



W friends of WILLIAM STAFFORD NEWSLETTER

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LAKE OSWEGO, OREGON

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STAFFORD WORDS TO BECOME PART OF COUNTY LIBRARY

The new Deschutes County Library will be completed next summer and officially open sometime in August. George Gasher, Project Director, reports the new structure will be red-brown brick with precast stone lintels above six large first-floor windows. Each lintel will contain thought-provoking words. From 130 submissions, a library board committee selected six authors of phrases that fit the purpose of the building as well as the area where it's being built. Words by William Stafford were chosen from the outset. Others selected are by John Quincy Adams, Wallace Stevens, Barry Lopez, Willis Eberman, and Christa MacAuliffe. Stafford's come from the last verse of his famous poem, "Ask Me."

NATIONAL ADVISOR ROBERT BLY PUBLISHES NEW POEMS NAMED TO HONOR STAFFORD

Students, staff, and townspeople were treated Nov. 3, 1997, to a reading by Robert Bly on the campus of Southwest State University in Marshall, MN. Bly, a National Advisor for *Friends of William Stafford* read from his newest collection of poetry, *MORNING POEMS* (HarperCollins, 1997).

Bly credits *MORNING POEMS* to Stafford, Bly's friend and mentor for most of his life and a continuing influence. Bly decided to stay in bed every morning until he had written at least one poem. He comments, "Stafford wrote early each morning in an effort to follow the language, maintaining that his mind was fresh from a night of sleep, and forcing himself to write something every day helped him exercise discipline in his writing."

STAFFORD'S POETRY NOTED IN NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

The Methow River Poems road sign project started by two visionary forest rangers in Washington's North Cascades, received national recognition last month. On Oct. 7, 1997, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL* ran journalist Susan G. Hauser's article, "Poetry in Its Natural Setting," which describes the project using seven William Stafford poems. See a full reprint elsewhere in this issue.

FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD WEBSITE TO BE AVAILABLE SOON

FWS members Dean and Erin Seabrook, of Brooklyn, NY, have been very generous contributors spending "after hours" creating a website on the internet. Soon people all over the country (and world) will be able to find information about projects of the organization, ways to volunteer to help, how to become a member and contribute ideas. Seabrook expects the *FWS* website to be ready in December at <http://www.wmstafford.org>.

STAFFORD POEM TO BE PART OF TILLAMOOK FOREST INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

Doug Decker, Director of the Tillamook Forest Interpretive Program, reports that the eastern entryway into the Tillamook forest area will be the first location in Oregon for a road sign using a William Stafford poem. Here travelers westbound from metropolitan areas will be able to stop and read "The Tillamook Burn." Decker says the sign will be at a lookout point above Gale's Creek located "about three stone's throws from the origin of the fire."

Friends of William Stafford Board of Directors: Brian Booth, Portland, OR; Linda Christensen, Portland, OR; Bob Dusenbery, Portland, OR; Ceil Huntington, Lake Oswego, OR; Harold Johnson, Portland, OR; Beverly Partridge, Portland, OR; Patty Wixon, Ashland, OR, Chair. FRIENDS OF WILLIAM STAFFORD NEWSLETTER will be published periodically for members. Send correspondence to Friends of William Stafford, P.O. Box 592, Lakes Oswego, OR 97034 or e-mail: vpwixon@jeffnet.org.

(TILLAMOOK FOREST, cont.)

Bids for design and fabrication of the sign will be let soon, with construction expected between April and June, and installation completed by Fall, 1998. The Tillamook Forest covers about 400 square miles (364,000 acres). Decker is overseeing the 5-year plan to develop a network of interpretive sites, an extensive educational program, and a large interpretive center at Jones Creek. Decker hopes to use several Stafford poems in interpretive areas within the Tillamook Forest program.

FWS MEMBER RELATES HOW FINDING STAFFORD'S WORK CHANGED HIS LIFE

Sam Jordan discovered William Stafford's poetry during his sophomore year in college, in late 1993, so he never had the opportunity to meet Stafford or to hear him read. After attending the William Stafford Gathering last August and hearing memories of Bill, Sam Jordan wanted to add his.

In a letter, excerpted by permission, he says, "... when I read the poem, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," it affected me so deeply that I could not help but to really begin exploring Stafford's work, reading everything I could find in the Lewis & Clark library. No matter what paper I was working on or which final test I was studying for, I always seemed to find time to steal a few quiet moments alone with one or more of Stafford's books open around me....my memories of William Stafford are of quiet nights reading his poetry to myself or to others, sharing a cherished line with my mother and father, buying a copy of one of his books to give away as a present, wondering what he might have thought about what happened today; wondering what he and I might have said to each other. ...To know him in person would have been amazing...and yet, even having not *known* him, I do *know* him. He has been a constant friend, a mentor, and a teacher over these past few years through his writing....Each time I read one of his poems or think about

something he once said, I create memories of William Stafford for myself....One day when I was thinking about all of this...I turned a page and found this poem ["Sending These Messages"]. I think Stafford wrote this to people like me, and like you...all the people with memories.

