



Foreword

He entered the classroom, a lanky seventeen year old, with a close, curly, parted afro and wire-frame glasses. Taking a seat in the center-back portion of the room, he was quiet but attentive. He rarely participated in class discussions but the “reaction cards” — 3 x 5 index cards used to record student responses to each class session — gave him the opportunity to have daily discourse with his English teacher. He even created a class collection container for those reaction cards, gluing wooden spools, painted blue and displaying tiny reproductions of contemporary posters to provide commentary on contemporary culture. As the school year progressed, the shy introvert became more and more expressive, revealing himself in extensive, thoughtful responses on those cards — sometimes illustrated — and he even started speaking in class. Eventually, he shared his poetry.

Stephen R. Clark was that young man in my senior English class the fall of 1969, the fifth year of my teaching career, which continued until spring, 2002. Throughout those years, my regular assignment was teaching literature and composition to college-bound seniors. Stephen R. Clark was one of those seniors. Even at seventeen, he was a gifted writer and an eager reader of literature.

We studied British and world literature, all genres, including poetry. So many students were used to “interpreting” poems and discovering “what it means.” Our approach to poetry was based on *How Does a Poem Mean?* by John Ciardi. What tools does the poet use to get to whatever he means? In his essay, Ciardi explained: “...the human-insight of the poem, and the technicalities of the poetic devices are inseparable. Each feeds the other. This interplay is the poem’s meaning, a matter, not of WHAT IT MEANS (nobody can say entirely what a good poem means) but HOW IT MEANS—a process one can come much closer to discussing.” So we explored poetic devices such as meter, rhyme schemes, stanza forms, figures of speech, imagery, and, of course, themes. We also related the works to the lines in Archibald

MacLeish's *Ars Poetica*: "A poem should not mean, but be." So-called "interpretations" were considered in light of what experiences the students brought to the poem.

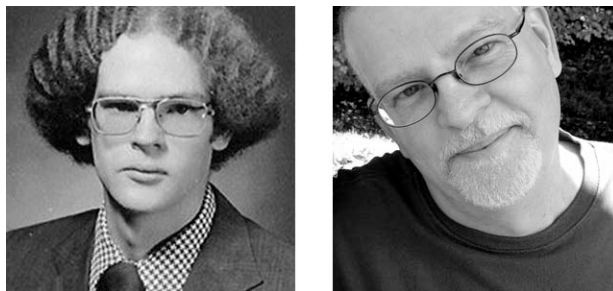
The students had wide-ranging discussions during the poetry study, inspired by the likes of Gerard Manley Hopkins, T.S. Eliot and William Butler Yeats. Stephen became involved and soon began sharing his own poems with me. Even at this young age, he was a craftsman with language and showed talent, skill, and insights that were mature beyond his years. There was little for me to criticize about his work. Instead, I encouraged him to continue his writing and limited my discussions with him to the possibilities of the creative process.

This relationship continued when Stephen attended Evangel University. Even over the years of his various careers, I saw a few pages of his current works or viewed some poems on his blog. Occasionally, I read a published collection. Now, after forty five years of interacting with this (still) young man about creativity, writing, and especially poetry, we share his latest product: *Home Noise — New Poems*.

In *Home Noise — New Poems*, readers can savor Stephen's sensory impressions of his (our) world. Like the mini-posters he glued on the spools of our reaction card container, these poems are glimpses into our contemporary society. There are deep, provocative views of spirituality interspersed with light, whimsical views of Stephen's — and our own — everyday world. Readers will delight in Stephen's use of sounds and senses as well as an array of poetic devices that reveal Stephen paid attention in our English class years ago.

But most of all, readers will have the opportunity to bring their own life experiences to his works and depart those printed pages with some universal truths. Stephen declares, "When I write poetry my intention is to make it accessible and inspiring. To write what connects with the heart and lifts up the imagination. That, in some way, always points to the Creator behind the creation." Again, he paid attention in class — "A poem should not mean, but be."

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Stephen then & now.