


John  
Caddy 2012  
Distinguished  
Artist

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION



Poet  
Teacher  
Eco-Philosopher  
Naturalist









# Introduction

In the late 1800s, the Cornish miner Tom Caddy came to Hibbing, Minnesota, by way of the iron mines of Upper Michigan. He was the mine captain who drove the first shaft in Hibbing's Hull-Rust Pit, the largest open-pit mine in the world.

The red dust churned up by the mine got into the blood of Tom Caddy's great-grandson John Caddy, born in Hibbing in 1937. John wrote about the town and about nearby Virginia in his second collection of poems, *The Color of Mesabi Bones*. "Kids who live close to the open pits / mix paint from trackside dust / and for a game dip a finger / and mark their faces with their caste, / or smear the whole face, like Dad's," he wrote in the title poem of the collection—a book in which the complicated history of Iron Range mining towns intertwines with the story of Caddy's own complicated upbringing in a violent household, his feelings of being an outsider, and his dreams of leaving the Range behind.

Caddy did leave the Iron Range, but luckily for us he has remained a Minnesotan, one who is equal parts poet, teacher, and naturalist. He began writing poetry as a young teacher at the University of Minnesota, publishing his first nature poem in 1968 and his first book of poetry in 1986. National recognition followed, including a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry and coast-to-coast reading tours.

In 1994, everything changed when Caddy survived a crippling stroke. "The strange thing is," he says, "after a stroke, people think you're dead." Caddy himself was surprised and delighted to be very much alive. Post-stroke, he has reinvented himself as **a poet dedicated to a celebration of the earth and, just as important, dedicated to sharing his poems as a way of helping people reconnect with nature.**

Each weekday, Caddy e-mails a photo and poem to more than 1,500 subscribers around the world. Most often, he captures the day's "Healing Image" during a walk on the 10 acres of forest, marsh, and ponds at his home near Forest Lake. It's Caddy's gift of Minnesota to the world, inspiring all who receive it to truly see the glories of nature that surround us.

**TED STARYK** Chair, The McKnight Foundation



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# Artist's Statement

Reading poems when young, we are sometimes knocked out by a line or two that make us know we are not in this world alone—that others out there think and feel as we do. Theodore Roethke wrote: “I fear those shadows most / that start from my own feet.” In my late 20s, when I needed such a key, his words were an “open sesame” that unlocked me.





As I look back, I see my life as a long sequence of gifts, mostly from Mother Earth, unsought and freely given. The gift of refuge in the woods. Canoeing the Boundary Waters. Backpacking the Cascades. The gift of knowledge of the wounded Earth. The gifts of learning that nature is indifferent to us—we are too new to remember—and that herons are wise to fly away.

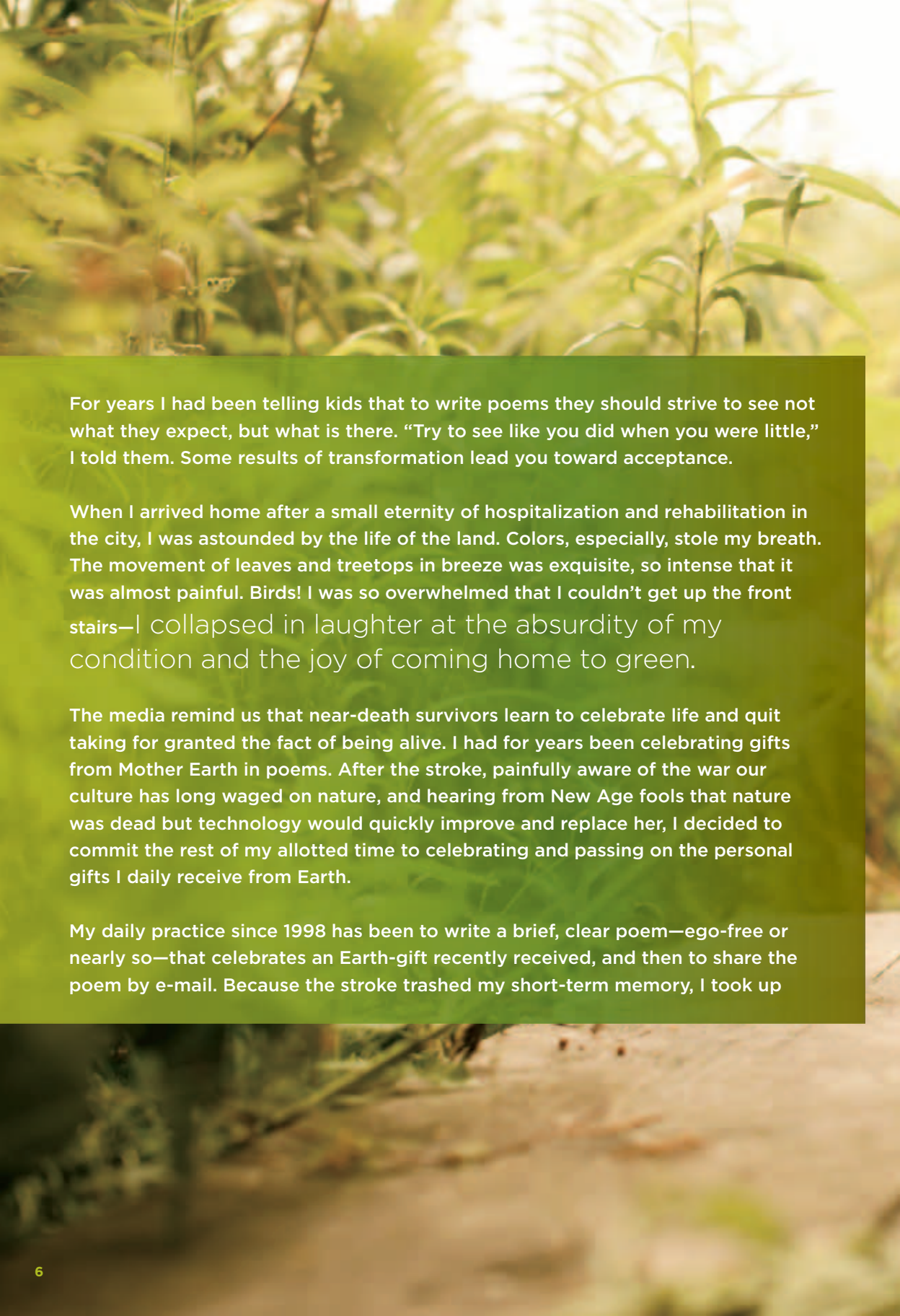
One summer when I was teaching at an Audubon camp near Spooner, Wisconsin, I went back to the cook shack after nightfall to see if there was any coffee left. I switched on the light to see if my cup was where I'd left it. I saw instead a deer mouse sitting upright, holding in her hands a wasp I'd killed earlier, and I saw that she was eating the stinger.

That gift flooded me—the gift of essential transformation, the gift of knowing that the mouse was doing what artists do: eating poison when it's on the menu and converting it into energy and power and often beauty. I think of the blues. I think of *Guernica*.

That mouse gave me my essential metaphor for perceiving my life as both teacher and poet. The teacher and the artist are both transformers of experience, and experience is the transformer of the artist. Change happens, and change never asks permission. Whether we like it or not doesn't matter. The title of the poem I wrote from that mouse teaching became the title of my first book, *Eating the Sting*.

In 1994 I survived a massive stroke. Almost dying was confusing, but not at first frightening. Terror waited a day. When I realized after a week or two that I could still think and play with words and that the nurses were still cute, I decided to not yet finish dying—to accept the transformation.

In stroke therapy, doctors take pains to point out your neurological deficits; that is, where your brain damage is going to screw you up in daily life. A big problem, I was told, was that my perceptual filters had been torn away, that I would have trouble selecting and sorting what was important. Everything would be interesting and would arrest my attention. I would see, but not appropriately. I said, "Oh, you mean like having a small child's eyes." They agreed. So I received a fine gift, cast as a neurological deficit: the gift of an innocent eye.



For years I had been telling kids that to write poems they should strive to see not what they expect, but what is there. “Try to see like you did when you were little,” I told them. Some results of transformation lead you toward acceptance.

When I arrived home after a small eternity of hospitalization and rehabilitation in the city, I was astounded by the life of the land. Colors, especially, stole my breath. The movement of leaves and treetops in breeze was exquisite, so intense that it was almost painful. Birds! I was so overwhelmed that I couldn’t get up the front stairs—I collapsed in laughter at the absurdity of my condition and the joy of coming home to green.

The media remind us that near-death survivors learn to celebrate life and quit taking for granted the fact of being alive. I had for years been celebrating gifts from Mother Earth in poems. After the stroke, painfully aware of the war our culture has long waged on nature, and hearing from New Age fools that nature was dead but technology would quickly improve and replace her, I decided to commit the rest of my allotted time to celebrating and passing on the personal gifts I daily receive from Earth.

My daily practice since 1998 has been to write a brief, clear poem—ego-free or nearly so—that celebrates an Earth-gift recently received, and then to share the poem by e-mail. Because the stroke trashed my short-term memory, I took up

photography to record what I saw and found that my newly innocent eye made for strong photos. Another gift! In 2005, I reconceived the daily offerings as a kind of digitized *haiga*, a Japanese form that combines a haiku with visual art. Since then, the daily poems have been accompanied by the photo that captures and evokes the experience from which I wrote.

I sum up my Earth-centered work of the past 20 years with two simple propositions: Celebration is the garden of hope. Shared pain shrinks; shared joy grows.

In his poem “The Waking,” Roethke wrote:

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

John  
Caddy



# The Bard's Ecology

**John Calvin Rezmerski**

Picture a man with a 10-acre backyard that encompasses a marsh, ponds, and woods. He has a reputation for love of the wild, but his life is also filled with books and art, and his voice echoes across an electronic world where he is esteemed as a teacher and envied as a student of almost everything.

Consider a bard, not just in the sense that he is someone who writes poetry, but as one formally elected a Bard of the Cornish Gorsedh who has chosen the bardic name *Kaner an Norvys*, "Singer of Earth." In ancient Celtic times, bards were the storytellers, poets, and singers who acted as the keepers of their nation's heritage; in modern times, the bard is an interpreter of the world and a builder of community. Like his fellow modern bard Walt Whitman, this bard celebrates and sings the environment he inhabits, accepting the poet's role as attentive explorer of the connection between observation and consciousness.

His ecology is practical: hosted by the universe, he becomes a host to his fellow inhabitants. He listens for its voice and responds with his own.

Earth is life  
is art;  
all  
is connected.

