

FIREWEED

POETRY OF WESTERN OREGON



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Roger Weaver	THE ULTIMATE GATHERING	/ 5	Doren Robbins	AGAINST ANGELS	/ 28
Lois Rosen	ROBERTO, ADIOS	/ 6		SWING	/ 30
	FIRST FROST	/ 7	Stacie Smith-Rowe	STUCK	/ 31
	POTPOURRI	/ 8		FINDING WHAT IS LEFT	/ 32
Laurell Swails	THE RIGHT SORT OF EMPTINESS	/ 9		FRIENDS OF THE WORD	/ 33
Frank Rossini	A VISIT TO CALVARY CEMETERY	/ 10	Renee Gionet	FOR THE BRAZILIAN POET ADELIA PRADO	/ 34
Ralph Mohr	AD REX RABOLD: IN MEMORIAM II	/ 13		TO THE POET	/ 35
Sherron Norlen	WASPS THOUGHTS	/ 14	Wilma M. Erwin	HAIKU	/ 36
Beverly Partridge	JANUARY LAMBING	/ 16	E. M.	ON ROGER WEAVER'S PROJECT: <u>TRAVELING ON THE GREAT WHEEL</u>	/ 37
Eleanor W. Griffitts	CALENDARS	/ 17	D. L.	REVIEW: <u>NIGHTMARKS</u> , BY CARLOS REYES	/ 39
Ken Zimmerman	THE SEA	/ 18		EDITORS' NOTES	/ 42
Paul Dresman	LOVE'S OUTCOME	/ 20		CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES	/ 43
	NOW IT IS TIME	/ 21			
Robert Cohen	THE FOOTBALL GAME: A DREAM	/ 22			
	NOTHING	/ 23			
Shelley C. Reece	APPLIED MENDEL	/ 24			
	OUR SMALL WAR	/ 25			
Scott Starbuck	QUILTWORK	/ 26			
J. Paul Baron	LEASH LAW	/ 27			

Roger Weaver

THE ULTIMATE GATHERING

Several selves, I'm calling all of you in --
the child who won't give up, the sad singer
who will not be comforted, the bag lady,
the comedian. The occasion? A kind
of Thanksgiving, sweet, sour, in between --
in short, something for everyone.

The possibility of being together
keeps me awake, excited.
I try to imagine the seating.
Finally I can't. Every time I count chairs
I have one left over,
so sit where you like. There are chairs
in corners for those who hate crowds,
one for the teenaged self who pretends
he doesn't belong in this family
with a child who says "hi" to everyone,
an aloof uncle buried in books,
a cousin stuck on sex,
a dipsomaniacal aunt with a reckless tongue.

I'm providing food and drink,
and asking for a one day Time Out --
that no one settles old scores.
Is that, and a short session of holding
still for the photographer, too much to ask?

My selves so far unmentioned, if you doubt
whether you belong, you do. Please come.

Lois Rosen

ROBERTO, ADIOS

Wild cucumber
bursts out of nowhere
twisting
Wide leaves
darken the buds

Whoever thinks nature
is gentle
has not watched

blackberry
dare me

Oregon without pickers
overripe cherries
strawberries rot

My student Roberto
whispers *Salvador*
Asylum denied

He pays a fee
Gonif, my father's word
for lawyer means devil

Roberto keeps my address
will write letters
to practice English

I, who have never
had to work
the fields

FIRST FROST

So many apples
spoil on the ground.

Dahlias in the attic
give no sign which will bloom.

When I teach
it is always that way.

Sergio, who worked
graveyard at the cannery

now leaves class
to cut Christmas trees.

I give him his Halloween photo:
plastic glasses, a moustache

and those shadows
under his eyes.

Lois Rosen

POTPOURRI

This is a bowl of old roses,
bright, papery to touch.
A winter afternoon's walk.
Preserved blooms
on a skeletal bush,
how they hold on.

Corsages:

Rosebud and satin, Hattie Shapiro
the spinster who wasn't family, gave me
for my ballet recital,

Orchids, because Gary Cohen
wanted the color to match
the lavender of my dress,
I saved until they crumbled.

Wonderful petals painted on china,
pieces left of grandma's set
that special flavor when we ate together

and beautiful, the white hair
coiffed short around her face
and like lines around her eyes.

Aged hands. Ashes of roses.

