



## Wilbur K. Huck

June 9, 1930 - December 23, 2021

Wilbur Huck was a peculiar man. (He called himself "eccentric.") He was a kind and sweet man who presented himself as cantankerous and kvetching. A gentle man who could yell and bristle when he felt threatened. A deeply loving man who could not reach out to make friends. A literary scholar who wrote little. A man of great learning who had trouble understanding himself and those he loved. A man whose name was misspelled on his birth certificate. A Gemini.

Will's parents were Volga Germans who immigrated to America before the First World War. Each of them went through hardship while getting to the United States, his mother being turned away twice for health reasons, crossing and recrossing the Atlantic with sick eyes. Both his parents lost their first spouses to the Spanish Flu and brought children into their marriage. So Will was born at home near Bayard, Nebraska in a house with a large family among whom English, German, and Russian were spoken.

As a baby, he seemed bewitched or like a changeling to older relatives. A "wise woman" was brought in to perform a spell to fix his strangeness. In later years, thinking of this story, his wife wondered if this early bit of "healing" was a response to a child with high functioning Asperger's.

Will started reading very young, getting his library card and taking out books

from the adult section when he was in grade school. A favorite story of his was the time a woman complained that "this little boy" should not be allowed to check out Daphne Du Maurier's Rebecca. The librarian and his mother said that he was already able to read novels and why shouldn't he? His early scholarly attitudes also made him a "teaching assistant" in the two-room school he attended, sometimes being put in charge of instructing younger children.

He went to Minatare High School and then on to Yankton College in South Dakota, preparing to become a Congregational minister. A year in the field as a replacement preacher (the only year he ever drove a car) taught him that he didn't have the social or political skills for the ministry. (And perhaps having a parishioner drop dead of a heart attack in the center aisle the first time he ever served encouraged that decision.)

He returned to school and earned a couple of degrees from the University of Chicago, Masters in Literature and Bachelor of Divinity. His first job hunt led him to Idaho State College in Pocatello. Although he looked for work elsewhere, taking a leave of absence to teach at Pacific Lutheran in Washington, he eventually accepted his lot, though with some grouching. When ISC became a university after he had received tenure, he faced pressure to get a doctorate, pressure he resisted loudly with the help of his faculty union. He was a highly visible character on campus, winning a "best teacher" award while also being hated by some for handing out "the grades they deserve" and resisting grade inflation until his retirement.

He taught a variety of courses including basic composition and upper division literature. Among the lit courses he taught were British, American, Women's, 20th Century, and the Bible as. He also invented the first film studies courses at the college. As a professor, he always found new books to share, new movies to show. He despised and rarely used anthologies and textbooks,

preferring "real books". Ironically, his one major publication, *The Modern Short Story*, was an anthology, edited and with commentary and questions by himself and William Shanahan. As an expert in film, he was called as a witness in the 1974 Idaho Falls censorship trial of *Last Tango in Paris*.

Beyond the classroom, he ran the writing center for a few years. He also spear-headed a team that created a long-running film program called Cinema Six, offering one of the only ways to see foreign films in Pocatello. And as a long-time member of the Speakers and Artists Committee he helped bring great culture to the intermountain campus.

On that committee he worked with Huldah Bell (ne: Hanson) and they became great friends. In August 1971 she introduced him to her niece, Kakie Hanson, who had just graduated from a California high school and come to Pocatello for college. After Huldah's birthday party that October, this rather feral young woman followed Will home and started something. Two years later they eloped without telling Kakie's parents. She was 19 and he was 43 at the time they wed in the Bannock County Courthouse. Their union was a scandal which both of them ignored. It paid her tuition through her Masters' program. Although living with another person, especially such an eccentric one, was rough and tumble for both of them, they eventually grew into their relationship, in spite of her being a Boomer and him being a member of the Silent Generation. Will supported Kake through her schooling as well as her mental health struggles. Kake wound up caring for Will through his final years of vascular dementia.

