

Originally published in *The Portland Review*, Sunday, May 27, 2007

Natural enchantments rule in Oregon poetry by B.T. Shaw

The first poem in "*Deer Drink the Moon: Poems of Oregon*," an anthology edited by Liz Nakazawa, is "*Waiting by the Sea*" by William Stafford. Built on an extended metaphor, the poem ends like this:

Making the day expand in your heart and return,
you play a limited part in whatever life is,
practicing for that great gift when enlightenment
comes, that long instant when the tide
calls your name.

Fittingly, "*Waiting by the Sea*" opens a section of poems inspired by the Coast Range. In a larger sense, however, the poem is a nod to the influence Stafford and his life's work continue to exert on the Pacific Northwest's writing community 14 years after his "long instant" began.

Although he died in 1993, Stafford is, in a certain respect, responsible for "*Deer Drink the Moon*." A longtime freelance writer, editor and instructor, Nakazawa said the idea for the book was born at the 2005 Stafford Birthday Celebration reading at the Multnomah County Central Library.

"There I heard a poem set at the coast, followed by another poem set in the Blue Mountains," Nakazawa said. "I thought of putting together an anthology of poems that reflect the mosaic of our state's geography, climate, flora and fauna, organized thematically into seven of the eco-regions of Oregon."

And she did.

A frequent audience member at poetry readings, Nakazawa approached local poets and asked them to submit "place poems" for consideration. She then spread the word across the state and eventually selected 92 poems from 33 poets, including two from Stafford and three from his son, poet and essayist Kim Stafford.

"I was interested in poetry that reflected the 'spirit of place,'" she said.

Once she'd gathered the majority of the manuscript, Nakazawa took it to Portland State University's Ooligan Press. The resulting book, released in April, is 6-by-9 inches, small enough to tuck into a daypack.

Which is good because the best settings for these poems may be their native environs. Most (though not all) are first-person narratives and lyrics relying (as should be expected from the book's title) on natural imagery. Read in a single sitting, the poems tend to blend and blur — all light, wind and water, trees and birds, buckets of rain.

Just as one wouldn't try to see the whole state in a day, the poems are best read a few at a time. Individually, they are like postcards. Wish you were here, the best seem to say, and you may find yourself wishing to visit. Before long. Before the tide comes in.

Night Beach (from "*Deer Drink the Moon*")

We can all fit in one car and the dogs, bring them. They run for the waves, we shuffle the edges. We all go down in darkness shivering.

I'm taking this bone wind home for a long lean back by the fire.

Deer Drink the Moon: Poems of Oregon is published by Ooligan Press. For more information please visit our website, at www.ooliganpress.pdx.edu