Laurell Swails

THE RIGHT SORT OF EMPTINESS

Brown pollen blows
in swirling clouds from the spruce
outside my open window.

In the Japanese Garden, after tea,
a man on the bridge over Strolling Pond
watches gold and silver koi
lip the water's surface.

To no one in particular, he says,
"The cup must be emptied
before it can be filled."
A yellow leaf meanders down.

I ponder empty nut shells and
pea pods, and the wives of husbands
gone astray:

They are not with the sort of
emptiness that leads to fullness--
unlike the tea bowl, black moon, tomb.

The tea bowl is not vacant
the way the shell is,
but expectant, awaiting the whisk.

The right sort of emptiness
you know when you find it,
the way this night the moon knows,
waxing.

Frank Rossini

A VISIT TO CALVARY CEMETERY
for my sister joan

this is where the journey ends immigrants
who didn't lose
their names chiselled
into gravestones or above
the doors of tombs we rise
thru ice
& snow to find
our family
& each turn in the cemetery road brings us closer
my nephew this generation's first-
born laid out like the Infant
of Prague on the porch where we'd watch
black & white tv my father sports page sprawled
on his lap cigarette
smoldering between fingers lulled
to sleep by baseball's
droning announcers & my grandfather lulled

to death by work
or drink depending on who told
his story & my great-
grandfather perched
on his "throne" parrot on each shoulder
holding court till the can of beer my father as a boy fetched
from the local tavern emptied
& was nailed to the kitchen table

we rise but the family
is lost
among others who came to plant
these stones
it doesn't matter these stones don't hold
flesh only
the names
& as we walk the snow
gives way to our voices
& we raise the dead with stories

that drift
from our tongues like the blue
snow of childhood street-
lights the snow we'd pray would last all night
the snow that would close school
& open the day like death
opens us to memory

Ralph Mohr

AD REX RABOLD: IN MEMORIAM II

Written on hearing of
the death of Rex Rabold, an actor
at the Ashland Shakespeare Festival.

I have seen you playing many parts: king,
the doctor of the wife of Pericles,
the teacher in a room filled with teachers
who wanted to know how you played the play,
a seducer or two; I had never
thought that you would be seduced and then die
on us, offstage. It was out of character;
like the Player in Stoppard's play, you were
always on, always in, in character
until Death took you out, a bit player
took you out, and we'll have no more rampant
kings, knaves, errant fellows, Malvolios
with cards on their heads, who should die on stage
with true knives. Ave atque vale, rex.

Sherron Norlen

WASPS THOUGHT

of paper first, papered
houses before the Japanese.
When papyrus dried up,
Rome died, but paper-
hanging wasps stayed
with the tried old way:
seven layers over the heart,
a peplum at the stalk end
that once fixed this cone

(a paper nautilus,
an onion, but all skin)
to our woodshed ceiling.
Tender, more malleable
than I'd supposed, the mass
has caved its underside
against a pewter dish: close
match for color, but none
for texture and tone.

The designer who buys
this fabric will take
the season in Paris:
picture lean models cupped
in moth-mottled capes,
papilionaceous,
flecked hints of mother-
of-pearl, porous, shapely
go-with-anything enigmas.

On the old nest, patches
of green more surprising
than stings on my cheek.
Insecticide froze these adults
sprouting white decay
at the exit. Their wings fork
over the yellow scallops on each
abdomen curled in tumbling
effort to drop out of harm.

Odor surrounds this tomb,
not harsh but sweet,
reminiscent of flesh
dissolving to element,
flashing me back
to a stainless autopsy-
table, the turnip-sized
brain of a dead child.
Tilted, the entrance admits
sunset to hexagonal chambers,
to mysteries in low forests of mold.

Beverly Partridge

JANUARY LAMBING

That week he came down with the flu
The hard kind, flat in bed for three days
Three days of twins, triplets and singles
The lambs dropped where they chose

Without any shepherd to follow
That week I milked twenty ewes
Gavaged their determined-to-die lambs
And built sudden pens with straw

I called Orion to sing with
I called the County Extension

Flu man, get out of your bed
Take over my bungled job
Let me return to my pots, my pans,
A table full of flowers

*

Still bodies of new lambs
lie limp in a garbage can,
on a truck, on the burn pile,
in the field where buzzards
care for them

The smoothness of their death
brings calm tears flowing
inside my guts trying
to make their river of blood alive

Eleanor W. Griffitts

CALENDARS

I cannot count the days -
they streak past my eyes
like box cars at a country crossing.
I sleep early, wake at dawn,
gleaning light in hope
that light alone will hold back
the dark uncurling of the night.
But what to do with years?
Unfolding like pages of a map,
they show only where I
should have traveled - never
where I've been.

