

WILLIAM STAFFORD

"I'LL BE BACK"

When we were driving past the Old Dental Building, a leaf fell softly on the sidewalk: "Yea, yea, that is where I had my first office many years ago when I was in the Iowa Writers Workshop," he said.

Since that time whatever has been deciduous has reminded me of that day, his look in his eyes, falling softly on the sidewalk. Squirrels on the front lawn there are still after something besides their Master of Fine Arts.

And there are leaves like that one that land softly wherever I go:

Once at Shimer College, when we were walking down the steps of the library, he smiled, and pointed at some tall brown weeds with a little snow around them and said, "I'll be back, its saying, I'll be back."

AN UNHITCHED WISH

When I walked down Pioneer Avenue this morning, I saw a pad-locked door unlocked.

There is a pioneer in everything unlocked. It begins like a covered-wagon and arrives as a new idea.

Unlocked finally, this idea went so far West it found me one Saturday in the sun. Some unhitched wish walked with it.

Saturday from that time on always remained unlocked. I could walk in and choose any way I wanted to arrive. Ideas became avenues, tiny places left partly open.

I was beginning to push as far West as Saturday can: an unhitched wish.

THE HORSES! THE HORSES!

All at once the elm trees left our conversations, our words floated past the ducks, and then we knew: the horses! The horses!

At night, without reigns, the sky rode bareback on library roofs. The sounds of their hoofs were indexed. Card-catalogs were cross-breeding.

Once, at dawn, one of these horses broke loose, and down dirt roads now sunsets splash their orange, willows are looking for their owners, and every horizon breaks herd.

And these horses, these horizons, these splashes are the words we now write with. Our tracks are a publication. Some fencelines still come in paperbacks.

But far up one of the mountains one of these horses has escaped. It bends to drink in a stream. The gray sky is indexed. The wind stirs. Then this horse goes beyond what we know.