

William Stafford

was born on January 17, 1914, in Hutchinson, Kansas, and attended school in his home state, graduating from the University of Kansas in 1937. Between 1942 and 1946 he was interned as a conscientious objector in Civilian Public Service camps in Arkansas and California. His prose memoir of those years, *Down in My Heart*, was published in 1947.



In that same year, he joined the faculty at Lewis & Clark College, together with another internee, Hideo Hashimoto, who remained a lifelong friend. William Stafford taught at the college, with brief forays elsewhere—to the University of Iowa for his doctorate in the early 50s, to the Library of Congress as Poetry Consultant in the early 70s—until his retirement in 1979.

Married to Dorothy Hope Frantz in 1944, Stafford was the father of four children. William Stafford wrote sixty volumes of prose and poetry, including *Traveling through the Dark*, which received the National Book Award in 1963. Widely loved and admired as a poet, and a generous mentor to writers everywhere, he traveled thousands of miles in his later years, giving readings and leading workshops in colleges, universities, and community centers.

Since his death at his home in Oregon on August 28, 1993, nine further volumes have appeared, among them his new and selected poems *The Way It Is*, and *Every War Has Two Losers*.

First Grade

In the play Amy didn't want to be anybody; so she managed the curtain. Sharon wanted to be Amy. But Sam wouldn't let anybody be anybody else—he said it was wrong. "All right," Steve said, "I'll be me, but I don't like it." So Amy was Amy, and we didn't have the play. And Sharon cried.



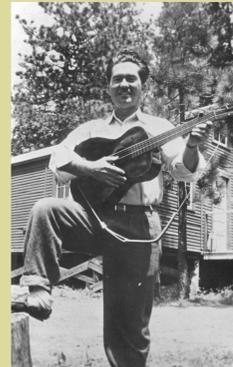
Serving with Gideon

Now I remember: in our town the druggist prescribed Coca-Cola mostly, in tapered glasses to us, and to the elevator man in a paper cup, so he could drink it elsewhere because he was black.

And now I remember The Legion—gambling in the back room, and no women, but girls, old boys who ran the town. They were generous, to their sons or the sons of friends. And of course I was almost one.

I remember winter light closing its great blue fist slowly eastward along the street, and the dark then, deep as war, arched over a radio show called the thirties in the great old USA.

Look down, stars—I was almost one of the boys. My mother was folding her handkerchief; the library seethed and sparked; right and wrong arced; and carefully I walked with my cup toward the elevator man.



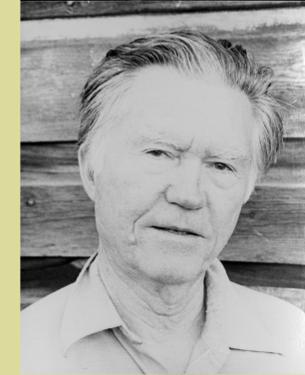
Any Morning

Just lying on the couch and being happy. Only humming a little, the quiet sound in the head. Trouble is busy elsewhere at the moment, it has so much to do in the world.

People who might judge are mostly asleep; they can't monitor you all the time, and sometimes they forget. When dawn flows over the hedge you can get up and act busy.

Little corners like this, pieces of Heaven left lying around, can be picked up and saved. People won't even see that you have them, they are so light and easy to hide.

Later in the day you can act like the others. You can shake your head. You can frown.



The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread. But it is hard for others to see. While you hold it you can't get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread.



At the Bomb Testing Site

At noon in the desert a panting lizard waited for history, its elbows tense, watching the curve of a particular road as if something might happen.

It was looking at something farther off than people could see, an important scene acted in stone for little selves at the flute end of consequences.

There was just a continent without much on it under a sky that never cared less. Ready for a change, the elbows waited. The hands gripped hard on the desert.



With Kit, Age 7, at the Beach

We would climb the highest dune, from there to gaze and come down: the ocean was performing; we contributed our climb.

Waves leapfrogged and came straight out of the storm. What should our gaze mean? Kit waited for me to decide.

Standing on such a hill, what would you tell your child? That was an absolute vista. Those waves raced far, and cold.

"How far could you swim, Daddy, in such a storm?" "As far as was needed," I said, and as I talked, I swam.



Just Thinking

Got up on a cool morning. Leaned out a window. No cloud, no wind. Air that flowers held for awhile. Some dove somewhere.

Been on probation most of my life. And the rest of my life been condemned. So these moments count for a lot--peace, you know.

Let the bucket of memory down into the well, bring it up. Cool, cool minutes. No one stirring, no plans. Just being there.

This is what the whole thing is about.



1914-1918: World War One • 1929-33: The Great Depression • 1939: Germany invades Poland • 1941: United States enters World War Two • 1945: United States bombs Hiroshima and Nagasaki • 1945: United Nations established • 1945-91: "Cold War" between United States and Soviet Union • 1950-53: Korean War • 1957: Russian launch of Sputnik satellite • 1963: March on Washington • 1961-75: Viet Nam conflict • 1969: First moon walk • 1989: Berlin Wall taken down • 1991: Persian Gulf War

poet laborer activist builder teacher musician writer photographer traveler student father dreamer