John Caddy was a naturalist from early childhood, eager to observe and to understand what he was experiencing. Whenever he could, he spent time in the woods, looking for the ways creatures interacted with one another and their environments. Wherever he went, he was alert to what was going on around him. Without becoming bogged down in methodology, without becoming jaded, and without losing his sense of simple joy in his surroundings, he became committed to ecology and to sorting out an ecological stance that has at its heart a creative engagement with the natural world, a way of responding spontaneously and emotionally to the details of its workings.

While he worked to recover from a life-altering stroke, Caddy launched [Morning-Earth.org](http://Morning-Earth.org), a website that celebrates the confluence of art and ecology through an ever-growing collection of poems, photographs, resources, and philosophy. “I found myself filled with a persistent mood of opening,” Caddy recalled about his inspiration for the site. “I decided to dedicate myself to a celebration of earth life in my art and in my teaching....The poems’ intent, or their hope, is to help people reconnect with their intuitive love of the wild....Take these little poems as proofs that the wild is still alive to sustain us, and still offers to the careful eye images that heal.”

That is one of the essential roles of the modern bard: to be a healer of consciousness. Caddy plays many other roles that fit perfectly onto the map of bardic territory: eco-philosopher, teacher, poet, naturalist—“a few of the hats I wear,” he says of this list. In Caddy’s case, you could add gardener, woodworker, organizer, music lover, and sardonic wit to the haberdasher’s mix. He is as apt to quote Spinoza or refer in detail to a classic film as he is to explain the taxonomy of fungi or offer a visitor a taste of the homemade elderberry/sumac jelly that is a creation as fine as any of his poems. The amazing thing about Caddy is that he so completely and seamlessly manages to integrate all of his avenues of endeavor.

# The Bard<sup>as</sup> Eco-Philosopher

Caddy has distilled much of his thinking about life and art into a set of six eco-principles informed by decades of study, observation, and practice. Opposite, the large text refers to the earth's outer ecology; the smaller text refers to the inner ecology of the individual.



1 Life is powered by **flows** of energy from the sun.

Art-making is powered by flows of images from the conscious and the unconscious minds, and by a flow of energy between self and other.

2 Life lives in **circles**.

The mind's creative wellspring is the cycling of our memories.

3 We all belong to the **whole**.

Making art rounds and integrates the circle of self.

4 All lives continuously **transform**; being is becoming.

Art-making transforms us into Other.

5 Living entities seek **balance** and healing.

Making art provides us the images we need.

6 All lives **symbiotically** intertwine; cooperation is basic to life.

Art-making is communal.

These six principles operate simultaneously and continuously, not separately or sequentially. They provide a framework for Caddy's work as a naturalist, artist, and teacher, and they animate his commitment to developing a creative community in which all members can discover themselves as artists, aware of the possibility of living in a more hospitable, harmonious, and interconnected culture.

For Caddy himself, that sense of connection has been hard-won. By most people's criteria, John Caddy's life has not been easy or orderly—he has survived childhood abuse, injury, surgeries, interrupted education, lack of money, and a stroke—but it is marvelously coherent. “Opportunities came along that seemed interesting,” he says simply.



Many of those opportunities involved education, which for Caddy was self-directed from the very beginning. He was born into a mining family in Hibbing and grew up in Virginia, Minnesota, spending summers 20 miles north in a cabin on Lake Leander. The cold hostility that characterized his family's dynamic prompted young John to retreat into the woods, a direct engagement with nature that, he has said, saved his life. Growing up, he knew, was partly finding out what you were for.

Summers at the lake helped him find out by providing the beginnings of his nature study, later augmented by the work of writers such as Ernest Thompson Seton, William Hornaday, and Rachel Carson. When as a teen Caddy discovered a book of essays by deep-water explorer William Beebe, he bought himself scuba gear and learned to dive. Sigurd Olson's *Listening Point* was a revelation that reconnected Caddy to the Boundary Waters, where he had canoed for a week in eighth grade. (In the early 1970s, Caddy collaborated with Tom Bacig of the University of Minnesota-Duluth and a very old Sigurd Olson to teach a multiday wilderness writing workshop in the Boundary Waters. Sigurd Olson, it turned out, had been Caddy's parents' high school science teacher in Nashwauk in the 1920s. See Eco-Principle No. 2: life lives in circles.)

Poets made their way onto Caddy's reading list when he was in high school in the mid-1950s and his sister gave him Louis Untermeyer's anthology of modern American and British poetry. He was stunned by Muriel Rukeyser's "Effort at Speech Between Two People":

Speak to me. Take my hand. What are you now?  
I will tell you all. I will conceal nothing.  
When I was three, a little child read a story about a rabbit  
who died, in the story, and I crawled under a chair :  
a pink rabbit : it was my birthday, and a candle  
burnt a sore spot on my finger, and I was told to be happy.

and by John Berryman's "The Ball Poem":

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,  
What, what is he to do? I saw it go  
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then  
Merrily over—there it is in the water!  
No use to say 'O there are other balls':  
An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy  
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down  
All his young days into the harbour where  
His ball went....

Inspired by the deep connection he felt to these poems that treated childhood emotion seriously, Caddy began to experiment with writing poems of his own—part of the "seeking balance and healing" that his eco-principles express. He recalls that he showed some poems to a few people; one said that he liked the words ("the comfort in mud isn't cold / open your thighs") but not the morality. Caddy wrote a few pieces over the next few years while he attended the University of Minnesota to study zoology and traveled to South America courtesy of his Naval ROTC scholarship. (He loved Chile but did not love the Navy.) After a long hospitalization for back surgery, Caddy married and dropped out of college. For a few years he managed Musicland record stores, where, he says, he "learned to appreciate high school kids who hung around the store between buses, playing the Top Forty."



# The Bard as Teacher

In 1962, Caddy returned to the university to study English and education. At 25, he felt comparatively ancient among his younger peers. After serving as a teaching assistant in the English department, he taught for eight years at the University High School (where he connected with those kids whom he'd learned to appreciate while working at Musicland) and in the College of Education, where he also served as the advisor for English and speech/theater majors.

Caddy says that creating things and being helpful to people kept him sane, so he became a poet and teacher. He began writing poetry again, encouraged by his professor, the poet Sarah Youngblood, who invited him to be a visiting poet at a summer writing workshop she taught. He began to hang out with other poets on the university scene: Michael Kincaid organized an open-mic poetry forum at a Minneapolis Unitarian church, where writers such as Charles Baxter, Michael Tjepkes, Roy McBride, Keith Gunderson, Gerald Vizenor, and Caddy shared their work. Another aspiring poet was Franklin Brainard, an English teacher at Mounds View High School, who invited Caddy, Tjepkes, and Kincaid to visit his classroom.

Caddy was chosen to teach poetry at the Twin City Institute for Talented Youth (TCITY), a summer program for gifted high school students. And he was one of the first Twin Cities poets selected in 1967 to participate in the Poets in the Schools program sponsored by the St. Paul Arts Council, the Minneapolis School District, and the National Endowment for the Arts. When Poets in the Schools began to emphasize student writing rather than readings by visiting poets, Caddy welcomed the chance to teach creatively, despite some social difficulties. "I had hair on my face and long head hair, so I was not welcome in some schools," he remembers. "One time I was teaching an after-school in-service class for Minneapolis teachers at West High. The principal saw me walking down the hall and, fearing hippie invasion, threw me out."

But Caddy persisted, and his approach to teaching by nurturing students' creativity resonated deeply with his students as well as with many of his fellow artists and teachers. In Caddy's classroom, there were no intellectual borders: reading, writing, performing, creation, observation, analysis, craft, feeling,

understanding, work, and play all came together in shared experience. For example, sometimes he would give each student a navel orange, ask them to very slowly peel and eat it, then ask about their sensory experience before having them write. He had them read their poems to each other. They learned from experience that poetry was not just in the mind, but also of the body, and learned from each other that widely different responses—all of them legitimate—could be generated by a simple and immediate activity. Spontaneity was born of experience, and being creative required first being observant.

I can't resist a personal aside here, because I have first-hand experience with Caddy's teaching techniques. In the early '70s, after Caddy and I had read together several times and had conversed about many things, a teacher at a suburban school invited us for a joint Poets in the Schools residency. Caddy asked all of us in the room to break into teams of three. One person on each team was the sculptor and the other two were the clay; each group was to mold an imaginary animal exhibiting some characteristic behavior. **Then we would write.**



This kind of exercise might have been common in drama classes, but it was new to me in a writing workshop. Confused, then bemused, I found myself the rear end of a six-legged elephant scaring away a hunter. It didn't matter that the resulting poem was not memorable; the process was unforgettable. My own exercises had always been based on verbal or visual prompts, and I had never considered writing from experience imagined through the body as a medium. Now, I intuited that the senses were not merely to be referenced in poems, but to be essentially part of the process of creation. My writing and teaching orientation changed abruptly. Without John Caddy's influence, I might have remained a head-poet, full of attitude and paralyzed feeling, without learning that it was not the poems that mattered but the act of producing them in response to experience, feeling, and spontaneity.

For Caddy, teaching is not a matter of instruction, but a way of finding opportunities and motives to learn and create and connect—a way for all of us to feel that we are part of the whole. During one residency at a junior high in Mankato, Caddy asked the students to write about their own lives by choosing an object as a metaphor for themselves. “They’re so involved in the hormone storm, so mixed up emotionally, that they love to get things on paper,” he said. “I try to open up the turf, to let them know they can write about anything....They write with such facility, so little fear.” He would type and distribute their poems the next day, to be shared. “They find that others tune in and say, ‘Yeah, I’ve felt that same way,’” he explains. “It makes them successful.”

Over the course of more than 40 years in the classroom, Caddy taught in some 800 Minnesota schools and programs, including many weeklong summer workshops that helped teachers and artists learn how to use nature to stimulate students’ creativity. In the mid-1980s, he began teaching teachers in Hamline University’s graduate school, and he taught numerous staff-development courses for suburban school districts. He estimates that he’s worked with 75,000 students and 1,000 teachers over the years, influencing all of them one by one to see, feel, and express the gifts of the earth.

# The Bard as Poet



In his days at the University of Minnesota, Caddy built a small audience around the Twin Cities, occasionally placing poems in magazines produced by fellow poets and in anthologies published by small presses. In 1968, he submitted his first nature poem for publication; “Eye of Toad” was accepted and published by the *Beloit Poetry Journal*. Even then, it was clear that Caddy did not settle for the easy conversational verse and fashionably oracular rhetoric popular at the time. Image-laden, even dense, his poems packed language simultaneously original and rooted in the language of Old and Middle English verse.

The mouth is wide, habit of hunger,  
stretched drum throat trembles, alive, and  
the fourth finger quivers in its sleep.

Eyes of wet gold netted in sable,  
intuitive lessons in dream.

(Cellini wept when he saw these eyes.)

