

# The poet on the hill

By Matthew Manguso

**PINELDALE** – Surrounded by shelves loaded with books of all kinds, Cornelius “Cork” Kelly, pen name C.F. Kelly, sits down in his green recliner chair and, with a gigantic smile, asserts he is poet because he writes poetry.

“It’s as simple as that,” he says. “But that doesn’t mean your poetry is good, or bad.”

He looked down at his seven collections of poetry, scattered on the floor around his chair, and said he has trouble believing he wrote so many.

*For thirty years I taught the sonnet form / to freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, too, / and never put aside the time to warm / my thoughts with words and precious rhyming glue.*

Kelly’s first jaunt into the world of poetry began when he was in seventh grade. Growing up in Michigan, the young man fell in love with a “sweet looking German/Polish neighbor.” With no other way to express his emotion, Kelly sat down and wrote her a poem.

“I became the poet laureate of the neighborhood, even though it wasn’t very successful in terms of romance,” he said as grains of snow tap against the window of his Orcutt Hill home.

After majoring in English during college, Kelly began teaching the subject to high school students. In 1971, he moved to

Wyoming and earned a Masters degree in Spanish from the University of Wyoming; he began teaching that language, as well. All the while, poetic lines and verses festered inside him, but they rarely, if at all, made their way onto the page.

Still, Kelly stressed the importance of writing, making his students write in their notebooks for the first 10 minutes of each class. The content didn’t matter, he explained, as long as his students were writing something, he was pleased.

“For all the years I taught English, I had a saying: ‘writing is a skill you improve by writing.’ Which could be true,” he said with a smirk. “I also think revision and refinement is very important.”

In true Irish fashion, Kelly and his wife Agnes (not the girl from his childhood, but just as sweet looking) were blessed with ten children.

“I started writing because of our children,” he explained. “I wanted to write a poem for each child, to and about each child, that’s where I got going.”

He kept going.  
*Ideas would come, light up, then disappear, / and I would fret their loss and carry on / with my routines, attempting to make clear / the poet’s craft till all my time was gone.*

Joining poetry groups like WyoPoets and Wyoming Writers, Inc., words and verse began flowing out of Kelly like a river after the thaw. Eventually, he settled in Pinedale.

The poet describes his arrival to the area as fortuitous. Though he has bounced all over the state, he finds Sublette County to be one of the most beautiful areas in Wyoming.

In 1996, Kelly released his first book of poems – printed, bound and published himself – titled *Pinedale Poems*. Sixteen years later, he has seven complete books, one written entirely in Spanish.

*My students wrote their rhythmic, measured verse / with grace and lucid clarity of thought, / while I observed and acted as their nurse, / providing guidance all the time I taught.*

Like any good poet, Kelly is inspired by everything that surrounds him. From his children, to the way he deals with the changing of the seasons and even his green chair.

“If the spirit moves me, I write,” he said. “I had an idea recently that popped up because I’m a diabetic, and diabetics have a certain language so, putting all these experiences together, I had to write a poem about that special diabetic language.”

He has been published both nationally and internationally and has juggled and danced with everything from rhyming couplets to free verse to haikus.

His collection is varied and shows how he takes his life experiences and crafts them into meter. One book, *Letters to Mae* is a collection of letters from Kelly’s mother to his father, both of whom were deaf. Another book, *Poetry for Poets* is just that; poems about the art form of poetry. His favorite, though, is a se-

ries of poems written for children titled *Paint Pots*.

“I have to write,” he said. “Sometimes you search for an idea, and, I think, you have to realize any subject is fair game for poetry.”

At 76, the poet has had his fair share of experiences to write

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-Cork Kelly,

about. Some of those experiences are common, like having and raising children, others are more unique, like when he read a poem, written in Spanish, for a Nicaraguan audience.

“What a wonderful experience that was,” he exclaimed.

There is no formula for writing poetry. What one person thinks is a good poem, another person will quickly dismiss as rubbish. Luckily for Kelly, many of his poems have been well received. When you ask him why that is, the poet shrugs his shoulders.

