

## Writing Up a Storm

by James B. Goode

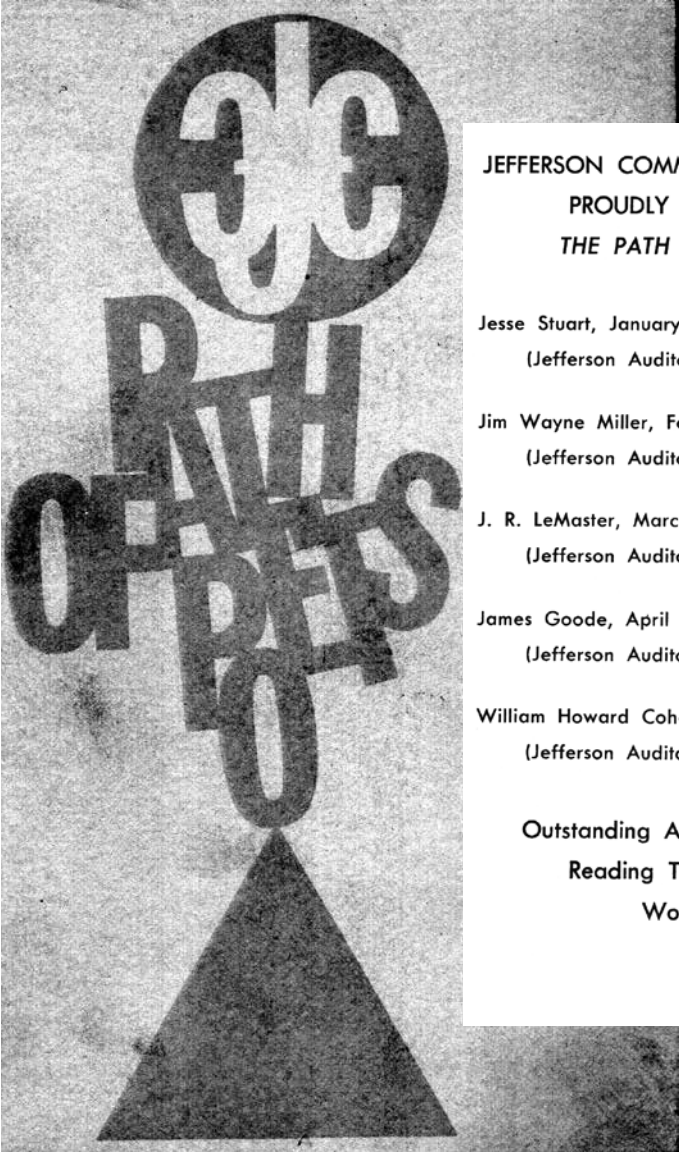
The first time I ever saw Jesse Stuart was at the Rebecca Caudill Public library at Cumberland, Kentucky in the late 1960s when Southeast Community College professor Lee Pennington invited three writers to participate in a speaker's series. Western Kentucky University professor Jim Wayne Miller who had just published *Copperhead Cane*, Alice Lloyd College professor William Howard Cohen who had just published *The Hill Way Home* and was working on his book *To Walk in Seasons: An Introduction to Haiku*, and the already famous Jesse Stuart who had just published *My Land Has a Voice* appeared as speakers at the former grocery store turned library during my freshman year in college.

I remember being impressed with Jesse Stuart's size and vitality. His commanding presence and venerable story telling abilities became the very reason I developed a life-long interest in Kentucky authors and in writing poetry and fiction. A few years before, Jesse had been invited to swap tales at one of the first The Kingdom Come Swappin' Meetin', a local folk festival that recently celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Lee Pennington, who had graduated from Berea and the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop had come to Southeast Community College in the fall of 1966. I graduated from Cumberland High School in the spring of 1967 and entered Southeast Community College that fall. My first semester enrollment included an honors freshman composition course under Lee. Since the University of Kentucky required a minimum number of words to be written by entering students, he required that we write at least one type written page-per-class meeting. Since we met three times-per-week, that amounted to forty-eight pages. I devised what I thought to be a clever way to avoid writing that much prose—I would emulate poets like e. e. cummings and some of the "Beat" poets and fill up my pages with poems. After all, he had announced no restrictions on margins. Lee handed my sheets back, looked at me with a grin coming from his famously long, red beard, and winked. I was home free! On that day, without much planning on my part, I started what would become an avocation in writing that has resulted in publishing seven books, several hundred poems, dozens of essays, and ten short stories.

