

## BOOK REVIEW

# "TWO WORKS FROM AN AMBIDEXTROUS MIND"

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"The Wonder of Natural Life in Kentucky" and "The Wondrous Journey of Food," **Ronald R. Van Stockum, Jr.**, with illustrations by Steven P. Eilers, both published by Bareham Tsuga Press, Shelbyville, 2017 ... 'Reggie' to his ever-widening circle of friends and fans—is a cornucopia of content; adept in books, music, teaching, acting, and in the practice of environmental law.

He owns three degrees in biology in addition to his law degree. He is first, last, and profoundly, a person of science ... He makes science make sense to judge and jury.

Mr. Van Stockum's is that rare mind that occupies a midpoint between the left brain and the right brain ... He has 19 books in print ... he is an **information omnivore** ...

"The Wonder of Natural Life in Kentucky" works as a digest of the natural history of our fair Commonwealth. Mr. Van Stockum hikes its woods and canoes its streams, then heads for his books to find for the reader the most telling facts about his fascinations back to the beginning of scientific time.

He is like a **jazz master** who plays the theme, then plays changes on the theme to the limit of its beauty and meaning ... There appears to be little in the natural world that eludes Mr. Van Stockum's discerning eye and research prodigies ...

Perhaps an even more ambitious effort is "The Wondrous Journey of Food," which is deft sketches on how humankind has assuaged its hunger from the beginning of recorded history.

The book begins with a short story that sets the theme for the non-fiction narrative to follow. The protagonist is hungry and he forages in a woods, by the method of trial and error. The individual's persisting hunger in the story becomes the theme for the non-fiction narrative: how humankind has fed itself, since the beginning ...

Much of the history and science of food is captured in vignettes in some 20,000 words of footnotes ... He reports with a flourish the subject of genetically modified organisms: the science, the politics, the economics, the regulation and litigation. For a **miniaturist**, Mr. Van Stockum fills the frame ...

These books are of the category Mr. Van Stockum calls his science books. A second group are works of what he calls 'magic realism.' A third category he calls 'fiction science,' which find readers among the fans of science fiction he meets in his rambles to book stores and book fairs ... What is given in the nature book is what many here experience as the great beauty of Kentucky by a **romantic learned in science**.

The food book is an informed flight of the imagination which answers these queries: what is it that nourishes us; where has it come from, back to the beginning of time; and can you tell me the story in under 200 pages?

The books make the reader want to become familiar with Mr. Van Stockum's quantum of fiction to delve further into the turns of mind and heart revealed there.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A regular contributor, **JAMES P. DADY** is editor of the *Bench & Bar*.