

the mid-1990s in Coboway, a fictional Oregon town modeled on Astoria. (See the Bookmonger's review on page 19.)

The Aunt Dilly character in "Forty Ways" is based on the Hummasti's own aunt, Helmi Peterson, whom Neil cared for during her decline. Arnie, who lived in Bellingham, Wash., at the time, occasionally drove south to help his brother.

"I can tell you that the representation of the aunt is very accurate," Arnie said, adding that many of the novel's lines are directly from his aunt's mouth, and many incidents are based on Neil's experiences as a caregiver. "If you have a relative with dementia, or you know someone who is, I think there would be many moments of recognition in this book."

Arnie's brother had a knack for capturing the improbable-seeming reality of, say, precocious children and the politics of secondary education. A lover of literature and baseball, Neil was a scholar, wordsmith and Renaissance man who would seize on a subject or project and be unable let it go, Arnie said.

"Once he got involved in something, he went in wholeheartedly, then that became almost an obsession," Arnie said. "He just went full force into whatever he decided to look into."

### A literary life

Laura Clark, a Jewell resident who was one Neil's students in the 1980s and '90s, isn't at all surprised her teacher wrote novels in his spare time. "Other than teaching, I'm pretty sure that was his main thing," she said.

Susan Wilcoxon, a colleague of Neil's who taught English at Jewell before and after him, remembers Hummasti as a good writer, but not one who talked about it often. Over the years, Neil published short stories and other works in various magazines and literary reviews.

Wilcoxon remembers Neil making weekend trips to Portland. "He haunted Powell's (City of Books)," she said.

As a teacher, Neil introduced students to Shakespeare, Hemingway and Dickens, and guided students to find their voice in his creative writing classes.

"He was a favorite of ours," Clark said. "A group of us usually took an elective in his class because it was so fun."

Neil would take his students on annual overnight field trips to Ashland to catch a few plays at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

"Everything we could take from him,



**A Jewell School staff photo from 1989-90. Neil Hummasti is pictured second row, second-to-last column.**

Arnie Hummasti



**Neil Hummasti in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) with his aunt, Helmi Peterson, upon whom the character of Dilly in Hummasti's novel 'Forty Ways to Square a Circle' is based.**

we did, if we had a chance to take it," Clark said.



Arnie Hummasti

**Teacher and posthumous author Neil Hummasti.**

When he needed to be, Neil was a strict disciplinarian, but one who wanted all of his students to succeed. "We had a couple knuckleheads in our class, and he was able to keep them in line, so to speak, without being mean," Clark said. "He was just a very kind man."

Neil Hummasti died at age 61 and is buried in Svensen Pioneer Cemetery, from which Arnie's press takes its name. Now, nearly eight years after his death, this undiscovered author is earning some



Arnie Hummasti

**A photo of Neil Hummasti, left, and his older brother, Arnie, taken shortly before Neil's death.**

measure of local literary recognition.

"I just think he was a talent, and I just think that his writing deserves broader exposure," Arnie said. "He just really didn't have a chance before he died to promote (his books), or even get them published."

"I See London, I See France..." and "Forty Ways to Square a Circle" are available in Astoria at Lucy's Books, Godfather's Books, Finn Ware and RiverSea Gallery, as well as at bookstores in Seaside, Cannon Beach and Manzanita. The Astoria Library also has copies in circulation. For more information, visit [neilhummasti.com](http://neilhummasti.com). 