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Fort Worden State Park, Port Townsend, Washington,
First floor non-commissioned officer quarters No. 234
South, Summertime 2012.

You may need all the above information to pinpoint the location. Two blocks away, a big literary conference gathers for workshops and lectures here at the park. Twenty blocks away is the downtown of Port Townsend. Across the bay is Seattle, Washington.

And the Fort business? Back in 1900s, the U.S. Army built the fort for a coastal artillery base to dare foreign ships to sail into Puget Sound. Use your imagination here about huge bore cannons mounted on Artillery Hill overlooking my quarters in a non-commissioned officer's house. Add a ship (that never came) from the Spanish American War sailing in to make trouble for those cannons to blast to pieces. Chalk up, however, that this was an important place to train soldiers until it closed in 1951.

For now, realize that the writers and teachers here, at present, are not only important to readers and students. Good chance someday one might be the poet laureate of our country. Important to note now and further along that poets laureate are the unknown, unsung heroes of our entire U.S. of A. government.

Go back as far as you want, you will never find a poet laureate who needed armed bodyguards, or chauffeured limousines, or private jets furnished by the taxpayers. Mankind doesn't go crazy enough to bother to bump off a poet. The job doesn't require street parades, much less flight overseas to review the troops.

Also, hear that this poet laureate draws \$35,000 a year. Safe to bet we pay the President's cook twice or three times that much. Laureates might have an office furnished over at the Attorney General's department. Whatever the case, you can't find a better bargain in D.C.

Address, further please, the commonly held charges that poets are kooky, abnormal, strange, queer, and odd. Pick more if you like, but how about building a case for going to war in Afghanistan after the Russians warned that the only way to conquer that country was to be willing to kill every last one of them? While you are at it, move over to Iraq to add up the cost and lives we've lost there. Still think poets are peculiar?

Weeks before this conference, I stopped going to the barber's to fit in up here. No better disguise for a literary conference than to let your hair grow. "Inner collar length" is one way to put it, "collar length," or "Adam's apple level."

With a big stand of African bush locks and an untrimmed gray beard, a takeoff of "Mary's Little Lamb" will pass for literature. Bow ties also throw folks off guard. In a scene like this, where dark tee shirts serve for dress clothes, a bow tie becomes distinctive. I also nap in the shirts I plan to pack before leaving home. In an hour, the shirt conforms to the body's folds to look tailored at unpacking.

Yesterday, a literary evaluator, a special editor, spent an hour reading and discussing one of my columns that changes my ambitions to be a writer. She edits poetry and prose and perhaps other genre. She's no "apple dumpling" is another way to put it. All business; pay for an hour, you receive an hour's worth of time. Her summary, her advice, was to learn to work with my hands, like woodworking, or become musical and take harp lessons.

After she pointed out how ideal my left shoulder shapes to lean an instrument against, how perfect my fingers are to strum the strings, I caught on she wasn't talking about a French harp like we used to play in bunkhouses. She meant a big gold arc instrument with shiny long strings and a pick shaped from a triangle piece of cow horn. (The last part is made up about the pick.)

After the first shock, the idea sounded better than trying to be a writer. Bound not to take long to learn to play a harp, no more notes than a harpist plays in a whole symphony arrangement. All it takes is that he or she rolls the big gold instrument out on wheels off to one side of the stage. Tunes up "ku blumb, ku-blum" with a few deep "ku-blues". For the whole performance he or she plays maybe a minute.

Before daybreak a thunderstorm crashed and boomed like the way artillery men must have fired their enormous bored cannons over the trenches in France in 1918. Sad the enemy never came in range when the guns rested on the huge emplacements now left empty on Artillery Hill.

Forts are hardly the setting for harpists and bow ties.