

Thoughts on aging and Oscar Mayer

Linda Barr Batdorf
Staff Writer

"Whether seventy or sixteen, there is in every being's heart a love of wonder; the sweet amazement at the stars and starlike things and thoughts; the undaunted challenge of events, the unfailing childlike appetite for what comes next, and the joy in the game of life."

Samuel Ullman, 1984

Growing older isn't such a disagreeable deal. It certainly beats the alternative.

I will never forget the sight of my eighty year-old grandmother walking up to me, sternly wagging her finger in my face for a moment before exploding into a stirring rendition of, "Oh-h-h... I wish I were an Oscar Mayer Wiener..."

Grandma knew the secret. Grandma never grew old.

I would like to think that some of her sparkle and joy of living extended down my way. After all, Grandma knew well the misery that life could dish out, but she never chose to dwell on it. Instead, she focused on her steadfast faith and that "joy in the game of life."

Grandma left a legacy that laughter, especially laughter directed at ourselves, is the best fountain of youth around. Besides, people who take life too seriously are not much fun to be around. Studies show that we don't usually have to be around them too long anyway, because they "serious" themselves to death.

You've seen them. "No way, can't go to the show with you and the kids, I've got a report and a heart attack to work on." Or "Go

to the park? Are you kidding? I have my nails to do and besides, I'm busy developing a bad case of ulcerative colitis..."

Some jerks even make fun of those who are older than they, as if being long lived isn't a goal we all hope to attain.

Growing older is a curious thing. How we react to growing older is even more interesting. Remember when you were eight and just about everything seemed like a game or a secret spy mission? What's wrong with doing that now that we are adults? Why not pretend that the loathsome test in chemistry is just a fun game of Aggravation? Why not make that hurried commute from school to work and home again an exciting spy and snoop mission like you used to?

Where do we put that childlike love of wonder, anyway? Did we send it off in a manila envelope to the IRS, or did it disappear with that overdue bill from the electric company? Have we let the headaches, the broken-down car and responsibilities of growing older turn us into the kind of adults we loathed and avoided as children?

As I write this column, I fight off the notion that I am growing older, that I am past my prime, that I am neither what I used to be nor a spring chicken anymore. By the time this article hits print

I will have turned forty years old.

Now I am perfectly aware that no one really gives a rip how old anyone else is -- generally speaking. My age or your age or the age of the checker down at Safeway is of no real import in the grand scheme of things.

But it is often the case that whenever one of us is looking at a birthday that changes the first digit of our chronological age, for some reason, we can find that numeric adjustment disturbing.

My six year-old son, Andy must have overheard me commiserating about my pending digit

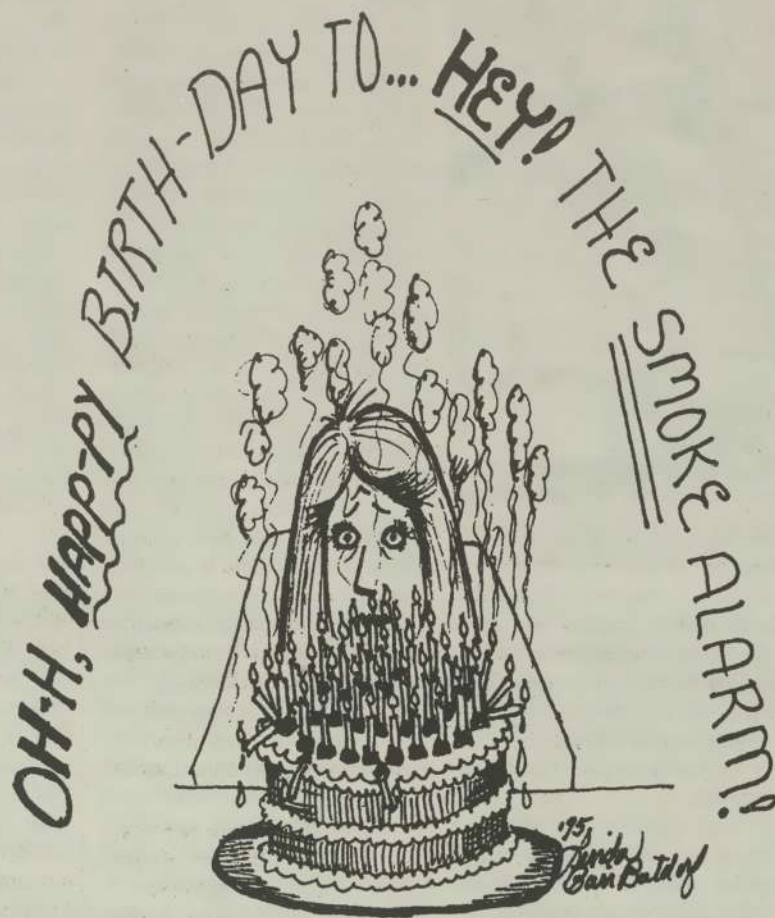
change and remarked excitedly, "Don't worry Mom, you look like you're in your thirties!"

Whew.

I have decided to make this birthday the best one yet, because in many ways, it simply signifies a new beginning.

This year, when the candles are blown out and jokes about dentures and Depends subside, maybe we will just start singing that old Oscar Mayer tune.

Jack Benny said it best, "Age is strictly a case of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."



