



Submitted photo

'Wild Honey, Tough Salt,' the latest book by Oregon Poet Laureate Kim Stafford, will be unveiled in Astoria on Tuesday, April 23. It will be on sale at the event and on amazon.com.

'WILD HONEY, TOUGH SALT,' ON THE MENU AT KALA

The Earth Day events over two days conclude with a book launch of Kim Stafford's poetry called "Wild Honey, Tough Salt."

The free event is open to the public. It will begin 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 23, at KALA, 1017 Marine Drive, Astoria.

Even when speaking by telephone, his excitement is palpable.

His father, William Stafford, also Oregon poet laureate, died in 1993. He had named his son as literary executor, a job the younger Stafford embraced.

"He has published 15 books since he died!" Kim Stafford said. "My own work has languished a bit ..."

Four sections in his new work address buoyant living, war and peace, the Earth and family reflections in poems penned in the last 20 years.

"Tough Salt" in the title references what he calls "heavy-duty" reactions to torture and child soldiers. Works in a lighter section savor the way poetry is celebrated on Scottish 5-pound and Mexican 100-peso banknotes.

Award-winning poet Pattian Rogers describes the collection as "poems of quest, reconciliation and joy, offering the reader enlightening variations on the essence of heart and self in communion."

Another poet, Naomi Shihab Nye, notes his words "shimmer with breathtaking leaps and humble wisdom." Stafford says today's best writers counter what he labels "false advertising" and "fake journalism."

"The poets are trying to talk back to it," he said. "That's what I am encouraging and I instill in my students. Poetry is trying to understand the meaning, the story behind the story, the other half of the balance sheet."

He seeks national healing during what he calls "this confounding epoch" through post-election stanzas with titles like "Practicing the Complex Yes" and "Champion the Enemy's Need."

Rather than dwelling on what caused the 2016 presidential choice and what has followed, Stafford chooses to look forward with a "sliver of hope."

"Let's find common ground, heal our divisions and work together, not add to the polarization," he said.

One verse reads:

"We have not done enough to spare our country this avalanche of foolishness — not by word or heroic act, sufficient witness at the fulcrum to raise our state of union that lies in the gutter."

Dorband, a writer and photographer, is known for chronicling the Rogue River; McClure is a librarian and musician; and Banyas is a writer and choreographer.

A "Forest Visions" contemporary art exhibit is on display at the Royal Nebeker Art Gallery, 1799 Lexington Ave. through Thursday, May 9. It features images by Astoria photographer Robert Adams, art by painters Kim Osgood, Laura Ross-Paul, Michael Brophy and Rita Robillard and sculptor Lee Imonen.

It is supported by donations from foundations and the Clatsop County Cultural Coalition, which distributes money from the Oregon Cultural Trust. Its mission is to examine issues like forest management and climate change, plus regional and historical themes "grounded by art, science and storytelling."

Banyas moved to Astoria from Portland four years ago. Her activism was ignited by the treatment of Native Americans protesting a pipeline at Standing Rock in North Dakota, and threats to water rights in the West.

"There is a groundswell about this, because it's not just climate change," she said. "It is global economics. It's people wanting to reclaim their territory from the corporations that abuse the landscape and the people."

She lamented divisive argument. "People put it as 'Them vs. Us.' The environmentalist vs. the logger ... It's a big and broader story — we need to get that back, remember who we are as a people, and adopt a protectionist spirit."

The Staffords

The environment has been a cornerstone of Stafford's career. Now 69, he has taught at Lewis and Clark College in Portland since 1979. He helped found the Fishtrap Writers Gathering in the Willowa Mountains and has led private workshops in Italy, Scotland and the landlocked Asian nation of Bhutan.

