

2012 Nebraska Book Festival Set for March 31

Join the Nebraska Center for the Book (NCB) for the **2012 Nebraska Book Festival**, Saturday, March 31, in downtown Lincoln at nuVibe Juice and Java (126 North 14th Street) and the Nebraska State Historical Society's Nebraska History Museum (131 Centennial Mall North). This event is free and open to the public and will focus on Nebraska authors who published new works © 2011. Participating authors will answer questions from the audience, be available for book signings, and attend the concluding reception. The Nebraska Center for the Book will present the Mildred Bennett Award to an individual for significant contributions to fostering literary tradition in Nebraska. Joe Starita will discuss the 2012 One Book One Nebraska, "I Am a Man:" Chief Standing Bear's *Journey for Justice*.

The keynote presentation will be offered by novelist Ron Hansen, author of *A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion*. Born in Omaha, Hansen earned his B.A. in English from Creighton University, M.F.A. in creative writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and M.A. in Spirituality from Santa Clara University in California. He is the Gerard Manley Hopkins Professor of Arts and Humanities at Santa Clara, where he teaches writing and literature.

Readings, question and answer sessions, and book signings will highlight the following Nebraska writers:

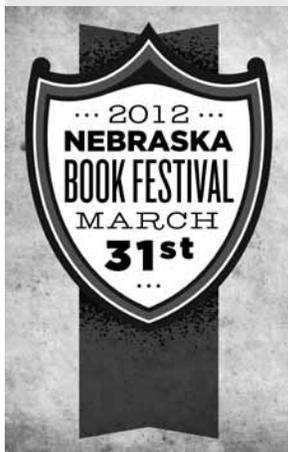
- Twyla Hansen, poet, *Dirt Songs: A Plains Duet*
- Neil Harrison, poet, *Back in the Animal Kingdom*
- Allison Hedge Coke, poet and editor, *Sing: Poetry from the Indigenous Americas*
- David Philip Mullins, fiction, *Greetings From Below*
- Frank O'Neal, poet, *Fireside Chats: A Surrealist's View of the World*
- Ferial Pearson and Omaha South High

students, anthology of personal essays, *In My Shoes: Teen Reflections on Hope and the Future*

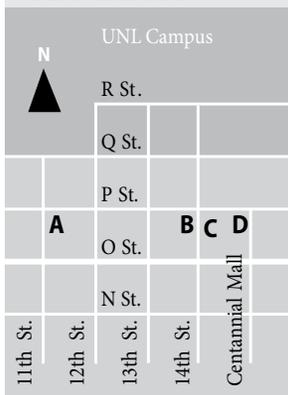
- Amy Plettner, poet, *Undoing Orion's Belt*
- Rainbow Rowell, novelist and columnist, *Attachments*
- Mark Sanders, poet, *Conditions of Grace*
- Timothy Schaffert, novelist, *The Coffins of Little Hope*
- Brent Spencer, creative non-fiction, *Rattlesnake Daddy: A Son's Search for His Father*
- Joe Starita, non-fiction, "I Am a Man:" Chief Standing Bear's *Journey for Justice*
- William G. Thomas, non-fiction, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America*
- William Trowbridge, poet, *Ship of Fool*

William Trowbridge and Lisa Knopp will lead free poetry and creative non-fiction writing workshops, with opportunities to discuss writing techniques, share experiences, and receive expert feedback. Trowbridge's poetry explores the contemporary "Fool" with humor and reflection. Knopp's *What the River Carries* includes essays about the Mississippi, Missouri and Platte rivers and contemplates how people experience landscape.

The festival will conclude with a reception at the Museum of Nebraska History and an evening of readings at nuVibe Juice and Java. Mark Sanders, co-editor for a 2011 Nebraska issue of "The Midwest Quarterly," will arrange readings by some of the 66 Nebraska poets who were included in the issue. The Nebraska Book Festival is supported by Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Humanities Council, Nebraska Library Commission, Nebraska State Historical Society, and nuVibe Juice and Java. For more information contact Matt Mason, 402-453-5711, mtmason@gmail.com, <http://bookfestival.nebraska.gov> or www.facebook.com/NebraskaBookFestival. 



FESTIVAL MAP



- A - Parking Garage**
- B - Parking Garage**
- C - nuVibe**
- D - Nebraska State Historical Society Nebraska History Museum**

Celebration Honors Nebraska Writing

*Guest Editorial
by Tammy Marshall
Wright*

On October 22nd, I had the privilege of attending an event called “A Celebration of Nebraska Books” at the Lied Center in Lincoln. This event was sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book. As a lit lover, I am always on the lookout for people who embrace reading as an integral part of their lives and for activities that revolve around books. This event was a wonderful mixture of the two. While I enjoyed watching the Nebraska Book Award winners receive their beautiful trophies, I especially enjoyed hearing them read portions of their books to us. David L. Bristow, author of *Sky Sailors: True Stories of the Balloon Era* and winner in the Young Adult Nonfiction category, not only captivated me with his narrative but also with his resonant reading voice – I could have listened to him read for hours.

