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Oregon Trails — Readers, Authors, and Collectors

Column Editor: **Thomas Leonhardt** <twleonhardt@earthlink.net>

It really doesn't matter what the actual number is but four seems about the right number of things to constitute a collection. If you find that you have four or more souvenir key chains, hotel soaps, match books, paper weights, fountain pens... you get the idea. Get rid of at least one of them and save no others unless you really decide to be a collector of that item. Sometimes, we find out too late and sometimes, when we do find out, we don't care because we like our collection. I love the collection that I began quite unconsciously and didn't even know I had, even after thirty years or more, depending on how I want to count.

I have been living in Eugene, Oregon since January and in just four months, I have been able, on separate occasions, to hear **William Kennedy** and **Barry Lopez**. **Kennedy** talked about his *Albany* novels, especially the latest one (he promises that it is not the last), *Roscoe*, and **Barry Lopez**, embarrassed at the standing ovation he received, talked about how he decided to dedicate his career to writing about the environment. Before he spoke, he was preceded by several of his writer friends (**Scott Russell Sanders**, **Annick Smith**, **John Daniel**, **Ann Zwinger**, **William Kittredge**, and **Terry Tempest Williams**) who read passages by **Lopez** and by each of them.

Kennedy talked for at least 90 minutes. I had arrived early and had a good, comfortable seat. I could have sat there, easily, for another 90 minutes. He speaks easily and entertainingly about his life and his writings and clearly enjoys the contact with his readers. **Larry McMurtry** shares that ease in front of an audience.

Lopez has lived in Eugene for 34 years and was being honored in his hometown as the 2002 recipient of the **Orion Society's John Hay Award**. **Lopez** got to choose this year's topic ("Literary and Artistic Responses to Terrorism") that was discussed by himself and his writer friends for two days before bringing a panel discussion and the readings

to the public, something that is not always done but something that **Lopez** thought was important. I didn't stay for the panel discussion because I got there late (hard to find parking anywhere near the **University of Oregon**) and was sitting on a concrete floor. Two hours was enough and yet it wasn't. I was entranced as I listened to those writers read from their works and from **Lopez's** and comment along the way. I wanted to be one of them, not necessarily up on stage with them but a writer of equal stature, part of a small community who get together, mainly in the West (Oregon, Utah, Montana) to talk about the land they love and anything else that comes to mind.

But I am not one of them, except at heart. As I reflected on that hard truth, I realized that I had a vast collection of writers in my past (and many more, I hope, in my future), those whom I have admired and even loved since boyhood (**Howard Pyle** and **Howard Pease** come to mind right away along with **Robert Louis Stevenson**, **Rudyard Kipling**, and **John R. Tunis**) and those I have been able to meet, usually at a distance as a listener.

After I heard **Larry McMurtry** speak, I had him sign some of his books (he is also a good businessman and an antiquarian bookseller of some distinction). Others I heard speak include **Joe Gores** (mysteries), **Amy Tan**, **Steve Allen**, **Lawrence Clark Powell** (one of my heroes), **Alice Kahn**, **Katherine Paterson**, **Isaac Bashevis Singer**, **Jimmy Carter**, **Stephen Jay Gould**, **Daniel Boorstin**, **Don Tapscott**, and **John Kenneth Galbraith**. I didn't get to actually meet any of these with the exception of **Don Tapscott** and **Joe Gores** but I can't recall that a one of them was boring. And every one of them was speaking with some kind of library, library association, or library friends connection.

Lopez and **Kennedy**, on the other hand, were sponsored by the **Oregon Humanities Center**, another worthy cause.

My first literary love in high school was **John Steinbeck**. I graduated in 1961 so he was still alive but it never occurred to me to write him and tell him how much I enjoyed his books, even the non-fiction titles I read — *A Russian Journal*, *Bombs Away*, and *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*. I liked **Hemingway**, too, and remember his suicide as one of the two big events the summer after I graduated. The other was the erection of the **Berlin Wall**, begun the week after I left **Karlsruhe** (and **Karlsruhe American High School**) for the States and college.

I complained, many years after that, to my wife, that I had never written to **Steinbeck**. She told me that instead of regretting what I had not done, I should write living authors whose works I particularly enjoyed. Well, **Bernard Malamud** was dead and I had not read any **Saul Bellow** in a good while and no **John Updike**, either. Those were writers I discovered while in the Army, those and **Nelson Algren**. I also read **Thomas Wolfe** then, a fellow North Carolinian, but don't know now how I got through those huge tomes but I did and even copied long passages from them, poetry in prose I called them. I still have a sentimental feeling for him.

And **James Agee's** letters to **Father Flye** were comforting to me during those Army years and led me to read **Agee's** other books later on to my pleasure. And I mustn't forget *From Here to Eternity*. I wasn't a lifer but my father was and I could identify with **James Jones's Prewitt**, a fighter, a bugler, and an Army man. I later enjoyed reading about the fellowship that he shared with **William Styron** and **Willie Morris**. If you are going to drink whiskey, you couldn't pick a better bunch to drink with.

I finally wrote to two writers, novelists in the main but good writers of non-fiction, too, criticism and photography for **Wright Morris** and *American Indians and the Colorado River* for **Frank Waters**. They each wrote back, short notes with thanks and, from **Wright Morris**, a suggestion for further reading.

I never got to meet **Frank Waters** but actually developed a relationship of sorts with **Wright Morris**. If you have never read any of his novels or seen any of his photographs, you are missing something

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available in a POD format. And all of this development will further our exploration and development of the eBook world.

