



W friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD
N E W S L E T T E R

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JANUARY 1999

SEVERAL MEMBERS AROUND THE COUNTRY SELECT JANUARY TO HOLD POETRY READINGS

William Stafford's birthday January 17 has prompted several Friends of William Stafford to organize poetry readings in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington.

Additional information will be published later about readings scheduled for April, National Poetry Month. Two include an evening at Shoen Library, Marylhurst College (Portland, OR) and a reading by Naomi Shihab Nye, co-sponsored by the Poetry Society of America at San Antonio Main Library (San Antonio, TX).

January events involve both writers scheduled to read and a call for the public and local poets to bring poems to read.

NOTE: All events are free and open to the public.

++FRI., JANUARY 8, 1999, 7:30 PM, PORTLAND, OR+++++

Place: Powell's City of Books

Readings and remarks by several writers, including Judith Kitchen (author of a new book, *WRITING THE WORLD: UNDERSTANDING WILLIAM STAFFORD*), Chris Faatz, and Kim Stafford.

++SUN., JANUARY 17, 1999, 2 PM, ANCHORAGE, AK+++++

Place: Barnes and Noble. The public is invited to bring their favorite Stafford poem or story to share. Contact Jim Hanlen or Brenda Jaeger at (907) 522-3269.

++SUN., JANUARY 17, 1999, 2 PM, ORCAS ISLAND, WA+++++

Place: Orcas Island Library, 2 to 5 pm. Ted Braun, who shared an office with William Stafford, will moderate. The public is invited to bring poems to share. For further details contact Anne Hay at the Orcas Island Library.

WILLIAM STAFFORD LIBRARY ROOM DEDICATED

A reception held November 19, 1998, brought together friends, colleagues, and admirers of William Stafford to dedicate a study room in the Watzek Library at Lewis & Clark College. The event began with a short address by President Michael Mooney during which he announced the purchase by Lewis & Clark (with assistance of donors) of a fine collection of Stafford books, including many signed First Editions. This new part of the library's permanent collection was acquired from the Estate of S. Carter Burden, New York.

Also speaking at the dedication was Robert Bly, internationally recognized poet and FWS National Advisor. Bly gave a superb reading of six Stafford poems and concluded with one of his own, "Conversations with Bill".

For additional information on the event see *THE OREGONIAN* article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Friends of William Stafford Board of Directors: Patty Wixon, Ashland, OR, Chair; Nan Atzen, Forest Grove, OR; Brian Booth, Portland, OR; Bob Dusenbery, Portland, OR; Martha Gatchell, Drain, OR; Robert Hamm, West Linn, OR; Ceil Huntington, Lake Oswego, OR; Shelley Reece, Portland, OR. FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD NEWSLETTER is published quarterly. NEWSLETTER articles also appear on FWS website: www.wmstafford.org. Send inquires and correspondence to Friends of William Stafford, P.O. Box 592, Lake Oswego, OR 97034 or E-mail: friends@wmstafford.org.

William Stafford: Prophet in his own land

No one loved the language more than William Stafford. Oregon's best-known, best-loved poet, who died in 1993, thought of words as small puzzles that each of us puts together in our own way to solve the personal mystery of who we are.

"You must revise your life," he commanded — advice to would-be poets, yes, but also for anyone who wants to live in a fully conscious way.

In some hands, this would be heady stuff. But Stafford made it seem easy, almost natural. By dint of his skill and the force of his personality, he attracted a resilient band of loyal disciples.

The latest evidence that Stafford's fans are alive and well can be found at Lewis & Clark College, where the poet taught for 30 years. Last month the school dedicated the new William Stafford Room in its Aubrey R. Watzek Library and announced acquisition of a selection of Stafford's books and teaching materials from a Manhattan collector.

There is already the Friends of William Stafford, an organization devoted to the poet's work and memory that is involved with putting signs with Stafford's poetry on them in the Tillamook Burn. The William Stafford Archives, directed by the poet's son, Kim, is overseeing publication of two new works and a reprint of Stafford's story of his years as a conscientious objector, "Down in My Heart."

But the latest moves are the first permanent tributes to Stafford's legacy at Lewis & Clark. They are small but significant gestures, helping to ensure that Stafford — Oregon's only poet to win the National Book Award and Oregon's poet laureate from 1975 until his death — remains a prophet with honor in his own land.

