

Gleaning wisdom, advice from interviews

Two Northwest writers who have spent their careers engaged not only in their own literary pursuits but also in encouraging and sharing the work of others have come out recently with books drawn from interviews they've conducted with writers and others over the years.

Despite that commonality, the books are significantly different from one another.

"American Prophets" is a meaty paperback that contains transcripts of 16 lengthy interviews with poets, thought leaders and "technicians of the sacred."

Paul Nelson selected these from the scores of interviews he conducted over a quarter-century from his studio in Auburn, Wash., for a syndicated radio public affairs program that ran in 18 markets throughout the Pacific Northwest.

As a poet and a bioregionalist, Nelson has long been interested in exploring how people are responding to these times of what he calls "ecological crisis and

THIS WEEK'S BOOKS

American Prophets

By Paul Nelson

Seattle Poetics Lab

306 pp

\$25

Writers Unblocked

By E.C. Murray

The Writers Connection

64 pp

\$6.99

end-stage empire."

Nelson puts his subjects at ease with affability, personal candor and clear interest in their work, whether discussing censorship with Beat poet Allen Ginsberg or morphogenetics with Cambridge-trained biologist Rupert Sheldrake. He delves into the pain of 9/11 and the facilitation of energy with Wiccan high priestess Phyllis Currott, and he talks with Wanda Coleman about how she went from writing soap operas to creating jazz son-

nets, and learned to channel her rage about racism and inequity.

These interviews offer an interesting look back at our recent past. Nelson quotes one of his guests who describes the time as "after the death of the old gods and before the birth of the new."

The topics that Nelson and his guests tackle have not been solved in the years since those interviews were conducted; rather, many of the issues have become exacerbated since then, making the book title unfortunately apt. "American Prophets" provides tremendous grist for reflection.

The other book we're looking at this week draws from past interviews with authors that originally appeared in the free Writers Connection e-newsletter, published by Puget Sound-based writer E.C. Murray.

Murray describes "Writers Unblocked" as a tiny book, but she packs its three-score pages with advice from 30 writers from around the Pacific Northwest.

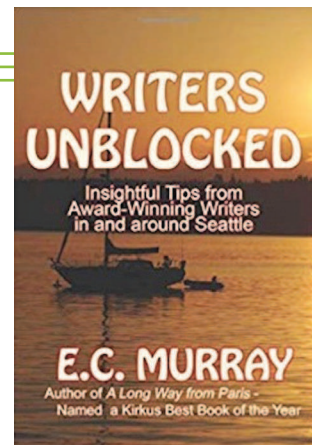
It's uncanny how many of these authors feel compelled to deliver their advice via triple-wallop: "Read, read, read," or "Write, write, write," and "Persist, persist, persist."

Beyond that, the writers share additional anecdotes about what works for them individually. Maybe it's an MFA program or a writer's group, maybe it's the inelegant but matter-of-fact directive to "Keep your butt in the chair," or maybe it's advice to adopt a dead mentor (that one comes from Seattle poet Susan Rich).

Montana-based author Jamie Ford reminds us to take joy in the creative act: "Learning to write is like being handed a box of a million crayons. Don't be afraid to try new colors."

"Writers Unblocked" is a gift of encouragement.

The BookMonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.



The Writers Connection
The cover of 'Writers Unblocked' by E.C. Murray.



Seattle Poetics Lab
The cover of 'American Prophets' by Paul Nelson.





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Last Week's Crossword Answers

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This Week's Crossword Answers

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