

Please join the Worcester County Poetry Association in presenting the

## Stanley Kunitz Medal to Paul Szlosek

in honor of his commitment to poetry and in celebration of the legacy of Stanley Kunitz

### The Farmer's Son

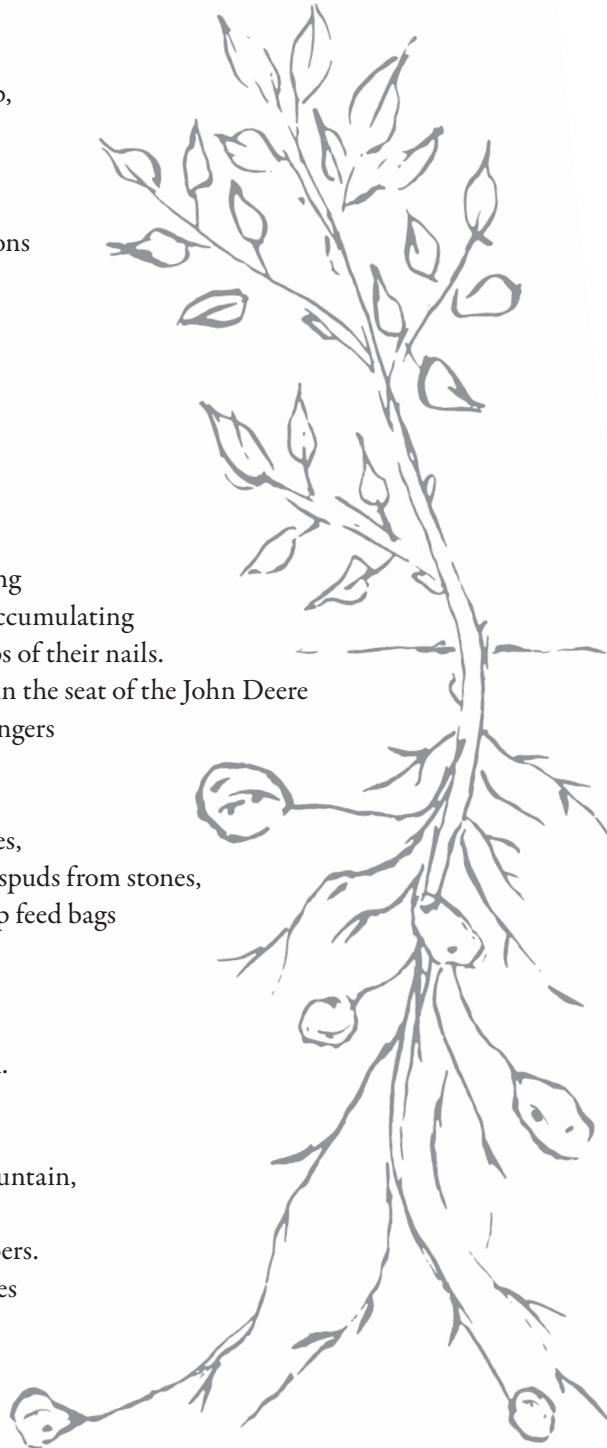
On a certain June evening,  
unable to descend  
into the shadowy depths of sleep,  
I find myself back  
in the back of a pickup truck,  
seven years old and pining away  
for the Saturday morning cartoons  
I'll be missing.

My mom's at the wheel,  
steering the old Ford  
down the rock-infested path  
to the potato field.

My two sisters are already there,  
so eager to begin, they are digging  
with their bare hands, the soil accumulating  
in back quarter moons at the tips of their nails.  
And my dad, he's perched high in the seat of the John Deere  
staring straight ahead, as steel fingers  
rake the earth behind him.

It's our job to walk these trenches,  
trying to tell the dirt-encrusted spuds from stones,  
dropping our bounty into burlap feed bags  
slung over our shoulders.

I do not care to be here,  
laboring under the morning sun.  
I do not care for potatoes  
except for their names:  
Kennebec, Catawba, Green Mountain,  
names too exotic, too divine  
for such bland-tasting fleshy tubers.  
I believe they are really the names  
of foreign kingdoms,  
lands of untold wonders.



I am the farmer's son,  
but not a good one.  
I am, by nature, an indoor child  
grown pasty by the blue light  
of the television screen,  
a pale boy who prefers  
school work to farm work,  
who withers and faints  
while picking string beans  
in the summer heat.