Sending These Messages

*Over these writings I bent my head.
Now you are considering them. If you
turn away I will look up: a bridge
that was there will be gone.
For the rest of your life I will stand here,
reaching across.*

*If these writings can bring a turn
or an echo that touches you—maybe
a face, a slant, a tune—you will stop
too and bend over them. When you
look up, your thought will reach
wherever I am.*

*I know it is strange. And there's no measure
for this. The only connection we make
is like a twinge when sometimes they change
the beat in music, and we sprawl with it
and hear another world for a minute
that is almost there.*

William Stafford

from A GLASS FACE IN
THE RAIN (HARPER &
ROW, 1982) by
permission of the
Literary Archives of the
Estate of William
Stafford.

Poetry in Its Natural Setting

By SUSAN G. HAUSER

Winthrop, Wash.

On the North Cascades Scenic Highway, it's hard to keep your eyes on the road. The towering, snow-capped mountains, the green and gold blur of pine and aspen trees, the rushing water of the Methow River—why, it's enough to make you pick up a pen and compose poetry right on the spot.

Failing that, one can always pull off the highway and read the roadside poems. Inscribed on seven signs placed along an 80-mile stretch of the highway is poetry that is as breathtaking as the view.

This poetry in paradise was composed by the late William Stafford, a former poet laureate of the U.S. who lived and taught in Portland, Ore. But the project was conceived by two forest rangers, Sheila McLean and Curtis Edwards, who, after years of creating interpretive roadside signs in the Okanogan National Forest, had grown sick of their own writing.

In an April 1993 letter proposing the project to Mr. Stafford, Ms. McLean explained, "We are tired of our own mediocre natural history writing. We need someone who can relate feelings as well as facts with only a few words. Poetry, actually, is what we need."

The Forest Service offered Mr. Stafford \$100 per poem. He wrote the poems in July 1993, after an inspiring visit to the Methow River Valley. A month later, he died at age 79 from a heart attack.

The poems were erected a year after Mr. Stafford's death. The Forest Service balked at spending more tax dollars on poetry, so a local private foundation, the Methow Institute Foundation, raised the \$1,000 each for the porcelain enamel signs. Six of the poems were erected next to natural history interpretive signs; a seventh poem, a gift from Mr. Stafford's family, stands alone at the summit of Washington Pass.

The seven poems have been published in booklet form by Confluence Press of Lewiston, Idaho, and a video about the project, "The Methow River Poems," features Garrison Keillor, Naomi Shihab Nye and Mr. Stafford

himself reading the poems.

The 11-minute video was made by Mike Markee of Ashland, Ore.'s TTTD Productions. That's short for "Traveling Through the Dark," the title of Mr. Stafford's best-known poem. Proceeds benefit the memorial organization, Friends of William Stafford, which has lately embarked on its own poetry in paradise project. Soon to be erected along Oregon's Wilson River Highway, which winds over the mountains from Portland to the coast, are two Stafford poems. Mr. Markee says there are more to come in various areas of Oregon, in order to catch up with Washington's Methow River poems project.

"I told Sheila [McLean] I was ticked that Washington got the poetry signs be-

was too busy, but the rangers did not take that as a definite no.

"He has North Cascades connections," insists Ms. McLean. It seems Mr. Snyder served as a forest fire lookout in these woods, as did his friend, Jack Kerouac, who wrote a novel, "Desolation Angels," about his summer sojourn atop nearby Desolation Peak.

Come to think of it, excerpts from Mr. Kerouac's novel "On the Road," might be most appropriate for the roadside signs. Before the poetry-loving forest rangers switch from poetry to prose, Mr. Snyder hopefully will see the benefits of being a roadside poet. Surely one of the perks would be that the poet's words touch thousands more people, in one tourist season alone, than a calendar full of poetry readings and a shelf full of published poems.

Ms. McLean has seen for herself that travelers stop to linger over Mr. Stafford's poems, most of which were written for the specific sites where they are placed. After the poet's death, she said, bunches of flowers were left at the foot of the signs.

Ms. McLean drove me along the highway to see, and to read, the poems. But the poem Mr. Stafford wrote in honor of Silver Star Mountain was temporarily missing, being repaired after a snowplow knocked it down. I asked Ms. McLean to read the poem "Silver Star" aloud from the chapbook. Her reverent reading as she faced the majestic mountain and her response to the poem showed me the power of roadside poetry.

"Isn't that a great poem?" she said. "It makes my hair stand up on my neck. And the smell! Smell that alpine smell!"