There were other award winners, but the main reason I attended this event was that I wanted to be present for the announcement of the One Book One Nebraska selection for 2012. On the Center for the Book’s website they have this philosophy: “The Nebraska Center for the Book believes One Book One Nebraska demonstrates

how books and reading connect people across time and place.” I couldn’t agree more. What better way to connect with people than to all read the same book and then get together to discuss it! When you do this, you find commonalities with others on levels far deeper than the superficialities of skin color, age and gender. One connection that already exists with the One Book One Nebraska is that the book chosen for the year is one either set in Nebraska or written by a Nebraska author.

In the past years, readers have rallied around *My Antonia*, by Willa Cather; *One False Move*, by Alex Kava; *Crazy Horse*, by Mari Sandoz; *Restoring the Burnt Child*, by William Kloefkorn; *A Lantern in Her Hand*, by Bess Streeter Aldrich; *The Home Place*, by Wright Morris; and *Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps*, by Ted Kooser. In 2012, Nebraska readers can enjoy and discuss Joe Starita’s “*I Am a Man: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice*.” Starita is a professor at UNL, but he is a well-known figure throughout much of Nebraska as he often journeys to towns to give presentations about his books. After the

(continued on page 9)

Thanks so much to all of you that renewed your membership. You will continue to receive this print newsletter in your mailbox. If you haven’t renewed your membership, it’s not too late (form on page 3). Please continue to support your Nebraska Center for the Book



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2012 Nebraska Center for the Book Board Meetings

February 25 10:30 a.m., Chances ‘R’ Restaurant, York

Advertising

The NCB News can accept up to four 1/8-page ads for each issue. The advertising rate is \$125 for 1/8-page. NCB News is issued May 1, August 15, and November 1. The advertising and copy deadline is six weeks prior to issue date. For details, contact Mary Jo Ryan, Nebraska Center for the Book, The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120, Lincoln, NE 68508-2023; phone 402-471-3434, 800-307-2665, e-mail: maryjo.ryan@nebraska.gov, www.centerforthebook.nebraska.gov

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Free Land Chautauqua in Beatrice May 20-25

Nebraska Humanities Council, Beatrice, and Homestead National Monument will host the “Free Land? 1862 and the Shaping of Modern America” Chautauqua May 20-25, in conjunction with the kick-off of a year of events commemorating the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Homestead Act. “Free Land” will address the collective impact of the Homestead Act, the Pacific Railway Act, and the Morrill Act on Nebraska, the Great Plains, and the nation. The influences of these three pieces of legislation, all passed within six weeks of each other in 1862, will be explored through scholar portrayals of six prominent historical figures: Union general and railroad builder Grenville Dodge, author Willa Cather, Ponca chief Standing Bear, author and homesteader Laura Ingalls Wilder, and homesteader and inventor George Washington Carver, with author and humorist Mark Twain as moderator.

Audiences will have an opportunity to examine five themes that were set in motion by the catalyst of the 1862 legislation and that remain relevant: the unfolding of the “free soil, free labor” ideal for America; the rapid economic development of the West and the nation, especially

through the building of railroads; the accelerated displacement of Native Americans; a broader access to public education that resulted in more opportunities for people of the West; and an increasingly landed and educated populace with more potential for social mobility in a developing American West.

Homestead National Monument will have the Homestead Act of 1862 document on loan from the National Archives in May and will observe the actual 150th anniversary of the signing of the Homestead Act on May 20 with an evening program featuring

a variety of special guests, including the historical figures of the Chautauqua. Chautauqua events will continue with a different scholar portraying his or her character each evening under the tent. Each will give a 40-minute, first-person presentation as the historical character, and answer questions. Workshops for children and adults, along with other activities, will be held during the daytime throughout Chautauqua week. For more information, see www.nebraskachautauqua.org or contact Kristi Hayek at the Nebraska Humanities Council, 402-474-2131, kristi@nebraskahumanities.org. 



What is the Nebraska Center for the Book?

The Nebraska Center for the Book brings together the state's readers, writers, booksellers, librarians, publishers, printers, educators, and scholars to build the community of the book. We are the people who know and love books, and who value the richness they bring to our lives. Our Nebraska Center supports programs to celebrate and stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. We have been an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress since 1990.

Join the Nebraska Center for the Book

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Address _____

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Name/address of a friend who might be interested in NCB membership:

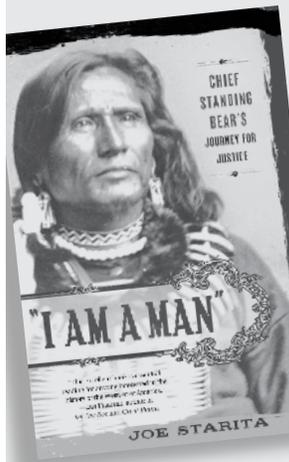
\$15 Individual Membership \$25 Organizational Membership Additional Contribution

Contributions above \$15 are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

**Please send this form and a check to: Nebraska Center for the Book
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I Am a Man is 2012 One Book One Nebraska

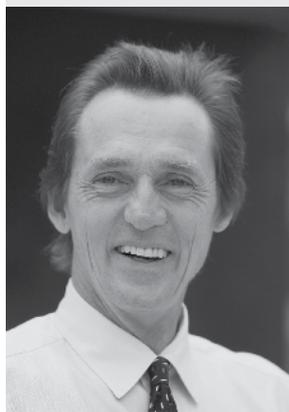


Joe Starita's *"I Am a Man: Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice"* has been selected as the **2012 One Book One Nebraska**. Standing Bear was a peaceful Ponca chief whose people were moved from the Niobrara river valley in Nebraska to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. *I Am a Man* tells the story of Standing Bear's return to Nebraska to bury his son in the Ponca homeland and the resulting trial in Omaha's federal courthouse.

