

A Poet in Every Child *"I wish I was a song bird so I could sing, sing, sing."*

If your kids came home from school last week and instead of begging for a bicycle they wished to be eagles or yellow daisies, don't be alarmed. They had most likely been keeping company with a poet.

In the grade schools for a few short days, poet Duane Niatum unlocked little corners of kids' minds and let words come out — soaring like hawks, swimming like pink fish and blooming like flowers in red and blue.

"Language can also be a playground," offered Niatum and he encouraged kids to

cavort on paper. "If they use their imaginations," he continued, "it will reverberate all over the page."

Unable to complete his full three week residency in the schools due to illness and another job commitment, Niatum did what he could to tap the poetry he believes exists in every child. In both Warm Springs and Simnasho, kids listened to Duane read selections of poetry, most of it playful and filled with images from the natural world. They

laughed at poems about yaks, sloths and "Dirty Dinky," written by Theodore Roethke.

"Read them good poetry," Niatum remarked. "You don't have to read down to them. If they learn from the best, they're going to respond well."

When it came time for the kids to respond with their own words, the poet suggested "round poems" which are collaborations in which each student contributes one line anonymously. "Round poems are less inhibiting — everybody's sharing. It's easier for them to open up when they know it's anonymous and just one line," Niatum commented.

The theme was "I wish" and the following images surfaced:

I wish I was a mountain so I could feel
The cool breeze.

I wish I was a river because then I could
Flow, flow and flow and no one could
Stop me even with a dam.

I wish I could go swimming
And see fish and underwater plants.

I wish I was a rabbit fluffy and white,
And lived in the country where I could run around all night.

I wish I was as yellow as a flower
With stripes like a tiger.

The poet expected the kids to show this sensitivity to their natural environment. "Children respond spontaneously to physical experiences. We (adults) code them and box them. They are without the boxes."

Often, though, kids will have picked up clichés and learned to imitate at an early age, and it takes awhile to peel away the conventional thought patterns. Niatum regretted that he didn't have more time to

tap the levels of original thinking that he knows are there, although he was delighted to find that some kids had already had expressed such images.

"The big problem is to convince them that they can, that they have that potential," said Niatum.

On the last day, the kids were asked to write lines that they would call their own. Their wishes became a bit more involved and sometimes even profound:

I wish I was the water so I
Could splash on the shore.

Bruce B. (3rd grade)
I wish I was the sun so I could
Make it sunny.

I wish I was a yellow butterfly
With black dots.

Aurel S. (3rd grade)
I wish I was an artist
I know it would be hardest.

Cherilyn S. (4th grade)
I wish I was a zebra so I
Could run in the wind.
Everybody is sometimes
A boy and a girl.

Sterling H. (4th grade)

Overcoming the distaste children seem to develop for poetry during the educational process is no easy task, says the poet. Sometimes they can't be reached until, as an adult, they find poetry on their own.

Niatum himself did not begin to write until he was 20, nineteen years ago. He is a Klallam Indian who grew up in two very different environments — the city of Seattle and the rural world of his grandfather. Even now his poetry falls into two self-described spheres — traditional Indian images and urban love poems.

His verse is rich with natural images whether he is writing in New York City or the Olympic Peninsula. "My roots are in the earth and sky philosophies and arts of my ancestors," Niatum is quoted in his most recently published volume *Ascending Red Cedar Moon*.

But he doesn't like to be labeled an Indian poet. ("You don't introduce Walt Whitman as 'white poet'.")

Notice

To All Tribal Members:
Those of you with out of town addresses; if you move and wish to continue to receive the Tribal and General Council minutes, please write or call in your new address to:

Steno Pool
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
Warm Springs, Ore. 97761
Phone No. (503) 553-1161, ext. 49 or 78; otherwise any returned mail without a new address, all material you've requested will be discontinued until we have a new address.
The Steno Pool

Attention

The Bureau of Recreation announced that there was a \$50,000 grant issued for the expansion of the Warm Springs Park. Matching funds locally also will be used for restaurants, the Information Center, picnic tables, playground structures, benches, and also to enlarge the boundaries of the park area.

"It reinforces a stereotype in both the Indian's and non-Indian's mind," Duane explained.

He would like to be a model to Indian kids through his writing, not his label. "It comes out of my writing," he said, "which is the way the Indian values that I value are carried on."

"Poetry is another kind of tradition, you know."

Niatum is helping to keep the tradition alive by working with young people. But he is also offering his vision to the other end of the age spectrum. His next job is with the elderly in Seattle.