In 1968, just as I was transferring from Southeast Community College to The University of Kentucky in Lexington, Lee took a job at Jefferson Community College in Louisville. He wrote to invite me to participate in a reading series sponsored by the college called "The Path of Poets." The lineup began with Jesse Stuart on January 4

and included Jim Wayne Miller, J. R. LeMaster, William Howard Cohen, and me. I was nineteen years old and had only published in nine small literary magazines. My path had crossed Jesse's again.



JEFFERSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
PROUDLY PRESENTS  
**THE PATH OF POETS**

Jesse Stuart, January 4, 8 p.m.  
(Jefferson Auditorium)

Jim Wayne Miller, February 16, 8 p.m.  
(Jefferson Auditorium)

J. R. LeMaster, March 29, 8 p.m.  
(Jefferson Auditorium)

James Goode, April 12, 8 p.m.  
(Jefferson Auditorium)

William Howard Cohen, May 18, 8 p.m.  
(Jefferson Auditorium)

Outstanding American Poets  
Reading Their Own  
Works

*Path of Poets Flyer*  
1968

Just as I graduated from Graduate school at the University of Kentucky in 1971 and headed to Louisville, Kentucky for my first teaching assignment, I got a call from Lee Pennington who had recommended me to fill the editor's position for the newsletter published by the Kentucky State Poetry Society. I heartily accepted the position but asked Lee what he thought about turning the newsletter into a literary journal. He was encouraging, so I launched *Pegasus* as a literary journal sponsored by the Kentucky State Poetry Society.