A committee of Nebraska Center for the Book board members selected five One Book One Nebraska finalists from a list of 48 titles recommended by Nebraskans in an open nomination process. The final selection was announced at the Celebration of Nebraska Books, Oct. 22 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln. Schools, libraries, and other literary and cultural organizations are encouraged to plan book discussions, activities, and events focus-

ing on the One Book One Nebraska. Joe Starita has joined the Nebraska Humanities Council's (NHC) Speakers Bureau for 2012 to make it more affordable for groups to feature him in presentations and discussions. DVD copies of NET Nebraska's new documentary, "In Standing Bear's Footsteps," will be distributed through the NHC's Humanities Resource Center at the Nebraska Library Commission, along with book club kits circulated through school and public libraries (contact: 800-307-2665, 402-471-4016, or nlc.ask@nebraska.gov). A proclamation-signing ceremony in the Nebraska State Capitol is planned for January 18. In addition, Standing Bear is a featured character in the NHC Chautauqua, set for May 20-25 in Beatrice. See the One Book One Nebraska Website (<http://onebook.nebraska.gov>) or Facebook group (www.facebook.com/onebookonenebraska) for supporting resources, updates, and activities. 📖

Nebraska Center for the Book board member Molly Fisher recently interviewed Joe Starita



Q. You grew up in Lincoln, went to school here—what led you to your interest in Native Americans?

A. Yes, I am a Lincoln—and a Nebraska—product through and through. And I think by virtue of growing up here, you get exposed to the heavy footprint left behind by the Native people of this state. And the more I got exposed to it, the more fascinated I became with Native culture—the people, their way of life, their value system and spiritual beliefs. They had a very strong sense of place—it was who they were—and the more you get exposed to that, the more real their experiences became in my young mind. Even today, when I stand at the Fort Robinson marker where Crazy Horse was stabbed, or look at the barracks where Dull Knife and the Cheyenne broke out of, or look down at the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri, I still get chills. So it's not an abstract concept—like imagining what things may have been like in ancient Greece. It's something that was only several generations removed and that gave it a power that resonated in me at an early age and has never stopped.

Q. As a writer, do you have a daily work schedule?

A. I've liked to write for as long as I can

remember. I like the feel and the flow and the arrangement of words to convey information, mood and emotion in a way similar to what musicians must feel when composing a score. In sixth-grade, I remember we were supposed to do a 10-page paper as a final project and I ended up doing a 40-page paper on Chief Crazy Horse. It was a story—written by Mari Sandoz—that I became thoroughly absorbed in. And it's where I also think I got my first whiff of the power of good storytelling. And that's what I really like: finding compelling characters and compelling themes and weaving them into a story that becomes real, that people can follow and identify with. I think it was E.M. Forester who once said: If you say the king died, and then the queen died—that's journalism; that's simply recording historical fact. But if you say the king died, and then the queen died of grief—now you have a story. And that's what I'm constantly on the lookout for: a good story, with strong characters and themes in which the landscape also can become a character because developing a strong sense of place is very important. When the research is finished and the in-the-trenches kind of writing begins, I am very disciplined. I like to start writing about 9:00 a.m., work straight through to about 1:00 p.m., take a brief lunch and nap and

(continued on page 5)



Joe Starita Interview (continued from page 4):

then keep going until about 4:30. Then you just have to drop it cold and back away from it and do other things—long walks, bike rides, workouts and just let your subconscious kind of work out any of the writing issues or stumbling blocks you’ve encountered during that day’s session at the word processor. And then you get up the next morning and do it all over again.

Q. Since *I Am a Man* was a One Book, One Lincoln selection, what are your expectations for 2012 One Book One Nebraska?

A. My expectations are that this powerful story, one that emerged from the soil of our own state, will be read by more and more Nebraskans. And that they will come to understand the perseverance and fortitude and love of country and family, the belief in a higher authority and the deep attachment to honor and courage that this story embodies. And by doing so, they will come to a better understanding and appreciation of what the Ponca endured and overcame to still be with us today.

Q. What particularly has given you satisfaction in the many discussions held?

A. At this point, I have given more than 130 talks on *Standing Bear* and this book, and I continually have been struck and deeply gratified by the quality of the questions that audience members ask. Whether it’s Fort Robinson, Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, Neligh, Miami or Chicago, the questions often are so thoughtful and so sincere and so insightful that it leaves you completely humbled. They are questions that could only have emerged from a very focused

reading of the book and so I am very thankful for that—thankful that reading is still something that has meaning and value to Americans.