He enjoyed revelations earned by contemplating nature, and sought language appropriate to them. Unlike many self-styled nature poets, he refused to sentimentalize, and wrote about the human experience of nature without clichés or stereotypical emotions.

In the early 1970s, Caddy gave up writing for a while, retreating again to the woods that had saved his life in childhood. He was discouraged by the war in Vietnam. “My heart was broken,” he says. “Students I knew died there. I lost America then, lost all the happy myths I had grown up with.” He and some friends quit the university and started Sundog Environmental Learning Center near Lake Itasca, where kids from nearby and urban neighborhoods came to learn about nature. He kept doing residencies, but wrote few poems for four years. “But the woods did their thing,” he says, “and helped me heal.” The Sundog years set a deliberate pace in Caddy’s life toward deeper ecological study and broader outreach that would culminate years later in the creation of the Morning Earth website.

While at Sundog, Caddy did a reading in Moorhead with poet and *Dacotah Territory* editor Mark Vinz and American political poet Tom McGrath. In conversation afterward, “McGrath encouraged me to write from the working life of the mining town I’m from,” Caddy recalls. “Those poems eventually became *The Color of Mesabi Bones*, which I kept dropping and coming back to. The subject matter required that the poems bore inward to my own childhood experience, which made the writing perilous and slow.” It took him many years to complete the book. Meanwhile, back in the city, he collaborated with choreographer Susan Delattre and jazz composer Pat Moriarty to win a grant to stage “The Heronry,” a poem cycle based on watching high school students interact with a heron colony. Caddy performed the piece with five dancers and a jazz trio.

In 1984, Caddy sent a few poems to *Milkweed Chronicle*, a four-year-old journal based in Minneapolis. Editor Emilie Buchwald was “smitten immediately by the lyricism that John brought to talking about the



natural world,” she recently told the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*. The following year, Caddy won Milkweed’s new Lakes and Prairies book competition, and in 1986 the fledgling Milkweed Editions book-publishing program brought out Caddy’s first collection, *Eating the Sting, Including The Heronry*. Upon reading the manuscript, poet and novelist Jim Harrison said, “John Caddy is a piper at the gates of dawn, which is what a poet is supposed to be.” Other compliments came from Mark Vinz, who had published some of Caddy’s work in *Dacotah Territory*, and from Caddy’s former intern George Roberts, now widely respected as a poet and teacher, who praised him for combining “the eye and grace of a true naturalist” with “the heart and wisdom of a true humanist.”

In the collection’s title poem, a deer mouse eats a dead wasp, making food of the venom in its stinger. The poet wonders how *he* can learn to find nourishment in poison and have it fuel a sense of grace and joy. Before pain can be transformed into song, it must be felt, and these poems try to undo the anesthesia of civilized life. The book’s final third is devoted to “The Heronry,” which immerses us in the double consciousness of a girl who chooses not to be named and a disembodied natural historian, conveying their overlapping experiences of a colony of herons. At the conclusion, there is no distinction between the mysteries of nature and the mysteries of humanity.

The whole of *Eating the Sting* shows us wilderness carefully blundered into, predators adapted to city life, whales revived by imagination in the dark, all presented without nostalgia, pop sublimity, melodramatic realizations, or exclusive fascination with totemic animals—we encounter not only bears and hawks but also voles, kingfishers, and stray dogs. Like a stretch of forest, Caddy’s language in *Eating the Sting* demands attention to unexpected detail. Odd compound words—pawbeats, creekstone, snowwind—spring up like weeds splitting rock, or echo the cry of an animal laying open our own animal insides. “We cannot name this cry,” Caddy tells us in “Sharing the Cry,” in which he names it in a dozen ways. To name is to discover nature, and to discover ourselves.

In the late 1980s, in quick succession, Caddy received a Loft/McKnight Award, a Minnesota State Arts Board grant, a Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award (which included a national reading tour) from the nonprofit Poets & Writers, and a Bush Foundation Individual Artist Fellowship. He finally completed the mining-town manuscript and submitted it to Milkweed, which published it in 1989.

Advancing beyond the work in *Eating the Sting*, *The Color of Mesabi Bones* revealed a symphonic depth and breadth of feeling and speaking. It is a book with intricately

interwoven themes, tempos, countermelodies, solos, and orchestral crescendos. It layers childhood memories, histories, natural observations, mini-dramas, catalogs, dreams, character profiles, and self-dialogues. Its many recurrent themes include punishment and escape, searching for models and myths, masks, physical and emotional abuse, work and play, the trap of a boy's rebellion against his father's abuse while being told "You're just like your father," injuries, and flight from religion. The title poem, ending the book, is a magnificent elegy in the Old English mode. The book's tenor is summed up by Layeh Bock-Pallant, writing in *Poetry Flash*:

"Caddy shares with you the process of being made and then making yourself, being powerless and taking power."



Photo courtesy of George Roberts

JOHN CADDY 2012 MCKNIGHT DISTINGUISHED ARTIST

*The Color of Mesabi Bones* won the 1990 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry and the 1991 Minnesota Book Award. Caddy was finally able to build the house he had designed on the land near Forest Lake that he had purchased years before, and to visit Cornwall, the home of his ancestors, an experience that led to a chapbook of poems and essays (*Presences the Blood Learns Again*) and eventually to his being elected a Bard of the Cornish Gorsedh for his contributions to Cornish literature.

In early 1994, Caddy had what he calls "a writing epiphany; poems flowed out of me like water from a faucet for two or three months. It was the best time of my life."

Then he had the stroke that rendered him paralyzed on his left side.

# The Bard<sup>as</sup> Naturalist

When Caddy returned home to his beloved land after stroke rehabilitation, everything had changed—a vivid illustration of his own eco-principle about the continual transformation of life. “Being so close to death opens your eyes wide to everything else,” he later told the *Pioneer Press*. “It opened me to joy in a way I hadn’t experienced since I was a child. I’d always loved nature, but when I got home in a wheelchair, after a month of rehabilitation, I realized everything was more intense and interesting. **Green had learned a thousand new names while I was gone.**”

After months of recovery, he was delighted to find he could still write poems and read them aloud. “My speech is not what it was,” he says, “and it was with fear that I began public poetry readings again. But people have been wonderfully generous.”

Post-stroke, Caddy transformed himself and his art. He saw everything afresh—and he took a new approach to sharing the gifts he received from the earth. He felt moved to dedicate himself to helping people reconnect with their love of the wild in a world where growing disconnection had become the norm.

His first major project was to strengthen young people’s connection with nature by helping schools integrate their arts programs with science and environmental education. In 1995, Caddy launched the Self Expressing Earth (SEE) environmental-education program at Community Programs in the Arts & Sciences (COMPAS); later, it moved to Hamline University’s Center for Global Environmental Education. The goal of SEE was to introduce teachers to methods of teaching science and ecology by immersing students simultaneously in nature and in making art. The Perpich Center for Arts Education funded weeklong live-in workshops for teachers, artists, and interpretive naturalists. At environmental learning centers across Minnesota, SEE’s teaching artists facilitated workshops that included poetry, dance, painting, puppetry, and music-making.

SEE was also an e-mail-based distance learning program to which elementary-school classrooms in several states subscribed. Caddy developed the SEE website into a resource site for ecological literacy, including essays that introduced ecology, pages honoring artist/naturalists, and classroom-tested learning activities for teaching ecological principles through making art.

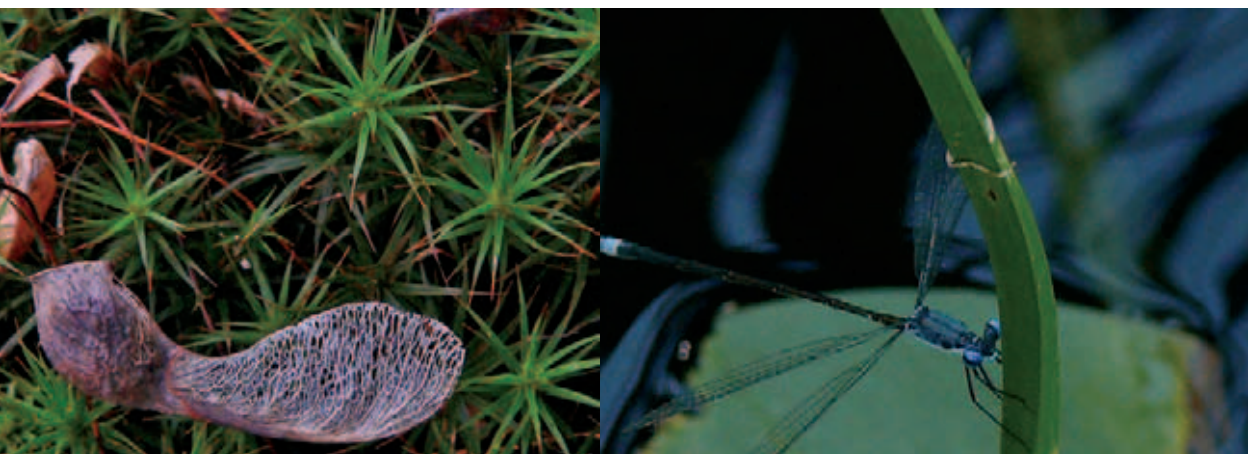
While he worked on SEE, Caddy also began to explore his longtime interest in the Japanese tradition of spontaneous poetry. He began a practice of taking a walk every morning and then writing a few spontaneous lines about it. These brief poems of celebration were based in moments of receiving a gift of beauty, laughter, surprise, or learning from the living biosphere. One early example:

The swathe of light  
each morning duck  
draws  
with its breast  
through quiet water.



In 1998, Caddy began to e-mail his daily poems to SEE-subscribing classrooms, where teachers often used them to begin the school day. After SEE folded in 2001 for lack of funding, Caddy transformed the mailing list into what he called the Earth Journal subscription list. In 2003, Milkweed Editions published a selection of poems from the first five years of the Earth Journal: *Morning Earth: Field Notes in Poetry*. In 2004, Caddy incorporated the nonprofit educational charity that he named Morning Earth, and Morning-Earth.org went online the following year.





©John Caddy

The site now contains some 500 pages, including archives of Caddy's earth poems and learning activities, based on Caddy's six eco-principles, that teachers can use to help their students develop eco-literacy. A sample activity, "The Journey of My Atoms," was designed to reflect the principles of cycling/recycling and of the transformation of all life: students select one atom that is now part of their bodies, imagine its travels through time and space, then write and/or illustrate that atom's story.

The Morning Earth website averages more than 2,000 visitors each day, attracting more than a million visitors from 120 countries since it went online. And more than 1,500 people receive Caddy's daily e-mailed earth-meditation, which since 2006 has included a photograph he takes on his daily walk. These arresting photographs of small moments are evidence of one way in which Caddy's art has changed: to compensate for the short-term memory damage caused by his stroke, he now uses a camera to keep natural images fresh until he can formulate a poem. With only one working hand, he relies on his camera's image stabilization for taking close-up and telephoto pictures. Naturally suspicious of technology, Caddy confesses that he is also a cheerful slave to it.

