found box,
the rough miscellany caught by our fingers
as we prospected together.

In July I touched your hand,
its warm roundness an autumn apple,
and now in autumn, you are an absence,
no longer a solid box of sound,
early winds pass easily
through where you were.
In my county the cold creek
where I fish for words pours
silt and leaf scraps
through my aching fingers,
I travel through fogs
where shapeless sounds
batter my face.

One spring your sentences
wove an old afghan
healing the first bruises made
breaking silence--
I remember hearing the first music fingered
by the little trumpeter out of Kansas,
notes that blow the dust
off any human distance.

Steve Dieffenbacher

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM STAFFORD

We sat in the kitchen
with George.
I can't remember anything
you said
but I remember the woodstove
in the corner
and George's wife
noisy beside it.
We sat around a table
just big enough for three.
I saw you in profile
as you talked,
smiling past us.

Through the window
you could see a leafless tree
and your hand quivered.

I didn't write poetry then.
Now this.

William T. Sweet

HOT HANDLES AND STRIKING SNAKES: WILLIAM STAFFORD ON TRUST, PARADOX, AND SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

(The following is based on an interview conducted by the author in the late fall of 1984. My thanks go to Myrna Peña-Reyes for her insightful comments and hours of transcribing.)

"Better good shoes on a long walk/than a good friend," William Stafford cautioned as he leaned into our conversation from across the table, quoting from his poem, "So Long." The line lay between us-- bristling soft warnings, tense with seeming contradiction.

Then as we discussed poems such as "Aunt Mabel," Stafford's penchant for exploring the relationship between what seems and what is became even more manifest. "Our senator talked like war, and Aunt Mabel/said he's a brilliant man/but we didn't elect him that much." Stafford chuckled over his "little gag" in the last two words in the stanza. As he reflected more on Aunt Mabel, who would "give bright flowers/away, quick as a striking snake," he pointed out that this "poem has a number of...paradoxical things in it.... It states that, in fact, I am weakened by her trust, her intermittent trust. Ironically, I make it seem that for a person to be trusting, to be generous...those are weaknesses. They unfit you for the world.... I had an Aunt Mabel who was like this, and that's the reason I am the writer that I am."

But it wasn't Aunt Mabel alone who helped to shape his appreciation of apparent contradiction. "My mother had this knack to empathize.... There was no one I can think of...that she was not capable of suddenly including.... Like Aunt Mabel she was capable of striking out with benevolence at any point. We couldn't trust her."

However, Stafford's tenaciously truthful aunt could be trusted to spring out of unexpected places. For instance, my quoting "...so much depends upon a little thing" from "The Animal That Drank Up Sound," provoked him to say, "There's Aunt Mabel again...being a cricket this time. Ah, yes...the poem says something about how scary it must have been...for this little creature on the north side of a mountain, but [it] still tried to say 'Cricket,' and from this one act everything flowed back. Yah, I guess that is Aunt Mabel. I hadn't thought about that. I hope Aunt Mabel wouldn't mind."

Aunt Mabel, in fact, probably would have felt kinship with Stafford in his search for writing practices which seem "...to accept the apparent value of the world, but [hand] them back with a hot handle."

Asked to identify other themes within his poems, Stafford said, "I guess I [am trying] to do something I've never tried before. I guess what I try to do in some of these poems is to induce readers to feel the

consequences of their ordinarily accepted values or lack of values."

Before going on, Stafford cautioned again, "Well, there's something I'd like to be careful of about this. That is, it's easy to say socially positive things; it's easier to take a stand of being holy or doing right, and it's another thing to do poems about it. I want to remind myself and be aware of that...that it's not enough to say nice things. In fact, I sometimes feel-- this is like confession for me-- that I'm using those stances to make a poem rather than making a poem to promote those stances. This 'confession'...is a further refinement of what we're talking about.... It is sounding like a social conscience poem, but not necessarily being that."

However, Stafford found that poetry with social conscience themes can be risky at best. While traveling in Iran, he was invited to give a reading. The poems had to be translated for his audience, but the translator feared to say Stafford's words in one of his poems. "To me it was an Indian legend, 'The Animal That Drank Up Sound,' and still if you're in a country where they have censorship...what would that animal be? I suddenly realized that that was a dangerous poem to read under a dictator...probably I made up that kind of Indian legend because I am consistently being appealed to by lessons like that...little ironies about the animal that drank up sound, the censor."