Q. Tell us about your current work.

A. What I’m working on now is a book that in many ways is very similar to the *Standing Bear* story—it’s just on the opposite side of the gender highway. This story—a true story—is again drawn from the cloth of Nebraska history. It’s a biography of Susan La Flesche, an Omaha Indian woman who was the younger sister of Susette La Flesche—also known as Bright Eyes and who had a prominent role in *Standing Bear*’s story as an interpreter. The story of Susan, the younger sister, embodies many of the same values and themes as *Standing Bear*, but it’s told from a completely different viewpoint and perspective. Susan was born in the waning years of the Civil War in a buffalo hide tipi in a remote corner of the Great Plains—and 24 years later, she graduated as the valedictorian of her medical school class in Philadelphia and became the nation’s first female Native physician. How did that happen? How could that possibly have happened? Well, that’s one of many things this book will delve into, so it’s kind of become my *Moby Dick* right now.

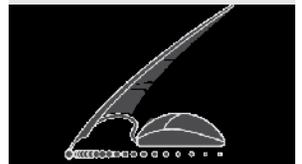
Ed. Note: For every book sold at an event or speaking engagement, Starita will donate 20% of the proceeds (about \$5) to a scholarship fund to help support a Nebraska Native American high school graduate attend an institution of high learning. 📖

Fine Lines Supports Creative Writers

Since 1991, *Fine Lines* has provided a place where creative writers can share their written ideas with others, a national, quarterly, literary journal devoted to the publication of poetry, prose, and writing across the curriculum. What started out as a classroom project is now a fifty-state network of authors who love the written word. *Fine Lines* receives creative writing from all over the nation and authors of all occupations. Recently, we printed work from an 8-year-old and several pieces from a 94-year-old great-grandmother, along with writing of ministers,

janitors, doctors, lawyers, scientists, and students of all educational levels. We have published writers from the Alsatian Islands to Switzerland, and from a US Navy aircraft carrier in the South Pacific. *Fine Lines* Summer Writing Camps are week-long events for “campers,” ranging in age from 5 to 65. Every session is filled with comedy, art, dance, music, history, and writing. For more information see <http://finelines.org>. Send questions, comments, concerns, and letters to the editor at fine-lines@cox.net. Write on. 📖

by David Martin,
Omaha Public
Schools



What Are You Reading?

Nebraska Center for the Book board members share their thoughts about the books they are reading:

Recently I had the luxury of re-reading Tom McNeal's *Goodnight, Nebraska* (1998). I thoroughly enjoyed it the second time, a response that I don't always have with a second reading. McNeal's novel holds up. The plot is straightforward: Randall Hunsacker is a troubled teenager who is sent from his home in Utah to Goodnight, Nebraska (a small farm town), to have a second chance to complete high school, play football, and figure out a future that doesn't involve conflict with the law. Randall is an outsider, a rough place to be for any teenager, and he has to carve his own identity among people who have heard the stories of the trouble that sent him to Nebraska. This is not a "Young Adult" novel; its target audience is those of us who have lived a little and have seen the ways in which adults struggle to develop meaningful lives.

Becky Faber

In mid-October I attended The Southern Book Festival in Nashville. *The Night Circus* (2011), by Erin Morgenstern was one of the books featured and I read the first 100 pages while there, and I became a "reveur," a follower of the circus. The circus is the playing field for two illusionists who have been bound together in a contest, which will last until one wins. The creations made, the fantasy, the complications, and the magic are as real as the circus itself. The mystery of the book was tantalizing.

Molly Fisher

I just finished *The Troubled Man* (2011), by Henning Mankell. It is the tenth book in the Kurt Wallander series, but it is the first one I have read. A friend told me several years ago that she really liked them, but I didn't pick one up until #10. I should have read them earlier and maybe in order, as it was great. This psychological study of police detective Wallander and his daughter's missing soon-to-be father-in-law is set in dark and dreary Sweden. How do those Scandinavian writers use words in such a way that I need a sweater and a sun lamp to read them? *The Troubled Man* was chosen as one of

The New York Times best crime novels of 2011. It is definitely on my best of 2011 list.

Sherry Houston

Currently, I am reading Robert Vivian's Nebraska Book Award winner for Fiction, *Lamb Bright Saviors* (2010). It's an engrossing read as the story fluctuates back and forth between the points of view of different characters. The book centers around an external event where a street preacher ends up on his deathbed, but the way the story is told through different characters gives a rich collection of widely-varying internal events brought on by this experience they all find themselves involved in. The writing does a great job of keeping me coming back for each chapter.

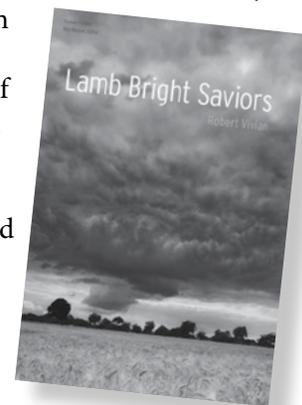
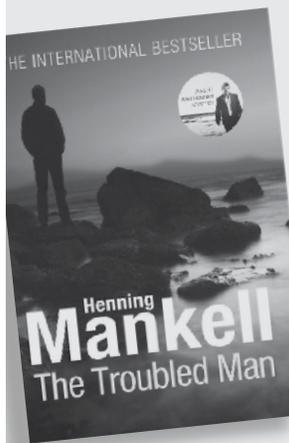
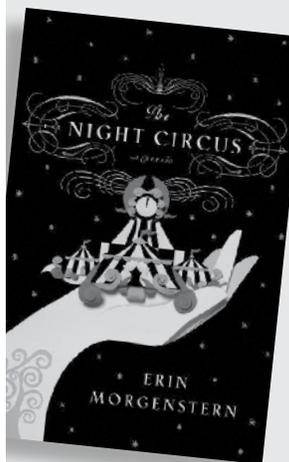
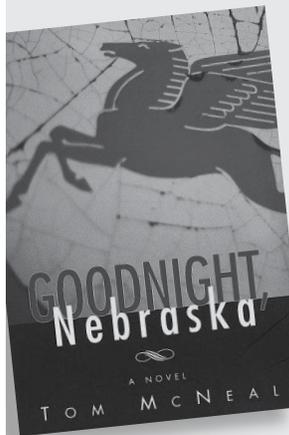
Matt Mason

