



April 14, 2014

Mill Valley Creative Achievement Award Selection Committee
 City of Mill Valley Art Commission
 26 Corte Madera Avenue
 Mill Valley, California 94941

Dear Selection Committee Members:

I am honored and delighted to nominate William (Bill) Katovsky, a Mill Valley resident for 18 years, for a "Milley" Award in recognition of his career contributions to the literary arts and to the creative life of the Mill Valley community and beyond. Bill is a nationally acclaimed and award-winning writer, editor, blogger, publisher, literary agent, magazine entrepreneur, and fitness guru. His lifelong literary accomplishments have been in the fields of both politics and personal health. In both areas, politics and fitness, his reach has been international, but his creative process has been decidedly local—because all of his prolific activity in the last 18 years, his political ideas and his first-hand fitness research, has been the product of many hours spent hiking, biking, running, and ruminating up and down the trails of Mount Tam. Truly Mill Valley has been the nurturing environment for Bill's salutary efforts, and if he were in a position to bestow an award on a geographical locale, I'm quite sure Mill Valley would be the beneficiary of his gratitude. As well, in turn, I'd like to propose that Bill richly deserves the wonderful honor of a Mill Valley Creative Achievement Award. Bill's not the kind of person to seek acclaim and to seize the spotlight; rather, he's a behind-the-scenes individual, the lone runner and thinker one might see on the local trails in the early mornings or just before dusk. But again for that reason, I fantasize that the Selection Committee will see the appropriateness of recognizing Bill's quietly creative presence and productivity in Mill Valley.

Before indulging in chronicling Bill's accomplishments I'd like to explain my relationship to him. I'm proud to call him a friend, a close friend, but we really haven't spent much time together at all—at least not in person. Ours is something of an odd friendship, renewed only via email—and literally thousands of them—after a long lapse. But it is some kind of testimony to the power of words and ideas. Let me explain. Bill and I started graduate school (political science) together at UC Berkeley 35 years ago, and we barely knew each other during those years. We took one class together on political theory. In his second year, after he earned an M.A., he participated in one of the early Hawaii Ironman Triathlons and he was hooked on the new sport. He soon founded and launched *Tri-Athlete Magazine*, one of the first of its kind—and the magazine's initial success drew him permanently away from grad school (and he and I had no contact with each for the next 20 years—I'll pick up that story below). *Tri-Athlete* became the powerful voice of the

sport and in just three years, a buyer bought the magazine outright. After a few months, Bill stless and poured the newfound profits into starting a national literary journal, called *Arrival*. Issues featured interviews conducted by Bill with Pauline Kael, Art Spiegelman, and a young, then relatively unknown writer by the name of David Foster Wallace. Bill was the first to recognize the talents of David Foster Wallace, and *Arrival* published Wallace's first-ever interview (a fact that gained some notice in recent years, after DFW's untimely death—more on that story below, too). He also published an original short-story "Lyndon" by Wallace, a wonderful portrait of the former president and his young political assistant. It was the first Wallace story ever published (though his first novel *Broom of the System* had come out several months earlier).

After *Arrival*, Bill relocated to San Francisco to start a cultural and lifestyle Bay Area magazine called *Frisko*, and that experience connected him to a wider arts and literary network, where he came into contact with numerous young writers such as Ethan Canin and Jonathan Lethem. Many national figures appeared in the pages of *Frisko*, including interviews Bill had done with Allen Ginsberg and the late actor Klaus Kinski. From San Francisco he whisked away to Boulder to help start another triathlon magazine and then a multisport magazine. But these early publishing and editing efforts eventually coaxed him into trying his own hand at book writing.

After doing extensive research, conducting over sixty interviews of journalists who covered the Iraq War, Bill—now a Mill Valley resident—published (with co-author Timothy Carlson) his first book, *Embedded: The Media At War In Iraq* (2003). Dan Rather of *CBS News* blurbed the book thus: "It is my hope that this outstanding piece of work will reach the widest possible distribution and readership." Indeed, the book sold well (over 20,000 hard copies, and then thousands in paper). Even more impressive, in 2004 the book won the prestigious Goldsmith Book Prize granted by the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The Goldsmith Book Prize recognizes literary works that "[improve] government through an examination of the intersection between press, politics, and public policy." The Goldsmith Book Prize was no fluke, and Bill was no overnight success: the early years of writing, editing, and publishing had honed his skills as a savvy and engaging author.

After *Embedded*, Bill turned his attention to free speech and political dissent with his second oral history, *Patriots Act: Voices of Dissent and the Risk of Speaking Out* (2006). He interviewed nearly two-dozen individuals for the book, and these included federal whistleblowers, political activists, environmentalists, and well-known truth tellers (Daniel Ellsberg, Paul Krugman, and Mort Sahl). Salon.com excerpted four chapters from the book over a one-month period. *Patriots Act* was also a Book Sense notable pick, an honor bestowed to new titles by a national organization of independent bookstores.