Ken Zimmerman

THE SEA

For Merv Mecklenburg

1

Walking on the winter beach I meet
no one, except a few grey gulls
circling over the water. One breaks off
from the rest and plunges into the sea.
All the others follow, and soon
they're lost to me, grey on the grey waves.

At home with what I can't comprehend,
they float, out of sight, passing
their screechy gossip back and forth.

2

Arriving for the first time at the margin of the world
you must have fallen out of yourself
as you spilled from the car. This was the color
of mountains just before dawn, but bigger
than mountains, vast as all of Montana,
heaving and shivering without flowers or trees.

You learn a new way of seeing from the sea
as if the mind needs to fill that immense emptiness
with thought. What images came to you:
"Water riding upon water, rising above water."

Was your son born then, as an idea,
around which the layers of flesh could gather?
Did you see yourself, two years later,
throwing him in the air? And hear the sound
of his laughter in the waves as you catch him again.

3

But that's not what I started out to say,
or why I'm here, near evening, on the coldest day
of the year. We were talking about image
and idea, and the whole time a quiet rage
wanted to burst out of me. Are we only things
without thought, seabirds born without wings?

An image is an idea, and I came here to find one
to give you. But all I found was the sound of waves
on stone,
my own small silhouette at the end of the land,
and behind me, no footprints in the wind-erased
sand.

Paul Dresman

LOVE'S OUTCOME

Part miracle, part unimaginable,
he looks too small, sound asleep
under the covers of our double bed--
a tiny bald head amid rolling hills and folds of star quilt
below the great headlands of our pillows.

In such a pastoral, when he gurgles
we both hear words below the surface--
the turn of streams over cobbles
and murmurs among small animals.

But when he howls, we want to shut it out.
Awakening with screams, he seems infinitely big,
the center of everything like a sun should be

and we long again for those languid days
when we lived together in sunless space.

But now we must leap to the bidding,
to this pretty little thing
who pees upon an obliging lap
and shits upon a helpful wrist.

At 3:46 in the morning, yet,
his eyes are wide and full of life
while we shuffle, bleary and weary,
with his life to be carried
warm in a crook,
and so we are married,
tenderly hooked.

NOW IT IS TIME

Now it is time to turn over to a new page,
to turn over a new leaf, so to speak,
to get out of the habitual chair,
walk down the stairs, climb into the syllable,
start the syllable and back out into the street,
open the glove box in the syllable and take out love,
look in the rear view mirror and remember:

I am always beside you, ready to shift into drive,
ready to drive down the infinite streets.

Robert Cohen

THE FOOTBALL GAME: A DREAM

See up there, in the 15th or 16th row?
The girl I love is sitting in those stands.
A one-armed soldier is holding one of her hands.
Why don't I raise a cry? I try . . . I try:
I scream like a siren and wave my arms.
But football games are full of false alarms.

She's not pretending not to hear.
She's busy being what she dares to be.
I don't think that she'll look this way again.
(I can still smell her hair like a distant sea.)
The game is over; it begins to rain.
She's holding on to the veteran's empty sleeve.

NOTHING

The Greeks spoke of ideal forms
but they still brought gifts
for the less discerning.

You ran through my life
like a summer storm
full of flash and fury
leaving a twisted landscape.

Oh the land will limp along
the trees will return
the flowers will bloom before fading

and nothing will ever be forgiven
nothing.

Shelley C. Reece

APPLIED MENDEL

Number of geep, a cross
between a sheep and a goat,
that have been genetically
engineered: 2.

- - Harper's

That gentle monk would have torn up his notes,
pulled his pea vines from the ground,
and salted the earth where they grew,
if he had looked from Austria
west to our academic America,
where everything runs to California
then intersects, like geep, in Davis.

