

Wallace Stegner's lecture on "The Gift of Wilderness" for the annual David Belkin Memorial Lecture

April 6, 1981

EDITORS NOTE: Wallace Stegner has chosen "The Gift of Wilderness" as the title for his lecture Thursday, April 23, at the University of California, San Diego.

Wallace Stegner, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, conservationist and western historian who started writing in the mid-1930s, will give the third annual David Marc Belkin Memorial Lecture Thursday, April 23, at the University of California, San Diego.

The lecture, which is free and open to the public, will begin at 8 p.m. in room 107 of the Third College Lecture Hall.

The Belkin Lectures on environmental issues were established by the parents and friends of David Marc Belkin, an honors graduate of John Muir College at UC San Diego. Belkin lost his life while backpacking in the High Sierra in July 1978. His love for the wilderness prompted his family to establish the endowed memorial fund in his memory.

Stegner occupies a unique position in contemporary American letters. He has won a large and devoted following for his novels but he is equally well-known for his perceptive historical studies and as the author of numerous critical studies. In addition, he established and headed, for 26 years, the Stanford University Writing Program which he developed into one of America's most important and prestigious training grounds for new writers.

He is the author of 15 fiction and nonfiction novels and collected short fiction including "Remembering Laughter," which was published in 1937 and which won the Little, Brown novelette prize. "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," Stegner's great family novel was published in 1943 while he was teaching in the Harvard University creative writing program.

He left Harvard in 1944 to help Look Magazine research a wartime series on racial and religious intolerance. One year later he accepted a position as professor at Stanford University. While at Stanford his publications included "Second Growth," "The Preacher and the Slave," "The Writer in America," "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," "All the Little Live Things," and "The Sound of Mountain Water."

In 1972, "Angle of Repose," a study of the life and letters of Mary Halleck Foote, a writer and illustrator who followed her mining-engineer husband west from New York in the 1870s, won a Pulitzer Prize. Four years later an adaptation of "Angle of Respose" was set to music and given a world premiere as the Bicentennial production of the San Francisco Opera. That same year Stegner published "The Spectator Bird," winner of the National Book Award for Fiction.

In 1979, at the age of 70, he published his 12th novel, "Recapitulation." His newest book, "American Places," a nonfiction look at the country's past and present written with his son, Page, is scheduled to be published next fall.

James Houston, in an interview with Stegner, called him "a regional writer in the richest sense of that word, one who manages to dig through surface and plumb a region's deepest implications, tapping into profound matters of how a place or a piece of territory can shape life, character, actions, dreams.

"In all of his books, fiction or nonfiction," said Houston, "the sense of place is essential to an understanding of the life."

The Belkin Memorial Lecture series, which began in 1979, brings to the UC San Diego campus each spring a speaker distinguished for his or her work in the appreciation and preservation of the wilderness. Past speakers include Peter Matthiessen, author of "The Snow Leopard," and the National Book Award winner for 1979, and David Brower, founder and head of The Friends of the Earth. It is currently planned that the first three lectures - those by Matthiessen, Brower and Stegner - will be published in a single volume by the University of California Press.

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