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It is a cozy place, this third-floor room with Stafford's name on it, where students can go to talk and study. Although spare in furnishings, it is rich in Stafford's spirit, which radiates from the wall displays about his life and work.

Lewis & Clark has changed, reflecting an ambition scarcely conceived of when Stafford arrived there to teach in 1948, and barely re-

alized when he retired in 1980. Looking out through the wall of glass on one side of the room, visitors can only imagine the humble, one-story building

that housed Stafford's office, since replaced by the splendid brick of the James F. Miller Center for the Humanities.

Likewise, the library has doubled in size, with a small corner of its rare books room now reserved for the Stafford books and class materials once owned by S. Carter Burden, the New Yorker with the name Vanderbilt in his pedigree and a well-known passion for collecting books.

Lewis & Clark thinks more big-league than it did when Stafford strolled the campus, and Stafford is certainly a star in its institutional crown. The catalyst for the college's recent recognitions of Stafford, however, came from the outside: Portland lawyer Brian Booth and retired Lewis & Clark professor Robert Dusenbery underwrote the furnishing of the William Stafford Room, and it was Booth who alerted the college about the S. Carter Burden collection. The school joined with two un-

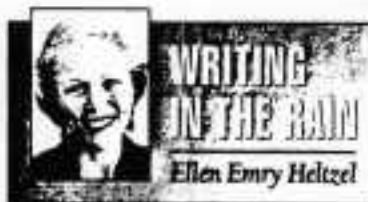
How These Words Happened

In winter, in the dark hours, when others were asleep, I found these words and put them together by their appetites and respect for each other. In stillness, they jostled. They traded meanings while pretending to have only one.

Monstrous alliances never dreamed of before began. Sometimes they lost. Never again do they separate in this world. They are together. They have a fidelity that no purpose or pretense can ever break.

And all of this happens like magic to the words in those dark hours when others sleep.

From "The Way It Is," used with permission of the estate of William Stafford



named donors to pay \$12,500 for the materials.

This acquisition may seem like a coals-to-Newcastle undertaking, given Stafford's long tenure at the

school. But colleges buy primarily for use, not long-term value; besides, Stafford was so prolific that it must have been hard even for him to keep up with what he produced. At last count there were 44 books of poetry that he had written or co-written, and 12 nonfiction books.

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Stafford believed that writing poetry was like fishing: You throw out the line and wait to see what's reeled in. His was an unpretentious, embracing philosophy that fit with his Kansas roots and a fierce calmness that contained both acceptance and firm conviction.

"He had a generosity of spirit somewhat rare in artistic circles," Booth says. "He was as accessible to high-school English teachers as to Pulitzer Prize winners."

To his friend and fellow poet Rob-

ert Bly, Stafford's time as a conscientious objector during World War II was the pivotal event of his adult life. "The reason why William Stafford is such an important poet is that he deals in every poem with discerning, discriminating, particularly how to discriminate between the various responses in us to our own aggressive impulses," Bly writes in his introduction to "The Darkness Around Us Is Deep," one of Stafford's poetry collections. "We could say that, despite his playful titles, his secret subject is aggression."

Bly says that Stafford's life and work provide the recipe for controlling aggression: for each individual to renounce the instinctual call of violence and, instead, choose a peaceful life within society.

"There should be writings so coercive that all in our time yield to them," Stafford once declared. This belief in the power of words lives on in his work, and also at Lewis & Clark.

Ellen Emry Heltzel writes weekly for Arts & Books. She is available by phone at 221-8066, by fax at 294-5172, by e-mail at eheltzel@news.oregonian.com, and by mail at 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, Ore. 97201.

ANNUAL DONATION TO FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD NOW DUE

To match the calendar year and coincide with the month of William Stafford's birthday, FWS is requesting a January renewal of annual membership to Friends of William Stafford. Please send a check to the below address. Of course donations are happily accepted any month, but a January renewal helps our volunteer staff with record keeping.

Yes, I would like to be part of
Friends of William Stafford.
Enclosed is my annual donation of
Individual \$25
Student or Retired \$10
Additional donation: _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Make check payable to Oregon Community
Foundation fbo *Friends of William Stafford*
and mail to *Friends of William Stafford*,
P. O. Box 592, Lake Oswego, OR 97034.