Over the last several years, studies about modern syndromes like "nature deficit disorder" demonstrate how much we lose when we eliminate nature experiences from our daily lives. Caddy now presents his daily poem/photo combinations as "healing images," and says that "Morning Earth is an antidote to eco-despair."

Many of Caddy's Morning Earth poems appear in *With Mouths Open Wide: New and Selected Poems*, published by Milkweed in 2008. The poem "With Mouths Open Wide in the Wave" brilliantly demonstrates Caddy's mastery of his craft: waves as the topic, a seasonal setting, recurring images of light, rhythm, rhythm, light, light, rhythm, light, and the seasons, all within an unexpectedly gentle account of hunters and prey at sunset, a beautiful blend of order and chaos, a unity of which we are a part, presented with copious alliteration, internal rhyme, and rhythmic phrases, capturing the complex motion of the birds feeding: "the easy swoop and drift and quickbeat and catch; all the wide mouths take invisible flies."

Caddy's language in his new poems combines the rigor of his early work with the transparency and accessibility of the Morning Earth poems. His topics are diverse, and the images are full of synesthetic echoes—for example, "the lowered pitch [of male voices] you can almost smell." Packed with old favorites and rich in new poems, *With Mouths Open Wide* ties together all of Caddy's many major themes and documents his evolving ecological perspective.


It has amazed me that one who has accomplished so much has been so little concerned with self-promotion. True to his eco-principles that we all belong to the whole and that cooperation is basic to life, Caddy has always seen himself as a collaborator rather than as a master. "Many aging people realize ever more strongly that all they have achieved has been collaborative and communal," he says.

For this modern bard, teaching is not about filling empty vessels, but about giving back—and, most important, about offering ways for people to release what is already inside. The work itself, all about making connections with the earth and with others, occupies center stage. His poetry's combined heft and delicacy reflect his learning from nature, and along with his dedication to teaching, touches readers' and students' lives. It is all hard-won and all one, awakening our attention to the world with all the vital modesty in which distinguished artistry can be arrayed.

JOHN CALVIN REZMERSKI IS A POET AND EDITOR WHO LIVES IN MANKATO, A VETERAN OF POETS IN THE SCHOOLS, AND AN ORGANIZER OF THE CAMBRIA EISTEDDFOD CELEBRATION OF POETRY. HE TAUGHT FOR 35 YEARS AT GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE, THE LAST SIX AS THE COLLEGE'S WRITER IN RESIDENCE. HIS MOST RECENT BOOK IS *BREAKING THE RULES: STARTING WITH GHAZALS*, FROM RED DRAGONFLY PRESS.

A close-up, warm-toned photograph of an older man with a grey beard and mustache, smiling gently as he smells a vibrant red flower. His hand is visible, holding the stem of the flower. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the same flowers. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Eating the Sting<sup>(1986)</sup>



Caught in the snapped circle of light  
on the cookshack oilcloth,  
an upright deermouse holding yellow  
in her fine fingers  
like an ear of black-striped corn,  
a wasp I'd slapped dead earlier.

She stares, belly resonating, round above  
a scatter of brittle wing, bits, a carapace—  
she has already eaten the stinger—  
stares at me, still,  
something thrumming in her eyes

beyond herself, a mouse stung  
onto an edge as far from cartoons  
as the venom she's chewed into food.

She cocks a fawn ear now, trembling poisonchanger,  
caught in the circle of light  
I've thought myself in at times,

but never sure, I ask her softly how  
she does it, if I can learn this turning  
of sting into such food as startles in her eyes,  
learn to suck pain into every sense  
and come up spitting seeds, force poison  
to a tear held fierce between my lips  
and whirl it into tongue which sings, but

here I've come too loud: She drops the husk,  
fusses whiskers with her paws, kicks  
a scrap of wing aside, and whispers  
*thanks for the corn,*

steps backward off the table  
(and so potent she is with wasp)  
flips a circle through light and  
lands running on her leaf-toed feet.



# Unheralded Gifts

BY EMILIE BUCHWALD

Many of the best gifts come unheralded. I hadn't read John Caddy's poetry until he submitted a group of poems for publication in 1984 to *Milkweed Chronicle*, the journal of literature and visual arts I cofounded with artist R.W. Scholes in the winter of 1980. By that time, we had published the work of more than 500 writers and artists and had just started Milkweed Editions' book publishing program.

When I read them, I recognized love poems—drawn from personal, heart-deep knowledge—that bring to life the woods of John's youth. Each creature's integrity is captured in delicious, meticulous detail. Together they evoke a transient, imperfect yet magical world in language that is little short of ecstatic.

I was smitten with these original, beautifully realized poems. I wrote back, asking John if he had a manuscript. We met to discuss the poems that would become *Eating the Sting* in 1986. I remember that we sparred during these meetings about which and how many of his poems should go into the book. John vigorously supported every one of them as worthy of being included. I hadn't yet learned that John's childhood had more than prepared him for any challenge. We negotiated.

A year later, John sent *Milkweed Chronicle* a second group of poems, describing another universe entirely: a childhood where there was no escape from beatings, bleakness, relentless darkness, terror. The poems' emotional force and immediacy make the experiences unforgettable, calling up an existence I didn't want to absorb but was compelled to endure. These poems became part of John's second book, *The Color of Mesabi Bones*, published in 1989. The book brings to violent life a childhood, a culture, a history, and a way of life rooted in Minnesota's Iron Range at the time that John was growing up. Reviewers found the book mesmerizing. This fierce red world of iron ore, dust, and blood, constricted by traditions that became chains, received a Minnesota Book Award and was awarded the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry, the first and only book of poems by a small press to win this national award.

In 1994, a stroke stole John's ability to use the left side of his body. He could have retreated from teaching, writing, and traveling. Instead, he strove to escape that dark cocoon, to move, to walk, to resume reading his work with but half a tongue, to travel to distant countries whose plants and animals he wanted to see for himself. Indeed, he writes that as an outcome, he was, once again, renewed, regaining the unprejudiced child's eye that delights in whatever it gazes upon: among hundreds of such sights, dragonflies, oak gall, a raptor in flight, water escaping the thrall of ice,



The benefit of these new eyes and language persuasively direct is obvious in *Morning Earth: Field Notes in Poetry* (Milkweed Editions, 2003), a collection of daily observations in the form of a poem and a commentary that John calls “earth journaling.” John sends out a poem of the day (and a photograph) to readers of his online service, Morning Earth. More often than not, the product is a concise gem, a vision to enliven one’s day and, later, to become a keepsake. For a writer to broadcast his poems into the not-so-gentle Internet ether is breathtakingly daring. Rather than being concerned about what reviewers might say, this poet trusts his readers; indeed, the process is designed as an invitation to readers to create their own morning earth. This teacher loves his subject enough to show others the way to his bliss. This is poetry with ego left behind.

*With Mouths Open Wide: New and Selected Poems*, published by Milkweed in 2008, brought together John’s previous books and a variety of marvelous new poems. In the new poems, once again the reader is brought out of the city into the wild to meet predators on the trail, to hear bats squealing in a cabin’s walls, to observe fish greeting fish, and oh, most exhilarating, to enter into the lives of birds—ruffed grouse, ravens, snipe, cormorants, and cranes—with the newly gained conviction that these are gifted relatives previously overlooked.

Caddy has the empath’s gift of bringing the reader along on his journeys to see what he sees, feel what he feels.

By chronicling the experience of his stroke and its aftermath in the section called “Stroke,” John offers up a rare and generous gift. I hope that readers who are health professionals will read aloud every one of these poems. Having an insight into what it’s like to be plunged without warning into a perilously altered state—unable to communicate, helpless to do what once was simple, and, most humiliatingly, treated as if one were invisible—might lead to more compassionate perceptions.

Like many of the creatures he chronicles, John Caddy has found himself reborn. More than once. This is truth as much as metaphor, though metaphor is truth enough. His poetry has gathered depth, power, and translucence in the course of his metamorphoses to become a country of its own.

I am convinced that writing poems has become as natural to John as breathing, and I look forward to more of them. His powerful passion for the living earth and the community of beings who share it creates epiphanies for readers. He points out that all of us will, once again, become dust, “post-consumer content,” as he calls it. Until that moment comes for him, John Caddy will live in celebration.

EMILIE BUCHWALD IS PUBLISHER EMERITUS OF MILKWEED EDITIONS AND PUBLISHER OF THE GRYPHON PRESS. SHE WAS THE 2002 MCKNIGHT DISTINGUISHED ARTIST.



# An Appreciation

BY GEORGE ROBERTS

Somewhere along the way on his own passage, a good teacher, a master teacher, has realized that any path is a tightrope. And thereafter this is the first lesson: the capricious expectations of the crowd inhibit balance. All those upturned faces present distractions. To deflect distraction, to return the focus where it must be—inward—one needs a model. Someone who reveals the choices, then stands quietly to the side and observes.

A good teacher, a master teacher, knows how to keep his mouth shut, knows when not to help, knows how to leave the student alone with himself. John Caddy was born with his back to the North Woods. One of his first paths was into those woods. He was able early on to leave town for an afternoon amble, to experience, without comment from anyone, a red-tailed hawk protecting her nest. Able to notice what water does as it passes over stones. No surprise, then, that earth poetry results.

One could not be a young English teacher in the 1970s and not have heard John Caddy mentioned as a thoughtful, innovative, and insightful University of Minnesota professor and trainer of new teachers. Nor could one be an aspiring poet in the 1970s and not come across John Caddy as an observant, passionate, and challenging mentor.

I was fortunate at that time to be both a newly hired English teacher in the Minneapolis Public Schools and a beginning poet. And I was even more fortunate before long to work with and befriend John. He was the poetry teacher at the Twin City Institute for Talented Youth that convened each summer at Macalester College. I was an intern in his class in the summer of 1974.

Those seven weeks of daily classes were a revelation. That there was as much to learn about building human relationships as there was about being passionate and competent in one's subject matter created a sea change in the way I thought about teaching. Poetry was what we, John and I, loved. But it was the lives of young people we were being entrusted with, and I learned it was incumbent upon me, if I were going to become a good teacher, to enter those lives and to love them as much as I loved poetry.

There have been other lessons, of course, about the art of poetry and about the art of teaching: learn how to lend support at the right moment, to ask difficult questions when they will do the most good; learn to see what you are looking at, not what you are looking for; understand that imagery is the language of the senses; accept difficult criticism as a gift. But the tightrope lesson, that early and necessary one, remains for me the most salutary.

