

Signposts & Hedges

BY DAVID KROGH

What do you get when you take a civil litigation lawyer who pursues a Masters degree in Liberal Arts (literature)? You get a poet. SE Portland resident David Melville started writing poems while a practicing attorney in Portland. Melville explained how this worked for him, saying, “While law and poetry do seem polar opposites in many ways, the hidden link is a love for words. Lawyers spend their days wrangling over words and their meanings. A love of language and the subtle shades words can have is what drew me to poetry.” Although Melville has been published in several literary journals, *Signposts & Hedges* is his first book of poems and is well worth the read. It is from Finishing Line Press, a publishing company that specializes in poetry works.

Poetry has changed dramatically since the 1800s. Melville clarified what this means. “Until early in the last century, most poetry rhymed and almost all of it was written in meter. For instance, in England, from Chaucer on through Shakespeare and the Romantic poets like Lord Byron and John Keats, almost all poetry used traditional forms, often employing rhyme. Free verse, that is, poetry without rhyme or meter or traditional line requirements, began in earnest as a real force in the art when Walt Whitman broke the mold with his *Leaves of Grass* in the mid-1800s.”

In short, free verse allows poets to create their own expression, focusing on imagery and ca-

dence rather than traditional rules. Melville said, “While it typically takes years of hard work for anyone to develop the skill of writing well in free verse, the time and energy required is greater still for traditional forms and rhyme. I am actually relatively uncommon as someone writing today who has a book with a significant number of poems in both free verse and traditional forms. For me, writing with rhyme and form provides an exciting challenge. It’s like a giant puzzle.”

As mentioned above, *Signposts & Hedges* is uncommon in that it includes a mix of poetry types. What helps to maintain one’s interest and provide a learning experience as well is the author’s explanatory Notes section in the back of the book. That section provides a variety of clarifications and/or definitions for his various poems. For example, although most of the works are done as free verse, there are several poems with definite rhyming and/or formatting. The poem from which the book takes its name is “an iambic pentameter sonnet with a Shakespearean rhyme scheme.” The poem *Lopers* is a Japanese form of haiku. Two of the poems are ghazals. “In ghazals, couplets end with the same word at the close of each stanza.” The author’s Notes also explain unusual places or people identified within a poem.

Another interesting aspect of Melville’s poetry is his ability to both reference and respond to portions of other classical works.



Author David Melville. Photo by Melville.

For example, *My Inferno, Purgatory* and *Steps* are references to portions of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* while *Yojo* is a reference to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. “What I love about the classics,” says Melville, “is that you can read them again and again and they are different each time, and there is always something new to discover. Stories or poems written by people from another time and place also have a great way of jolting me out of my assumptions about the world.”

Melville further explains his love of the classics and their influence on his poetry. “While I was practicing law, I attended Reed College part time. The first class I took was Greek literature, and I fell in love with it. Homer’s *Iliad* was the first book we read, and I was intrigued how an ancient epic that on the surface was

a war poem, at its heart, is actually a poem about loss and grief. While at Reed, I read as many of the classics as I could. For a poet, the classics are a fabulous education, because it makes reading someone like Dante much easier because you already get many of the allusions he makes. I think something similar draws me to them in my own poetry. When I write something in my book which responds to Dante, it’s like I am having a conversation with him in the here and now. It’s a way of saying, his poem has touched me, and I see the world differently in these other ways too.”

Nature and meditation are two aspects of great interest to Melville and both are reflected in many of his poems, especially in his two favorites, *Twilight* and *Silent Music*. “I love nature, par-

ticularly its dramatic elements, like a cliff over the Oregon coast, or the majesty of Mount Hood, or the thunder before a summer rain shower. Plus, nature has a way of cleansing us from the inside out.”

Melville has also spent considerable time studying Zen and Buddhist spirituality. “Once my shift toward spiritual practices occurred, it almost immediately affected my writing. The spiritual lies beyond easy description, and poetry tries to evoke those things we can sense and feel, yet not easily put into words.”

Signposts & Hedges is currently available in Portland at Selected Stories on SE Division St., Rose City Book Pub, Second Shapes, Broadway Books and Annie Bloom’s. It is also available directly from the publisher at finishinglinepress.com/shop and from other online distributors.

An Easy Way to Turn an iPhone Into a Kid Phone

BY MEGAN ORTON

Many of us are increasingly wishing that our kids and teens could have a way to communicate with friends and family without the worry of handing over a device that allows them to instantly access addictive content like gaming, social media, porn

and AI companions. This is why the idea of a “starter phone” has been getting a lot more traction lately. A starter phone is like a learner’s permit, a stepping stone for kids and teens so they can have a more gradual introduction to smartphone ownership.

There are several good starter phone options out there like Gabb, Troomi and Pinwheel. However, these phones can be expensive, require difficult set-up and are often not supported by the cellular network you have a plan with.

For families who use iPhones, there’s an easy starter phone solution that isn’t getting enough press. It’s called Assistive Access. (Not to be confused with “Guided Access,” which is different.) Originally designed to make iPhones friendlier and safer for folks with cognitive disabilities, Assistive Access offers a perfect way to set up a starter phone so that it has exactly what you want on it and nothing that you don’t. Best of all, even the most tech savvy kids and teens can’t circumvent it.

One of the big benefits of Assistive Access is the convenience. There’s no confusing “parent portal” or tricky set-up and it works with whatever cell carrier you have. It also allows you to pass an old iPhone on to your child, instead of a new, expensive starter phone from Gabb or Pinwheel. As long as your old

iPhone runs iOS 17 or later, it has Assistive Access. Kids like it because an iPhone using Assistive Access looks just like any other iPhone, so there’s less pushback about not fitting in like there is with a flip-phone. And if you have an iPhone yourself, you can try it out on your own phone first and see if you like it. If you don’t like it, you haven’t spent a dime. In fact, adults may choose to use Assistive Access on their own phone when they want to make it less tempting and distracting.

Another benefit of Assistive Access is safety. It grows with your child, and you get to decide exactly what goes on it and what doesn’t. You can start by creating a phone for your child that just calls and texts (or just calls). When they’re older, you can add other apps as you see fit, and eventually remove Assistive Access all together. It can also be used along with the regular iPhone Parental Controls. And don’t forget, you can use Assistive Access on any iPad that runs iOS 17 or later too.

Here are a few tips to make sure it works well. To ensure your child can’t remove Assistive

Access, set the passcode when they’re not in the room with you. It’s best to pick a passcode they can’t guess no matter how hard they try, perhaps the last four digits of your childhood best friend’s phone number. If you don’t have an old iPhone, you can buy a very inexpensive, refurbished one at backmarket.com/en-us. (Just make sure it runs iOS 17 or later). This is where we bought my son’s first phone, which was good, because he dropped it in the toilet the first week.

We all want our kids and teens to develop a healthy relationship with technology and research is showing that the later a child gets their first smartphone, the better their mental health outcome. Starter phones give parents more peace of mind while giving kids more time to run around outside, hang out with friends in-person and develop off-screen hobbies—all of which we know protects their mental health.

To learn more about setting up Assistive Access, visit mindful-media.net, go to the Printouts page and click on Parental Controls for iPhone/iPad under Parents/Family.

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