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What makes this collection of short stories different from your other published collections? How do you see it in context of your 35 year career?

My other story collections have focused more on the Southwest, where I grew up, and in this collection I've given more space to Maine, where I've spent more than thirty summers on a lake in the woods. The stories here also give some attention to WWII, which formed the background of my childhood. But beyond the surface level, there are certain constants in my work: people trying to find a way to live or searching for some essential part of themselves; what the West represents in terms of a new territory for the imagination; the relationship between art and life. My hope is that over the years the stories treat these concerns with greater depth and insight.

The main strands of my work exist in this collection as interplay between the real and the fabulous. I took my first excursion into the fantastic with a story called "The Tiger's Eye," which I wrote in 1979. (It's just now appearing in an anthology, *Paraspheres: Fabulist and New Wave Fabulist Fiction* from Omnidawn.) I didn't know at the time that the fantastic would have such a large part in my major work. I like the statement by the great water colorist Charles Burchfield that he likes to play between the real and the fantastic in order to approach a truth he couldn't otherwise realize. I would say the same; it's also true of my painting.

It appears that there is a theme of reflection from one generation to another within your stories. Take A Garden Amid Fires

and Traveling Light for example. Could you tell us what this symbolizes for you?

I think it symbolizes for me the mystery of those relationships. I don't think we understand very well the influences that act upon us and help shape who we are or what we're passing on to our children. Each generation sees the world with such different eyes, yet we all go through the same phases. And though we try to give the young the best we can to help them forward, we are often very limited in our understanding of what that should be.

I know you have written a lot about southwestern motifs in the past and it appears in the story Cochise. Could you relate the mysterious or religious elements that are at play in a story like Cochise?

Perhaps certain places call upon capacities that belong to different realms of imagination and perception. New Mexico has certainly worked its enchantments upon me. My novel *Ghost Dance: A Play of Voices* took me in directions I never expected to explore. And since then I've listened to some quite incredible experiences people have had in New Mexico. I'm convinced that there are spiritual realities that we can potentially apprehend, and they certainly belong to a mystery. The past is part of that mystery.

With the story The Orange Bird you touch on another familiar subject for you, that of painting. Since you are an artist and this story speaks about artistic integrity have you ever been in a place where your ethics as an artist were tested? How do your

other passions in art effect your artistic passion for writing?

Well, when I was young I thought I ought to write travel articles in order to make some money, but my husband kept saying, "You're a fiction writer. You should be writing fiction." So I did that for seventeen years without placing a story or making a cent. That sounds more like madness than ethics. When I tried to publish *Ghost Dance*, several agents were enthusiastic about the book up until the ending. They wouldn't take it on that account. But the ending seemed right to me, so I couldn't change it. The novel was finally published by LSU and nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award.

I'm not sure anymore whether I'm a writer who paints or a painter who writes—it's all one now. And I love it all. Painting allows me to see the world in terms of light and color, gesture and form. Writing sends me in the direction of action and motive, irony and ambiguity. Each offers a different way of handling image; each has a different vocabulary. In subtle ways each influences the other. I like being a-swim where there are no words to hang onto.

What would you like other artists that read this story take to take away from it?

A sense of the ironies involved in the creative process and its results. Recognition of the joys and struggles of the game.

The story Women Don't Tell War Stories is a unique glimpse into human relationships. I love the internal combat/conflict which is represented in this story. Could you elaborate on how you see women's roles in living with soldiers and their past?

I was just a kid during WWII, so what I know, I know indirectly. A war involving the whole nation creates special conditions. I just tried to imagine what happens when you attempt to seize the moment because things are temporary and transient, and the shadow of death hangs over everything. Anything goes. There's a kind of freedom in that, but for some, both men and women, a certain moral perplexity as well. Because they had to, women took on different roles while the men were away and probably expanded their sense of potentiality. Then after it was all over, Rosie the Riveter was strongly urged to go back to the kitchen and turn out tuna noodle casseroles.

What makes these stories work together?

I find it difficult to answer this, except to say that a writer creates a particular world embodying a particular vision, and these create a relationship.

Including your forthcoming publication, A Garden Amid Fires,

your literary career has emphasized that you lean toward short stories of personal accounts rather than novels. Are you aware of any factors that motivate this choice for you?

Actually what you're seeing is what I've managed to publish. I've written a sequence of three other novels dealing with the characters in my first novel, *Carnival for the Gods*. Another novel, *Ceremony of Innocence*, is an attempt to connect American consciousness with what has happened in Europe since WWII. This came out of my experiences in Eastern Europe. And finally, there is a kind of epic set in New Mexico, *The Dark Gamble*, that took its inspiration from *Gilgamesh*. In other words, most of my major work has yet to be published.

Finally, do you write with any particular audience in mind? Are there any particular audiences you hope will connect with these stories?

I worked for so many years in isolation that I didn't know if I had an audience (unless you count my husband), much less who that audience would be. I could only attempt to write the sort of work I admired. After my first book was published, I was fortunate enough to discover a core of editors and readers who have read my work with wonderful insight and appreciation--a great blessing. Perhaps a book creates its own audience. Naturally I'd like to be able to speak to a broad spectrum of readers—be that as it may.

