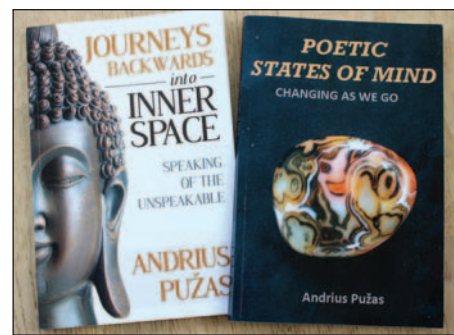
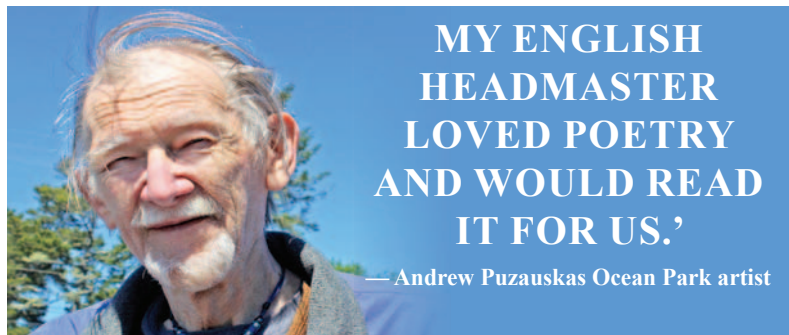


Zen and the art of a Peninsula poet

Puzauskas writes with zeal, glows with tranquility while Lithuania beckons

By PATRICK WEBB
For the Observer



Ocean Park resident Andrew Puzauskas has self-published two books of his contemplative and poignant poetry, "Journeys Backwards into Inner Space" and "Poetic States of Mind." The paperback books are \$19.95 each on amazon.com.

OCEAN PARK — He fled his native Lithuania as a 3-year-old when Russian tanks rolled up.

Seven decades later, Andrew Puzauskas has never returned. But he hankers to rekindle links with his eastern European birthplace.

Puzauskas is an Ocean Park resident whose family lives in Van-

cover. His slender frame, wispy gray hair and neat goatee are a familiar figure on Bay Avenue, vending his hand-made necklaces from a simple table outside Okie's grocery store.

But jewelry isn't his only art.

He has just published a second book of poetry, work with a con-

templative tone that reflects a balance achieved by embracing Buddhism at 19. He hopes "Poetic States of Mind" will give readers "a warm afterglow." It follows last year's self-published "Journeys Backwards into Inner Space," poems which had titles ranging from "The Prison of Me"

to "Trees Will Listen." Identity infiltrates many verses of the new book, subtitled "Changing As We Go." "Exactly who I am is a decision I have postponed making," one poem declares.

"I am trying to create a state of mind in the reader," he says.

Under the CD player in his

modest home, a knee-high, unevenly aligned stack of albums ranges from Josh Layne's "Masterworks for Harp" to "Equinoxe," Jean-Michel Jarre's experimental electronic music which pulsed through France in the late 1970s.

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HATCHLINGS ON PARADE



MADLINE KALBACH

Canada goose goslings are covered in yellowish down.

It's prime time for watching cute little ducks and geese

By DR. MADLINE KALBACH
For the Observer

Many Canada geese, common goldeneye, wood duck and mallard eggs have recently hatched, and now the hatchlings are on parade in our wetlands, rivers, bays and ponds.

Ducks, along with geese and swans are a family of waterbirds called waterfowl. Other waterbirds, such as coots, cormorants, grebes and loons are often called waterfowl, but scientifically they don't belong to the waterfowl family (Crossley, Baicich and Barry, 2017).

On average, waterfowl incubate their eggs for 28 days. Nesting style varies and the attentiveness of the male also varies. In most cases, the female goose or duck is the parent who incubates the eggs. Canada geese males guard the female while she is incubating and continue to be a protector after the goslings hatch. Generally, the family parades together with one parent at the head of the line and one at the back. Male ducks, on the other hand, generally play no part in the incubation or protection of the female. Once incubation is underway, they tend to disappear.



MADLINE KALBACH

This mallard momma hatched seven ducklings. She watches over them as they forage for seeds and aquatic vegetation.

Both Canada geese and mallards prefer to nest on the ground and near water. Canada's usually choose elevated areas on which to nest so that they have a clear, 360-degree view. Mallards nest in an area where the vegetation is relatively high so they can sit and pull the vegetation nearby over themselves and the nest to conceal both. Canadas and mallards pluck down from their breasts to use as a liner or to cover the eggs if they leave the nest for a bit. Common goldeneyes

and wood ducks are cavity nesters. Old woodpecker holes and squirrel nests are two of the kinds of cavities used. Canada geese will also make use of man-made structures such as nesting platforms, while common goldeneyes and wood ducks take readily to nest boxes, especially when cavities are scarce.