After quite a search for the most precise translation, I've been reading Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?* (1996) I've been interested for several years now in art as a primary means of communication of the beliefs, desires, and intentions of the community from which it emerges. Tolstoy derides classical training, professionalism, and aesthetic obligation in arts endeavors and instead presents accessibility, universality, and sincerity as the chief components of good art and good artists. I haven't decided quite how I feel about his stance, but it is the first theoretical treatise on the nature and purpose of creative work I've read that casts aspersions on Shakespeare, Beethoven, Dante, Wagner, and Milton all at once.

Ryan Tewell

I read Erin Duffy's *Bond Girl: A Novel* (2012) for an author introduction at the American Library Association Midwinter meeting. *Bond Girl* is Duffy's first book, a fictional account of a young new worker in a bond trading unit of a Wall Street brokerage firm. Duffy has personal experience as a "bond girl" and offers an insider's view of life and work in the high stakes investment world.

Rod Wagner



Review: *Attachments*

by **Rainbow Rowell**

Dutton Adult Publishing, 2011,

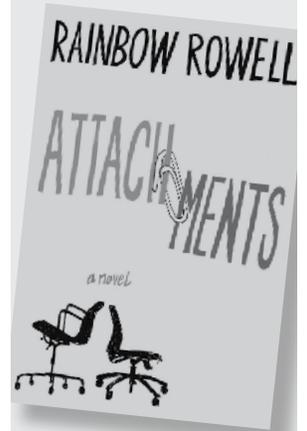
ISBN: 978-0525951988

Readers can rate books on the Internet on sites like Amazon and Barnes and Noble, and *Attachments* by Omaha writer Rainbow Rowell has been getting rave reviews. Considered “chick-lit,” most readers are giving *Attachments* 4- 5 stars. Some of the comments are “adored it, fun read, laughing throughout, one of my favorite books of the year.” Set in the late 1990s, the main character, Lincoln, is an IT guy (computer geek) at a newspaper who begins to read e-mails between

two young women employed by the newspaper. The book alternates between Lincoln’s life and the girls’ e-mails. The story has a sweet quality, but it is also spot-on with the computer scene at the turn of the century. Employers did hire people to read employee e-mail and everyone was concerned about what the year 2000 was going to do to their computers.

Rainbow Rowell is scheduled to speak at the Nebraska Center for the Book’s Nebraska Book Festival on March 31. Read the book and come to the festival to get your book signed, hear the author read, and have the opportunity to ask questions. 

Reviewed by
Sherry Houston



Enter Short Story Contest by February 17

Original short stories by Nebraska authors are currently being accepted for the 2012 Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation’s short story contest. Story length should be 1,000-2,000 words (there is no minimum word requirement for the Intermediate category) and submissions should be written in the wholesome spirit displayed by Bess Streeter Aldrich in her works. To read books by the author to get ideas about content and style see, the Foundation website, www.bessstreeteraldrich.org.

Age categories are Adult, High School, Middle School, and Intermediate School. Cash prizes will be awarded at the annual Spring Banquet of the Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation. The due date for submissions is the author’s birthday, February 17 (postmark date). Send submissions to: Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation, P.O. Box 167, Elmwood, NE 68349. A complete list of rules can be found at <http://www.bessstreeteraldrich.org/contest.html>. 

American Life in Poetry: Column 346

It seems to me that most poems are set in spring or summer, and I was pleased to discover this one by Molly Fisk, a Californian, set in cold midwinter.

Winter Sun

How valuable it is in these short days,
threading through empty maple branches,
the lacy-needled sugar pines.

Its glint off sheets of ice tells the story
of Death’s brightness, her bitter cold.

We can make do with so little, just the hint
of warmth, the slanted light.

The way we stand there, soaking in it,
mittened fingers reaching.

And how carefully we gather what we can
to offer later, in darkness, one body to another.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2010 by Molly Fisk from her most recent book of poetry, *The More Difficult Beauty*, Hip Pocket Press, 2010. Reprinted by permission of Molly Fisk and the publisher. Introduction copyright ©2011 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction’s author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts. 



by **Ted Kooser**,
U.S. Poet Laureate,
2004-2006



The Apollon Debuts with Work Based on Cather Poem

Performing arts newcomers The Apollon recently hosted their first public performances, based on the Willa Cather poem “Prairie Spring,” at Lincoln’s Haymarket Theatre. Emphasizing artistic collaboration across genres and the expansion of arts engagement in Nebraska communities, these performances marked the beginning of a year-long introduction of the company through a series that will take them to various venues in Nebraska. We



Alan Holly (left) as John and Lauren Huston as Ruth perform in *Out of the Lips of Silence*.

