

WTE column of May 9, 2015. Editor's headline: "Rub elbows with Wyo. writers at conference." CST of same date: "Fostering writing talent in Wyoming."

Wyoming's writers are a diverse and unevenly recognized lot. Some pen letters to the editor; others, like nature writer Mark Spragg and rancher Gretel Ehrlich, are nationally known, with slews of books to their credit. In this column you'll learn about Wyoming Writers, Inc., an organization that fosters writing talent and, this year, brings its conference to Cheyenne. First, however, a word about a Colorado writer who helped publish some Wyoming writers.

Laura Pritchett and I have known each other for many years. One time we arranged to meet in the Sierra Trading Post parking lot. While Laura's parents hunted for bargains within, we sat in Laura's car and talked shop.

Because I love her dearly and admire her writing—the Denver Post has described Laura as “one of the most acclaimed young writers of the American West”—I had baked a German “Stollen” bread as gift, which prompted Laura to bequeath several books she had edited and/or written. (At an earlier time I purchased her novel “Sky Bridge” and passed it around, getting ahs and ohs from daughters-in-law—no mean feat from conflicted family members.)

It is my great pleasure to inform you, should you be interested in advancing your writing potential, that Wyoming Writers has retained Laura as one in a trio of illustrious writers for its conference June 5, 6, and 7 in Cheyenne. Her two co-presenters are the poet Aaron Abeyta and the short-fiction writer and essayist Kent Nelson. On Saturday, June 6, Mr. Abeyta, who won the American Book Award for Poetry and the Colorado Book Award for his collection “Colcha,” will give the keynote address.

“Kent and Aaron are GREAT writers,” Laura emailed. Of Kent Nelson she says, “I have been a fan of his writing for a long time. His book deservedly won the 2014 Pitt Drue Heinz Literary Prize.”

Wyoming Writers was established in 1974 and bills itself as “a group of writers, for writers, by writers” who “invite you to join our conversation.” Run mostly by volunteers, the organization may be long on good intentions but short on publicizing those intentions, except online. An “early bird” reduced-enrollment rate with deadline of May 15 is offered at www.wyowriters.org. Or call Susan Vittitow Mark at [\(307\) 772-0733](tel:3077720733).

Not disposed toward workshops, readings, schmoozing with writers big and small? Unwilling or unable to shell out conference fees? Not to worry. Laura will be on hand for an open reading on Friday, June 5, at 1 PM at City NewsStand Bookstore & Coffee House.

She might share from “Stars Go Blue,” a finalist for the Mountains and Plains Bookseller Award, or from her upcoming “Red Lightning.” Both novels are set on the ranchlands of

Colorado and tackle issues that press upon the West: forest fires, immigration—and, yes, land stewardship.

“We look forward to hosting Laura Pritchett,” says owner Allen Warren. “We’ve had readings by Steven Horn and C. J. Box. Steven always reads here first when he comes out with a new book.” His bookstore and coffee house is on 1722 Carey Avenue in downtown Cheyenne.

In that long-ago STP parking lot, among the books that changed hands that day was “Home Land: Ranching and a West that Works,” a compilation of essays and poetry about people across the spectrum who work to preserve the land. To my delight, I found a self-effacing neighbor, Bob Budd, in the collection. His “Otters Dance” is a poignant meditation on family, ranching, and the Wyoming environment.

Bob is executive director of Wyoming Wildlife and Resource Trust, a statewide program that funds habitat improvement and encourages biodiverse ranching. The river otters of his essay appeared at a pivotal moment during a decade of drought. “Their presence signaled Red Canyon Creek’s essential health: it held enough fish to sustain otters, and enough organisms for the fish to thrive.”

Budd admires these Wyoming “Home Land” authors: Page Lambert, Teresa Jordan, Mark Spragg, James Galvin, Sharon Salisbury O’Toole.

There are others, of course. Aaron Abeyta’s profoundly affecting poem, “i remember my father in the future,” speaks not only to the struggles of ranching but also to the bitterness of ethnic strife in the West. Pritchett describes Abeyta as “one of our nation’s great poets.” She feels honored to have his ode in “Home Land.” Now, in spring 2015, she is equally eager to meet aspiring writers at the conference forthcoming in Cheyenne. Wyoming Writers has had the support of the Wyoming Arts Council for many years.

“We have open-mike sessions both nights,” says Wyoming Writers volunteer Lynn Carlson, another writerly friend of long standing. “Participants sign up at registration” (if they wish to read). “Also included is a Paddle Panel that critiques the introductory remarks of submitters who sign up early. “

It’ll be a terrific conference, promises Lynn.