Sabbatical Report

I am grateful to have been granted a sabbatical for the 2007-2008 academic year. My expressed hope was 1) to research the life and work of the Scottish botanist David Douglas and begin to write a series of poems about him, and 2) to revise a series of four eco-fantasy novels, *The Alpine Tales*, for publication.

I read and annotated a number of books about Douglas, some of them a bit rare and purchased with monies from the college. I visited his haunts in Scotland on a two-week trip in April 2008 and interviewed one of his biographers there. I also visited a number of Douglas sites in the Pacific Northwest in July 2008. By summer’s end I had several hundred pages of handwritten notes and about four poems; I felt poised to start creating poems in earnest. Unfortunately, almost all of the notes and books burned in the Tea Fire. Sometimes I think I would like to continue this project; other times I think I should let it go. Time will tell.

I worked very diligently on revising *The Alpine Tales* from June through December 2007; I was on contract with WordFarm and met my submission deadline. The finished product was about 215,000 words in length. WordFarm is a small literary press, and the editing process since then has been a slow one. I responded to their edits of the first two novels in July and August 2008, and to the third in January 2009. At this point I do not know when the book will be released.

In August 2008 I was contacted by a pair of screenwriters in Los Angeles who inquired about the film rights to *No Clock in the Forest*, the first of *The Alpine Tales*. This novel has long been out of print, though in its day it did sell 20,000 copies. As of yet no contract has been signed, but the screenwriters keep assuring me that a contract is forthcoming.

In fall 2007 I worked on the final editing of my first full volume of poems, *Visiting Home*, published by Pecan Grove Press in April 2008. In winter 2008 I worked on the final editing of my second full volume of poems, *Rosing from the Dead*, forthcoming from WordFarm. One of the poems from *Visiting Home* was selected in October 2008 for *Verse Daily*, a popular website that displays one poem per day, and three others were featured online by the *Matthew’s House Project*. The book was showcased in an interview in the *Santa Barbara Independent* and favorably reviewed online by *Image* magazine. (I was also featured by *Image* as their Artist-of-the-Month in April 2008.)
During my sabbatical I also wrote some poetry reviews of my own. One five-book review essay was published in *Christianity & Literature*; a single-book review is forthcoming there as well. Other essays from this time include seven short pieces in *Lectionary Homiletics* on connections between various passages in scripture and the arts, especially literature. This is a publication to help ministers in the preparation of their sermons.

In 2007 and 2008, I had twenty-seven poems appear in fourteen different journals: *Books & Culture, California Quarterly, Camas, Christian Century, Cider Press Review, Cresset, English Journal, Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, Kerf, Reflections* (a publication of the Yale Divinity School), *Rock & Sling, Ruminate, Slant,* and *Stonewall.* Seven poems were accepted but not yet published in three journals: *Anglican Theological Review, Cider Press Review,* and *Weber.* During this period I also had one poem that appeared in a textbook, *Creative Writing: Four Genres in Brief* (Beford/St. Martin’s), and two poems that appeared in an anthology, *Dog Blessings* (New World Library). Two other poems were selected but not yet published in two other anthologies: *Earth Blessings* and *Remembering the Future* (Cascade Books).

I gave six invited readings during my sabbatical. These took place at the Ojai Poetry Festival (Ojai, CA), CSU Channel Islands (Camarillo, CA), the Poetry Zone (Santa Barbara), the Calvin College Festival of Faith and Writing (Grand Rapids, MI), the Wildling Art Museum (Los Olivos, CA), and the Looking Glass Bookstore (Portland, OR). In addition, in January 2008 I coordinated the second annual community reading in Los Padres National Forest to remember the poet William Stafford.

In July 2007 and again in July 2008, my wife and I traveled to Ashland to attend the Oregon Shakespeare Festival with Westmont alumni, and I led discussions on the plays that we saw.

Last but not least, during my sabbatical I constructed a trail from the main college entrance down Chelham Creek to the Chelham Way gate. This connects with the previously constructed Westmont Creek trail to create a 1.5-mile loop that is mostly on dirt and is (or was, before the Tea Fire) mostly hidden from college structures. (In all, there are 1.75 miles of dirt paths, with connectors to Lovik Field, Las Barrancas, and Mountain Drive.) The trails have been well used by students, faculty, and neighbors, and I hope they will continue to provide a place of escape and refreshment. In 2007 I published an essay in the *Cresset* about this work called “Trail Maintenance.”