Almost in anticipation of this experience, and in confirmation of his brief visit to the reservation, Duane wrote shortly before he left:

Now as if drawn north
by a Simnasho wind,
A juniper sky offering me
the last snow lily,
I, too, begin to round dance,
modestly.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

May 5 Mrs. Cooke's second grade class will make their third annual cultural exchange trip to Newberg.

May 9-13 Indian Week, sponsored by the Junior and Senior High Indian Clubs. Highlights will be a mini-powwow, races, dress-up day and a pageant.

May 11 Franklin High School band from Portland will entertain the grade school at 10:30 a.m.

May 12 Academic awards presented at the high school.

May 18 NASA Aerospace Demonstration at the grade school, 9:00 a.m.

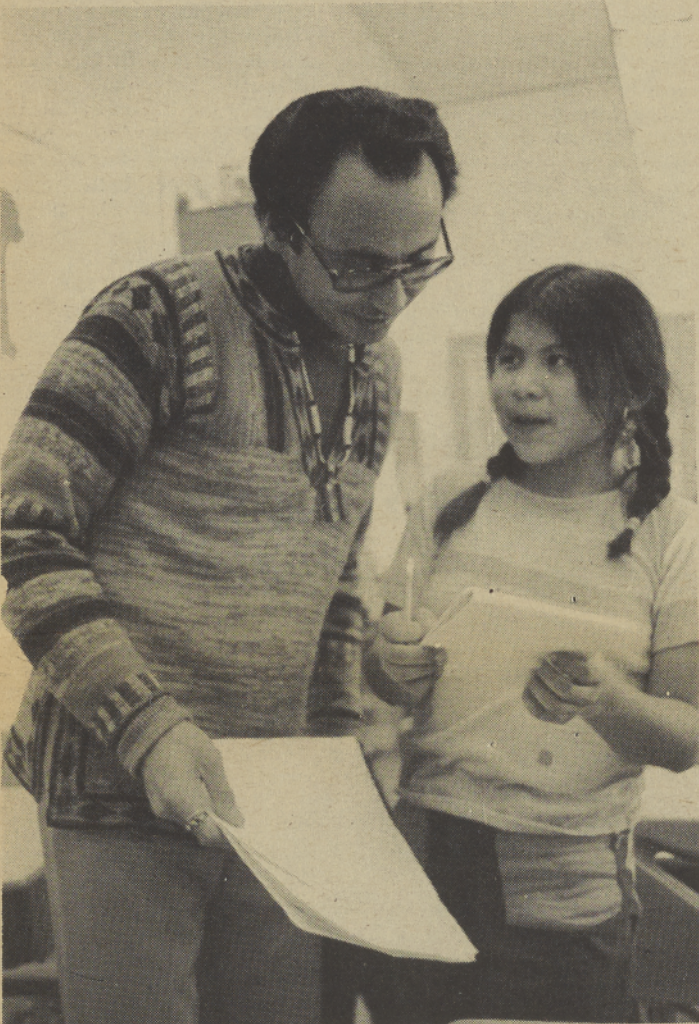
May 19-20 Cultural program to be presented by junior and senior high at the David Douglas High School in Portland.

May 23 Senior Sneak Day
May 27 Madras Senior High School Commencement
May 30 Memorial Day, no school.

Lions Club

The Lions Club Held Their Regular Meeting on April 25, 1977, at Alices restaurant 7:00 p.m. in the evening. The main purpose was to interest the ladies of the community in forming a Lioness club here on the reservation. There were several wives of the mens lions club present and each one showed desire to form a ladies club for an opportunity to serve Humanity. A woman has a chance to express her concern for human need through structured, productive service activities that benefit the community.

The nominations committee turned in the names for ones that were nominated for the coming year and it was suggested that they be mentioned in the Spilyay Tymoo (News Paper). The names are for President is, Uren Leonard, 1st Vice President Sid Miller, 2nd V.P. Nathan Jim, 3rd V.P. Larry Bourland, Secretary Richard Craig, Treasurer Francis Atkins, Lion Tamer Everett Miller, Tail Twister Charles Nathan. Board of directors are 1st Donald Maxwell, 2nd Elton Greeley, and 3rd Ed Manion. At the next regular meeting the voting will take place.



Poet Duane Niatum consults with a student at Warm Springs Grade School on a poem she has written. CDS Photo



Students in Jeff Henry's fifth grade class listen with amusement to poet Duane Niatum as he reads poetry by Theodore Roethke. "Don't read down to them," Niatum says about poetry and kids. CDS Photo