I have seen a photo of a geep.
Not a shoat from the animal farm,
or a goat from the meadhall,
or a sheet from the store,
but a cross, confused,
mountain-plains goat-sheep
made with care from Mendel's law
after a hundred fifty years,
jump-started from plant to meat,
burst out of a womb so hard
we can't tell the sheep from the goats
the shepherd from the goatherd
(now the good geepherd?),
tell the kid from the lamb,
or say Blake's "little kimb, who made thee?"
And what child wants to recite
"Mary had a little kimb,"
that grows into a geep?

OUR SMALL WAR

From my high post,
I killed everyone:
Miller at the corner
of the garage; Nick
looking over a deformed
tree root; and Greg,
caught in the open,
died like Cagney,
face contorted, body splayed.

I came down and claimed
a win in our small war.
My gun worked just
as it should have,
pushing up dots
of black powder
behind a red paper strip
till the hammer
exploded them,
releasing acrid smoke.

But the others agreed:
Nick's gun would have fired first
if he hadn't been out of caps.
I had to admit
I heard it click behind me.
So I was dead too.

Scott Starbuck

QUILTWORK

He crashes the spaceship
into a purple blackberry patch
beside Miller's Pond,

orchard sky so close
fingers on soft white pine
jet the cab back

up and over miniature farms,
over miles of rust
and cow dung.

J. Paul Baron

LEASH LAW

We keep the old dog
in the back porch
like you keep an old man
in a side room.

He lies there
recycling his thoughts
on the bottom landing.

At night we let him out
and he rolls on the neighbor's lawn
and barks at the people
who aren't there.

Doren Robbins

AGAINST ANGELS

I no longer quarrel
about the topic of the soul--
to deduce or repeat
inductive facts for its evidence.
For me it is plain.
It is one of those names
for what the Alsatian poet
referred to as the precision
of the indefinable.
And I have risen
in the plain rinse
of that precision
before. And before
that. But my reason
or imagination
has no depth for angels.
Not Lawrence's angel
which he thought was made
when a man's
soul
and a woman's
soul unite.

And not Rilke's angels,
their beauty--
which he believed
was nothing but the beginning
of a terror he could
just barely
endure.
I think there is something
somewhat neurotic about angels
and the prestige
of their rarity.
No, I will stay plain--
a sparrow among blue jays
and turkey buzzards.
And I would be cautious
of angels. Constantine the Great,
for example, contracted leprosy
after he dreamt
of an angel
pouring water on him.

Doren Robbins

SWING

Driving back thirty
sometimes forty miles
from work, and I would
take her to walk
before we ate
and to name the wild
lupine again,
and to see
over the hedge
from my shoulders
and to name
again
the bleached and sanded twilight,
and to pause always
by the jasmine since I walked
her there once
and she remembered
crying who knows for what
till I handed her a folded
cup of jasmine,
and the swing went
straight again,
and she with a wet voice hummed,
and I perceived through twilight
and in my blood
as the waves perceive
in salt.

Stacie Smith-Rowe

STUCK

Stuck in these hills
by my own design
I find pathways
to the other world
choked with introspection now.

This cabin full of comfort
hand-made home-spun
comfrey poultice atrophy
has put my wits to sleep
and I am weak
from these holistic ways.

I need to touch
the rotting urban stones
and breathe the sickened air.
These quiet, clean
and sun-filled days
are bad for me.

Stacie Smith-Rowe

FINDING WHAT IS LEFT

The way time goes,
I turn my head
and trees are turning gold.
I hear a note of panic
in the jay's cry
and watch the urgent motions
of the gatherers of seed.
One breath of days ago
the season brought me
all I need; warmth and color,
clarity and ripened fruit.
Now so soon,
the branches clatter
in a cooling wind.
Creatures all around me
heed the urge to dig
and grow fat.
I feel the pressure too,
to gather and store up,
but I squander these fading days
instead, finding what is left
of what is bright,
feeding my mind's eye,
making it fat with color.
My spirit like a squirrel's cheek
stuffed with a load of light
because of winter.

FRIENDS OF THE WORD

Wanting to talk
to my friends of the word,
I'll testify.
But shall it be
for the ones who gather here
among the pin oak,
manzanita and hemp?
Or for the others
who congregate for sanction
every seventh day?

Drunk, but thinking
of the Lord,
I know both camps.
I know why the Welshman
drank his death
as well as I know
the Eucharist.
The spectrum of ways
is beyond all ken,
but the words at both ends
are the same: deliver us.
Deliver us from
the lovelessness
that rules the world.