And all these years later, through all the roles John has assumed, no surprise that this is still the first lesson he offers—whether to novice literature and writing teachers, poets, or naturalists.

GEORGE ROBERTS IS A TEACHER, POET, AND LETTERPRESS PRINTER WHO OWNS HOMEWOOD STUDIOS, AN ARTISTS' WORK SPACE, GALLERY, AND COMMUNITY MEETING SPACE IN NORTH MINNEAPOLIS.



# Singer of Earth

BY BERT BISCOE

When John Caddy first came home in 1992 to Cornwall (Kernow), from whence his ancestors had embarked as miners for America, he found inspiration for his book *Presences the Blood Learns Again*. Later, he returned and read from it to appreciative audiences. One night, when word had spread and many dignitaries were arrayed in rows to hear this new poet of the Cornish diaspora, he decided that it was time to do a set of some “horny” stuff!

Caddy’s charm, wit, and delivery had the widows and wives rocking with less-than-sedate laughter as he gently ridiculed himself and our gender with poems richly wrought and acutely observed. He turned the unturnable well and truly on! As *Kaner an Norvys* (Singer of Earth), he was subsequently elected to the College of Bards of Cornwall, Gorsedh Kernow.

As we grew to know him in Kernow he slowly unveiled Morning Earth, his great work: a poetic mission to imbue as many people as possible with the deep sense of nature as pure love that drives him and takes us, each day, to a small but important place away from the hurly-burly and the material onslaught to dash a little cold poetic spring water into our waking eyes. Morning Earth grows—it is “Paradise Fought For,” a Miltonic work imbued with science, Bud-dha, woodcraft, wry Minnesotan humour, and a passion for the unadulterated planet which inspires, admonishes, and, above all, leads us to see clearly, with language, the essence, clarity, and beauty of the natural world.

This is a poet of stature—respected by his peers, loved by the birds.

BERT BISCOE OF TRURO, CORNWALL, IS A POET, SONGWRITER, AND MEMBER OF CORNWALL COUNCIL.  
HIS BARDIC NAME IS VYAGER GANS GERYOW (TRAVELS WITH WORDS).



# Morning Earth

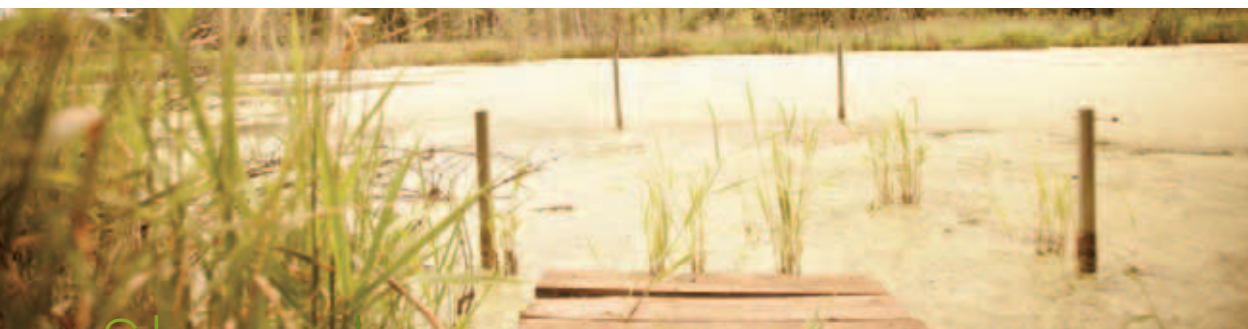
(Bert Biscoe, 2012)

rings of pee in Minnesotan snow—  
blood rings of ketchup round paternal eye—  
rings of Cornish stones salute the Come-to-Grass—  
rings of wonder in children's words,  
rings of love from pond-pebbles arc'd,

rings clipped to migrant wings  
to track poetic journeys  
across this smallest of rocks,  
this rock that runs its ring around  
our slowly fading star—

rings within rings  
shackle poets to meaning, to nature—  
but the smith who fashions rings  
between hammer and anvil—  
the smith is poet and poet is compass—  
center, circumference—  
it is his song shines the ring—

is that Caddy's voice I hear sing?



## Shared Joy

BY JOE PADDOCK

It wasn't until the mid-1990s that I really got to know John. Before, I was mostly aware of his role in helping to establish the COMPAS Poets in the Schools program, and of his elegance as a person, a poet, and a reader of poetry. However fine all of that was, his greatness didn't fully emerge until after he had a stroke in 1994. It left him hemiplegic, paralyzed on his left side, and was serious enough that one could easily imagine him giving up on a career, if not on life itself.

John once told me about something that happened shortly after his leaving the hospital. As he was entering a room at Hamline University, a colleague looked at him in shock, then said:

"What the hell happened to you?"

"I had a stroke."

The man looked at him thoughtfully, then asked, "What's the upside?"

As I see it, that upside has been at the heart of John's life ever since. I've often wondered what it must have been like for so much intensity and intelligence to be trapped in a limiting body, but it's occurred to me as well that irrelevancies would of necessity have to be sloughed off—allowing or even forcing one to discover what is most important. I love what John has written about a decision he made around that time:

“In 1994 I suffered a stroke, and was elated to find myself alive, somewhat sensible, and still capable of making poems....[When I] came home to the land, I was freshly amazed by beauty; in my absence, green had learned a thousand new names....After stroke therapy, I decided to spend the rest of my allotted time writing and sharing poems of celebration and helping people recover their intuitive connections with Earth.”

John walks his talk, and what he decided to do back then he has done. And then some. His vision for this work is a truly ambitious and far-reaching one, no less than doing his best to wake as wide a swath of human consciousness as he possibly can to love of and caring for the earth. It must be understood that John is as much teacher as poet, and that this English major is a truly fine naturalist and eco-philosopher. These varied aspects of him have merged into a single flow, inspired and given focus by his belief that the arts may be the best way of all to teach people about the environment and to commit them to caring for the earth.

All of this sounds awfully serious, and indeed it is, but it belies the playful humor with which John relates to the world. In fact, he has long used a poetry-writing assignment built around what he calls the Antic Spirit, which he defines this way: “The Antic Spirit is the irrepressible trickster inside us, that part of you that now and then puts a gleam in your eye, that puts the ‘devil’ in you.” I seldom have a conversation with John in which his antic spirit doesn’t emerge, and I suspect it is more alive in him now than ever before. I’m two months older than he, so he delights in calling me “the old guy.” And a while back I wrote a poem in which I characterized, fairly accurately, his post-stroke walk as a lurch; since then he’s often signed letters and e-mails to me as “Lurch.”

That poem, “John Caddy at First Light,” can be found on John’s Morning Earth website, which he calls an antidote to environmental despair. Ever and always returning to the importance of the arts in connecting to and understanding the natural world, it’s an incredible, complex compendium of arts and insights, offering guidance to both students and teachers. Go to it and lose yourself in what may just be one of the most important environmental collections of our time.

Five days a week thousands of us discover via e-mail a small, insightful poem by John, paired with and illuminating a photograph of something in nature. I’ve often wondered how he so unfailingly manages to do this, but I do remember past conversations with him that may suggest an answer: we’ve discussed how the unconscious, as nature within us, abhors a vacuum, and if a writer is open to such support, the “empty” conscious mind will always be filled according to his or her need.

Beginning in the mid-'90s, I worked with John in his Self Expressing Earth program. The goal was to train teachers, teaching artists, and interpretive naturalists to help kids learn the nature of life on earth through making art. These were weeklong retreats in natural settings. They were not just about art and the environment, but deep experiential immersions in both. They were life-changing experiences, and I've been struck by how many participants continue to maintain a connection with John.

I'm pretty certain that the following is John's most famous quote:



It was in his earlier work, *Eating the Sting* and *The Color of Mesabi Bones*, that he concentrated most on the first of these two assertions. "When we take our pain out of ourselves," he writes, "and transform it into a poem, a song, a painting, a dance, it becomes outside of us, which enables us to deal with it in a way we couldn't when it was locked inside."

Strangely perhaps, the work that John has taken on since his stroke focuses mostly on the second assertion, the one about shared joy. "The key to this new practice," he writes, "is celebration, for the poems [are] all in response to brief gifts from earth. The gifts are gifts of beauty, surprise, laughter, intricacy, and sometimes painful lessons, which are a joy delayed." John's Morning Earth poems reach out beyond himself to those "gifts from earth." In a time when so much of contemporary poetry is terribly self-involved, John can only be discovered in this work as an observer of the gifts he celebrates.

JOE PADDOCK IS A POET, ORAL HISTORIAN, ENVIRONMENTAL WRITER, BIOGRAPHER, AND ARTS ADVOCATE WHO LIVES IN LITCHFIELD, MINNESOTA, IN THE SAME HOUSE IN WHICH HE GREW UP.

# John Caddy at First Light

(Joe Paddock, 2002)

I see him in mind, struggling yet  
against the clutch of stroke, lurching  
drag-foot out into the pre-dawn dark  
of his yard, down to the sedgey rim  
of the pond where he stands, listening  
to a breath of air through dark leaves,  
peeping and croaking at water's edge,  
the overhead whistling of wings,  
flutter and splash, guttural quack....

Sounds he translates now  
easily after sixty years  
of such listening. Standing there, knowing  
so much of the intricate green labyrinth  
within which he searches, knowing  
its circles and edges, knowing  
how little he knows,  
that it's best at the edge  
of ignorance to simply stand  
in awe, breathe praise, perhaps sing  
a little.

Enough light now  
for faint sight, and a muskrat, startled  
by this silent presence leaning on a cane,  
slashes its tail savagely and dives,  
and a great blue heron floats down  
from gray sky to take its stand  
on the opposite shore, silent, too,  
and fully sensate, waiting at the brink  
of day.

Enough absorbed to fill his need,  
the man turns from that edge  
of awe and laboriously returns  
under an array of birdfeeders  
to his back door.

Inside, he touches the computer to first light,  
and perhaps just as the great heron's beak  
hungrily hits water, his finger strikes  
a key, and a small poem begins  
with little hesitation to fill the screen, brimming  
with peep and croak and whistling wings,  
stuff of the new dawn, translated, then sent  
suddenly out to be caught in a net where,  
in an hour, half-awake friends and, later,  
clear-eyed children in classrooms, unknowing  
all it took to bring it there, will discover it,  
alive and struggling and wise.



# We Are All Cousins

BY RODGER KEMP

John Caddy and I have been friends for some 50 years. Although we live far apart now—he in Minnesota and I in California—we’ve made it a point to do road trips each of the last 10 years or so in California, Oregon, New Mexico, and Utah. Those trips have given me the chance to see John do his fieldwork.

