

# The News-Gazette LIFESTYLE

SECTION C

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## Animals And Granddads



*'It's not the shortness; it's the compression you can make in a poem.'*

### Retired Professor Publishes New Book Of Poetry For The Young

By CLAUDIA SCHWAB

*This dapper gent  
can pay the rent  
with a flake of snow,  
and live on pies  
made of layered ice.*

These are the first five lines of Dabney Stuart's poem "Penguin" in his newly published book of poetry "Open the Gates."

The collection is deliberately subtitled "Poems for Young Readers."

"We didn't want to say 'children' because so many adults have liked the poems," said Stuart. "It's for 'young readers' — that's about ages 6 to 95; and that's what we meant."

It is Stuart's second book of poetry for children and his 23rd book overall. Besides books of poetry for adults, he has published fiction and literary criticism. Stuart, a Lexington resident, is a retired English professor at Washington and Lee University, having taught there for 38 years.

His other children's poetry book, "Friends of Yours, Friends of Mine," was published in 1974. Stuart explains how they differ.

"Both have poems primarily about animals but this one opens up a little more," he said. "It talks about extinct animals, grandfathers and about children playing in the sand. The first book was purely animals."

Stuart, 72, has four children and five grandchildren who range in age from 2 to 22.

"I had my own grandchildren in mind but it's not specifically for them," he said.

Still another difference is it is physically a bigger book than any of the others he has published. The reason for that, he said, was to accommodate the art. It is also the first of his books with original watercolors.

Even before opening the pages, the cover painting of a watchful wolf turning to look at something catches the reader's eyes. Artist Susan Elizabeth Elliott, who is also an ecologist and writer, created the images throughout the book to match Stuart's poetry.

The book, which was published by Pinyon Publishing Company in Montrose, Colo., has a unique local connection.

Publisher Gary Entsminger was born and grew up on Hunter Hill just north of Lexington. He still co-owns the house with his brother where they grew up and he returns to spend time here each year. Entsminger graduated from the former Lexington High School in 1968, and in 1977, from W&L where he majored in English, taking many courses from Stuart. Afterward, he moved west and had a career publishing books on computer software for many years. When he chose to switch gears and write fiction, he also decided to start his own publishing company.

"I lost touch with him altogether for 30 years and a letter came to me out of the blue asking if I perhaps had a manuscript that I could send him," said Stuart about his former student.

Stuart complied with Entsminger's request for a manuscript, which turned into "Tables," a previous book of poetry published by Pinyon in 2009. A few years earlier, Stuart was awarded a residency to write poetry at the Rockefeller Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. He remembers concentrating on the purpose of the project — to write poetry for adults — every morning but, in the afternoons, he would relax and turn to writing poems for children. That was in 2000 and the end product of those early efforts became the newly published book "Open the Gates."

Some poems, such as "The Kiwi and Koala Bear" and "Electric Eel," are dialogues.

"The koala talks to the kiwi and the electric eel has a clam that she talks to," noted Stuart.

While others, like "The Owls," are not.

Many poems, such as "Ex-Files," ask questions and often reveal the poet's creative imagination and sense of humor.

*When a creature becomes extinct,  
What happens to it, do you think?  
What's it like to be an ex-  
Tyrannosaurus rex,  
Or a former  
All-conquering raptor,  
Or a mammoth, once admired  
By everyone, but now retired?  
Imagine a mastodon  
Occupying her non-afternoon  
Or without a future the last hagfish  
Making a wish.  
What does the pterodactyl do,  
Not even available to the zoo?  
And the ammonites — there were so many,  
it's hard to believe there aren't any.  
There isn't even one on a penny.  
And thousands more such enterprises —  
what became of their shapes and sizes?*

Still other poems, like "Bumblebees," illustrate Stuart's love of language.

The opening line speaks of the fun he has with word play: "Do bumblebees fumble — or even bumble?"

Stuart has been intrigued with poetry all his life.

"I've been told I listened to poems very early, even during the time I was in a crib," he said. "Since I was 15, I knew I wanted to be a poet."

"I'm fascinated by language and the shapes I can give it, how you can evoke or suggest things and connect things without having to tell a story but to imply a story," he explained. "It's not the shortness; it's the compression you can make in a poem."

Above all, Stuart loves the mental and creative process.

"I'm publishing the finished thing for readers," he said. "The challenge of it is in the writing."

Stuart said he usually writes his poems first

using a pen and a legal pad. Then he types it into the computer. From there, he prints out a hardcopy of the poem and revises, again using pen and paper. Admittedly, technology has changed the process though not the essence of what Stuart has always done. It has just made redoing a poem easier and more efficient, he said.

