

The written word can inspire a reader in many ways. In the case of this month's notable reader, retired UW-Waukesha music professor Don Stimpert, the written word inspired him to set it to music.

"I had come across a passage referred to in the book 'Cold Mountain,' by Charles Frazier," he says. "I came across it again in a book called 'A Widow For One Year,' by John Irving. It was just a beautiful passage about what happens between two people. Because I had read it in both of these books, I set out to track down the book from which it was taken."

The passage was actually from a Victorian-era book called "Adam Bede," which was written by a woman, Mary Ann Evans, using pseudonym George Eliot. The novel tells the story of three 19th century characters who found themselves trapped in a love triangle.

He later found out that the passage was also used for wedding ceremonies performed by a pastor at his church. "I decided to write a piece of music with that text," he says. "The end result was 'What Greater Thing,' which is the first three words of the passage."

As music often stirs the listener's soul, words appear to have the same effect on Stimpert. "I love reading, and I really enjoy writers who reach the soul in a profound manner," he says. "I buy all my books because I never know when I will want to go back to re-read a passage or pass a book on to someone."

He sees value in reading. "I think you gain a little bit of wisdom every time you read and the words can take on new meaning if you return to them at a different point in your life," he says.

This may be why he gravitates toward well-written fiction. For example, Stimpert says that author Wallace Stegner is among his favorite authors. He's read "Angle of Repose," "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" and "The Spectator Bird."

"I actually recommended 'Angle of Repose' to a book club I was participating in and they really enjoyed it," he says. "I find Stegner's writing to be so rich. He seems so profound to me because his writing speaks to all kinds of people. It does reach the soul in a profound manner with no froth. It's a Pulitzer-prize winning book that is just absolutely wonderful."

He's also gained insight from M. Scott Peck's "The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth," a book that meant a lot to him as a teacher. "I wish I'd read

it earlier in my life," he admits. "My kids are 31 and 36 now, beyond my help, I think, but had I read it sooner, perhaps it would've influenced me as a parent."

Though he does have his personal favorites, Stimpert is also open to trying new authors. He is currently reading Jonathan Franzen's "The Corrections."

"I read in 'Time' magazine last fall that this was supposed to be 'the novel of the 21st century,'" he says. "It's a novel about contemporary life, which is something that I don't normally read."

He says he's found the book to be somewhat depressing, though gripping nonetheless. "Franzen has a real intuition about personality and when you read the book, you feel like you have a great insight into the characters," he says. "It's also a very slow read, but that's OK, because it is well written."

Stimpert didn't actually discover the joys of fiction until after college. "My wife, Jeanette, introduced me to fiction after we were married," he says.

The first summer after Stimpert finished school, he and his wife moved to Lake Placid, N.Y. Not only did they enjoy summer activities, but they also spent a lot of time at the public library.

"Up until that point, I just didn't have time to read because I was a student," he says. "Now, I just love it, particularly reading in bed. I actually look forward to going to bed at night because I know I'm going to do a little reading."

He also noticed the same anticipation from his children when they were younger. "We read to them all the time, particularly right before bed," he says, remembering many nights with the "Cat in the Hat." "Bedtime reading offers such a special time for parents and their children. Not only can you share by reading, but it also offers some time to reflect on the day and be close to each other."

It also sets the stage for a life-long enjoyment of books. Stimpert's daughter recently stopped in at his Waukesha home.

As she left, she grabbed his copy of "The Corrections."

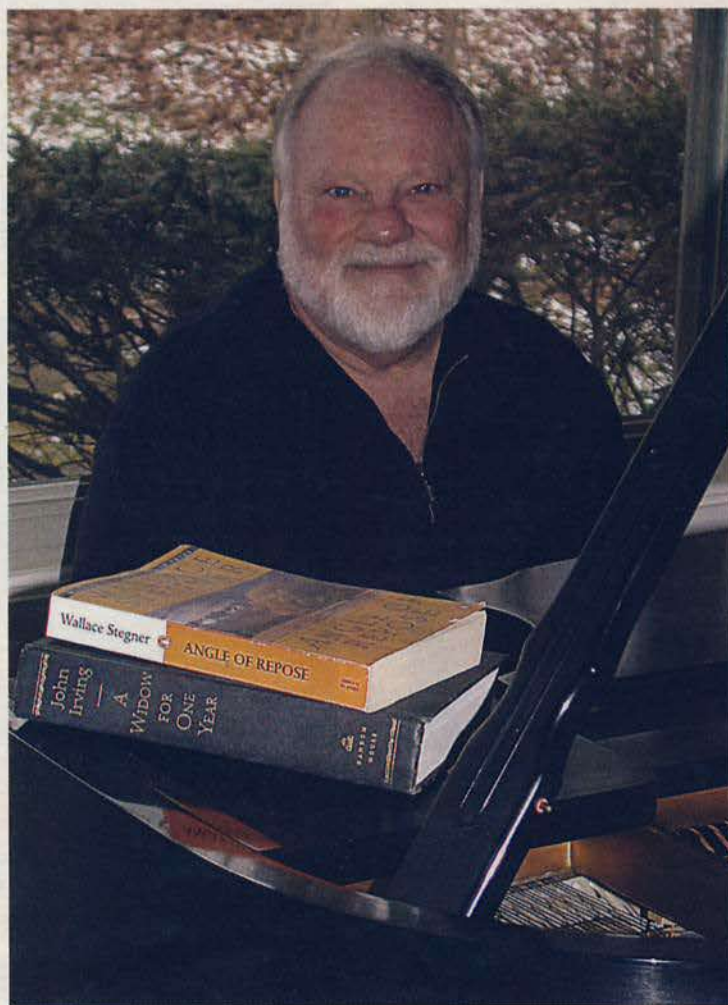
"I said, 'Hey, where are you going with my book?'" Stimpert asked. His daughter replied, "That's my book, Dad."

She was reading the same book in her book club and had mistaken his copy for hers. **NSW**

NOTABLE READER Inspired musician

Story by *Laurie Arendt*

Photography by *Barbara Slane*



Reading is not only a pleasurable past time for Don Stimpert, but it also inspires him to write music.