Volunteer Sign Up

Check areas you would like to participate in as a volunteer.

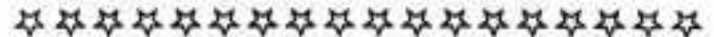
- ☆ Mailing (apply address labels and stamps)
- ☆ Organize poetry readings as a service to libraries and schools.
- ☆ Organize William Stafford Gatherings in your town.
- ☆ Serve as fundraiser for specific FWS projects.

- ☆ Other: _____

TWO WINTER QUARTER CLASSES OFFER FOCUS ON WORKS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD

A ten-week course titled "Seeing Through the Light: The Literature of William Stafford" will be held at Marylhurst College, Portland, beginning Monday, January 4, 1999, in the BP John building. Contact instructor Joan Meyers at Marylhurst for further details.

A poetry workshop titled "Writing Poetry: Crossing Unmarked Snow" will be held at the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis & Clark College, Portland, on Thursdays from Jan. 14 to Feb. 11, 6:30 - 9:30 pm. Instructor Paul Merchant will use unpublished teaching notes of William Stafford to help participants explore such topics as keeping a journal; writing list poems; reviewing and analyzing poetry; writing with "no praise, no blame"; and a range of prompts and workshop exercises. The course is designed for poets at all levels, and for teachers of poetry.

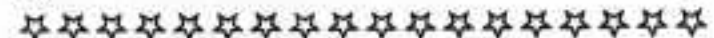


SMALL ELEGY

by *Linda Pastan*

"Death is only bad because it's like sunset,
or a long eclipse..."
--William Stafford

You always made the difficult
seem simple, and though
I've learned that simplicity
is hardest of all,
we followed you easily
for a while, one word at a time.
Now there will only be
the long eclipse you spoke of;
but if poems are a bit like stars
at least you left us a skyfull.



"A TELEPHONE LINE GROWS COLD"

--In Memory of William Stafford

I.

Second month after your death,
from dog-days to frost-on-the-gourd already,
I arrived in my rental car unannounced
on your sidling street above Lake Oswego.
Home and home, Bill, we kept in touch
over the years; "interacting" the best we could,
but now all the news I brought seemed cold,
and of all the questions I never asked you,
only the silliest remained.

"When you write before dawn enrolled
on that famous sofa,
how can your ballpoint pen function properly,
writing uphill like that?"

Once, friend, I really wanted to know.

II.

Both cars gone, yours and Dorothy's,
a week's newspapers piled behind the screendoor--
why had I come here? What would I say, or ask?
Your kindly house, once full of books and flowers,
humped on its lawn, impenetrable as stone.
And yet, as I turned to go, in some dark interior
a phone began to ring, and rang, and rang,
emptying room after room with its ignorant summons
from someone who did not know you'd gone:
and in the silence after the ringing,
inside that house grown vast as the Great Plains,
I swear I heard your calm voice answering us all:

*All writing is uphill, friends,
and the words must percolate up, like love.*

Jarold Ramsey

Poetry Northwest XXXVII


(Winter 1996-7)

**NEW BEND, OR, PUBLIC LIBRARY
HAS LINTELS WITH WORDS BY
SIX FAMOUS PEOPLE**

Exterior stone lintels with quotations by famous people have created an attraction for people walking toward the new Bend Public Library. Bend Library manager, Patti Bailey, reports that the new construction has changed the whole block and she's delighted to look out the window and see people stop to look up and read the quotes. Words are by **Willis Eberman**, a poet who lived on the Oregon Coast from 1917 to 1979, **Barry Lopez**, **John Adams**, **Toni Morrison**, **Christa McAuliffe**, and **William Stafford**. The words of Stafford are from his poem, "Ask Me," and adapted for the quote:

*You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait ...
what the river says, that is what I say.*

Dedication for the Bend Public Library, part of the Deschutes Public Library System, was held Saturday, October 24, and drew a large audience and many patrons. Jim Scheppke, Oregon State Librarian, was the featured speaker.

 **friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD**
P.O. Box 592, Lake Oswego, OR 97034