Author

William Stafford was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, in 1914, and died at his home in Lake Oswego, in 1993, at the age of 79. Between 1960 and 1993, William Stafford wrote more than 60 published collections of poetry and prose, including 12 full-length books of poems. Stafford’s first book of poetry, West of Your City, was published in 1960 when he was 46 years old. His second, Traveling Through the Dark, won the National Book Award in 1963. All but one of his books was written in Oregon.

William Stafford was also an influential and beloved teacher of writing. He served as Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (the post now known as United States Poet Laureate) during 1970-71 and as Poet Laureate of Oregon from 1975 through 1989. In 1948, Stafford joined the faculty of Lewis & Clark College, where he taught until his retirement in 1980.

Stafford grew up during the Great Depression in central and southwest Kansas, with an appreciation for nature, the Great Plains, and books. As a pacifist and conscientious objector during World War II, Stafford did alternative service in civilian work camps in Arkansas, California and Illinois. After the war, Stafford worked for the Church World Service relief organization, taught high school and finished his master's degree in English at the University of Kansas. His master’s thesis, a memoir of his wartime experience in the civilian work camps, was published as Down in My Heart in 1947 and is still in print from Oregon State University Press. In 1948, Stafford joined the faculty of Lewis & Clark College, where he taught until his retirement in 1980.

Stafford's poems tend to be short and deceptively simple. His plain-spoken style invites readers into the poems, which often take unexpected turns toward discovery. His poems are at once quiet and tough-minded, clear and mysterious, open-hearted and sly, serious and funny, witty and down-to-earth. While grounded in day-to-day life and local experience, they also touch on universal concerns, from war and peace to the tension between individual freedom and social responsibility.

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