As an example of what we do on the road, let me mention a day in the White Mountains, the range immediately east of the Sierra Nevada in California. Those mountains are home to the westernmost bristlecone pine community on the continent. The bristlecones are the oldest trees on earth; the oldest of them, called the Ancient Ones, make a living at elevations of 10,000 feet or higher in a growing season of 45 days or so. Predictably, old men identify with them.

When we drove into a visitors’ center and found it packed with cars and people, we turned around and drove up higher, going along a good dirt road to a quiet spot where we walked for three hours through a bristlecone grove. We pointed out a few things to each other as we moved, but mostly went our own ways in a type of parallel play. John talked about many of the things he paid attention to, including cones, rocks, birds, insects, duff, and sometimes me. He took photo after photo, often kneeling to focus his attention and his camera on what had caught his eye. By early evening we were back in our motel rooms and John spent a couple of hours reviewing and culling photos before we met for a quick supper and some conversation before bed.

Photography is crucial to his work. As he has explained in conversations and interviews, after his stroke John turned to photography as a tool for writing, using photos the way others might use notes or a voice recorder. But he also started using photos as teaching tools at Morning Earth, his website that started out—and continues—as a service for teachers who want to encourage students to write.

For thousands of people Morning Earth is also a life-celebrating message they get nearly every day via e-mail. John recently added “Invite to Write,” wherein he posts a photograph for both adults and children to respond to in writing. The website is also a storehouse of teacher resources, work by other artist/naturalists, and kids’ art and writing. All of this reflects what many students and fellow artists know: John is an extraordinary teacher and a generous collaborator.



Morning Earth has made John's art available to more people than he might otherwise reach, and it certainly has added to his reputation as a nature writer. He has special gifts for expressing the connectedness of living things, as when he refers to us all as cousins, a word that rings with both feeling and scientific fact. I find special pleasure in his portrayals of behaviors we share with our animal cousins such as yawning, scratching, and dozing.

John started making his art available to others well before the Internet arrived, of course. Those who have not yet read beyond what he sends out to Morning Earth subscribers are in for a major treat when they look into his printed work including *Eating the Sting*, *The Color of Mesabi Bones*, *Presences the Blood Learns Again*, and *With Mouths Open Wide*.

Thanks for what you do, John. Many thanks.

RODGER KEMP LIVES IN LOS ANGELES AND IS RETIRED FROM CAREERS IN TEACHING, WRITING, AND AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION; HIS LATEST CAREER IS IN GRANDCHILD CARE.

## Morning Earth Healing Images

November 13, 2008

As I explore the bristlecone grove,  
a bit of green glows in a midden of cones,  
finds sun at 11,000 feet,  
a pine seedling in the midst of Methuselahs  
time-wracked on the mountain.  
I am torn wide by the promise, a child  
who could open and stretch  
and abide dry mountain winds  
for thousands of years.  
The ancestors live.  
The parent of this child  
grew green needles as the Pharaoh Cheops  
watched his tomb climb the sky.



©John Caddy



# Learning to See

BY MARCIA McEACHRON

I met John Caddy around 1981 while I served as a visiting artist in the Minneapolis Artists in the Schools program. Poems often inspired my sculptures and paintings, so I was happy in the company of poets and attentive to their ideas. John invited me to teach in his Self Expressing Earth (SEE) workshops, which he created to show teachers how to teach ecology through the arts.

SEE taught an understanding of the natural world through art experiences, so John planned each day to include sessions in poetry, watercolor, dance, and music. We artists might have been invited there to teach our respective media, but we all became learners under John's leadership. He taught all of us to look deeper into the natural world for its metaphors, which shape and animate our imaginations.


One SEE workshop at Wilder Forest was an epiphany for me in my understanding of the word "transformation." John sent all of us on a hunt through the woods and around ponds to witness and find evidence of transformation. *Just as I was about to give up, I discovered a damselfly devouring a moth at the edge of a marsh. Suddenly, the thin needle profile of the damselfly devouring a large moth made me realize that the damselfly was transforming mass into energy to fuel its life!* I had found transformation in action! What I had previously taken for granted took on a new significance in my life.

John's style of teaching writing puts the joy of writing a poem into one's heart. Writing is hard work, and John knew how to challenge us to love that. I participated in John's summer writing workshops in Grand Marais and on Mallard Island, where he presented the work of many poets and gave us a strong base for understanding and respecting the power of words to reveal the human heart and mind.

What an inspiration John Caddy's work as a poet and teacher has been in my life. He has the unique gift of being able to challenge his students with humor and compassion. Knowing the terror in the heart of someone reading a poem for the first time to a maybe-indifferent audience, John dispelled the fear with this wisdom: to introduce your poem, say, *"This is a bad poem. Don't kill me,"* then read the poem. And he was right. The poem was never as bad as we feared.

MARCIA McEACHRON IS A METAL SCULPTOR WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN MINNEAPOLIS. HER WORK IS HELD IN PRIVATE COLLECTIONS AND IS ON VIEW IN PUBLIC INSTALLATIONS THAT RANGE FROM THE ROOFTOP GALLERY AT THE MINNESOTA CHILDREN'S MUSEUM TO THE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS OF JOHN DEERE.





# Winter, Warm Blood (2008)

A greyblue blur so fast it stutters the eye  
strikes a finch right off the thronged branch  
and blurs a hundred feet  
to an oak where it stops still as if

always still—but a wing sweeps and folds,  
the goldfinch dangles from a clenched foot.  
Flaps down to snow at the pond's edge  
and tears, feathers toss.

I was going to say,  
“A small hawk, sharp-shinned hawk,  
adult: eye red, the fieldmark greyblue back.”  
Do that. Pull back.

The whole birch was goldfinches  
waiting for sunflower seed.  
Now it is white on white.  
I could say,

“...the Autumn birch reborn with golden birds for leaves  
is now but quiet winter bones on white...” Do that.  
But the finch is yellowdrab and grey and elegy  
is distance, not hunger. I can't pull back.

Could say, “...staring from a low  
branch on a distant tree,  
then hurling flat...”  
I didn't see that.

Only the velocity of death.  
I haven't breathed yet.  
Was going to say, “...God.”

# In Praise of Caddy

BY TOM BACIG

John Caddy is a name giver and has been for all the 50 years I have known, heard, and read him. He makes me see, hear, and feel the garden again and fills me again with wonder.

The seeing and naming of the flora and fauna of our place and time are for John a lifetime calling. Thirty years ago I stood with him creekside near Lake LaSalle and wondered at the sphere of bullhead fry, being herded by their mother, that he showed me. Seeing long and through time is what makes the word true and names the nameless. Having looked deeper and waited for the nameless, John saw two such spheres meet and gave it word.

....what a wild order our eyes meet in this creek,  
and what caring back-fence mothers,  
as the shadows of the spheres mingle with those  
of ripples cast on sand like old half-memories, dancing light  
bounced to our human eyes which know little,  
but open at any age, see so much, our eyes that do  
remember light, and do enter when we see it, the dance.

(from "Bullheads in LaSalle Creek, Passing Strange," 2008)

Thus the nameless is named—preferring the knowledge of good and evil to wondrous ignorance, but longing to remember light and enter the dance.

In deed and word my friend sees and hears the here and now with precision and wonder, and takes his friends and readers with him.

When John was named the McKnight Distinguished Artist, I sent him the following note:

Bard,

This note gives me a chance to celebrate your McKnighting, Sir John. I take great joy in the public celebration of your work. I knew before they did. You enlightened my life. You taught me to see the jewelry in coruscate eye of toad, feel redemption in mouse eating pain, laugh at being the mummies we are become, recognize the bones of the range, see signatures written in snow by a boy using his tool....Thanks and congratulations for singing man song, my brother.

This is the way I seek to name the nameless and word the love I bear for one who is my friend, and whose poetry, photographs, and woodworkings made me see, hear, and feel wonder.

TOM BACIG IS THE MORSE ALUMNI DISTINGUISHED TEACHING PROFESSOR OF CULTURAL  
STUDIES EMERITUS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA-DULUTH.





# The Tales of Hoffmann (1989)

When the gondola crosses the screen with the courtesan poised in the bow and the boy first hears Offenbach's *Barcarolle*, tears leap into him where he sits in the darkened Granada Theatre with a friend, and remain. He has never heard so much. After the movie they are expelled into the downtown lights, where he has a hard time concealing, but so does Willy.

They do not look at each other or anyone until they walk in the dark between streetlights. In the reflections of snowbanks they begin to hum, still not looking at the other's face. But by the time they reach Sixth Street they are glancing at each other's eyes as they wordlessly sing the *Barcarolle* over and over, and they sing it under the streetlight, kicking holes into a packed snowbank until their ears crack with the cold, and they sing it as they turn toward their houses on opposite ends of Seventh, and hear each other singing it for a block, ringing it off the long arch of elms. When they meet in the hall the next at school, they are shy.



# Notes from friends and colleagues



I came late to John Caddy. After a reading I'd given in Denver, a former student of his suggested I look into John's poems. I did so with the pleasure of recognition you get from meeting someone you should have known long ago. The following winter, at another reading in Minneapolis, a gentle and soft-spoken man approached me. "Hello," he said, "I'm John Caddy." He had driven miles through a gathering blizzard to attend, and would drive back again afterward. The next day the roads were impassable. How lucky I felt to have had that meeting, like some visitation from a winter wraith, or a southering lynx with uncommonly good manners.

One thing I took away from that happy conjunction was a subscription to Morning Earth. What a joyful immersion in the poetics of the immediate! Even for a young poet on overdrive, the discipline of such a daily deposit would be difficult if not downright impossible to maintain. That a man of mature years, struck by blows and high winds, should do so with faithful verve and breeze-in-your-face freshness, is a Minnesota miracle. Every one of these weekday wonders tumbles out like tadpoles popping in spring or mushrooms bursting from the autumn moss. They carry the purl of meltwater, the curl of leaf and tendril, the permanent surge of a wild curiosity.

I have only read about John's legendary contributions in the schools, ministering to poets, naturalists, interpreters, and apparently everyone else. If those encounters carried anything of the spontaneity of Morning Earth, his students never had a chance to be bored with the world, or with words. What seems to me so right about this recognition is that John Caddy so thoroughly achieves such a deep and frequent connection with the actual physical world of people and the rest of nature, like no one I know. **So I came late to John Caddy. But the important thing, for me, is that I have come to him.**

ROBERT MICHAEL PYLE | Lepidopterist and writer | Gray's River, Washington

John and I have been connected for a long time: we were school classmates, our fathers were employed by the same now-extinct mining company, and we were linked to the same church community by our parents.