Yet even censorship could not bring about Stafford's condemnation in absolute terms. "I'm going to cut back on something in a recurrent theme...and that is if this world is complex, then it takes careful looking, careful listening, careful sensing. So, I am accompanied through life by a realization of-- for me at least-- the puzzlement [that] there is, in the universe, the possibility of being wrong, by being haunted by the hunch that there is another layer of things, that whatever I most fervently affirm could be reversed by further discovery."

"I have a story in my own life that is like a little emblem, for me at least. I worked in a gasoline refinery, and I came to be the electrician's helper. (This is when I was in college.) The electrician in a gasoline refinery is a kind of spook, you know...someone who knows, ha, ha, ha. So there were places in that refinery where we wouldn't flip a switch; there were places we wouldn't use an iron hammer. And we were the ones supposedly alert to the unseen presence of catastrophe. That's my little story. That's how I feel in the world."

In yet another "little" story told in response to the question about whether or not readers can trust Bill Stafford, he said, "All categories are provisional. I'll give you one dramatic example/experience of this. I was hitchhiking late at night. A trucker picked me up, and then a mile or so down the road, he saw another hitchhiker. And he picked up that other hitchhiker, and this was a very vicious-looking guy. Ah...so we went barreling along down the highway, and the truck driver came to where his highway turned off,

and he was going to let both of us off in the dark. So he let me and this vicious-looking guy out, and the vicious-looking guy ran."

Whether or not there is anything or anyone we can truly trust, we can learn even from those "vicious-looking guys." "But this makes me think of something else," Stafford says, "and that is... maybe...when you write, if you follow alertly enough the little leads you get from your life and experience, and from the language, you have come up with poems or stories that have the complexity of real life rather than, say, the simplicity of slogans. So, it wouldn't surprise me if someone pulled another lesson out of one of my poems. In fact, I think I would feel gratified because we don't want... to simplify life in literature, I think. We want to enrich the complexity... and the differences of opinion are a sign that life is complex, and a poem or story can be complex, too."

Scarcely the least of these complexities in Stafford's work is the continuing exploration of not only a social conscience but its darker twin, a social conscience denied. "There is a flavor...a kind of leaning back and being folksy and letting the city folk fall on their faces. In fact, I think that phrasing is from another poem I call "A Song in the Manner of Flannery O'Connor." Yes, it's 'So long, Sucker!' [the concluding line]"

Finally, as we discussed "At the Klamath Berry Festival," Stafford said, that "stance we've been identifying [paradoxes within social conscience]...runs through all of my poems.... 'I envied [the war chief] the places where he had not been.' That's what sets [the sociologist in the poem] off. That's what gives [the war chief] the great advantage, and the sociologist is there studying [him] because [the war chief] *hasn't been* anywhere, something like that."

However, as pointed out in "So Long," it's not only where you walk that matters but also how long you've been walking in those "good shoes." William Stafford said he has "invited the audience [to] just think about this...if the walk is long enough, you will agree with me."

Stacie Smith-Rowe

REMEMBERING STAFFORD

I remember the sense of ease in his classroom. I remember that sometimes his introductory comments would dovetail into the poem so smoothly the seam between conversation and poem couldn't be heard. This was one point I believe he really hoped to get across to his students: Write the way you speak. Pay attention to the way people around you speak. Pay attention to your vernacular, pay attention to the opportunities of moment and place. A simple and clear description of a moment in time can be a poem.

Years later, Stafford came to Rogue Community College in Grants Pass for a reading. It was the first time I had seen him since the class at Lewis and Clark, over twenty years earlier. He looked just as I remembered. There was an almost fierce humility, that conversational flow, that unassuming intensity that [had] first made me believe I could try my own hand at word-working. I came home from that reading and wrote this poem.

ON BEING ABLE TO WRITE A POEM
with gratitude to a great teacher

Of the stuck ones
who would wring their hands
waiting for the perfect word
he said "Those poor guys! Well
if you think you can't get started,
just study your shoes.
Picture the places they've been.
Think of that time they carried you
out to the yard behind the house
and you lost yourself
in the tall gold grass.
Those shoes Mr. Binkey sold you
forty years ago; remember
Mr. Binkey's ears, how they seemed
as big as shoes themselves.
In words you grew up with,
picture the places
your heart has moved
one step at a time
through days of unknowing.
Then look at the page
and find stories
like so many footprints
flowing."

Lee Crawley Kirk

WILLIAM STAFFORD: A SLANTWISE LOOK

Recently I found an old envelope stuffed with poems that I had clipped from magazines when I was still in my teens. Reading through them, I was surprised to see several by William Stafford. I know I had no particular awareness of Stafford at that time, but obviously his work had reached out to touch me even then.

