

## A PRAIRIE WINDS RETROSPECTIVE

A hundred years ago *Prairie Winds* used to be a section within the DWU yearbook, *The Tumbleweed*. It became a separate publication under the stewardship of then English Professor Agnes Hyde, who was also DWU's first Creative Writing professor. That was in the late 1930s. When I arrived at DWU in 1983, *Prairie Winds* was produced by the members of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. It was typed on 8 X 11 standard typing paper, folded in half, and covered with construction paper scissored to size. The Sigma students wrote, typed, and stapled the magazine. I am reluctant to call what it was then a publication. I took this nondescript "thing" out of the hands of the Sigma students, who were glad to be rid of it, and found the money to professionally print a journal and set about searching for my first student editor.

That was when this young football player, a freshman, came to my office asking about poetry and creative writing classes. His name was Henry Hughes. We were both "freshman" at that time. I had wrangled enough money to bind and print a journal of some sixty-five to seventy pages. It wasn't too hard a task, since I was named Faculty Advisor to DWU's Publications Board, which received a handsome amount of money to publish the *Tumbleweed*, our yearbook, and *The Phreno Cosmian*. I inserted the *Prairie Winds* into that publications cycle, and from that time to the present we have had a substantial student-produced literary journal of significant merit. Henry Hughes has the honor to have been the first editor of this nationally recognized literary journal.

This "Retrospective" is intended to honor him and another editor, James Van Oort, who piloted the *Prairie Winds* through perhaps its most successful publication years. And now for more about both of these men, their works, and their careers:

### HENRY HUGHES



The editorship of the *Prairie Winds* made a significant difference in Henry's life and career. He took the work seriously, looked upon it as a window into the literary life of the nation, and added *Prairie Winds* to the listings of literary journals in the International Directory of Literary Magazines and Small Presses. He sought out contributions from prominent poets like William Stafford and David Ignatow, who were so gracious as to gift our just-blossoming enterprise with their latest poems. I remember those days when we would sit in my living room with the galleys of the magazine, he editing as I carefully read the poems and

stories, every word and comma and period, as we used to have to do in those days before the advent of the computer. It was a labor of love. And that labor created a bond between teacher and student that lasts to this day.

Henry graduated in due course, and entered the graduate program in English at Purdue University. His experience with *Prairie Winds* earned him the editorship of Purdue's literary journal, *The Sycamore Review*, which was just being founded. Henry was its first editor, as he was *PW*'s first editor. After his Masters degree, he betook himself to teach in Japan in the JET Program. He was so successful, he stayed for a second term, and from there he went to Beijing, China, where he taught in the Beijing Foreign Studies University. Upon his return, he earned his

PhD, also at Purdue University, and then took a job teaching at Western Oregon University, where he is now a tenured professor.

Henry's poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Malahat Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Harvard Review*, and countless others, and are represented in several anthologies including *Long Journey: Contemporary Northwest Poets* published by Oregon State University Press. His first collection of poems, *Men Holding Eggs*, received the 2004 Oregon Book Award. His second collection of poems, *Moist Meridian*, was published by Mammoth Books in July 2009. Henry's commentary on new poetry appears regularly in *Harvard Review*.

Since moving to Western Oregon University, Henry has continued to travel, most recently to Mexico, South America, the South Pacific, Britain and Germany. In 2003 he organized a Melville conference and expedition to Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, and in 2008 he traveled with his wife to Peru to do work on Herman Melville and maritime literature. Melville is Henry's "scholarly" area of interest, "But" he says, "I'm really a poet." The link below is to Henry's poetry web page. I encourage readers to check it out.

<http://henryhughespoetry.wordpress.com/>

## JAMES VAN OORT



James Van Oort began his undergraduate work at DWU in the fall of 1995 and immediately got involved with *Prairie Winds*. He began as a staff member during the editorship of Howie Gunston. We still had a Publications Board in those years, and that student body was so impressed with James' enthusiasm that they appointed him as co-editor for the next year, and in the following year, 1997, he became editor and remained editor until he graduated. He had become by that time so identified with the *Prairie Winds* that editors in the next several years continually consulted him for guidance.

In 2002, a year in which I as Faculty Advisor to *PW* was away from campus, James was appointed Interim Editor, even though he was at that time an alumnus. James had taken a job with our local newspaper, the *Daily Republic*, and still lived in town, so he served with typical aplomb and enthusiasm.

James had learned early on in his relationship with *PW* of the College Media Association and its convention, which was held annually in a major city in the US. Our Student Senate had enough faith in him to fund his attendance at this convention for two years. In the fall of 1996, James took the *Prairie Winds* to the CMA convention in Orlando, Florida. This experience awakening him to the aesthetics of design, to the literary values a journal like *Prairie Winds* must pursue in order to succeed, and to the roles of art, photography, and graphics in the overall appeal of such a journal. James returned wiser, more enthusiastic, and more committed to editing than ever. In 1997 he returned to the convention, this time in New York City, with a bundle of *PWs* under his arm that were entirely his own. At that convention, *PW* received the highest praise. "We took 250 copies of the journal to the New York convention," James writes in response to my query for this retrospective, "and set them up for distribution amid tables full of nationally-recognized journals and reviews. At the end of the weekend, the journals around *PW* still had

editions to spare. There wasn't a single *Prairie Winds* to be found in that bazaar—they'd all been hoarded.

James was a double major at DWU. In addition to his work in the Creative Writing program, as poet and fiction writer, he also majored in Theater, specializing in directing. He has been working on a novel which he hopes to finish by and by, and has recently published a chapbook, *The Mass in Red*. He is working now on a second epic-length poetry project based on the Requiem Mass. But it was his work for *PW* that has had the profoundest impact on him. Now a manager for Wal-Mart, James spends his non-working hours managing a publication of his own founding, *Darkling*, which specializes in poetry and in each issue of which, among the many poets who have discovered and love his journal, James honors one in a special feature. *Darkling* represents the fruition of James' dedication to *PW*. We honor him in this retrospective and his special enterprise.

**JOSEPH M. DITTA**