I recently sent John some black-and-white photos of a log-cabin construction project we were involved in near Prindle Mine just outside our hometown of Virginia, Minnesota. He remembers cold fall nights on the railroad tracks as we carried 2 x 16 sideboards stolen from the hockey rink, which would provide the floor of our cabin. In 1954, we two took a canoe trip out of Crane Lake and ended up windbound on David Lake for two days, passed by an old Ojibwe woman in a canoe who was obviously more confident and competent than we. John has a memory of our not staying the night at Lilac Lake after feeling that it was in some way haunted.

More recently, for a month in 2011, I accompanied John to LaPaz in the state of Baja California Sur, Mexico, to help drive his son Owen's car back after Owen's family became a part of that band of people who travel the world in small boats. It was during this trip that I really came to appreciate John's effort in putting together what we know as Morning Earth. Morning Earth poetry gives us all a unique connection both with John and with our natural surroundings. **He can capture the world for us through a damselfly.**

JOHN HERRIGAN | Superior, Wisconsin

We were a sad and dismal lot: undisciplined, poorly prepared, itinerant. If Alice Mott, our first principal, had been asked, she might have predicted, even hopefully, our imminent demise. At our opening in 1908 we were called, ironically, the Model School. By 1916 we had renamed ourselves "University High" and had, for the purpose of attracting a more desirable class of student, required students to be under the age of 21 to be admitted. By 1917 there were 84 students in grades 9-12, and we supplemented our lack of academic accomplishment by also being athletic failures. We were blasted, for instance, in 1921 by the Stillwater Ponies in a football game.

But help was on the way. On May 16, 1951, ground was broken for Peik Hall across from Dinkytown on the campus of the University of Minnesota, and some of the university's best graduate students began showing up to teach us. Imagine a tiny school of six grades taught by young, energetic scholars. By 1965, John Caddy was one of those teachers, and you could tell that the other teachers held him in high esteem.

But freshman English that year didn't start so well. John spoke quietly the first day and we came away thinking he was unsmiling, maybe a little too tough. I think he was just establishing authority. By the end of that first week, we students could tell that there was plenty of talent there.

John had to supervise a number of the student teachers who came over to establish their credentials; some of them were better than others. We had two who were assigned to teach a Shakespeare section, and I think they kind of knew who that was. Early on, with John observing from the back of the room, they made the mistake of ringing a bell persistently when the class got out of hand. I don't know what happened to those two, as we never did meet again in thunder, lightning, or in rain.

When I was 15 I received extra advantages from John's teaching ability when he helped me—after school or during what should have been his breaks—with some horrid television scripts I had written. But he never said a discouraging word. John made me promise never to tell anyone that he helped with my writing style. He was quite adamant about that for some reason, **so I'm not going to break my vow.** I have told John he'd have to write some pretty good poetry to surpass the heights he reached as a teacher, and I guess now he's done that.

FRITZ REEKER | Attorney | Edina

# Notes from friends and colleagues

From his earliest poems, which are often set in the North Woods where he grew up, to the more recent daily nature koans that emanate from Forest Lake to an international audience, John's work is always lucid, emotionally honest, possessed of rich archaic resonance, and animated essentially by a fierce reverence for the intricacies and enormity of the creaturely. But what I find perhaps most compelling about John's poetic vision is **the sense, underlying it all, that poetry belongs in active dialogue with the urgent issues of the day.** Indeed, if there is, as I hope and believe, a growing sense that our contemporary human civilization is no longer sustainable, and that the ecological crises we are experiencing now have their root causes in human culture, John Caddy—poet, naturalist, educator—has played an immeasurably prominent role in cultivating this sense.

 DANIEL SLAGER | Publisher and CEO, Milkweed Editions | Minneapolis

It is as though John Caddy has gone through a fire that burned up the other distractions in his body, leaving only the pure artist cells. **This Artist Being is busy seeing, recording, and reporting to the rest of us who struggle to stay focused. And he reports to us every week-day. Every one.**

John sees like breath, without trying, but completely and utterly committed to the lifesaving act. Selfishly, I am happy he is here, right now, spinning on the Earth. Peeking over his shoulder has helped me be a better artist. His gift is the great one: John Caddy's seeing is contagious.

 DEBRA FRASIER | Author and illustrator | Minneapolis

As a friend and poetry student of John Caddy's, I enjoy his wicked sense of humor, honor his comprehensive knowledge of natural habitats, and appreciate his inspiring lessons. However, I'm most amazed by his poems and photographs. Every weekday, I turn to Morning Earth to immerse myself in his latest communication from the world. Often I'm dumbfounded at the unity of a day's poem-photo combination, for this combination is not an illustrated poem, not an explained photo, but a balanced work of art.

Despite and possibly because of the challenges in his life, John has taught himself to really notice the many natural gifts surrounding us. His eye and voice are discerning and honest: every pebble, every leaf, every animal he encounters might find a place in one of his poems, one of his photographs, or both. **He embraces the individual parts and the whole—up close and far away—and then melds them into impressive images that clarify his vision for all of us.** Most of us hope that we can be a positive force for the planet, and in my estimation, John Caddy is just that. We are lucky to share his sights and insights.

I've been sharing his insights since 1998, when I joined John's adult poetry group. I had been writing poetry in my head for years, while I raised four children and taught sixth grade, but hadn't put metaphor to paper. At 66 years old, I was hoping to avoid fellow poets who would merely listen and offer bland appreciation—crumbs for the little old lady—and the Scandia Poets group fit my desires. At my third meeting, John heard my poem and asked, "And why should I care?" My heart was his forever. I'd found the honesty I craved, which helps explain why, at 80 years old, I'm still a member of this group.

 BEVERLY BONN JONNES | Retired teacher | Stillwater

"Notice and note." Class started and John's directions had us writing immediately—we were sent outside, pens in hand, and I spent 15 minutes noticing and noting a sometime-singing cardinal, partially hidden in a tree. This was my first encounter with John. I had registered for a Morning Earth journaling class at Hamline University and had been warned by a friend that John was not your typical teacher and that his classes had the potential to be life-changing. That class opened a door for me to a new world with our simple assignment. In between sessions my morning walks around Lake Harriet were transformed, my writing practice grew, and I noticed and noted spring's daily details unfolding for the first time in my 50 years. My next encounter with John was a year later at a Loft class. As class began, he stopped and pointed to two eagles circling a tall structure outside our window. The class watched, John noticed, and the next day, a Morning Earth poem focused on that event was sent via e-mail.

There's an old religious hymn that is still sung in Cornwall:

**Sound, sound your instruments of joy....**

**See, see the gladdening dawn appear....**

**Surprising scenes....**

**Let heaven and earth and sea proclaim**

**....all the universal frame**

John Caddy, the Bard of the Cornish Gorsedh, poet, teacher, and friend, leads a modern chorus of this hymn with variations that ring out each weekday, year-round in my e-mail.

 **JOE ALFANO** | K-5 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics coordinator, Minneapolis Public Schools

One of my first encounters with John Caddy was a morning visit to his residency in a suburban elementary classroom. He began by reading the students' poems that he had collected the day before. He recited each poem as if it were a glittering gem, reflecting back to students the power, beauty, and sometimes pain within their own work. By taking their beginning attempts so seriously, John was able to move these young people—and thousands of others—deeper into themselves, and into their sense of the magical world of poetic language.

Later, when John and I were working together on a project that involved much research writing, he would start our morning meetings by reading a handful of student poems. I felt extremely special, even though I had seen him do this many times before in the offices of teachers, principals, and other arts administrators. In the context of those poems, he gently elevated my thinking about the writing we were doing. I collected many of them and began reading out loud to others myself.

Now, through Morning Earth, I wake up each weekday to a poem by John or someone he has encouraged. As an undying believer in the power of poetry, he spreads the wealth to hundreds and hundreds of us, and in turn we too pass on poems. **Right now, as you are reading this, because of John Caddy, someone is likely sharing a poem with a student, neighbor, lover, or friend.**

 **MARY ALTMAN** | Public arts administrator, City of Minneapolis

# Notes from friends and colleagues

**I'd like to praise John Caddy's legendary generosity—his open spirit, the way he's welcomed so many new writers into the life of poetry.** Through his inventive Morning Earth, his decades teaching as a poet in the schools, and his own strong, courageous poetry, John has inspired many. I thank John for teaching me to trust the truth of children, to take student writers seriously, to write my own work with a brave and steady heart. And more, I thank him for the gift of perseverance given by example; John has taught me to remain a working writer, regardless of the obstacles, to stay loyal to the page because the work we have is here.

 SHEILA O'CONNOR | Writer | Minneapolis

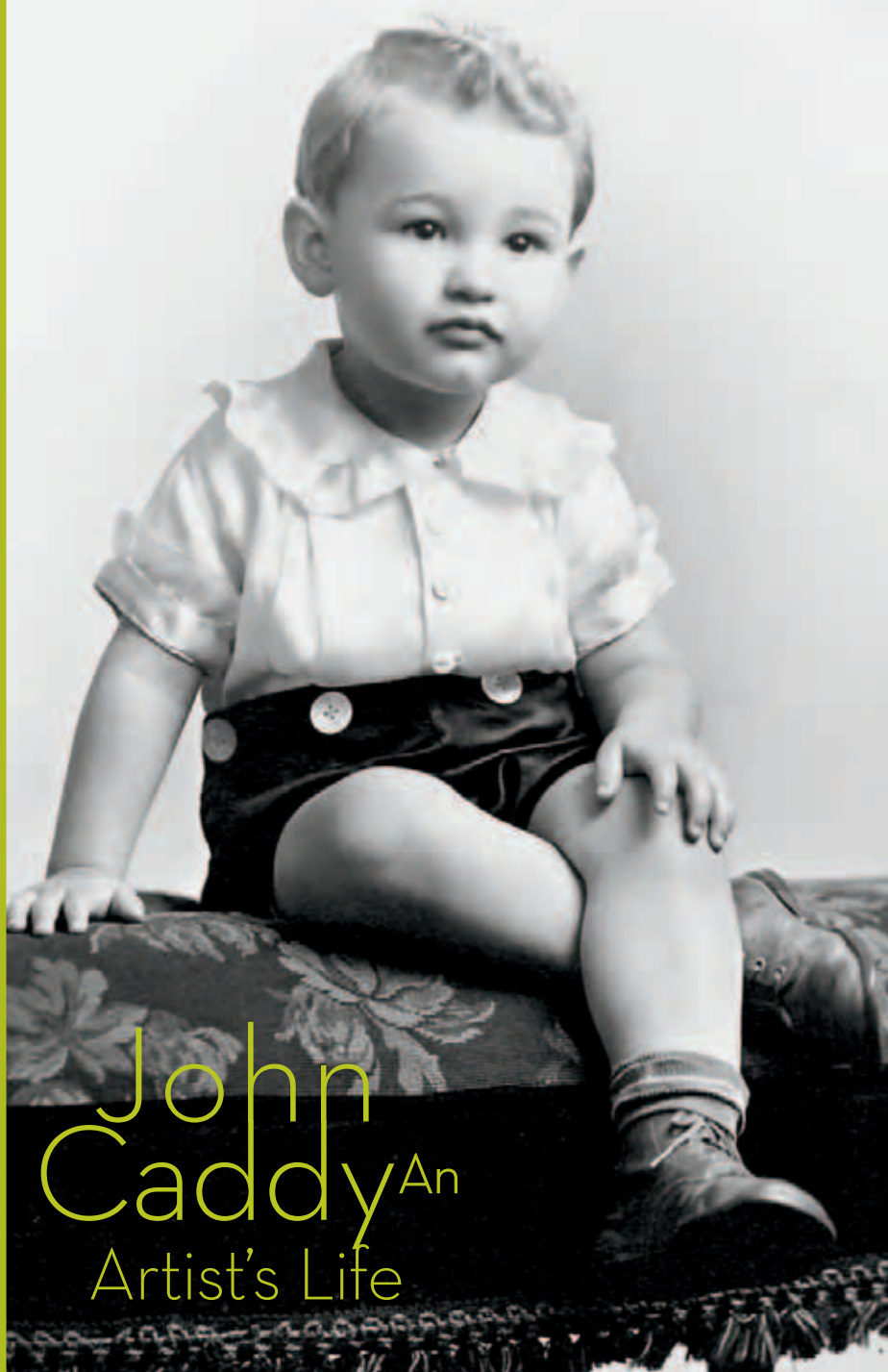
I met John in 2001 when I joined the faculty of the Natural Science and Environmental Education program at Hamline University, where he taught for more than 20 years—but like many other people, I had heard of John long before I met him. I was eager to meet him because of his Self Expressing Earth (SEE) program, which shared John's deep understanding of how science and the arts can be integrated to enhance students' capacity to wonder and imagine.