Canada geese have one brood and

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MADLINE KALBACH

Female common goldeneye sitting in the entrance to her nest.



MADLINE KALBACH

These wood duck babies hatched during the last week of May. They all clambered up on to the fallen branch to rest. They had been following their mother at quite a fast pace down the length of a fairly large lagoon.

Poet: 'I still feel I have a lot of poems to put out there'

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A turquoise parakeet chirps from its cage, perched in the exact center of his favored upstairs cave. Inevitably, Baby Blue has had a poem written for it, of course, from the bird's perspective.

"I don't sit down and say, 'I'm going to write a poem.'" Puzauskas says, when probed for his inspirations. "I wait for it to come. I may start with one line. I get lines driving along. 'I have got to write that down, otherwise I will forget it.'"

Contentment at 78

Puzauskas was born in 1942. His earliest memories include images of fleeing his Kaunas birthplace, then the second-largest city in Lithuania, and seeking refuge in defeated Germany. The Baltic nation, which dates to 1253, was occupied by the Germans during World War I, then by the expanding Soviet Union, then by the Nazis. Amid the concluding tide of World War II, Soviet tanks rumbled back.

"We fled. I was aged three," he says, unable to recall what his parents lugged with them. "They had very little. We went overland in a horse and carriage to Germany ... the Germans took the horse!" His mother chided him for drinking water from the same trough.

At war's end, the devastated German capital of Berlin was divided into Soviet, French, American and British sectors. "There were burned-out tanks and ammo dumps," Puzauskas recalls. "We were in the English zone for three years in refugee camps. I never asked why British — I assumed it was the first place we reached."

Eventually the family resettled in England, where Puzauskas was schooled in Wellingborough, a market town 70 miles north of London. "I had a terrible British accent," he laughs, recalling how wartime rationing — regrettably sugar — continued well into the 1950s.

He embraced other sweet pleasures. "I loved poetry from a very early age," he declares. "My English headmaster loved poetry and would read it for us."

Penmanship classes exposed him to Keats and Shelley. "I wrote them out carefully." A half-century clouds no memories. "Half a league, half a league, half a league onward," Puzauskas recites, laureate Tennyson's valedictory for the Light Brigade's disastrous 1854 cavalry charge into Cossack cannonfire, which borrows from Psalm 23. "Into the Valley of Death rode the six hundred."

Next, he segues into a line from Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners" which every grubby kneed English schoolboy has embedded in his DNA. "Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller, knocking on the moonlit door ..."

Puzauskas smiles as loyalty to country is superseded by a questioning foray into the spirit world. De la Mare's lonely search has been dissected since 1912; Puzauskas is still embarked on his, amid contentment at 78.

Coming to America

Thirteen years of his boyhood passed in England while seeking permission to emigrate to the United States. "We waited a long time for our turn to come." He preserved the poetry he began scribbling as a 16-year-old when they arrived to join sponsoring relatives



PATRICK WEBB

In a quietly confident voice, Andrew Puzauskas reads from his poetry book in his cluttered upstairs den in Ocean Park. After a lengthy wait in England, where he endured food rationing that continued nine years after the end of World War II, his family sailed to the United States in 1958. He was drafted into the U.S. Army and stationed in Germany, the country where he had lived in a refugee camp after fleeing his native Lithuania as a very young boy.



PATRICK WEBB

Puzauskas used charcoal to draw this 1975 self portrait while looking in a mirror. It depicts him at age 33.

in Chicago. "I still feel I have a lot of poems to put out there," he says, flipping through handwritten wads of unpublished words as thick as his fist.

He won a poetry contest and graduated from Roosevelt University with a degree in English literature. He married, yet was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1969 for two years. Stationed in Germany near Heidelberg, that nation's educational core, he visited England on leave but never Lithuania, which was still under Soviet domination.

Puzauskas moved to Vancouver, where his wife, Ruta, and two grown daughters still live and where he studied at Clark College. The G.I. Bill bankrolled his education. "I would model in clay and make sculpture and vessels, and learned to draw and design," he says. "I took every art class I could possibly do, even though I didn't think I had the skills to draw accurately."

After a pause, he adds quietly, "It's your perception of reality."

He worked for United Parcel Service for 19 years, marshaling trailers at the Swan Island depot. Being close to Portland exposed him to contrasting Buddhist styles, including lectures and group medi-



PATRICK WEBB

The press card belonging to his late father is a prized possession. Puzauskas hopes his own writing will reach an audience in his native Lithuania. He first moved to the Long Beach Peninsula to care for his declining father and mother in their last years.

tation. "Zen Buddhism is a solitary path," he says. "There is comfort and enlightenment in meditation. I had actively practiced my own style. I just didn't feel like I needed companionship in that area, but it was a positive experience to be part of a group."