Photo by Kim Fogle.

are fortunate to count one of The Apollon’s founding members, Ryan Tewell, among the newer additions to the Nebraska Center for the Book Board of Directors, so we sat down with him to

find out what all the fuss was about.

NCB: I suppose I should begin by asking, who are you and what is this all about?

Tewell: Our company, The Apollon, has grown out of the friendship and support of a small group of artists. Several years ago, four of us—a poet, a chef, a director, and an architect—began a dialogue about our individual disciplines and the state of the arts in our area. We found that we were all troubled by the segmentation we saw in Nebraska’s arts community. The theater artists only had a casual knowledge of what the visual artists were doing. The writers didn’t seem to mix very often with the dancers. Most of the chefs didn’t even consider themselves artists. The disunity was startling.

NCB: Sounds a bit like a high school cafeteria.

Tewell: [laughing] We found it distressing that there were only a handful of arts organizations that seemed to be paying attention to what artists could create if they worked together across the artificial boundaries of artistic

discipline. Can you imagine what an architect, a chef, and an acting troupe might come up with if you put them in a room together? We wanted to know.

NCB: So, you lock a crazy combination of artists in a room together and refuse to let them out until they make something?

Tewell: Not exactly. Our core team has since expanded to seven. When we plan a performance, the seven of us get together to select a theme or idea that will serve as the inspiration for our new experience, and we begin selecting artists who may be able to find their own inspiration from that common point of origin. From there, we create an immersive performance experience – essentially an evening where our theme is expressed through many art forms.

NCB: And “Prairie Spring” was one of those points of origin?

Tewell: Yes. Our Artist Director, Joel Egger, went to grad school at Cal Arts. He’s fond of saying that, when he was stuck in traffic on the 405 Freeway, he started to yearn for the open space of the prairie. Our creation, *Out of the Lips of Silence*, brought together visual artists, culinary artists, theater artists, and a musician to create work inspired by Cather’s poem. The result was a full evening of experiences including a group gallery exhibition, a full plated meal, and a movement piece with live soundtrack—all created by twenty-three Nebraska artists and inspired by nineteen lines of poetry written by one of Nebraska’s most celebrated authors.

NCB: Even the meal was inspired by Cather’s poem?

Tewell: Yes. Our chef drew on the poem’s theme of the changing seasons and prepared meatloaf four ways, each incorporating ingredients that would be seasonally available. It was so good, I still loved it the fifth time I had it!

NCB: Will you be performing again soon?

Tewell: We just started planning the next step in our performance series. We’ll be in Omaha in May. Watch for details and join our movement at <http://apollonomaha.com!> 



UNL Conference Supports Writers

Writers come from all over the country. Some come with “completed” manuscripts in their backpacks; some with pieces on their laptops that they’ve written and rewritten; and some with just the dream of writing—and ideas for stories that need to be told. They are poets and journalists, homemakers, and computer programmers. They all want help. They want published authors to share their experience and help them hone the tools of their craft. They are hungry for ideas on how to polish and fix their writing. They want a roadmap on how to publish, distribute, and market their work. They come to the Nebraska Summer Writers Conference in search of that roadmap.

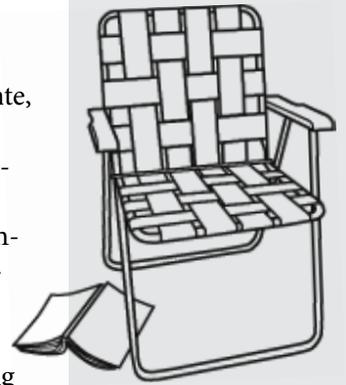
Last summer I was fortunate to attend the Writers Conference weekend workshop, *The Business of Writing: Inside the Publishing Industry*, with Scribner editor Anna deVries and novelist, screenwriter, and legal professional Richard Dooling. I joined a circle of writers in the basement of Andrews Hall on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus, wedged myself into one of those plastic one-armed student chairs, and scanned the flow chart that stretched across the white board spanning the front of the room. I learned that the world of publishing may be changing, with e-books exploding into more than 50% of the market, but there are still defined roles for writers, literary agents, and

editors. We all leaned forward in our chairs, trying to visualize our future place in that flow chart.

In these workshops, we examined why we write. Richard Dooling quoted Charlotte Bronte, “I am going to write because I cannot help it.” and suggested, “If you are frustrated with writing and aren’t making any money from it, just try quitting.” We explored the world of publishing. We shared our sample query letters, reading the pitch to an agent aloud to each other. We worked on how to distinguish between a full-blown plot summary and sketching the big picture for the query letter—envisioning the letter as a “movie trailer” for the book. We picked up hints for branding, like imaginary shelving of our books in a bookstore or library and reading the back cover copy of similar books. We took comfort from the fact that Kathryn Stockett, author of *The Help*, sent forty-five query letters to agents before getting any attention.