I remember the students in one Hamline summer course commenting that they could hardly wait for school to start again so they could implement what they had just learned from John. **He was an inspirational leader to his students, encouraging them to transform their thinking about who they were as teachers, as writers, and as individuals.** In his courses, teachers learned how to encourage their students' creativity by getting them to think about nature and learn about ecology...and he succeeded in replicating children's natural sense of wonder in his students. It might sound a bit dramatic to say that John has changed people's lives, but that's what many of his former students—now teaching students of their own—have said to me.

 RENEE L. WONSER | Assistant professor, Center for Global Environmental Education, Hamline University | St. Paul



1939



John  
Caddy<sup>An</sup>  
Artist's Life

# John Caddy<sup>An</sup> Artist's Life

**1937**  
Born in Hibbing



**1943-56**  
Attends school in Virginia, Minnesota



1957



**1956-57**

Attends the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis on a Naval ROTC scholarship



1957

**1957**

Cruises the Caribbean, Panama, and Chile as a midshipman



1954

**1959-61**

Manages Musicland record stores in Minneapolis and St. Paul



1968



1967

**1962-64**

Returns to the University of Minnesota and works as a graduate teaching assistant in the English department; begins to write poetry on an old L.C. Smith manual typewriter

**1965-67**

Teaches in the University of Minnesota College of Education and at University High School; cofounds Minnesota Poets in the Schools. Publishes protest poetry in small journals. Bonds with other young writers (Charles Baxter, Keith Gunderson, Roy McBride, Gerald Vizenor, Michael Tjepkes) at open-mic readings organized by poet Michael Kincaid



# John Caddy<sup>An</sup> Artist's Life

## 1968-69

Publishes first nature poem, "Eye of Toad," in *Beloit Poetry Journal*. Takes part in Vietnam War protests and in the "Chicago Eight" protest reading tour with Robert Bly, Galway Kinnell, Robert Creeley, and other poets. Treated for major depression. Teaches the poetry class at Twin City Institute for Talented Youth

## 1973-79

Quits teaching at the University of Minnesota and cofounds Sundog Center for Environmental Education near Lake Itasca; directs the first Minnesota Conservation Corps camp there for high school students. Begins to teach eco-principles through art-making. Publishes poetry in regional magazines such as *Dacotah Territory* and *North Country Anvil*. Begins writing *The Color of Mesabi Bones* and "The Heronry"

## 1980-83

Returns to the Twin Cities and earns a living through teaching residencies and woodworking

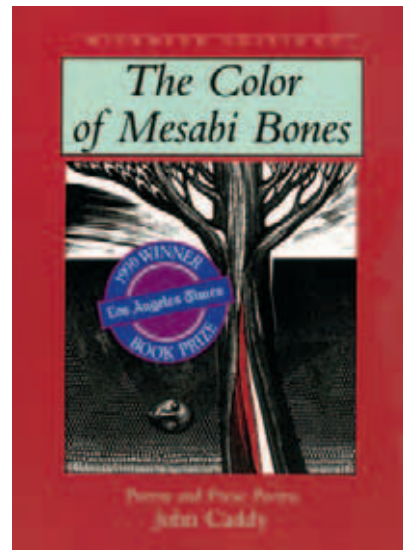
## 1984

Receives a Minnesota Independent Choreographers' Alliance/Jerome Foundation grant to stage "The Heronry" with choreographer Susan Delattre and jazz composer Pat Moriarty; piece is performed with five dancers and jazz trio. Begins publishing in *Milkweed Chronicle*

## 1985-88

Wins Milkweed Editions' Lakes and Prairies Award; publishes *Eating the Sting, Including The Heronry*. Wins Loft/McKnight Award in Poetry and a Minnesota State Arts Board Grant in Poetry





## 1989

Receives the Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award from Poets & Writers; gives readings on the East and West coasts. Receives Bush Foundation Individual Artist Fellowship. Milkweed Editions publishes *The Color of Mesabi Bones*. Finishes building self-designed home near Forest Lake



### 1990-93

Wins *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry and Minnesota Book Award for *The Color of Mesabi Bones*. Visits Cornwall for the first time. With Carol Sirrine, creates and conducts a summer arts/ecology workshop for teachers at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center

### 1994

Catastrophic stroke results in permanent left-side hemiplegia



Sally Ordway Irvine Award winners, 1997



On the Cornwall coast, 1992



SEE summer workshop, 1999

### 1995

Startled at being alive and able to write, begins developing Self Expressing Earth (SEE) environmental-education program at Community Programs in the Arts & Sciences (COMPAS) and later moves it to Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education. Returns to teaching residencies and starts the Scandia Poets writing group

### 1996-99

Tours Cornwall, giving readings; self-publishes *Presences the Blood Learns Again*. Receives Sally Ordway Irvine Award for Arts Education. Conducts five ecology-through-arts workshops for teachers, teaching artists and interpretive naturalists. Begins writing a daily eco-poem sent to classrooms that subscribe to SEE. Spends a week in residence in Ojai, California's Topa Topa School, where his daily poem opens the school day for the entire year

### 2001

SEE closes down due to loss of funding; website remains up at Hamline as resource site. Continues e-mailing daily eco-poem to a few hundred friends and subscribers



2002



© St. Paul Pioneer Press, 2003



© John Caddy, 2007

## 2002

In Cornwall, elected a Bard of the Cornish Gorsedh; takes Cornish-language Bardic name *Kaner an Norvys* (Singer of Earth)

## 2003-06

Milkweed Editions publishes *Morning Earth: Field Notes in Poetry*. Incorporates Morning Earth as an educational nonprofit and develops SEE website into much larger site focusing on ecology, ecoliteracy, celebrations of artist/naturalists, and archived Morning Earth poems (site launches in 2005; begins incorporating daily photos in 2006). Subscription list grows steadily

## 2008

Milkweed Editions publishes *With Mouths Open Wide: New and Selected Poems*

## 2010-2011

Gives numerous Twin Cities-area readings of Morning Earth poems accompanied by projected slides. Renames daily poems "Healing Images" to reflect research showing that people's health improves the more they are exposed to nature. Morning Earth website records its one millionth unique visitor

## 2012

Lives on 10 acres near Forest Lake; continues daily practice of photography and poetry, with Healing Images e-mailed to more than 1,500 subscribers daily



Dominick Argento 1998

Warren MacKenzie 1999

Robert Bly 2000

Dale Warland 2001

Emilie Buchwald 2002

Mike Lynch 2003

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski 2004

Judy Onofrio 2005

Lou Bellamy 2006

Kinji Akagawa 2007

Bill Holm 2008

Bain Boehlke 2009

Siah Armajani 2010

Ranee Ramaswamy 2011



## About the Award

The Distinguished Artist Award recognizes artists who, like John Caddy, have chosen to make their lives and careers in Minnesota, thereby making our state a more culturally vibrant place. Although they have the talent and the opportunity to pursue their work elsewhere, these artists have chosen to stay—and by staying, they have made a difference. They have founded and strengthened arts organizations, inspired younger artists, and attracted audiences and patrons. Best of all, they have made wonderful, thought-provoking art.

The McKnight Foundation is committed to fostering an environment in which all artists are valued leaders in our community, with access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. John's inseparable roles as poet, teacher, and naturalist could not be a more perfect illustration of the impact an artist can have on our state: over more than four decades, not only has he produced thousands of indelible poems, but he has also worked with tens of thousands of Minnesota schoolchildren and teachers to help nurture their creativity and their connection with the natural world.

This award, which comes with \$50,000, goes to one Minnesota artist each year. Nominations are open to everyone, and those received by March 31 are considered the same year. The panel that selects the recipient is made up of five people who have longtime familiarity with the Minnesota arts community.

Our thanks go to panelists Philip Bither, Walker Art Center's senior curator of performing arts; Graydon Royce, theater critic at the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*; Stewart Turnquist, former coordinator of the Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; 2001 McKnight Distinguished Artist Dale Warland, founder of the Dale Warland Singers; and 2002 McKnight Distinguished Artist Emilie Buchwald, founder of Milkweed Editions. Their high standards and thoughtful consideration make this award a truly meaningful tribute to Minnesota's most influential artists.

VICKIE BENSON Arts Program Director, The McKnight Foundation



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### ABOUT THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, collaboration, and encouragement of strategic policy reform, the Foundation uses its resources to attend, unite, and empower those it serves. Founded in 1953 and independently endowed by William and Maude McKnight, the Foundation had assets of approximately \$1.9 billion and granted about \$91 million in 2011, of which about 10% was directed to support an environment in which artists are valued leaders in our community, with access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

The McKnight Foundation is committed to the protection of our environment, a philosophy that underlies our practice of using paper with postconsumer waste content and, wherever possible, environmentally friendly inks. Additionally, we partner with printers who participate in the PIM Great Printer Environmental Initiative. This book was printed with soy-based inks on recycled paper.

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