Renee Gionet

FOR THE BRAZILIAN POET
ADELIA PRADO

I look at her
and this woman
has two chins
and a brain
riding poetry
like a bucking
bronco.

She holds onto
the mane with
one hand
and throws
the other wide
in the air
fingers scrimshawing
patterns on the
blue sky
hooves imprinting
the dust of the circle
where she rides
this poem
out.

TO THE POET

Sleeping with
your poems
next to my skin
I arise
tattooed.

Holding your poems
high above my head
in the deluge
images take root
in my brain
signaling stigmata
to blossom small
hungry mouths
in upturned palms.

Having braved
a thicket of images
I wait for you
to lick me clean
with black, forked
tongues of ink.

Wilma M. Erwin

HAIKU

driving into dusk ---
suddenly, the power line
black with birds

*

look
all of the birds in the tree
are facing the sun

ON ROGER WEAVER'S PROJECT: TRAVELING ON
THE GREAT WHEEL (Gardylloo Press, Corvallis, 1990)

Readers of Roger Weaver's third and most ample volume will find much to enjoy, much to engage them. Like his other books, this one is well-designed and produced. Gardylloo and several other Oregon houses--Arrowood, Eighth Mountain, Breitenbush--are publishing handsomely these days!

Weaver is a lyric poet, and I count at least a dozen lyrics as my favorites. Yet the sweep of the book's title and two longer central poems indicate an ambition to pull together and aim some years' work toward wisdom and vision. How do poets go about this project so essential to maturity?

There are two honored routes. One follows the signpost of Williams' "No ideas but in things." The other follows Roethke's joke; it might have been self-caricature: "If you can't think, at least sing."

Song propels this book. Neighbor poets choose other fuels. Lex Runciman powers his work with the exact detail of bourgeois life. Richard Dankleff's WESTERNS is driven by considerable research into region and period. Barbara Drake and Lisa Steinman derive motives for poems from bits of speech and drama that upset the ordinary so a poet is needed to restore equilibrium.

The practice of Yeats, Auden and Wilbur nourishes Weaver's song. In his best lyrics grace and deftness are joined with depth. These poems are drawn from the mash of daily living; they are distilled. From them it's hard to know Weaver's circumstances, yet his methods of shaping experience toward music are evident.

At the hub of the book are two travel poems; more than the others they are open to a gush of detail, to documentation and personal data-banking that fill--even clog--much Ameri-

can poetry today. "Triptych of Travel on the Great Wheel" and "Rivers and Roads" are slow, ruminative, their subjects gathering, filling, overflowing.

In each the poet tallies up details to find one sum. In each the poet works with "resources at hand, friends, nerve, and common meeting ground." The experiences of world travel and of a flooded local river give the poet a sense that "you cannot travel alone." The discovery of human company causes contrasting emotions. The great wheel confirms cultural unity; the swollen river spits back human waste.

While these poems are the thematic center of the book, Weaver is drawn to the lyric over and over. "No One Sees the Whole O" is a song version of the bigger poems. Keats, Weaver explains, derived authority from song:

Like a seal upon the envelope
of pain, his song. Pinched bird,
he sang in his cage of bone.

So while the wheel is great, the poet may be intent on enveloping, caging, even in small ways, vision and wisdom, drawn from the teeming world, stilled by lyric.

E.M.

REVIEW: NIGHTMARKS, BY CARLOS REYES
(Lynx House Press, Amherst, MA, 1990)

Carlos Reyes is a Portland area poet known to many of us as the author of several volumes of poetry, the most familiar of which may be The Shingle Weaver's Journal. The present collection, published last year, was nominated in 1990 for the Oregon Book Award for Poetry.

Reyes has produced a powerful work in the present vol-

ume, one that this writer returned to a number of times before he began to appreciate what the poet seemed to be attempting. It is not that the poems individually resist appreciation in any way. Far from it: the poet's craft is evident, as in these lines from "Dead Man's Curve":

A white line runs through his life
now, what time does he have?

Eyes focused on the line,
following cars, what time does he have

for the deer
standing at world's edge:

two lights shining back at him
from the darkness?