Within a dozen years of clipping those poems, I had developed an acute interest in Stafford's work. I began to collect his books and to read them over and over. Throughout the years I have turned to his poetry (as well as the essays and published interviews) for inspiration, consolation, affirmation, exhilaration. I read Stafford to learn the art and the craft of poetry, and although I never took a class from him, I have always considered him one of my finest teachers.

"It's all right to fail," Stafford told us. All right to make bad poems. If a bad poem needs to come out, it's possible that it is making way for a good one. If we hesitate to risk the bad poem, we may inhibit all the unexpected things that might happen if we only dared let go. "Lower your standards" was his notorious antidote for "writer's block," a condition he attributed to excessive self-criticism and inhibition. He wasn't saying that we should try to write second-rate verse. He was cautioning us to relax, to let the poem find its way through us.

To approach the writing of a poem with too much intent (for its form, technique, voice, or issues) rather than adequate attention (to what the poem wants to be) might result in an academically acceptable piece of work, but the tough, lively poem that should have emerged will have been suffocated. Stafford used plain words always, but he joined them in phrases that surged forward on the page, creating their own adventures.

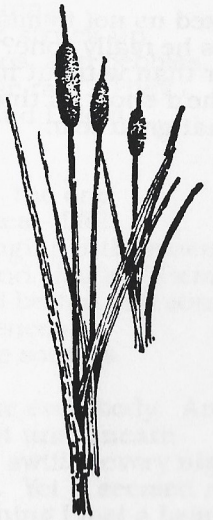
Most writers adopt some totem words. Stafford's included *lean, slant,* and *sideways,* to describe the way he felt one must look at things-- a bit off center-- to see them truly. Having grown up in small Midwestern towns, he recalled that there was always an "edge of town" beyond which was a wild unknown, spread out for a child's exploration. He remained much taken with the idea of edges, with the notion of finding out what lies beyond them.

LEANING FAR FORWARD

That last step you took
was just a doozie, Bill:
the riskiest one of all.
I hope it is leading you
toward new emergencies.

I hope the sun still shines
down all the streets and canyons,
and that wind springs in your hair
like a draft from a sharp-edged wing;
that words still come to tease
and roll like puppies in your path
until you try to touch them and they
leap and bound and lead you on

to the edges of things:
a town, a prairie, a galaxy;
places where you must look slantwise,
or squint your eyes, or lean to one side
or far, far forward to see beyond those edges.



Charles Goodrich

DAOIST OUT OF KANSAS

Because it was good, we were afraid.
--William Stafford

Whatever happened to your friend from Kansas,
guy who talked like grass? Remember him,
the one we'd catch leaning to listen
underneath? Or we'd find him scanning horizons
in the rain. He could sure breathe far.
Had a pet wind in his ear.

Remember, he tried to teach you the flat dance--
plain standing-- and a song
for going along your own way called
grammar. Those little handsprings
he wrote every morning helped him master
himself, he said. Nobody else
had the patience, ornery as he was.

He asked us not to miss him, so I
will. Is he really gone? Perhaps. I still hear
farther than without him, and care.
Wish he'd show us that cave one more time though,
and that great fear.

Martha Gatchell

THE MAN IN THE GRAY SHIRT EXPLAINS

...where you live wear the kind
of color that your life is (gray shirt for me)
--William Stafford

I grew older, like everybody--
and quieter. Like myself--
and there was always something
spiriting around inside my skin,
looking out windows, wanting to shout
Boo! and watch the town jump.
(I didn't let it, of course, but we
thought it together, and laughed in the dark.)

I was warm and restless, and something
gnawed and fretted-- I tried
talking to people, but they wanted
to be listened to instead. So,
I did that. And something
took me for walks, and struck up
conversations with trees, and pebbles,
little wavery creeks, the rain. They
were good listeners. And I liked
the feel of the ground.

But in the real world-- the one
we keep in colored boxes-- I felt
crowded. I took to bringing little spaces
with me, in pockets, and sharing them
around. It made me fit better, and some ears
seemed to hear the silences
I listened for inside the sounds.

Still, I was lonely. Like everybody. And always
older, that cold current underneath
deepening, darkening, swifter every night,
and home so long ago. Yet it seemed near. Something
came closer. One morning I met a bear
in the mirror-- I opened a book, and my face
looked back at me from a hundred years away,
somewhere in Minnesota. Something
welcomed me, and then I understood.
I have been home on this ground a long time.