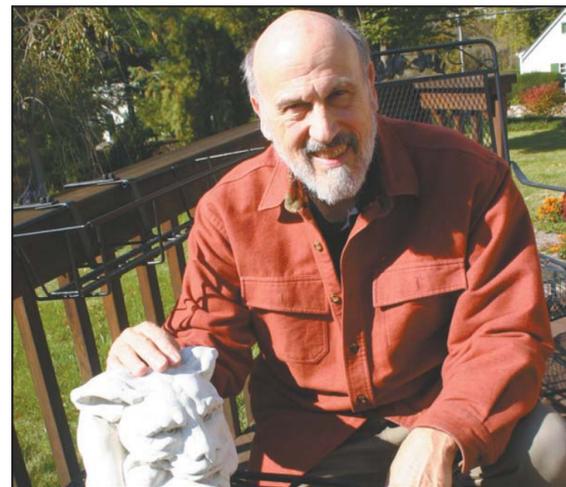
Stuart said he works on a poem for varying lengths of time — anywhere from a few weeks to a few years, though mostly he works on a poem for three to four weeks. Asked how he comes up with the ideas, he answered, "I just relax and let it happen." But, the lengthy time period spent on a poem is not necessarily the creation of it but time taken to rework it.

"I've never written something I haven't revised over and over," he said.

One poem in the collection which took Stuart more time to write was "Yak." He had to puzzle through and revise it, he said, in order to figure out how he was going to get that large cold-weather animal to realize her dream.

*She's a huge, shaggy mop  
with horns, who lives on top  
of mountains so high  
even birds have to try  
extra hard to fly  
over their peaks.*

*...What does she dream of?  
Something hair-raising  
you can bet, like a haircut  
to take all that load off,  
and stretches of grass forever...  
and warm weather all year.*



DABNEY STUART pats the head of a favorite gargoyle each morning on the deck of his Lexington home before he starts his working day. Stuart has a collection of gargoyles and loves gardening in addition to being a writer, husband and grandfather. (Claudia Schwab photo)

#### Book Signing This Saturday

Dabney Stuart will be signing copies of his newly published book of poetry, "Open the Gates," at The Bookery Saturday, Nov. 27, from 2 to 4 p.m.



## 'Southern Inn And Out' Offers Musical Magic

### Ruley And Mule Train's Latest CD Captures 2009 Christmas Show

By DOUG CHASE

There stands a tall, young man wearing brand-new basketball shoes and squeezing the handle of a small gym bag at the intersection of two busy New York City streets looking "lost-er" than lost.

A compassionate cabbie, sensing either a fare or a good deed opportunity or both, asks, "Can I help you?"

"Yes, could you tell me how to get to Madison Square Garden?" asked the tall fellow.

#### An N-G Review

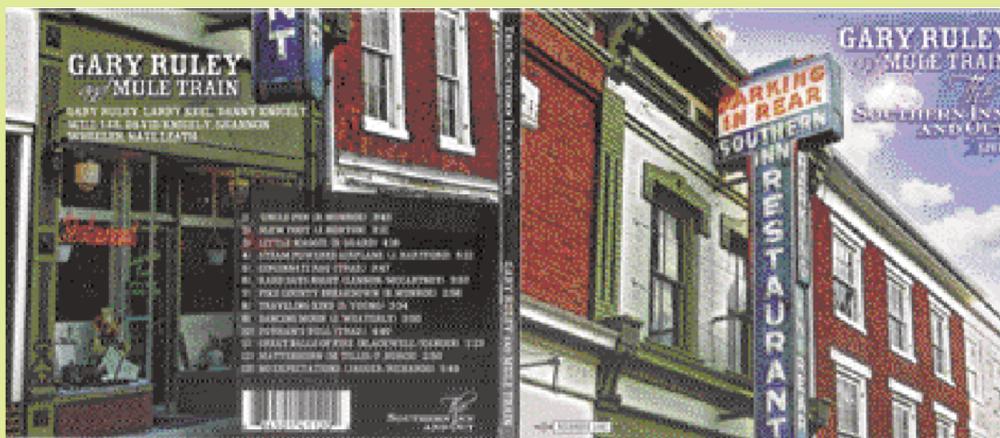
The cabbie shakes his head and sighs. As he slams his machine back into gear, he yells out the window, "Practice, boy, practice."

And so it is with any skill or ability that one wants to master, the only applicable admonition is "practice, practice, practice."

Ask any coach, composer or musical organizer how to get the best results, and they'll quickly snap, "Get the best players."

Rockbridge County native Gary Ruley never had a chance to avoid that cabbie's advice to "practice, practice, practice" because that was just part of the deal growing up in a house where Pat Ruley, no slack musician himself, thought that the family that worked together — and boy did those Ruley kids learn the meaning of work before they could spell it — and the family that

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THE COVER for Gary Ruley and Mule Train's latest CD, "The Southern Inn and Out," shows a pre-fire Southern Inn. The CD was recorded live during the band's Christmas show last year at the downtown landmark. This year's Christmas show will be held this Friday at the Lexington Golf and Country Club.