# Pegasus

VOLUME ONE

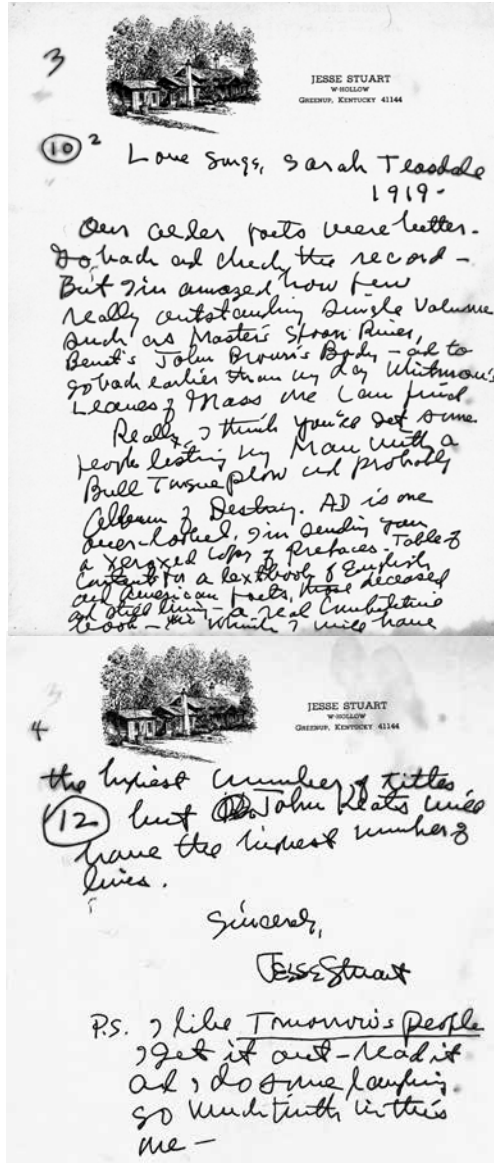
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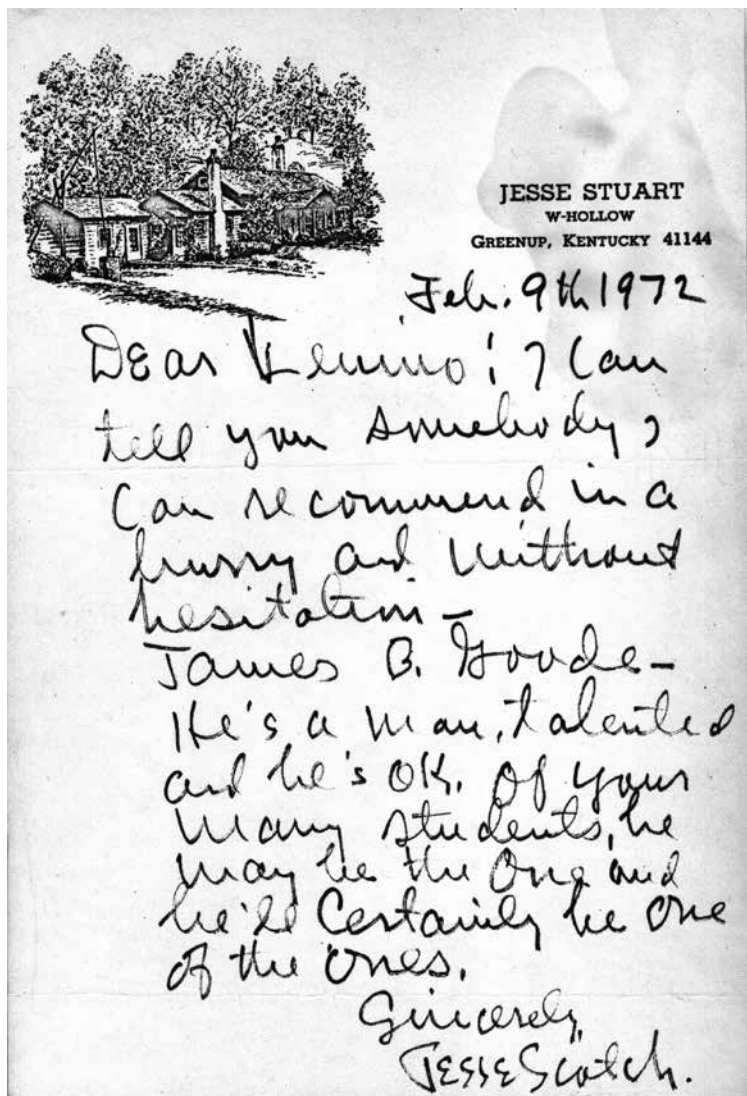
Notify us promptly when you change your mailing address.  
Send both the old and the new — and the ZIP Code numbers.  
Allow at least two weeks for processing the change.

This led to my next major contact with Jesse Stuart. I decided to feature a well-published Kentucky writer in each issue and, of course, my choice for one of the early issues was Jesse. I wrote him a letter and waited. Almost before the ink could dry on the envelope, I got a package from Stuart containing several poems. In the second issue, I featured seven of Jesse's poems along with a letter he had drafted that responded to a question about what he considered to be the ten best books of poetry ever published.



Jesse Stuart Letter to  
James B. Goode, June 30, 1971

Jesse was always supportive of me. On numerous occasions he promoted my poetry by suggesting possible markets, writing letters to editors, ordering copies of my publications, encouraging me to pursue more education, and sending extra copies of his publications for my collection—he was the consummate mentor. In February 1972, he wrote a flattering letter of recommendation to Lee (whom he often called “Levino”) to suggest that he and J. Hill Hamon in their newly formed Whippoorwill Press publish my book *The Whistle and the Wind*. By the end of 1972, the book was in print.



Letter from Jesse Stuart to  
Lee Pennington, February 9, 1972

Over the next several years, Jesse and I kept a correspondence that lasted into the early 1980s when he was beset by ill health and could no longer move the Osmaroid point on his Esterbrook fountain pen. The last message I received from the Stuart household was a note from Naomi Deane dated January 27, 1982.

**NAOMI DEANE STUART**

Dear Mr. Goode -

Jesse wishes me to thank you for your letter and your book "Under My Heartstone" both of which came some times ago.

My husband does not yet read or ~~see~~ his mail - I read to

him much of the time - as he cares little for television -

We think the book is very attractive and both of us are enjoying your verse - very much.

Thank you for ~~remembering~~ for this way.