(This poem deals succinctly with the very same moment in a poet's life as do two poems mentioned in a review in the July 1990 issue of Fireweed, William Stafford's "Traveling through the Dark" and John Daniel's "The Crossing," two favorites of mine. Reyes' rendition is altogether as skillful as the others. You are invited to make this interesting comparison for yourselves!)

Reyes divides his poems in Nightmarks into three sections: "The Neighborhood," "Daunce Wyt Me," and "Nightmarks." One senses a relationship between the parts, and it is in the overall movement of the work that much of its strength lies.

The first section, "The Neighborhood," contains poems which are in the tradition of William Blake or of Garcia Lorca. These are poems which often address the modern urban reality with terseness and despair. The best of these poems actually construct their own reality audaciously and are surrealistic. As Reyes says at one point, "the imagination is a wild thing." Here is only a small sample from a poem

entitled "Once There Was A Way, Maybe":

Years later
things are not so simple.
Your head is a balloon
full of words, your fingers
something like honeyed batwings
(when they come to visit),
reality something
poking through rare occasions
full of bones
on Sunday afternoon:
a plastic bag
full of chicken
but bones all the same
when the picnic's over.

The anguish of the first section gives way in "Daunce Wyt Me" to a kind of healing. The poet addresses a gentler pastoral reality, the Irish countryside, and the poems are more lyrical and even meditative, though darkness is never far off. This is a section of "Half Island":

The farmer in black
wool suit walking
along the walled road
as he returns home
from a funeral in Lahinch
at twilight hears
the cuckoo singing
pauses to count
his remaining days.

In the section "Nightmarks" we leave behind the urban scene and the Irish shore and head out to sea. At sea the poet seems to find himself. He is in his element, and he has worked through his despair and now is able to look ahead. He has accepted the presence in life of darkness and danger and has achieved a kind of wariness as he looks

ahead (nightmarks = "aids to navigation during darkness"). The most impressive of the book's poems happen when the poet looks death in the eye. These lines are from "Southwester":

His heart
was not beating wildly in that second
nor later, when he suddenly remembered
what had nearly happened,
no shakiness as he looked towards the sea,
as seawater poured over the stern,
wind coming
up fast from the southwest.

Nightmarks is the book of a maturing poet who keeps his own work in a personal perspective and who has the courage to share with others the condition of his sensibility in hard times.

D. L.

EDITORS' NOTES

Neighbors: If the world were a ladder FIREWEED would be a rung to climb and surpass; one appearance would be good enough, a step toward a higher something! We feel Oregon is a neighborhood, horizontal and mixed together. So FIREWEED is a kind of newsletter. So it's important that poets keep sending along their work, continuing our exchange!

Last and Next-to-Last Calls: Barbara Drake is editing the April issue. Up to February 20 all poems sent to us will be sent to her. Clem Starck will edit a selection of work-related poems for the July issue. Send likely poems marked for Clem's attention. Let's give the guest editors some good reading!

Where to Browse: In Portland, Powell's, Conant and Conant, The Catbird Seat. In Salem, Jackson's Books. In Corvallis, Grass Roots. In Eugene, Beginnings, The Hungry Head, U OF O Bookstore. All these stores help distribute FIREWEED. Attention, collectors: Back issues of FIREWEED are available for \$1.50 each plus postage.

Not Yet 100%: We hate to misprint poems, but we did misprint Hannah Wilson's "Defrosting the Refrigerator." Here is the entire first stanza as it should have been in the October issue:

The night before I set
a batter bowl beneath the water tray
I know will overflow--
I've put this off too long.
In the morning, delay impossible,
I lift the jars encircling
the bowl and set them by the sink--
orange juice and cranberry,
fresh blueberry jam,
the milk in white cartons--
then swing around for the bowl
to pour in one Niagra'd swoosh
the mottled water down the drain.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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ROBERT COHEN, moved to Portland from Chicago, writes and edits book-selection magazines for libraries. His poems have appeared in the PORTLAND REVIEW and the newsletter of the Oregon State Poetry Association.

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BEVERLY PARTRIDGE lived on a working farm in the Willamette Valley and taught creative writing at Catlin Gabel School; she now writes and resides in Portland.

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shot off California. She's been writing poetry for six years.

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STACIE SMITH-ROWE is a visual artist from Hugo, Oregon, who took a college elective writing class with William Stafford in 1964. She's been writing ever since. Recent artwork is being shown at Mt. Angel Abbey Library.

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