

The Writers' Lens

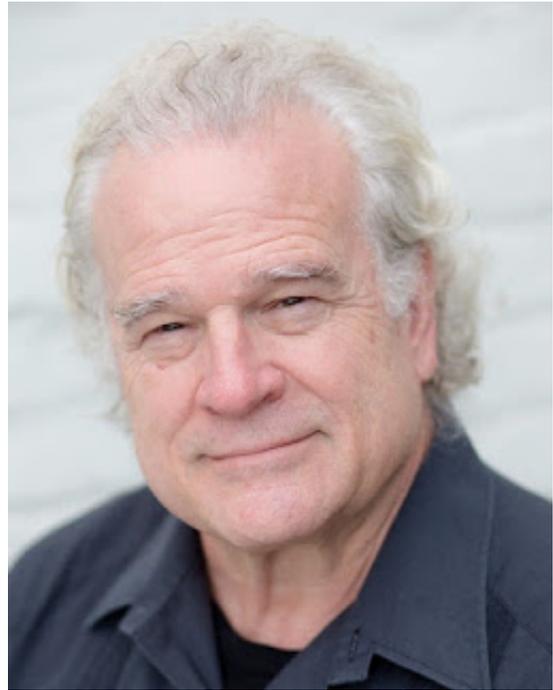
Bringing fiction into focus

Tuesday, December 6, 2016

Topic & technique inspire Van Stockum: Author, Lawyer, Scientist & Musician

Welcome to **Ronald R. Van Stockum, Jr.'s** academic degrees include a **Bachelor of Science** in Biology from Santa Clara University, California, May 1972; a **Masters of Science** in Biology from the University of Louisville, May 1975; a **Ph.D.** in Biology from the University of Louisville, May 1979; and a **Juris Doctor** in Law from the University of Louisville, May 1979. Prior to entering the private practice of law, **Dr. Van Stockum** was an attorney for the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. He has been in the private practice of law as a sole proprietor since 1981. **Dr. Van Stockum** practices from his office in Shelbyville, Kentucky.

Dr. Van Stockum is published in the areas of biology, history, environmental law, and creative writing, and has addressed these topics in numerous presentations and seminars. His resume can be found at www.vanstockum.com and contains a complete list of his publications and presentations.



He is past Chair of the Kentucky Chapter of the Nature Conservancy and has served as Vice President of the Filson Historical Society. He is past Chair of the Environmental Law Section of the Louisville Bar Association and past Chair of the Kentucky Bar Association, Environment, Energy & Resources Law Section. He is also past President of the University of Louisville Alumni Association. **Dr. Van Stockum** currently serves on the Oil and Gas Work Group for the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet working on revisions to oil and gas statutes and regulations.

Dr. Van Stockum has published six short stories and two novels of fiction science and magic realism. The first is entitled *Markman's Home*, and the second, *Cosmos, the Stellar Stalker*. He has also recently published his nonfiction short story entitled, "The Wonder of Natural Life in Kentucky."

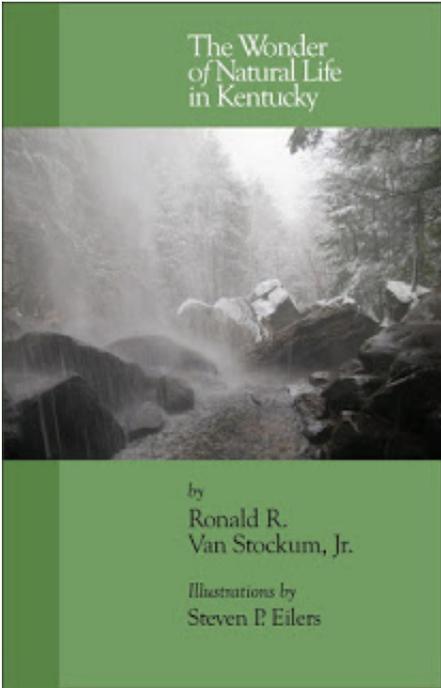
The Writers' Lens is about "bringing fiction into focus." What brings your writing into focus-the characters, the stories, the love of words? Feelings compel me to write. They are strong enough to continually nag at my consciousness, seeking an outlet of expression. When I give way to these urges to write, I blend in scientific subjects that I am studying.

How do you find time to write and do a demanding job? There is time in between other activities to write copiously. The only requisite is the activation of energy to get started and the reward that one feels in expression. It is remarkable how much time is available "in between." Of course, one looks somewhat unsociable sitting at a social engagement and writing, but my friends have become used to it.