“Every now and then you get lucky and write a poem that is really meaningful,” he said. “If I write something and someone picks it up and likes it, it’s a success because I’ve communicated with someone in a very special way.”

For whatever reason, Kelly’s poems communicate to a wide array of people. *Rendezvous Pointe* publishes one of his poems monthly in its newsletter, his work has been featured in notable publications like *American Cowboy* and *The Oak*, and, at the end of the month, he will be a featured speaker at the Night Heron bookstore in Laramie.

“[Being published] is a reward which, I say, is good for my ego, because it suffers otherwise,” he said with his signature laugh.

*But now I’m free to write the things I please, / and if it’s sickness, how I love the disease!*

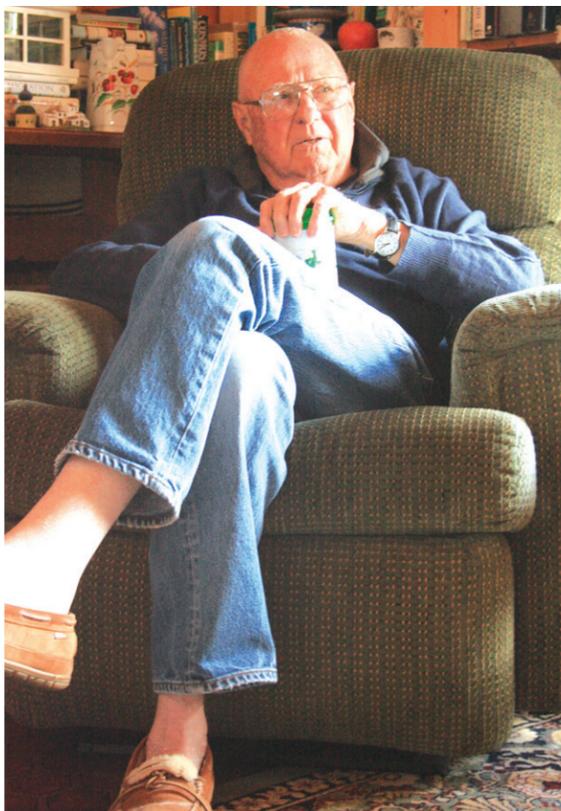
Besides being a poet, Kelly is an unabashed liberal democrat, medal-winning swimmer and all around tongue-in-cheek, sarcastic man. So much so, that it’s hard to tell if he really believes his poetry is worth publishing, or if he is laughing on the inside because people actually take the time to read and print his work.

“Facetious has all the vowels, and is an attempt to be frivolously amusing,” he said with a grin.

But when it comes to the art form of poetry, he is completely serious, sometimes.

“The fact that poetry gets national recognition is important because it is an art form,” he said. “But who today talks about iambic pentameter, metric or dactyl? It’s much easier to write in free verse.” ■

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Matthew Manguso photo

With eight books of poetry, Cornelius “Cork” Kelley is one of Pinedale’s most prominent poets.

## Do you think the school district needs to install cameras at the skate park?



Yes.  
Tristen O'Neal Pinedale



Yeah I think they should because there are a lot of people doing drugs here.  
Adrian Ancaya, Pinedale



I think they do because there’s a lot of kids fighting and bullying and smoking.  
Gable Grove, Pinedale



Yes because there’s a whole bunch of smoking and fighting.  
Hunter Arvig, Pinedale



Yeah because a lot of kids get in fights and nobody is here to watch them.  
William Stevens, Pinedale

## In case you were wondering ... what the status of the Boulder Schoolhouse was.

On Monday, Sublette County Economic Resource Council Director Sam Bixler, along with Kathy Sandmeier, president of the Boulder Community Center Board, traveled to Cheyenne to hear the final word on a \$950,000 renovation grant from the State Loan Investment Board (SLIB). At the Sublette County Board of Commissioners meeting on Tuesday, Bixler pleasantly announced SLIB granted approval. Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in June.

## IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

Let us know what you're wondering. Email [editor@pinedaleroundup.com](mailto:editor@pinedaleroundup.com) or call (307) 367-2123.