On the "Methow River Poems" video, Ms. McLean is shown walking across a suspension bridge to reach the riverside site of her favorite Stafford poem, "Where We Are." During my visit to the Methow River, she led me to that spot. Moved by the words of the poem, I read this line aloud: "But rain will feel its blind progress along the valley, tapping to convert one boulder at a time into a glistening fact."

Ms. McLean nodded. "It makes me want to cry," she said.

Where We Are

Fog in the morning here
will make some of the world far away
and the near only a hint. But rain
will feel its blind progress along the valley,
tapping to convert one boulder at a time
into a glistening fact. Daylight will
love what came.

Whatever fits will be welcome, whatever
steps back in the fog will disappear
and hardly exist. You hear the river
saying a prayer for all that's gone.

Far over the valley there is an island
for everything left; and our own island
will drift there too, unless we hold on,
unless we tap like this: "Friend,
are you there? Will you touch when
you pass, like the rain?"

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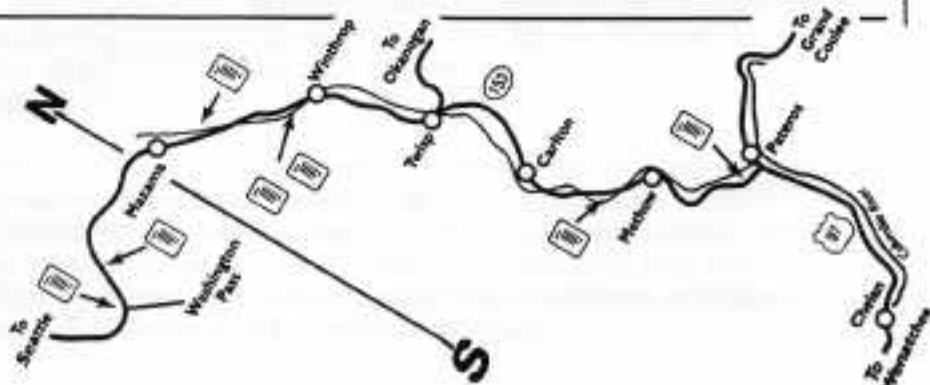
fore Oregon did," Mr. Markee good-naturedly recalls. "She said, 'You don't own William Stafford.'"

Ms. McLean and Mr. Edwards, who work at the Winthrop Ranger Station and read poetry in their spare time, now wish to expand their project to have poetry follow (or lead) travelers along the entire length of the North Cascades Scenic Highway. Most recently, they approached another famous poet with Northwest roots, Gary Snyder. Mr. Snyder protested that he

Where the Signs Are

- Public parking area beside the river where the Methow and Columbia Rivers join
- Public parking area at McFarland Creek between Methow and Carlton
- 2 miles south of Winthrop, just south of the Big Valley Ranch (2 signs)
- On the Methow Community trail at the river crossing near Goat Creek
- At the Silver Star Mountain overlook 3 miles below Washington Pass
- At the Washington Pass Overlook

Map provided by U.S. Forest Service and reprinted with permission of Confluence Press, Lewiston, ID.



**CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR
TWO FWS PROJECTS IN YOUR
TOWN**

The Board of Directors for *Friends of William Stafford* is seeking volunteers for two projects, one scheduled for January or February, 1998, and another in August, 1998.

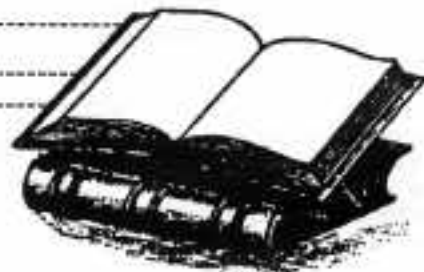
For the first volunteer project, during the month following William Stafford's birthday (January 17), the Directors hope to have readings scheduled in several libraries and schools. The purpose is to build an appreciation for the importance of poetry within our communities and to extend awareness of our literary heritage. Volunteers will be provided a copy of **CROSSING UNMARKED SNOW: FURTHER VIEWS ON THE WRITER'S VOCATION**, as a resource of about twenty Stafford poems which could be selected to read along with works by other poets. If you're interested in organizing a reading in your local high

school or community library, please contact FWS Directors at FWS address.

A second project involves a Gathering next August in your community in memory of William Stafford, on the fifth anniversary of his death. This event would be a local poetry reading, where participants could read or listen to favorite poems by William Stafford and other poets. Organizers will establish a schedule for the readings --from picnics to tea parties under the stars --to fit a specific community. For further details, contact FWS Directors at FWS address.

NOTICE: TAX INFORMATION

The application for 501(C)(3) designation for *Friends of William Stafford* is still in process. We will continue to give you updates as they become available. If the organization's application for not-for-profit status is successful after December 31, 1997, any donation you have made previously would be a retroactive tax deduction.



Friends Of William Stafford

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