



When I came down from the attic  
with the pastel portrait in my hand  
of a long-lipped stranger  
with a brave moustache  
and deep brown level eyes,  
she ripped it into shreds  
without a single word  
and slapped me hard.  
In my sixty-fourth year  
I can feel my cheek  
still burning.

—FROM "THE PORTRAIT"

The back hall is presumably the setting for one of Kunitz's most personal Worcester poems, "The Portrait." He wrote it in 1969, well before returning to 4 Woodford Street. This house, with its rooms, hallways, staircases, attic, and backyard, had already become a significant expression of his deepest feelings and memories.



I summon up all my strength  
to set the pear tree in the ground,  
unwinding its burlap shroud.

It is taller than I. "Make room  
for the roots!" my mother cries,  
"Dig the hole deeper."

—FROM "MY MOTHER'S PEARS"

When Kunitz stepped once again into the back yard, he murmured, "My first garden . . ." In all the years the Stockmals lived here, the pear tree that he and his mother planted in 1919 yielded fruit every fall. But after Kunitz died on Mother's Day, May 14, 2006, Carol remembers that "the pears all fell off the tree before they could grow and ripen. Greg said, 'Not one pear was left, like it was in mourning.'"

In 1991, Kunitz noted that the Stockmals had transformed 4 Woodford Street "into a literary landmark." In 2010, this prescient comment was confirmed when the American Library Association designated his boyhood home as a Literary Landmark™.

### Further Reading

- Ferrara, Judith. "The House on Woodford Street: Memory and Imagination in the Poems of Stanley Kunitz." *Worcester Review* 33: 1-2, 2012. 144-57.
- —. *A few sweet drops in my bitter cup: Portrait of Yetta Dine, Mother of Poet Stanley Kunitz*. TidePool, 2022.
- Johnson, Carle. "A Glimpse of Stanley Kunitz's Childhood Home, Worcester, Massachusetts." *Worcester Review* 26: 1-2, 2005. 22-27.
- Kunitz, Stanley. *Collected Poems*. W.W. Norton, 2000.
- —. *A Kind of Order, A Kind of Folly: Essays and Conversations by Stanley Kunitz*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 1975.
- —. *Passing Through: The Later Poems, New and Selected*. W.W. Norton, 1995.
- Kunitz, Stanley with Genine Lentine. Photographs by Marnie Crawford Samuelson. *The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden*. W.W. Norton, 2005.
- Menides, Laura. "The Sense of Place in Kunitz, Bishop, and Olson." *Worcester Review* 27: 1-2, 2006. 117-26.
- Moss, Stanley, ed. *Interviews and Encounters with Stanley Kunitz*. Sheep Meadow Press, 1993.
- Rudman, Mark. "Thursday, October 17: Worcester, Massachusetts." *A Celebration for Stanley Kunitz on His 80th Birthday*. Sheep Meadow Press, 1986.
- *Stanley Kunitz Papers*. Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
- *Stanley Kunitz-Stockmal Collection*. Archives and Special Collections, Robert H. Goddard Library, Clark University.



Text by Judith Ferrara with John Gaumond, Kate Gregoire, AJ Leto, Carol Stockmal, and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. Photos by AJ Leto (house exterior plaque; piano; George and Martha Washington portraits; highchair; back hall); Cheryl Richards (Kunitz on porch); and John Gaumond (pear tree). The draft of "My Mother's Pears" and portrait of young Stanley are reproduced from the Stanley Kunitz-Stockmal Collection at Clark University; the portrait of Solomon Kunitz is from the Stanley Kunitz Papers at Princeton University.

This brochure was produced in 2022 by Mapping Worcester in Poetry, an initiative supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through Scholarship in Action at Holy Cross, with Worcester County Poetry Association as a community partner.

[kunitzhome.org](http://kunitzhome.org)

Tours by appointment only



**Worcester County  
Poetry Association**  
Growing Poetry Since 1971



# Stanley Kunitz Boyhood Home


4 Woodford Street | Worcester, MA 01604

*This was indeed the house of my childhood,  
the one I still dream about.*

—LETTER FROM STANLEY KUNITZ,  
NOVEMBER 18, 1985

Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations **ALTAFF**  
Literary Landmarks Register designates

**4 WOODFORD STREET**  
in tribute to the life and writings of  
**AMERICAN POET  
STANLEY JASSPON KUNITZ**  
1905 - 2006

 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry 1959  
Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress 1974  
National Medal of Arts 1993  
Poet Laureate of the United States 2000

who lived in this house from 1919 - 1925

"This was indeed the house of my childhood, the one I still dream about."  
Worcester Public Library Board of Directors June 19, 2010  
Worcester County Poetry Association  
Friends of Stanley Kunitz



Poet Stanley Kunitz (1905-2006) — “Worcester’s pride,” as he says of the fruit in “My Mother’s Pears” — returned to 4 Woodford Street on October 17, 1985. Greg and Carol Stockmal, who became curators of the Stanley Kunitz Boyhood Home, had bought the house in 1979, unaware of its literary significance. They were in the middle of restoring it when Kunitz stopped by on the last day of a poetry festival held by the Worcester County Poetry Association in honor of his 80th birthday. The Stockmals invited Kunitz, his wife Elise Asher, and the poets accompanying them to come inside. From this first encounter, a two-decade friendship grew between Kunitz and the Stockmals, sweetened by an annual gift of pears from the tree Kunitz and his mother had planted in 1919.