W. H. 1100

Jan. 27, 1982

Sincerely

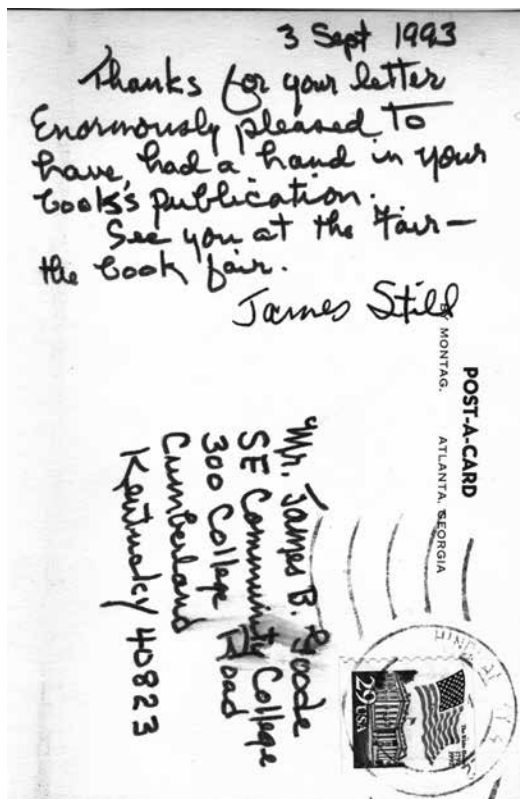
Naomi Deane Stuart

Letter from Naomi Deane Stuart to  
James B. Goode, January 27, 1982

The University Press of Mississippi released my book of coal mining poems entitled *Poets of Darkness* in 1981. This was partly due to a recommendation by Dr. Bill Ferris, a folklorist at Yale University (later to become the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities under the Clinton administration).

A few years after this publication, the Jesse Stuart Foundation was looking to print a book of creative work with a coal mining theme. James Still, who had read *Poets of Darkness* and had high praise for it, recommended that the board consider reprinting the then out-of-print book. I recall getting a call from Jim Gifford in early 1992, asking if I might be interested in this proposition. I was elated but told Jim that I had completed at least one long poem entitled "Piecing the Coal Quilt" that I felt should be included in a second edition. He asked me to send it along. He called almost immediately after having read the new poem and asked if I had more similar material. I sent a packet the very next day. In less than a week, he called and said he felt as if we had a new book. The Foundation would publish the core of *Poets of Darkness*, but with several additional new poems.

The manuscript entitled *Up From The Mines* went to the Foundation on August 31, 1992. The camera-ready pages arrived on July 7, 1993 and the book was in print in time for the November 20, 1993 Kentucky Book Fair. On September 3, 1993, James Still wrote to tell me how pleased he was to have had a hand in the book's publication.



Note from James Still to  
James B. Goode September 3, 1993



*Jesse Stuart & Harry Meecham (President  
of the American Academy of Poets)  
Kentucky State Poetry Society Meeting  
Greenbo Lake State Park Lodge, c. 1970*

By December 1993 *Up From The Mines* was listed as number two on the Local Best Sellers list published by the *Lexington Herald Leader*. *Up From The Mines* continues to generate interest and is still being carried in the Kentucky section of Joseph Beth Booksellers.

My relationship continued with the Jesse Stuart Foundation with short stories being included in two anthologies: *Appalachian Christmas Stories* (1997) and *Appalachian Love Stories* (2001). Additionally, two technical books on coal mining were released: *Ancient Sunshine: The Story of Coal* (1997) and *The Cutting Edge: Mining in the 21st Century* (2002).

Because of Jesse Stuart's generosity and encouragement, his legacy lives on in a host of writers throughout the world. His influence upon this boy who was born August 8, 1948 in the International Harvester coal camp at Benham, Kentucky has been seminal. In the 1950s, when I read Jesse's books late at night in the back bedroom of that four-room shack, little did I realize that someday my dreams to be a writer would be realized through one of my boyhood heroes.

As I leafed through the dozens of letters in my file in preparation for this essay, I could not help but think that he actually is still moving the Osmaroid tip of his Esterbrook pen across the page, every time I craft a poem or shape a short story.