

Poet rings writing bell for Clackamas students

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Staff Writer

Poet Marvin Bell's visit to Clackamas quickly turned from a traditional reading into a discussion about his life, meaning of specific poems, and advice for writing poetry.

"I'm going to dogpaddle along, read a few poems, and then we'll see what questions you have," he greeted students. He said he borrowed the term dogpaddling from late Oregon poet William Stafford, with whom he worked. He also used Stafford's definition of poetry to explain where he gets ideas: poetry is what happens when you pay special attention to words.

Bell's work with language has produced nine books of poetry.

Bell discussed in depth the poem he wrote for his wife, "To Dorothy."

"I wanted to write a poem that wasn't like all the other love poems in the world, so I started with 'You are not beautiful, exactly.' And when you

start with a line like that, you damn well better write a second line."

He also discussed his "Dead Man" poems. He has written two books of poetry from the perspective of the Dead Man. "The dead man isn't me," he clarified. "He just knows a lot about me."

After learning that many students present were in writing or poetry classes, Bell dispensed a lot of advice.

"You can write about anything.

It doesn't matter what (subject) you start with," Bell said. "It's the quality of attention you pay to it."

"Here's the thing," he said, quoting a Spanish proverb. "People possess four things at

sea that are no good at sea: anchor, rudder, oars, and a fear of going down." When you write, he explained, you should let go of a desire to control.

"My feeling about writers,"

he said simply, "is that they're people who can't stand not to write." Bell stressed doing what makes one happy. "Everybody needs something that they can talk to themselves about. Whether it's writing or

gardening or long distance running, everybody needs something that they would do whether someone paid them or not."

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ELISABETH MEYER / Clackamas Print

Ryan Scariano, a long-time Marvin Bell fan and CCC student, gets his copy of the book "Night Works" signed.

Poet's corner

"To Dorothy"
By Marvin Bell

You are not beautiful, exactly.
You are beautiful in exactly.
You let a weed grow by the mulberry
And a mulberry grow by the house.
So close, in the personal quiet,
Of a windy night, it brushes the wall
and sweeps away the day till we sleep.

A child said it, and it seemed true:
"Things lost are all equal."
But it isn't true. If I lost you,
The air wouldn't move, nor the tree grow.
Someone would pull the weed, my flower.
The quiet wouldn't be yours. If I lost you
I'd have to ask the grass to let me sleep.

Marvin Bell at a glance

- Born in New York City in August of 1937.
- Lives in Iowa City, Iowa, and Port Townsend, Washington.
- Iowa made him its first Poet Laureate in 2000.
- He is the author of fifteen books, including "The Book of the Dead Man," "A Marvin Bell Reader," and "A Probable Volume of Dreams" (winner of the Lamont Award.)
- Currently teaches for the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa.

Information compiled from http://www.74thstreet.com/marvin_article.html



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