

### For Richard

I met Richard  
more than two decades ago  
through the Striped Water  
Tuesday night poetry meetings,  
a self-help  
and critique group  
for aspiring writers.  
This was well into  
Richard's retirement,  
his work life behind him,  
those meetings  
a chance to socialize,  
talk poetry,  
and be out of the house  
for a couple hours.  
Though we might not admit it,  
most of us  
who read aloud each week  
hoped for a raspy voiced,  
"Wicked"  
when we finished,  
the ultimate  
Dick Brugger compliment.  
He always made  
this awkward introvert  
feel invited,  
accepted,  
with his mischievous smile  
and eyes  
as kind as a hug.  
We all celebrated  
when Richard was named  
Auburn's first Poet Laureate,  
one of our own  
sharing poetry  
with a wider audience,  
his generosity  
already legendary  
in this town.  
Over time,  
his voice became  
more gravel than road,  
the words arriving  
in clouds of dust,  
his handwriting  
almost illegible

even to him,  
and after his fall,  
breaking his hip,  
he'd still come  
to the meetings,  
though far less frequently,  
wheel in,  
laugh and smile,  
growl out  
a "wicked" or two,  
and then wheel home.

With the virus  
and quarantine  
of the last year,  
I haven't seen him  
in far too long,  
so hearing from his daughter  
that he had passed  
last week,  
I felt the loss  
of pure gentleness  
our world needs  
now more than ever,  
but I know  
as he walks through  
those pearly gates,  
a bundle of poems  
under one arm,  
when St. Peter  
welcomes him in,  
he'll just smile,  
and despite,  
or maybe because of,  
the irony,  
he'll whisper,  
"Wicked!"

**James Rodgers 11/02/20**