Not that Will would have noticed these facts as a "balancing." He didn't approve of what he called "a debit-credit morality." The concept of "things balancing out" within relationships, whether with other humans or God, was not part of his weltanschauung. He gave what he could to people and his god

and accepted what was given, be it a feast of love or a famine of friends. There was no "this for that" where connection was concerned.

But where money was concerned, he kept his eyes on the scales. The man never met a penny he couldn't squeeze till Lincoln popped a tear. Until his death, he was living with furniture he inherited from his mother. He believed in guerilla consumerism. Until his dementia, he did all the household shopping with clipped coupons. When Kake took on the financial tasks Will had performed most their lives together, she realized how much he had cared for her by shouldering that burden through the years.

Will picked up their shared burden when he took early retirement from Idaho State University in 1990 after 33 years of teaching. In late 1989 he visited Kake in Central Oregon, where she was teaching at the community college and, after two days of shopping, bought the house that he would die in 31 years later. He moved to Bend in September, 1990 with his entire personal library which eventually grew to about 10,000 volumes. Over a retirement that lasted (almost) as long as his teaching career, he read, watched movies on television, and enjoyed traveling to see art, theatre, and film. During the school year, he supported his wife by taking care of the shopping, cooking, clothes washing, taxes, bills, and outdoor flowers.

From 1976 until 2016, Will also took care of the household cats, first the beloved golden Max, then ferocious five-pound Rafferty, followed by the most-revered June Jhumpa (rescued from the Deschutes County Humane Society) and boring old black Sasha. In 2009, after years of argument, Will allowed Kake to purchase a poodle puppy with whom he promptly fell in love. Princess Birdy preceded him in death, along with his parents, John and Effie Huck, and all of his siblings: Hermina, Mable, Hank, Jacob, Elmer, Sam, Frieda, and Bill.

He is survived by Karen "Kake" Huck, his spouse of 48 years.

The funeral will be held at 11:00 a.m., Friday, January 14, 2022 at St. Helen's Hall of Trinity Episcopal Church and streamed live from the Trinity Episcopal Church Youtube site: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxl0n\\_Mp4Je0f9oApiqxCdw?](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxl0n_Mp4Je0f9oApiqxCdw?)

Memorial contributions may be made to the Central Oregon Symphony 15 SW Colorado Ave., Bend OR 97702.

# Tribute Wall

JP

“*Wilbur was my composition professor at Idaho State. I struggled in that class, but after each paper, the gruff professor gave me the option of making corrections until the paper was passable. I learned so much with each paper and even passed the class yet I never turned in a passing paper! I learned how to edit, and grew to love it. I went on and became a reporter and all the things I learned from Wilbur served me well. Outside of class, we chatted one day about films. Turns out we both had a love of cinema and a friendship was born between the 'gruff' professor and struggling student. Professor Huck was a favorite of mine and I wish I could have thanked him for helping me. --Jake Putnam*

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**Jake Putnam** - May 27, 2022 at 12:00 AM

MS

“*Some five or ten years back, on a frightfully hot summer day, Will came in to our sign company on Second Street. I came out front and greeted him (we were neighbors). He asked if I might have a glass of water to spare -- he'd walked down from home in the West Hills to 'straighten out' a discrepancy at the credit union across the street from our sign business. I provided it and asked if he was on foot. He was. So, I told him I would drive him home, it's 92 degrees out there. He wouldn't hear of it, but relented when I assured him I was getting ready to go up to the house anyway. (I wasn't). On the way home he explained to me in full about the failings of the bank and the banking industry in general. It was a great interlude in my work day and a fond memory.*

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**Michael Smith** - January 13, 2022 at 12:00 AM

AH

“ *We are deeply sorry for your loss ~ Niswonger-Reynolds Funeral Home*

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**A Memorial Tree was planted for Wilbur K. Huck - January 07, 2022 at 12:00 AM**