Steven Katz reads fiction at Clackamas

Writer of 16 novels including *Wier & Pouce*, *Florry of Washington Heights* and his newest, *Swanny's Ways*, visits

Vicki Welch
Copy Editor

Steven Katz, author of "Wier & Pouce" and "Florry of Washington Heights", visited Clackamas last Friday, from noon to 1 p.m., to read part of his new book "Swanny's Ways", which is the last book in his current trilogy.

"More credibility should be given to the experiments of three-year-olds. I tried a chicken in a rain barrel and learned it couldn't swim. It died instead, and that gave me my first taste of megalomaniacal ecstasy, which was one of my first reasons for becoming a novelist. Characters are quite like chickens; you can kill them for your sport fry them if they refuse to come home to roost."

When talking about his new novel, Katz remarked "What I'm trying to do is write a narrative." He then read a part of "Swanny's Ways", "Wine", which is set in New York City. This is the story of a man, Wil-

liam "Swanny" Swanson, who is trying to rectify the past, something Katz thinks is incredibly interesting.

Katz has considered himself an author since high school. He has written 16 books between 1962 and 1995. He has been published by several publishing companies including Sun and Moon Press, Bamberger Books and Random House.

"In my experience it doesn't get any easier to write; if anything, it gets harder.... Getting my new novel right is the most difficult thing I have ever done. I tend to ask more questions of my work, and want more from it. I suppose there is an advantage in this, that if ever I felt I'd written a perfect work, I might stop and what keeps the writer alive, what keeps the culture alive, is the continual reframing and telling of the stories. Perhaps everything I do as a writer is by way of figuring out in what language to atone for once drowning the Hardens' chicken."

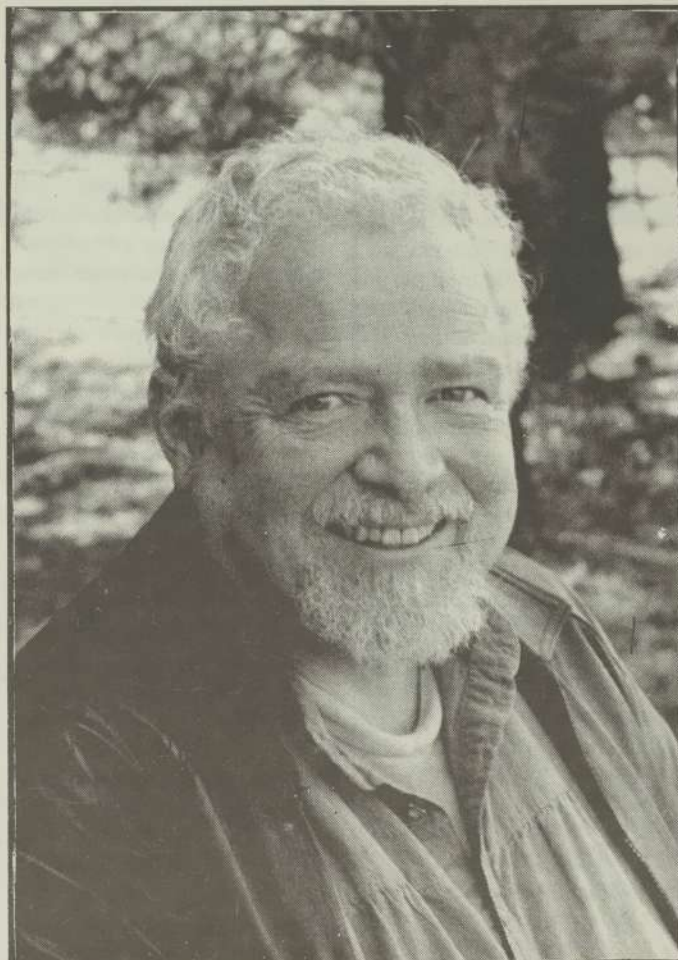


photo by Lora Wahrgren

Authors at CCC get published

Dan Anderson
Staff Writer

Clackamas now boasts five faculty members who have contributed to the body of modern literature in prose, poetry and drama.

Craig Lesley, currently on sabbatical supporting his latest offering "The Sky Fisherman," has published three novels. Lesley's works focus on small-town rural life, the Native American experience and real-life images. He has also compiled and edited two compilations of other authors' work, most notably "Talking Leaves," a collection of Native American legends given him directly from people living on Oregon reservations.

The sign outside writing instructor Diane Averill's office reads: "Do you have enough poetry in your life?" If anyone has enough, Averill does; she has published one complete collection of poems entitled "Branches Doubled Over with Fruit," and a smaller chapbook called "Turtle Sky." Averill offers this advice to student writers: "It's good for beginning writers to familiarize themselves with all kinds of writing, not just one type. It's important to read, read, read and write, write, write."

Actress, playwright and part-time instructor Susan Mach has produced two full-length plays. The first, titled "Monograms," a kind of biography of 1920's personality Hazel Hall, was nominated for a Grammy for best off-broadway play. In April, an off-Broadway theatre will produce "Monograms" for a New York audience. Her second play will show in Boston, in November.

Jim Grabbil has become a finalist for the Oregon Book Award this year for his work of nonfiction, "Through the Green Fire." Grabbil also has a collection of poems published.

Tim Schell, a native of the Northwest, has written many short stories. They have been published in several publications, including "Discovery," "Tokyo Journal," "Signature" and "Sports Illustrated." He was also the Fiction Editor of "Hayden's Fairy Revue."

WANT MORE?

If you're smart enough to know marketing is where the money is and environmental solutions are a hot commodity, then join our team. \$5K - \$10K+++ / month. No joke. Offices in Portland, Salem, Eugene. We train. For interview: (503) 363-8342