His father published 65 books and took his four children through stints in Oregon, Iowa, Indiana, California and Alaska. He was named poetry consultant to the Library of Congress in 1970, a



DAN KVITKA

'Blue Alpine Stump,' an oil on canvas by Portland artist Kim Osgood, features in the 'Forest Visions' exhibit at Clatsop Community College. Other examples of Osgood's work include two acrylics on panels, 'Endless Possibilities' and 'Belonging Here.'

'FOREST VISIONS' SCHEDULE

Events begin with an 8:30 a.m. opening ceremony at Clatsop Community College on Monday, April 22, featuring ceramicist Richard Rowland and poet Nancy Cook. Members of the Chinook Nation are expected to participate.

Stafford will lead opportunities for Clatsop students to learn and demonstrate creative practices between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.

He and the thoughts of photographer Robert Adams will be featured in a "Talk Poetry, Talk Forests" conversation at the gallery 6 p.m. Monday, April 22; Roger Dorband and Susan Banyas will lead.

Tuesday's schedule will see Stafford shift to the Astoria Library from 10 a.m. to noon for a creative writing session open to anyone. A similar event assisted by members of the Writer's Guild of Astoria will be held for students at Astoria High School during the afternoon.

The two days culminate in a book release 7 p.m. at KALA in downtown Astoria where Stafford will unveil his new poetry collection, "Wild Honey, Tough Salt," and read excerpts. (See related story.)

ABOUT THE WRITER'S GUILD

Guild members call themselves, "a group of writers in Astoria committed to strengthening the larger community through the power of the written word."

While encouraging adult writers, it seeks to enhance literacy in North Coast schools and the Tongue Point Job Corps Center, as well as at-risk youth.

The nonprofit group is led by founder-president, Marianne Monson, author of 11 books for children and adults with an emphasis on women's history.

Its calendar of events include open-mic sessions for writers to read their work aloud, a writing lab and open writing "lounge" sessions. It also stages a literary costume ball in November.

For details, log on to www.thewritersguild.org or email info@thewritersguild.org.

His 313-page thesis on a 14th-Century English work, "The Pearl" earned him a doctorate from the University of Oregon in 1979, though his advisor reportedly labeled it "turgid prose."

Stafford laughs when reminded of the critique. "Maybe poetry is my penance? It's short, clean and clear!"

In 1992, after collecting material during an oral history project in Florence, he published "Wind on the Waves," 52 stories celebrating life on the Oregon Coast, including a character who sets off from Astoria.

A critic called his account of his brother's 1988 suicide, "100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do," as a narrative where "the writer

reaches back through the difficult end to grasp the beautiful beginning, like pulling a venomous serpent inside out." It was named as one of The Oregonian's top 10 Northwest books of 2012.

'Sing in your own voice'

Marianne Monson leads the Writers Guild in Astoria whose members are helping with workshops. She labeled the Staffords "pillars of the Oregon literary tradition."

"We're thrilled to be able to offer this experience to young writers, as well as local authors who will have the opportunity to listen to Kim read his work and share insights on the craft," she said.

In a 2011 interview with High Country News, the Western states' environmental and cultural newspaper, Stafford offered a deeper glimpse into the therapy of writing. "Writing is a way to go beyond what you know in the direction of what you need."

His website kim-stafford.com offers a plea to "listen eloquently" to seek common ground.

"If communication is the fundamental alternative to violence and injustice, what is the work of each voice among us?" it states.

He noted, "The problems of our time are political, ecological, economic — but the solutions are cultural."

"I focus on things that we do agree on, In Astoria, I want to save the forest, but I like loggers, too."

He quotes far-left African-American philosopher Cornel West, whose recipe for social justice is, "the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people."

Stafford urges students to find their voice — through place.

"It's about being local about what you write," he said. "Rather than parodying a literary voice, strengthen your own. Learn to sing in your own voice."

"It is part of authenticity. We have a vote and we have a voice. The vote is finite, the voice can grow and reach others."

That approach dovetails with the Writers Guild, whose philosophy statement concludes: "We believe a literate community is a thriving community." 