Life journey

He moved to Long Beach twice, in 2001 for nine years and most recently five years ago. Caring for his elderly father and mother as dementia and physical decay ravaged their final years sparked sad stanzas. "The corn grains of her mind are all chewed off, with only the dry cob left," he wrote in "I Volunteered to Care," an unsparing description of his late mother's decline. The subtitle of his earlier poetry book contains that line is "Speaking of the Unspeakable." Amid the indignities endured by a dutiful caregiver, anticipating guilt when the struggle was over, he sought pleasure in fishing and mushroom hunting.

Ceramic creations and framed drawings adorn his home. One self portrait of the mustachioed artist as a young man, drawn while looking into a mirror, could be an older Sun-



PATRICK WEBB

A clever knot allows wearers to cinch the lanyards of some attractive jewelry that he assembles and sells outside the Okie's store in Ocean Park.



PATRICK WEBB

Ceramic creations like this madonna face, fashioned after the picture on the left, adorn his modest Ocean Park home.

Beacon of enlightenment

His late father's membership card for the U.S. Lithuanian Journalist Association is a prized memento. "Journalism was keeping him alive," his son says, describing his father's enthusiasm for Lithuanian newspapers in Chicago and Cleveland before dementia struck.

Puzauskas wonders if his own writing would resonate in his birth nation. Lithuania, now home to 2.7 million, stands as an apparent beacon of enlightenment. It gave women the vote in 1918, two years before the United States, and has elected modern female political leaders. As well as Chicago, Philadelphia and Cleveland have significant Lithuanian populations; hundreds crossed the Atlantic in 1867 to escape famine.

"I would love to travel over there," says Puzauskas, who laments he cannot translate his father's journals. "My Lithuanian is at the level of an eight year old."

His poetry books are published under the name Andrius Puzas. He was known for years as Rimas, a shortened version of his middle name, and chose Andrew when he became an American.

"I thought any Lithuanian seeing this would say, 'This guy is Lithuanian!'"

Hatchlings: The life of a mother wood duck can be complicated and a lot of work

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usually lay two to eight eggs. When the goslings hatch, they are covered in a yellowish down. They are alert from the start, and their eyes are open. They are ready to leave the nest when one or two days old. Upon leaving they can feed, walk and swim. A family of four was cruising down the river today in a very straight line until the lead parent decided it was time for a snack. The family swam to the edge of the water where the goslings fed on the grasses and sedges while their parents looked on.

Mallards often raise two broods. Female mallards can lay anywhere from one to 13 eggs. Ducklings are covered in down, are very alert and, according to science, are ready to leave the nest within 13 to 16 hours. Mallards forage for seeds and aquatic vegetation but also eat seeds and vegetation found on shorelines. Mallard ducklings have been on the canals for several



MADELINE KALBACH

This mallard duckling is swimming as fast as it can to catch up with its mother and siblings.

weeks now as well as in our Peninsula wetlands.

Wood ducks seem to be one of the earliest nesters among the ducks. I have been seeing their ducklings for at least three weeks now. They lay between six and 16 eggs, according to the Cornell Ornithological lab. The families I have been seeing have had between nine and 13 ducklings. The life of a mother wood duck can be complicated and a lot of work. Some females may lay eggs in another female's



MADELINE KALBACH

Three of this mother goldeneye's four ducklings followed her to the river. They behave well, staying on the river's edge while she flies over to the pond to check on her fourth duckling.

nest if nesting cavities are scarce. Such a large family must be a lot more work than the mother ever dreamed it would be.

Common goldeneyes lay a clutch of between four and nine eggs. As soon as they hatch the ducklings can feed themselves but still require protection. I have been watching a female with four ducklings. She has a tough job because three ducklings followed her to the river's edge, but one stayed in a little pond about 500 yards away.

The female has been busy flying back and forth trying to protect all of ducklings. Yesterday, she appeared to scold the stray duckling because it seemed to be getting too close to the other species of ducks in the pond. She chased the tiny, little duckling into the grasses at one end of the pond and then took off to check on the other three. They were obedient — staying in place until she returned. Today, she was still flying back and forth attending to the little one who was all alone! Some common



MADELINE KALBACH

A wood duck family. How many ducklings do you see?

goldeneyes can also be the recipient of other goldeneyes' eggs or even eggs from a different species such as the common merganser.

Many waterfowl mothers are now on parade with their offspring, but some are still incubating. They may be late nesting or incubating a second brood. Ducks that nest in cavities are most interesting to watch. I have been watching goldeneyes fly furiously through the trees and over the water circling several times until they can come in for a

landing, which means they line up with the cavity and fly in like an arrow. Common mergansers engage in this behavior too. Thus, it is not too late to be on the lookout for cavity nesting ducks such as those I have mentioned. You will be royally entertained. Happy birding!

"Common Birds of the Long Beach Peninsula," by Kalbach and Stauffer, is available from Bay Avenue Gallery, Time Enough Books and the Long Beach Peninsula Visitors Bureau.