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## Raymond Carver, Writer and Poet Of the Working Poor, Dies at 50

By STEWART KELLERMAN

Raymond Carver, a poet and short-story writer who chronicled the lives of America's working poor, died of lung cancer yesterday at his home in Port Angeles, Wash. He was 50 years old.

Mr. Carver, who was married in Reno last June to the poet Tess Gallagher, died soon after finishing a book of poetry, "A New Path to the Waterfall."

Ms. Gallagher said in a telephone interview from Port Angeles that they had decided not to tell anyone about his latest relapse, which was discovered in early June during a routine examination. "He wanted things to be calm so he could finish his book," she said. "He battled right up to the last minute."

Mr. Carver, a heavy cigarette smoker until he became ill, spent his last days sitting on the porch of his home, looking out at his rose garden. Hours before he died, Ms. Gallagher said, he spoke of how much he liked the stories of Chekhov. The last story in Mr. Carver's last book of stories was about the death of Chekhov. 'They're My People'

Mr. Carver came from the hardscrabble world of the down-and-out blue-collar characters in his stories. "I'm a paid-in-full member of the working poor," he said in one of two interviews with The New York Times last spring. "I have a great deal of sympathy with them. They're my people."

Mr. Carver published 10 books of prose and poetry in a career shadowed by alcoholism, poverty, a broken marriage and cancer.

In 1988 he collected what he considered the best of his stories in the book "Where I'm Calling From." The novelist and critic Marilynne Robinson, reviewing it in The New York Times Book Review, said he "stands squarely in the line of descent of American realism" and "should be famous for the conceptual beauty of his best stories."

Mr. Carver was born on May 25, 1938, in Clatskanie, Ore., to Cleve Raymond Carver, a sawmill worker, and the former Ella Beatrice Casey, a waitress. He was brought up in a gray tract house in Yakima, Wash., a mile from Bachelor Creek, where he began a lifelong love affair with fishing. Start in Storytelling

Frog, as he was nicknamed, used to sit at the foot of his parents' bed and listen to his father read from Zane Grey books or tell his own tales of hunting and fishing.

Before long, the boy was telling his own stories, amateurish efforts at escapism that drew groans from the grown-up Carver when he recalled them in the 1988 interviews. It was not until he went to Chico State College in California in 1958 and took John Gardner's creative writing course that he became serious about writing.

"He galvanized me," Mr. Carver said. "He told me who to read and helped me learn to write. He opened a door for me."

Mr. Carver graduated from Humboldt State College in California in 1963, then attended the Iowa Writers Workshop. He published his first story, "Pastoral," and his first poem, "The Brass Ring," in literary magazines while still at Humboldt.

But writing had to take second place to earning a living. Mr. Carver was married within a year of leaving high school and soon had a family to support. He returned to the West Coast with his wife, the former Maryann Burk, and their two children, Christine LaRae and Vance Lindsay. Like a displaced person, he knocked around California with his family, moving from from one dead-end job to another in search of a better life. 'We Never Found It'

"We were just looking for a place where I could write and my wife and the two children could be happy," he recalled. "It didn't seem like too much to ask for. But we never found it."

Mr. Carver was a janitor, a farm worker, a delivery boy. And in his spare time he wrote.

He began achieving recognition as a writer in 1967 when his story "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" was selected for the anthology "Best American Short Stories."

But that was also the year he began to drink heavily, torn between the demands of his family and those of his writing. He was in and out of alcohol rehabilitation centers in the 1970's as the drinking ruined his marriage and his health. He and his first wife were separated in 1977 and divorced five years later. In 1982, after being hospitalized for the fourth time, he turned to Alcoholics Anonymous and quit drinking.

Mr. Carver said in the 1988 interviews that he viewed his troubled life as an emotional reservoir to draw upon for his fiction. "Most of my stories, if not all of them, have some basis in real life," he said. "That's the kind of fiction I'm most interested in. I suppose that's one reason I don't have much respect for fiction that seems to be game playing."

He managed to keep on writing despite his drinking. His first volume of poetry, "Near Klamath," was published in 1968. His first collection of short stories, "Put Yourself in My Shoes," came out in 1974. In 1976 a collection with "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" as the title story was nominated for a National Book Award. The Teaching Positions

During the 1970's and the early 1980's, Mr. Carver taught at the University of California at Santa Cruz, the Iowa Writers Workshop, the University of Texas, the University of Vermont and Syracuse University.

In 1983 he quit teaching upon winning a Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Award, which provided a tax-free stipend of \$35,000 a year for five years.

That was also the year he published "Cathedral," a critically acclaimed collection of stories nominated for

a National Book Critics Circle award.

Soon after the publication of "Where I'm Calling From" in 1988, Mr. Carver was inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Mr. Carver had lived with Ms. Gallagher since 1977, when they met at a writers' conference in Texas. They shared an oak-and-pine house on the Olympic Peninsula between the Juan de Fuca Strait and the Olympic Mountains, encouraging each other to seek new literary challenges.

Though much of Mr. Carver's art imitated his life, it could also be the other way around. He felt "in the pink of health" in 1987 when he wrote "Errand," a story about Chekhov's death from tuberculosis. Months later, Mr. Carver, like the character in the story, began spitting up blood. It was cancer. Two-thirds of his left lung was removed in the fall of 1987. He had a relapse and underwent radiation therapy last spring.

But Mr. Carver tried not to let his illness get him down. In the 1988 interviews, he dwelt instead on his good fortune: his acceptance as a writer, his passion for salmon fishing, his life with Ms. Gallagher.

"I feel like the luckiest man around, I really do," he said, even as the radiation and the drugs wore him down and left him too weary to write.

In addition to Ms. Gallagher, Mr. Carver is survived by his mother, his daughter and his son.

Photo of Raymond Carver (Jerry Bauer)