*Those strangers are my friends  
whose kindness blesses the house  
my mother built at the edge of town*

—FROM “MY MOTHER’S PEARS”

Kunitz was born several blocks from Woodford Street in a “Green Street tenement” (as he describes it in “Passing Through”), just eight weeks after his father Solomon’s suicide in Elm Park. In 1919, Kunitz’s mother, Yetta Jasspon Kunitz, and her second husband, Mark Dine, built the three-story, two-family home at 4 Woodford Street together with another couple, the Siffs. Yetta and Mark owned the Dine Dress Manufacturing Company on Water Street. After Kunitz’s stepfather died suddenly in 1920, Yetta struggled financially; in 1925, she sold her half of the house to the Siffs. Woodford Street became

*The house, the stucco one you built,  
We lost.*

—FROM “FATHER AND SON”

*Sister’s doughboy on last leave  
had robbed me of her hand;  
downstairs at intervals she played  
Warum on the baby grand.*

—FROM “THREE FLOORS”

“Three Floors” was one of the Stockmals’ favorite Kunitz poems, so they bought a 1910 Wasserman baby grand piano at a Newport, R.I., estate sale. Kunitz happened to telephone them shortly after its delivery. When they shared the news, he told Greg where his mother had her piano — exactly where Carol and Greg had told the movers to position it in the living room.



*One of my assigned compositions for Miss McGillicuddy  
began with the smashing sentence: “George Washington  
was a tall, petite, handsome man.” She gave my essay  
an A-plus and read it annually to my successors, as a  
sample of immortal prose.*

—FROM A KIND OF ORDER, A KIND OF FOLLY

The Stockmals purchased a pair of paintings for their dining room to celebrate a story of Kunitz’s literary beginnings he often told. His public life as a writer began with this profile of George Washington. The budding poet, unable to resist words like “petite,” later called the Worcester public schools “first class.” He attended Providence Street School and Ledge Street School (both demolished in the late 1950s for Interstate 290), graduated from Classical High, and earned a full scholarship to Harvard. Kunitz’s literary star grew brighter with every decade as he became a renowned poet, winning major prizes (including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award), co-founding New York’s Poets House and Provincetown’s Fine Arts Work Center, and serving as United States Poet Laureate.



MY MOTHER’S PEARS  
for Carol and Greg Stockmal  
Green-gold, succulent, plump,  
transported through autumn skies  
in a box marked Handle With Care,  
sleep eighteen Bartlett pears,  
hand-picked and polished and packed  
for deposit at my door,  
each in its styrofoam nest  
with a stub of stem attached  
and a single bright leaf like a flag.  
A smaller than usual crop,  
but still enough to share  
as always at harvest time.

*What a lovely, festive visit we had with you last Monday! I came back with a host of new memories to mull over . . . Here is the poem that, for good reason, I have dedicated to you.*

—LETTER FROM STANLEY KUNITZ, NOVEMBER 16, 1989

Shown here is an excerpt from the draft of “My Mother’s Pears” that Carol donated to Clark University in 2009 along with many other items, thus establishing the Stanley Kunitz-Stockmal Collection.

*[Kunitz] said his mother had a work-room [in the cellar]. I opened the door [...] and there was some furniture and a highchair. “That’s my old highchair,” he exclaimed. Now we have it here in the kitchen. Stanley said, “My mother dragged the highchair with her wherever we moved.”*

—GREG STOCKMAL,  
QUOTED BY CARLE JOHNSON



The highchair, now ensconced in Carol’s kitchen, is the only surviving piece of furniture from the Kunitz-Dine family.

August 27, 1986 - Dear Carol & Greg Stockmal — this is the boy who lived in (y)our house at 4 Woodford St. — Blessings, Stanley Kunitz.



In his caption, Kunitz writes “(y)our,” highlighting co-ownership of the home. These four letters symbolize the depth of his friendship with the Stockmals, his joyful return to Worcester (a city he once said had “scared” him), and a poetry community that would honor his life and work. It is fitting that this photograph now hangs in his boyhood bedroom.

*Bolt upright in my bed that night  
I saw my father flying;  
the wind was walking on my neck,  
the windowpanes were crying.*

—FROM “THREE FLOORS”