If you are wondering if this experience might be just what you need, I suggest signing up for a weekend or week-long workshop. This year, the Nebraska Summer Writers Conference is scheduled for June 9-15. Faculty includes Emily Danforth, Meghan Daum, Kwame Dawes, Dave Madden, Lee Martin, Michelle Tea, and more. For more information see <http://nebraskawriters.unl.edu>. 

by Mary Jo Ryan,
Nebraska Library
Commission



Celebration Honors Nebraska Writing (continued from page 2)

announcement, Starita spoke to us, and he had this to say about literature: “A good story should free each of us to look deep into ourselves and ask two questions – ‘Who are we?’ and ‘What do we believe in?’” This, my friends, is the power of a good book.

Afterwards, I bought his book and had Starita sign it. It simply says, “To Tammy – Best Wishes, Joe Starita.” I’ll take an award-winning author’s best wishes any day as I hope to someday be a published writer myself. I have not yet

read Starita’s book, but I plan to do so in 2012 with my book club, so I can revel in the conversation that will result from our shared literary experience. You can bet, too, that it will reappear in this column in the New Year.

Ed. Note: This guest editorial is taken from a column in the Norfolk Daily News: “Reading Wright” by Tammy Marshall Wright. Wright can be contacted at senoratammywright@hotmail.com. 



Focusing on Cather's Readers, Past and Present

by Charles
Johanningsmeier,
University of
Nebraska at
Omaha

In December 1938, a 15-year-old girl named Jean Keppy Winslow drove across Nebraska with her mother and stepfather, enroute from their home in Denver to her grandparents' house near Ann Arbor, Michigan. Although at that time she had no idea who Willa Cather was, Cather would soon be involved in a very interesting episode in this teenager's life, beginning with her grandmother's recommendation just 6 months later that she read *My Ántonia*. Eventually, by a strange turn of events, this reading experience would lead Jean, 71 years later, to reread *My Ántonia*, seek out and read other Cather works, and be interviewed by me about her reading and her life.

How—and why—did these recent events transpire? In large part, the answers to these questions have to do with my recent research project of investigating Cather's readers from 1900 up to her death in 1947. When most people think of Cather's "readers" during this time, they usually think of her intellectual friends and acquaintances, professional reviewers, or other famous writers. In contrast, I am most interested in understanding how Cather and her works have affected a broader group of less formally educated, less "trained" readers. To begin doing just that, in the fall of 2007 I started tracking down examples of Cather's fan mail. I eventually found over two hundred such letters, and one of them was written by Jean Keppy Winslow on June 12, 1939. Recently, she—now Jean Spero—located the listing for her letter online at UNL's Archives and Special Collections and contacted the staff there; since that time I have had numerous telephone conversations with her. Two other very interesting letters are those forwarded to me by staff members of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial, who, aware of my interest in this type of reader, provided copies of letters to Cather dated 2005 and 2009, respectively. All three of these letters illuminate aspects of Cather's works that have seldom before been examined, but which I believe deserve serious consideration.

Why should anyone be interested in such letters? After all, they rarely contain what most academics would regard as "sophisticated" interpretations of Cather's works. Yet, to me, they do this and much more. Indeed, I believe they add

a whole new dimension to Cather studies and represent a new direction that I believe Cather scholars would do well to pursue in the future: how Cather's works have impacted the world in various ways, one reader at a time. . . . The actual readers' responses contained in these letters can, I believe, lead educators and others to acknowledge that the "meaning" and "significance" of Cather's short stories and novels are created not only by Cather, who wrote the words in them, or by well-trained academics, but also by less formally trained readers interacting with these texts in their own ways. . . .

Reading Willa Cather's works—both in 1939 and during the past few years—clearly has had an impact on Jean Spero's life. Jean, though, is not alone in this regard. For example, only a few years ago a Californian named "Tom" (not his real name) brought a postcard with him from the Musée d'Orsay in Paris when he visited Red Cloud. On one side of this postcard is a reproduction of Van Gogh's "La nuit étoilée, Arles" (1888), and on the other his message to Cather; "Tom" slipped it inside the secretary in the foyer of Cather's childhood home, where it remained hidden until a staff member found it in the summer of 2009. . . . And four years earlier, in November 2005, a young woman named "Mary" (again, not her real name), typed a lengthy letter to Cather that detailed how and why she had responded so positively to the character of Ántonia Shimerda. . . .

What is clear to me from the letters written by Jean, "Tom," and "Mary" is that readers wrote (and continue to write) to Cather not necessarily to "touch fame" or to obtain a signed response. What they wanted—and want—most was/is to connect to the author of stories that had/have moved them deeply. Their letters are powerful reminders that to most readers, a literary text represents the character and personality of its author, and that they view reading a fictional text as a way to learn from other people's mistakes, as well as an opportunity to meet role models they might wish to emulate. As we teach students and others about the "meaning" of Cather's works, I believe we would do well to remember this, as Cather did. Listening to such voices today exposes us to interesting, alternative interpre-

(continued on page 11)

Photo courtesy of
Willa Cather Pioneer
Memorial Collection,
Nebraska State Historical
Society



Focusing on Cather's Readers, Past and Present (continued from page 10)

tations of Cather's works, ones grounded in readers' personal, lived experiences rather than in knowledge of artistic movements, prevailing ideologies, and so forth. Doing so also, I would suggest, gives us a better idea of the broader impact of Cather's texts on thousands, if not

millions, of readers, past and present, and why they remain so popular.