What inspired your latest book? My latest book is a novella that bridges one of my earliest and longest books, *Markman's Home*, into the third of my novels, *Xortal*. I needed to expand on the ending of the first novel so as to increase the diversity and delight of the characters as they further interact under new circumstances. In addition, I have had the pleasure of listening to Brad Cook lecture on points of view. If, in my thought process, I feel naturally comfortable in moving from one point of view to the next, then I am convinced to write that way. Multiple points of view in the same chapter. So, the inspiration of my book is two-fold: one, topic and the other, technique.

What do you think readers will like about your book? I think most readers will find plot forwarding through different points of view to be either captivating or distracting. I intend to "capture" them by continuing to write in an action/adventure speed with unusual descriptions of human nature allowed by the varying points of view.

Will you share a bit about your next project? I am a scientist and also a lawyer. I write a great deal of professional material in both science and the field of environmental law. I have been recently contacted by a law journal seeking the submission of an article regarding agriculture. I would entitle it "The Wondrous Journey of Food-Our Relationship Through the Ages." I have found success in merging my nonfiction, technical style of writing with my creative fiction style of writing. That breakthrough came in a long short story entitled, "The Wonder of Natural Life in Kentucky," which has been very well received. I would anticipate writing this new book, which deals with the history of food, in a similar fashion.



What is your favorite way to interact with fans/readers? I enjoy promoting my books at conferences and seminars. Although conversation limits the number of books one can sell an hour, the ability to meet and get to know a potential buyer is a satisfying exercise. Their willingness to engage in a journey through your writing when they purchase one of your books, is even more gratifying. Of course, when they return at another conference to tell you how much they enjoyed your work, well-that's simply "the cat's meow."

What are your top three reasons for writing? 1) passion; 2) love; and 3) interest.

What is the highest compliment someone could make about your writing? There are two: a) It was fun; and b) I love your footnotes.

What is your favorite writing accessory or reference? I am a speed printer, so having a mechanical pencil with an effective eraser and a double-backed yellow pad makes me exceptionally comfortable and efficient. That is how I am writing now. There are many references in the writing that I do, but I am always pleased when I am able to bring out the original Oxford English Dictionary. There is history of writing in that great work even if it takes a magnifying glass to examine!

What tune/music could be the theme song for your book? "River Nights," by Reginald Bareham. You can find it on vimeo under "Reginald Bareham." It is also on the sound track of the educational television documentary, "Harry Caudill, A Man of Courage."

If you could meet one of your characters, who would it be and where would you meet? I am with them all of the time.

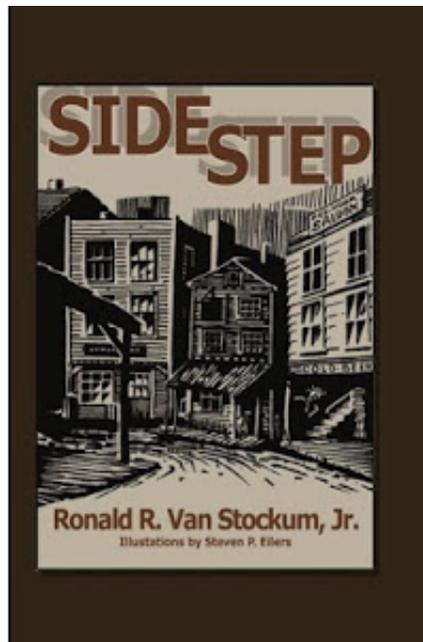
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Side Step

Picture a bar in Red Hook, a dangerous port in Brooklyn across the river from New York City. A horrible scene begins between Rebecca who serves beer and a customer, Lawrence, who looks with one eye on Rebecca, and one on the door. "I am pregnant," she says. We, the other bar patrons, listen while she explains to Lawrence. "I am being watched by a creature and it knew of the man I was with — the creature is a Monster and facilitates such sexual recombinations." What is the reader to think as the action unfolds? Is it the effect of too much beer? Some B-movie horror playing out on the TV screen above our heads? Or is it an attack on Rebecca's cellular ribosomes by the growth of a wasp egg that would feed on her innards unless her brother Lawrence's antibodies can defend against her enemies? Again, the scientific mind of Ronald R. Van Stockum, Jr. serves up a mixed genre story that repulses the senses with images of wasp stings, pimples leaking streams of pus, and Lawrence's suction of cancerous RNA strands, while also imparting a microscopic textbook explanation of processes we never think about. *Side-Step* is connected to two other of the author's stories, *Gillie Deaton and the Breathit County Silver Mine*, and *The Moxare Pit*. Van Stockum is always educational, always entertaining.

Mary Popham

Mary Popham's essay "The Kindnesses We Give Each Other," recently appeared in *This I Believe: Kentucky*. Her novel, *Back Home in Landing Run*, was published by MoonBooks in 2015.



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