As much as we all know that the "efficiency" of the eBook model is a probable and eventual outcome in the distant future, there is still one major hurdle in my opinion -- screen quality. The highest ended screens for any computer or handheld device have a dpi

(dots per inch) resolution of 100 to 125. Most ink-jet printers in the market these days offers 600 dpi. A high quality printed book will have a dpi of 1,200 or more. Certainly, there is a huge resolution gap between looking at a printed sheet of text and an eBook screen of any size.

Until this gap gets smaller, the p-book still has a strong future. And, the POD model will help all of us make the transition to the "efficient" eBook model. 🐾

special. Take *Field of Vision*, for example, a National Book Award winner. It is not a hard novel to read, unlike those of some writers I won't name, but when I finished reading it, I wondered how he had written it, technically. His photo essays are stark, Nebraska depictions, no people, but evocative of lost souls and lost lives that he writes about in some of his novels.

While in the Army, a former high school teacher used to send me care packages of books and in one package was *A Mississippi River Reader*, edited by **Wright Morris**. It is a paperback and, for **Morris** collectors, a scarce item. My copy has an ink (fountain pen) notation by **Morris's** name, "A Nebraskan." My friend was born in Council Bluffs but educated in Nebraska. Look at a map and you will see the connection.

Later, as a graduate student at **Berkeley** and working at the Rare Books and Special Collections Department (now part of the **Bancroft Library**), I witnessed **Peter Howard**, of **Serendipity Books**, appraise stacks of gray archival boxes full of the manuscripts of **Wright Morris** and in our vault, there were all of the first editions. I had to read them and from *My Uncle Dudley* on, I was an admirer. **Morris** was teaching at **San Francisco State** back then and happily decided to bless **Cal's** library and not **Stanford's** or **S.F. State's**, not that they aren't worthy institutions but I wasn't working for them and would have been deprived of the glorious sight of those gray boxes.

Move ahead about twenty years and I found myself inviting **Wright Morris** to speak at the annual dinner of the Library Associates of the University of the Pacific Libraries. I had read his books, had written a fan letter to him, and now I was going to meet him.

I still have the tape of the talk he gave that night and some more notes from him but my favorite memory concerns our talk about Chicago and the errand I undertook on his behalf.

In one of his autobiographical works, **Morris** talks about his boyhood experience at the **Larrabee YMCA** in Chicago, **Blackhawk** and **Larrabee**, if I remember correctly. I told him that I would be in Chicago soon for an **ALA** conference and would be glad to visit the **Larrabee Y** and take some pictures for him.

I was staying at the **Chicago Hilton** so after all my meetings were over, I walked out front and waited for a cab. Luckily, the cab driver was a native of Chicago, an African American of my age, almost exactly. I didn't have an address, only an intersection and that is where I told him I wanted to go. As he slowly pulled out onto Michigan Avenue, he asked if I would mind telling him why I wanted to go there. I told him, he smiled, and seemed really pleased that I was doing

this for a writer with a homesickness for a boyhood haunt.

He told me that the neighborhood had once been mainly Italian but was now African American. When we got there, the **YMCA** was gone and a magnet high school sat in its place. There was an abandoned building, low to the ground, an outbuilding of some kind, cater corner from the school and an "El" track in the distance but otherwise, just vacant lots. The cab driver asked if I wanted him to wait while I took my pictures and I obligingly said yes.

Wright Morris laughed and gently chastised me on the telephone when he called to thank me for the photographs. I had left my good Yashica 35mm camera at home, I forgot it. So I had to buy disposable camera and it was with that that I took the pictures for a man who had received two Guggenheim fellowships for his photography.

After my art work was finished, the cab driver took me to the area's new **YMCA** and then drove me back to the **Hilton** while telling me about his boyhood in Chicago, letting me know how much he loved his city, the city that **Wright Morris** grew to live in just a few months and no more, at least not as a resident.

Wright Morris died last year in his nineties. I lost contact with him because we really weren't friends. I collect his books, I have a few notes from him, and I have those memories of a meal and a private conversation with one of the best of American writers.

There are other writers in my collection that I haven't mentioned and haven't done justice to some mentioned here, but they will have to wait for another time. We can't all be writers, but we sure as heck can be readers and that ain't all bad.

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — What Movie Is This Anyway: *La Dolce Vita* or *My Life as a Dog*?

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Column Editor's Note: Any librarian who makes sales calls on fellow librarians has earned the right to reflect publicly on the world shared by vendors and librarians. Mark Sandler is Collection Development Officer at the Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. — BN

Since 1998, I've been moonlighting from my day job as collection officer at the **University of Michigan** to promote a joint initiative between my institution, **Oxford University**, and **ProQuest Information and Learning**. (Writing this column is an example of the kinds of promotion I've been doing but it's usually more direct, hand-to-hand combat.) **ProQuest** owns and markets digital images of 125,000 volumes of **Early English Books (EEBO)** accessible through searchable MARC records. The vision we've advanced at **Michigan** is that the academic community could create a significant number of searchable and readable full-text editions of the **EEBO** works. This subset of 25,000 texts, accurately keyed and tagged in

SGML, is being developed under an agreement with **ProQuest** that maintains links between the text and image editions but conveys full ownership rights of the text-file to institutions funding the conversion. The **EEBO-Text Creation Partnership** — a coalition of approximately 80 libraries funding this project — is now seeing some return on investment in the form of a database of full-text digital editions. The **TCP** has set a goal of 150 partner institutions with total revenue targeted at \$9,000,000. As of this writing, we're about halfway there.

So, whether we call it "sales" or "promotion" or "recruitment," in many ways the process of rallying the community around a project like **EEBO-TCP** emulates what the commercial information producers and sellers have always done — provide librarians with information about scholarly resources and ultimately try to push toward a positive commitment to buy or subscribe. As a librarian with a materials budget, I've spent years avoiding the best efforts of vendors to

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