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GEM STATE LAURELS

by Chris Lewis

Idaho's first woman Writer in Residence was Eberle Umbach. Umbach's mother grew up in Boise and grandfather built a cabin in McCall in the 1940's. Her mother left the state when she married, but Umbach grew up spending summers and Christmases in Idaho.

Umbach has no doubts that traveling the state was a definite impact on her life, though not in the ways she expected. "At the time all I was thinking about was the adventure of travel, taking circuses back and forth, and getting to the towns where I gave readings and led workshops—glorying in the pristine dunes and atmospheres of rural Idaho."

I was into the presence of place—from the mountain meadows to the incantation pointed tide pools, played with prancing mares and droves of sheep in the Owyhee country and finding that rural Idaho has some of the most unbelievable abundance. It was a thrill.

Now living in beautiful Idaho Valley, Idaho, Umbach believes Idaho was always the counterpart to whatever she was doing, the place where she would end up living later in life after her time as WIR. She decided: why not? Over the past decade, however, she has been more involved in music than writing, composing music with her husband, John Hayes, for local community performances of plays at McCall's Nipsey Plaebhouse and for the Mainline show which she styles works by Neil Shepard. Umbach's most recently published prose appeared in 2006, when Impasse Press of Seattle included selections from her book, The Winter River Valley Fallow Book in In Pieces, an Anthology of fragments Writing.

Ron McFarland

Idaho's first Writer-in-Residence was Ron McFarland. McFarland was born September 22, 1942 in Bellingham, Washington. In 1960, McFarland's family moved to Cocoa Beach, Florida. After graduating from Cocoa Beach H.S., McFarland remained in McFarland was appointed to the Writer-in-Residence position, the program was broadened and McFarland had the pleasure of being the residency's program garners poetry. He recollected when he was treated as a celebrity of sorts, being wined and dined, going readings, talking to writers' groups. Other times he really being less celebrity and more substance teacher. Still, even the workaholism could be great, he loved it.

"Here I was," he confides, "a mediocre poet and writer being treated like a big cheese." The other time, he was hardly enough of a crowd to have a good mouse trap!" McFarland says WIR duties took him to a lot of places that he wouldn't have seen otherwise, and he cherished for that. As a result of his position as Writer-in-Residence, he received a M.A. from Boise State University in 1988 and taught at the University of Montana (Missoula) in 1976.

Wright taught first at Lewis Clark College in Lewiston, Idaho, and has been a Professor at the University of Idaho since 1995. He has published seven books of poetry, and has been the recipient of numerous awards, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Idaho Commission on the Arts. He was awarded the Kingsley Tufts Award in 2000, the Poetry Prize in 2006, and the San Francisco Poetry Center Book Award.

When I asked Wrighty what his goal as a WIR, he told me that his goal was "to get literary art—poetry, in particular, since that's what I write—into the schools, into the air." I also asked how readings given in Idaho compared/contrasted with readings given in other areas. Wrighty explained that, as a WIR, once gave a reading in Idaho and then two days later at the Library of Congress. He told me that even though the reading was well attended and was held in an impressive venue, the Idaho reading was more rewarding.

Wrighty believes many of the people at the LOC reading had probably been to similar events, while the audience in Idaho was possibly unfamiliar with poetry readings. The Writer-in-Residence, Wrighty noted, may have been one of the most appreciative, adding "Idaho—in politics notwithstanding—at full of thankful, hard-working, and interesting people. I wish I could have spoken to more of them in my travels so far!"
Daryl Jones (1952-)

Jones grew up in Racine, Wisconsin, and attended Michigan State University, earning his B.A. in English.

His teaching has taken him from the University of Idaho to the University of Nebraska, and he has received numerous awards for his poetry and fiction, including the Poetry Society of America's Award for Merit in Poetry and the National Poetry Society's Award in Poetry.

In 1990, he received the Poetry Award from the Texas Institute of Letters for his book _Two Years, Three Months_.

In this piece, Jones talks about how his two years as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Idaho in the piece he says that "though the stipend is respectable, there were differences between the audiences of readings in small towns compared to larger ones, and also that those who came to have been able to be a part of it."

"I'm a reader, I'm a writer, and I call this life my home."

Clay Morgan (1949-1999)

Morgan was born October 15, 1950 in Portland, Oregon. His father was a medical doctor and his family moved frequently.

In 1978, Morgan graduated from Boise State University and earned his B.A. in English from Stanford University, where he won the John L. Reed Award for Excellence in Writing.

In 1999, he was chosen as the Writer-in-Residence at the University of Montana, where he taught fiction writing.

He attended Bowdoin College in Maine and went on to teach at Harvard University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was also a fellow at the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

He died of cancer in 2000.

"I was born in Portland, Oregon, grew up in Washington and Idaho, and now live in New York and Florida, and remain with my family in 1985, on a small island in the St. Lawrence River."

He is the author of several collections of poetry, including _A Critical Study of Woolf_ and _A Pocketful of Poems_.

William "Bill" Johnson (1999-2001)

Johnson was born in Portland, Oregon, grew up in Washington and Idaho, and now lives in New York and Paris.

His first reading in WIR was "To share my delight in..."

"I was born in Portland, Oregon, grew up in Washington and Idaho, and now live in New York and Paris."

"I'm a reader, I'm a writer, and I call this life my home."

Kim Barnes (2004-2007)

Barnes received her B.A. from Lewis Clark State College in 1983, her M.A. from Washington State University in 1985, and her M.F.A. from the University of Montana (Missoula) in 1989.

She is the author of two memoirs, _Hungry for the World_ and _You Ask about the State of the Arts in Idaho? How Can I Answer That Question?_.