My dad conceals his disappointment  
in a son who does not share  
his love for the land  
he has toiled for his entire life.  
Yet somehow he understands  
and tries not to push me so hard.

Perhaps he recognizes  
I am not a crop to be cultivated,  
but more like a weed  
which must spread its roots  
wherever it pleases to survive.

And now once again,  
it's twenty years in the future,  
the path I chose, led  
not to the potato field,  
but to this cramped city apartment  
where I lie in an unmade bed,  
trying to come to grips  
with the passing of my father,  
harvesting longings and regrets.

It is soul, not soil  
I dig through now  
and what I uncover may not be  
as comforting as potatoes.

### The Worcester Historical Museum

30 Elm Street, Worcester, MA • Thursday, July 27, 2023, 6:30 to 8:30 pm

**THE STANLEY KUNITZ MEDAL** originated with a bequest from his estate to the Worcester County Poetry Association. It is presented annually to a person with a strong Worcester County connection whose dedication to poetry parallels Stanley Kunitz's lifelong commitment to poetry: teaching poetry, mentoring poets, speaking poetry, publishing poetry, and supporting organizations which nurture poetry. Stanley Kunitz (1905-2006) was born in Worcester, a city that "provoked him into poetry." After completing his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Harvard University in 1927, he worked as a reporter and columnist for *The Worcester Telegram*. He then moved to New York City and became an editor at H. W. Wilson Company, a publisher of reference books. Collections of poetry, such as *Intellectual Things* (1930), *Passport to the War* (1944), and *The Testing-Tree* (1971) earned critical praise. Kunitz was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1959 for *Selected Poems 1928-1958* (1958); *Passing Through* (1995) won a National Book Award. He served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1974-1976 and as Poet Laureate from 2000-2001. His teaching posts included Bennington College, Brandeis University, the New School for Social Research in New York, and Columbia University, all of which provided him with the opportunity to influence generations of writers. His association with younger poets was "one of the happiest chapters" in his life. Kunitz cofounded the Fine Arts Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and Poets House in New York City.

**PAUL SZLOSEK** is a poet with extraordinary gifts who began writing poetry around 1967 at the age of five. His mother Pauline collected his poems in a small booklet entitled "Paul's Poet Tree." These beginning efforts have been nourished for decades, as he matured into one of the most influential poets in Worcester County. His poems have been featured in regional, national, and international print and online journals and anthologies. Paul's poetry has been recognized with numerous awards and honorable mentions, including the Jacob Knight Award for Poetry in 2001. Paul served on the board of the Worcester County Poetry Association for over a decade, where he was co-chair of the committee which created the WCPA's occasional publication, *The Issue* - he was also its very first editor. He is well-known in the Worcester poetry community as a fanatical practitioner and promoter of obscure poetry forms, as well as the creator of his own forms, such as the streetbeatina, the sing-sang song, and the ziggurat, all of which he shares with his readers on his blog, Paul's Poetry Playground. A tradition he began during his First Night Worcester program in association with the WCPA combined poetry, magic, and mathematics, after which he organized and edited dozens of group poems. He has also conducted over two dozen in-depth interviews with poets (local, national, and international) that appear in his monthly online poetry journal, which he compiled and edited in the form of transcripts of imaginary poetry readings called "The International Imaginarium For Word Verse" (formerly known as "The Virtual Poetorium"). He is a frequent workshop leader and participant and visiting poet, not only at schools such as the Floral Street School in Shrewsbury, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Worcester State University, but at the Peabody Essex Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Worcester Art Museum. As a co-founder and host of the Poets Parlor and Poetorium at Starlite reading and open mic series, Paul continues to inspire countless poets to engage in the magic of poetry.

**The 2023 Stanley Kunitz Medal Committee**

Joe Fusco Jr. – John Hodgen – Heather J. Macpherson – Susan Elizabeth Sweeney –  
Judith Ferrara, Chair

**Sponsored by**

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The Stanley Kunitz Boyhood Home • The Greater Worcester Community Foundation  
The John Alden Trust • The Worcester Historical Museum

**Stanley Kunitz Medal Ceremony** - Thursday, July 27, 2023, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Worcester Historical Museum

30 Elm Street

Worcester, Massachusetts 01609