Bill had one more political book in his system: *The World According to Gore: The Incredible Vision of the Man Who Should Be President* (2007). Already, however, he had turned his attention back to issues of health and fitness, and he started a second track of book writing and publishing, producing a decade-long succession of informative, upbeat, and moving tales of fitful activity and haleful triumph. Those books include: *Bike for Life:*

How to Ride to 100 (with Roy M. Wallack--2005); *Return to Fitness: Getting Back in Shape after Injury, Illness, or Prolonged Inactivity* (2010); *Iron Heart: The True Story of How I Came Back from the Dead* (with Brian Boyle--2011); *1001 Pearls of Runners' Wisdom: Advice and Inspiration for the Open Road* (2012); *Tread Lightly: Form, Footwear, and the Quest for Injury-Free Running* (with Peter Larso--2012). That last book is telling, because Bill became one of the first pioneers, one of the first proponents and certainly one of the most prominent, of the minimalist shoe movement for runners who had been inspired by the national bestseller *Born to Run*. He researched thoroughly the benefits of a heelless, "zero-drop" sole in running shoes, well before the major shoe companies expanded their lines to include those now-ubiquitous shoes. And in the process Bill co-founded, with running specialist Dr. Mark Cucuzzella, a web site called Natural Running Center (www.naturalrunningcenter.com), a site devoted to minimalist and injury-free running and serving as a comprehensive resource to runners of all kinds. That site has now attracted over 4 million discrete visits. If you look at the comments for Bill's fitness books and for the Natural Running Center, I dare say that you'll see many persons crediting Bill, using words of lavish appreciation, with improving their health and fitness and enriching their lives thereby.

But back to how Bill and I reconnected. In the spring of 2006 and right after *Patriots Act* came out, he became an early blogger for Arianna Huffington's then-start-up web site, the Huffington Post (he had sent Arianna a copy of his book, and she emailed him requesting him to write for her web site). I, too, became an early Huffpo blogger, on a similar invitation. Those were still the "wild west" years of blogging (before Arianna merged with AOL), and Bill and I became on-line celebrities of sorts, finding ourselves often featured on the Huffington Post front page, along with Sean Penn, Ted Kennedy, and perhaps Madonna. At one point Bill recognized my name and remembered that we had been graduate students together. He asked Arianna to send him my email address, and she did, and he subsequently contacted me. It was thus that Bill and I remade each other's acquaintance, after a 20-year black out period. We started consulting each other, on a daily email basis, about politics and many other matters. I benefited from his editorial expertise and sound judgment, and I can report that he helped me immensely in my own writing, providing careful feedback and generous encouragement. Subject to much scrutiny and controversy, he and I went through many on-line blogging trials together. We also had a lot of fun. In the meantime he became my sounding board for many of my own scholarly endeavors, especially my books. His editorial eye, I learned, is keen; and I came to trust his professional judgment tremendously and to value his opinion immeasurably.

One more story: the writer David Foster Wallace, after he joined the Pomona College faculty, became not just my colleague, but also my close friend. As you probably know, he hanged himself. That next day, after the news broke, I wrote a memoir about him. That post brought on an avalanche of attention, from which I still haven't extricated myself. On the occasion of DFW's death, I turned to Bill, who also had befriended DFW during the *Arrival* period. We consoled each other, and we navigated the media firestorm together.

You certainly do not have to honor Bill because he's been a good, albeit long-distance friend in tough times. But I do want to suggest that his abilities as wordsmith have made a

big difference for many persons, including myself. Over 10,000 copies of the inspirational, life-sustaining memoir *Iron Heart* were given away at Red Cross blood drives on the East Coast: the President of the American Red Cross (who wrote the introduction to the paperback edition of that book) evidently shares my view that Bill's bookish efforts (in that case, co-authoring and agenting *Iron Heart*) help serve salubrious ends.

One more note: about a month ago I made the trek north to Mill Valley, and Bill and I spent the day together, meeting each other in person for the first time in 35 years. And so we walked around downtown, stopped off at the Mill Valley Market and The Depot Bookstore, and then took a short afternoon hike up Cascade Canyon and back down. He was a proud tour guide: I, for one, would be thrilled if you claimed him as Mill's Valley's own.

Sincerely,



John Seery

George Irving Thompson Memorial Professor of
Government and Professor of Politics
Pomona College

P.S.: my own quick bio highlights:

2013 American Political Science Association Distinguished Teaching Award
2010-2011 Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Professor for Distinguished Teaching,
Princeton University
2009 Phi Beta Kappa Sidney Hook Memorial Award (*awarded by the national Phi Beta Kappa Society every three years to one person in the country, recognizing "national distinction by a single scholar in each of three endeavors—scholarship, undergraduate teaching and leadership in the cause of liberal arts education"*)
1999, 1994 Wig Distinguished Teaching Award, Pomona College
1980-1984, Danforth Fellow
Author or editor of nine books, I've taught at Pomona College, Princeton University, Stanford University, Tufts University, and University of California at Santa Cruz.

for more, see here: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-seery>

P.P.S.: supporting documents to be delivered under separate cover