Ed. Note: This piece was excerpted and adapted from the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review*, Spring 2011 

Remnants of a Reading Life, part two

*M*y UNO teaching career ends in August 2012. What to do with a teaching library accumulated in Zimbabwe, Los Angeles, and Omaha housed in my 7.8-by-15-foot campus of-fice—my sixth campus habitation at UNO?

When hired in 1974 I shared an office with Mike Tate, who was then a temporary appointment; then I got my own office. As department chair I occupied an office with a window. Following this brief administrative stint, I persuaded the university to give me two adjoining offices and I paid for tearing down the separating wall. The department temporarily moved to the damp Engineering Building, causing some books to mildew (see George Orwell's description of mildewed books in *Burmese Days*). Then back to my present remodeled, asbestos-free 117-square-foot space.

During my thirty-eight years at UNO my undergraduate offerings included English History, British Empire and Commonwealth, African, Southeast Asia, and Historical Research. Teaching World Civilizations after 1981 dramatically changed what we taught. Publishers give complementary copies to induce sales. My texts and readers overflowed into the hallway. I will keep those containing an acknowledgement to me—the \$50 to \$400 honoraria have long since gone to the children's shoes.

The UNO History Department's Charles and Mary Caldwell Martin Seminar room contains journals subscribed to in the past and unloaded by departing faculty. The haphazard collection, infrequently used but well dusted, and left in

the dust by JSTOR. Retirees leave their books in the hallway, on tables, in boxes awaiting the next Phi Alpha Theta fundraiser book and bake sale. Students do not buy World Civ texts. Most texts are destined for the shredder.

There are 7,000 volumes in my basement. I envision a grandiose gesture to close my UNO career, an exhibit in the UNO Dr. C.C. and Mabel L. Criss Library's H. Don and Connie J. Osborne Family Gallery. Glass cases filled with candles of intellect will display incunabula, leaf books, Nebraska Jewish cookbooks, Burmese cookbooks, Omaha commercial college and taxi-dermy educational artifacts, Tillie Olson, Wright Morris, Doris Lessing, novels on academia, Oak Knoll Books on Books, Cliff Notes, library catalogs, association copies, books on how to study history—subjects studied, taught, and published. UNO's library will receive the three incunabula.

I have 300 Oak Knoll Books on Books Catalogues. Perhaps John Cole, director of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, the recent beneficiary of a festschrift, *Historical Essays in Honor of John C. Cole* (2011), would be interested in them.

A 2002 New Yorker cartoon character exclaimed on his deathbed, "I should have bought more crap." I continue to purchase several books a month, real ink on paper. Good habits do not retire.

Ed Note: JSTOR is a digital archive of academic journals. 

by Oliver B. Pollak,
University of
Nebraska at Omaha



The NCB News

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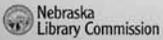
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Calendar of Events:



View the complete
Nebraska Literary
Calendar at
centerforthebook.
nebraska.gov/get_
involved/calendar.html

- Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation Birthday Open House**..... February 18..... Elmwood
Contact: Teresa Lorensen, 402-994-3855, tlorensen@windstream.net,
www.bessstreeteraldrich.org/events.html
- Neihardt Foundation Sunday at the Museum: Essayist David Martin** March 11 Bancroft
Contact: 402-648-3388, 888-777-4667, neihardt@gpcom.net, www.neihardtcenter.org
- “Making of the Great Plains” Symposium** March 28-30 Lincoln
Contact: UNL Great Plains Museum, www.unl.edu/plains/seminars/2012_Symposium/home.shtml
- Nebraska Book Festival**..... March 31 Lincoln
Contact: Matt Mason, 402-453-5711, mtmason@gmail.com,
<http://bookfestival.nebraska.gov>, www.facebook.com/NebraskaBookFestival
- National Poetry Month** April..... Nationwide
Contact: www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/94
- 28th Annual Adult Spelling Bee**..... April 10..... Lincoln
Contact: Nebraska Literary Heritage Association, Lincoln City Libraries,
402- 441-8516, m.mcgowan@lincolnlibraries.org, www.foundationforlcl.org/nlha.htm
- Visiting Writers Series: Poet George Bilgere**..... April 11..... Norfolk
Contact: Neil Harrison, 402-844-7348, neil@northeast.edu
- Wine, Writers & Song Festival** April 13-15..... Brownville
Contact: www.brownville-ne.com/main.ta?p=1,3
- Bess Streeter Aldrich Foundation Spring Banquet** April 14..... Elmwood
Contact: Teresa Lorensen, 402-994-3855, tlorensen@windstream.net,
www.bessstreeteraldrich.org/events.html
- 30th Annual Neihardt Spring Conference**
“The World during Neihardt’s Most Productive Years: 1900-1950” April 28..... Bancroft
Contact: 402-648-3388, 888-777-4667, neihardt@gpcom.net,
www.neihardtcenter.org/Events.html#Spring
- 57th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference** “Willa Cather, Poet: Making Herself Born” May 31-June 2 . Red Cloud
Contact: Willa Cather Foundation, 866-731-7304,
www.WillaCather.org/conferences/spring-conference
- Story Catcher 2012 Summer Writer’s Workshop and Festival** May 30-June 2 . Chadron
Contact: Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, <http://www.storycatcherworkshop.com>