Robert A. Davies

GRAPES
to William E. Stafford, 1914 - 1993

In the middle of the night
munching away on the grapes
till I poke them out with a broom
all four raccoons.
"Have you thought of just letting them feed?"
"Well I'm not going to shoot them."

Next night they aren't there
and neither is Bill Stafford
a masked man who tried
to hide behind his eyes.

Odd to mix raccoons
and William E. Stafford
but I'm in the middle of a poem
going where it goes
the way he taught us to do.

Outsmarting us all, getting
the sweet grapes, leaving the sour.
Do I poke? Watch and admire?
Biggest poet raccoon
munching away the night.

His shadow lingers on,
eons on will move us to say
What poems will compare?
O, Bill, you were good
masked, elusive, clever.
I pick up this grape you dropped.
Is it sweet? or is it sour?
So many things we don't know.

A FEW MEMORIES OF WILLIAM STAFFORD

Bill Stafford and I probably first met between '48 and '51, when he hitched a ride in my '39 Studebaker to Paul Engle's Iowa Writers Workshop party, at Paul's Stone City stone mansion, near Iowa City, on the land where Grant Wood and others had painted and become famous.... Like many, I kept a mysterious sense of kinship, testimony, I feel, to Bill's awesomely inclusive love of others, a strong, discerning love, which included a considerable measure of forgiveness... He was a concerned, sympathetic and perceptive teacher, who trusted the likelihood that most of his students would have 40, 50, 60 or 70 years to go on learning after his final word with them.

Ralph Salisbury

Today, I pulled down one of my favorite books, William Stafford's *WRITING THE AUSTRALIAN CRAWL* from the University of Michigan Poets and Poetry series. Stafford signed this copy at one of his hundreds of small town Oregon readings. Like Stafford and his thousands of writing students before us, when I draft poems, essays, and stories with my class, I'm following a tradition. Teachers need to test the waters, leave the bank of nonbelievers and learn to swim along with their students-- just as William Stafford did for his half century of classroom teaching.

Stephen R. Jones

It seemed the several occasions of my hearing Stafford read out loud that the reading, and his presentation, was like a mountain lake, with its waves lapping on the surface, but there was so much more in the man and his work which was bottomless-- clear, lucid, and reassuring.

Walt Curtis

"How much money do you make by writing poems?" He honored the questioner, visibly mulling it over. First, he said, you had to love the language to do that kind of work, and then he answered, "On average, maybe less than twenty cents a poem." The room fell silent. He shrugged his shoulders, feeling their disbelief. But something they couldn't quite define had captivated them. There was steel in him that magnetized their random filings.

Jane Glazer

Bill's [wedding] gift tangled my tongue. After all the other guests had left, he took me to a bookshelf and invited me to choose one. I was moving to Kansas after the wedding, and he wanted me to take his poems with me. We smiled at this full circle.

Mary Blakely

Bill Stafford wrote that his life was two parts, "...two rivers that blend. One part is easy to tell: the times, the places, events, people. The other part is mysterious; it is my thoughts, the flow of my inner life, the reveries and impulses that never get known-- perhaps even to me." I am thankful Bill Stafford left behind glimpses of his river: his writings and poems, which he called "exercises and revelations about the convergence of the two rivers in anyone's life." May we learn to stop and listen, hear the crinkling of paper, an old poet taking a page from his hip pocket, pausing for a maple leaf to float past.

Gregg Kleiner

The model Stafford offers me is a voice, often like that still and small one making its way along, steering me in ways I constantly rediscover. He is an instigator, the sound of "pssst" whispered, the shadow crooking its finger to me, motioning ahead, "this way into the brush." He calls me to the world that begins "under the map...."

Jane Thielsen

EDITORS' NOTES

William Stafford's two poems, "Passing Remark" and "A Ritual To Read To Each Other" are printed in this issue of *FIREWEED* by permission of the estate of William Stafford.

John Daniel has given us permission to print his poem "To William Stafford," first printed in *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE 14* and again in *STAFFORD'S ROAD* (Adrienne Lee Press, 1991). He also is permitting us to print his essay "William Stafford 1914 - 1993," which first appeared in *WESTERN AMERICAN LITERATURE*, November 1993.

