

EDITOR'S NOTE

SILENCES

was settling down into a Broadway theater seat when I got a text telling me Ned Stuckey-French had died.

After the shock, which lasted most of the first act, I was thinking how it had been only a month since he'd last written to me about the reviews for this issue, and about how to transition to the person who would take over the job of review editor for *Fourth Genre*, because he didn't think he could manage it anymore.

And since then, I've thought of him so often. How much I depended on his good ear when I was stuck making a decision about a submission. How much I learned about his activist commitments from hearing him read at a 2007 NonfictioNow panel we were both part of, each of us taking our turn at the podium in the Senate chamber of the Old Capitol building at the center of the University of Iowa campus. How at this past NonfictioNow conference in Phoenix, I realized I had come to listen for his laughter when I first entered the conference registration area, so that we could reconnect with a hug and a bunch of apologies about how we had each, again, missed the deadlines we set for one another.

Many on Facebook have already commented about what prodigious knowledge of nonfiction Ned had. What an inspiring and spirited teacher he was. What a kind friend. What an intelligent and eloquent writer. Radical and ethical come up a lot too, as do loving and loyal and funny. How, as one person put it and many of us witnessed, "he always afforded dignity to people," even those who goaded and baited him on social media. How shocking his death, too soon.

Ned had already been working as review editor for *Fourth Genre* when I took over as editor. I knew there were significant changes I wanted to make with the journal, and when I came to have a conversation with Ned about moving forward and told him my vision for review essays that were more than reviews of single works, he was right there with me. Instantly we were bouncing ideas off one another; it was as if we'd worked together for a long time already.

No matter what bumps came up in the production of this journal over almost a decade, Ned was kind and gracious. One or the other of us would be late, and no matter how many times I felt I needed to apologize, Ned would laugh and brush it aside. He was the first person, when I could get hardly any of the work done because my father was dying, who wrote back, "Don't worry. I've been there. Please take care of yourself."

Ned had, as most nonfiction writers and readers know already, a robust network of writer friends and a huge range of reading interests. He never ran out of ideas for what needed to be reviewed or attended to, and he was ever a champion of new or young writers. Even when I warned him of someone who was unreliable, Ned was willing to work with that person.

Ned's practices and contributions to the production of this journal embodied everything admirable in the life of a literary journal. His death leaves a huge hole, an echoing silence. I miss him.



There will be other changes in *Fourth Genre's* masthead coming this winter, but those will be matter for the next issue. This issue contains an extended conversation that I curated among past contributors to these pages, a conversation that extends the one taken up a year ago in the Summer 2018 issue (Volume 20, issue 1) by Maribeth Fischer's essay "She and I," in her accompanying commentary essay, and in my editor's essay. The question—the challenge—is how to navigate and negotiate including writing about other people in nonfiction essays. What do we owe to these others that we represent, and thereby of course, always, reduce in essays? As EJ Levy points out in her section of this conversation, the nine people I gathered do not include diverse enough voices, and I regret that. We'd like to hear from more.

As I have said before, I find that the complexities and the questions arising in classrooms, in correspondence as editor with authors, in conference

presentations and discussions are not enough part of our collective wrangling. They are not addressed enough in MFA programs, and the one (at most) AWP panel a year that might take up such questions directly and explicitly affords barely enough time for rich enough conversation. That fact is part of my decision to devote so many pages here, and it's our collective hope that the varied points of view will generate more discussion. I'd like to hear about it if they do.

—*Laura Julier*