With James B. Hall's permission we are printing his poem "After His Poetry Reading," first printed in *THE MALAHAT REVIEW* #27 in 1973 and later in his first book of poems, *HUNT WITHIN* (Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

The editors would like to thank Jackie Melvin for giving so generously of her time and creativity as volunteer copy editor.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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*WALT CURTIS, Oregon City, has hosted twenty-five years of KBOO poetry programs, published over ten poetry books, and co-founded Out of the Ashes Press. He is Secretary of the Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission.

JOHN DANIEL, Portland, has an expanded, paperback edition of his essays *THE TRAIL HOME*. Salmon Run Press of Anchorage is issuing his second poetry book, *ALL THINGS TOUCHED BY WIND*.

ROBERT A. DAVIES, Portland, has co-edited *MR. COGITO* since 1973. He read this issue's poem for William Stafford at the *FIREWEED* annual gathering last September.

*STEVE DIEFFENBACHER, Ashland, is an editor at the *MEDFORD MAIL TRIBUNE*. In 1992 he was one of a group of southern Oregon poets presented in a chapbook entitled *FRAME HOUSES*.

BARBARA DRAKE, Yamhill, is creating a new edition of her textbook, *WRITING POETRY*. Her 1992 chapbook is *BEES IN WET WEATHER*.

MARTHA GATCHELL, Drain, has work in *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE* and *CHADOKIN REVIEW*. Martha works at a tree farm and a garden nursery.

JANE GLAZER, Portland, published *SOME TRICK OF LIGHT* in 1993, Adrienne Lee Press.

CHARLES GOODRICH, Corvallis, writes, parents, gardens, and signs off letters with vegetable salutes: Rutabagas! Brussels Sprouts!

JAMES B. HALL, Eugene, and William Stafford were graduate students together at Iowa. An early appreciation, J.B.'s poem was published in *THE MALAHAT REVIEW* in 1973.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL, Emporia, Kansas, is author of five books of poems and regularly teaches poetry classes for the Oregon Writers' Workshop.

STEPHEN R. JONES, Corvallis, teaches creative writing at Sprague High School in Salem. Steve won the 1992 NCTE Teachers as Writers Contest, as well as a Spring 1993 OSPA competition. His work appears in *CALAPOOYA COLLAGE* and *ELOQUENT UMBRELLA*.

LEE CRAWLEY KIRK, Eugene, buys books for The Book Bin. Her poetry is represented in *FROM HERE WE SPEAK* and *STAFFORD'S ROAD*.

GREGG KLEINER, Corvallis, writes fiction and poetry: "Through art, we can help erase injustice, which keeps the little people from soaring."

BARBARA LA MORTICELLA, Portland, hosts poetry programs for KBOO. *FROM HERE WE SPEAK* includes her poetry.

LEX RUNCIMAN, Corvallis, teaches at Linfield College. His book of poetry, *THE ADMIRATIONS*, won the 1989 Oregon Book Award.

RALPH SALISBURY, Eugene, poet and writer of fiction, has taught creative writing at the University of Oregon for many years. He was a long-time friend of William Stafford's.

STACIE SMITH-ROWE, Merlin, was introduced to writing poetry by William Stafford at Lewis & Clark. Stacie is an artist, and her work is regularly presented by Schubert Gallery in Albany.

*BARBARA STAFFORD, Portland, offers her drawing from a collaboration with her father, "Connecting Earth and Sky." Barbara's art is used for the covers of *SMOKE'S WAY* and *MY NAME IS WILLIAM TELL*, as well as *STAFFORD'S ROAD* and *THE LONG SIGH THE WIND MAKES*.

*KIM STAFFORD, Portland, has taken leave from the Northwest Writing Institute to work on William Stafford's extensive papers, which include many, many unpublished poems.

WILLIAM T. SWEET, Eugene, is writing an account of growing up in the Oregon timber towns "between Jewel and Mist." This winter Bill read with other Lane County poets at a William Stafford commemoration at Marketplace Books. His poetry is represented in *FROM HERE WE SPEAK*.

JANE THIELSEN, Depoe Bay, is a poet who teaches at WOSC and Oregon Coast Community College.

STEPHANIE VAN HORN, Coquille, teaches at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay. She has published two poem sequences in *FIREWEED*.

INGRID WENDT, Eugene, with Primus St. John, edited the poetry volume of the Oregon Literature Series: *FROM HERE WE SPEAK*. William Stafford introduced her first book, *MOVING THE HOUSE*, from BOA, 1980.

VINCE WIXON, Ashland, worked with William Stafford on two videos about Stafford's poetry. Vince's chapbook, *SEED*, appeared last year.

* first appearance in *FIREWEED*