

**1. Describe yourself in seven words or less.**

*Father, grandfather, teacher, poet, artist, sportsman, chef,  
...*

**2. What do you like most about what you do for a living?**

**Having retired over 10 years ago from a career first as a teacher of art then as a teacher of English, and finally as a Director of English, Arts & Humanities, I essentially continue to enjoy now what I had done for most of that career in our great private and public schools: I teach English, reading and writing, this time around at the independent Wight Fdn., Nwk., NJ; and I volunteer in support of civic and arts-cultural organizations, e.g., Friends of The West Orange Public Library (FWOPL) and West Orange Arts Council (WOAC). I also try at every turn to continue to assist our public schools. In recent efforts with citizens and educators, especially with Lou Quagliato, Supervisor of Fine & Performing Arts, I shared ideas and took steps to make WOHS's new dance program a reality. With WOAC curator Lisa Suss, WOHS art teachers and, again, "Lou Q", I was able to help to re-establish the Annual WOHS Art Exhibition at WOAC.**

**Presently Lisa and I are planning what will prove to be WOAC's first ever (and most assuredly extensive) exhibition of Hispanic & Latino art, thanks to the**

**cooperation of WO Hispanic Heritage Association and, again, our high school's art department personnel.**

**I was lucky also to join a handful of community members to establish the new Friends of WOPL. (Membership in only a few months has risen to over 100!) Our mission is to support the library according to its needs as articulated by its Director.**

**I look forward annually to raising money in support of WOAC and FWOPL, both organizations that are responding valiantly to the pressing financial needs that face non-profit agencies which support the cultural, educational, intellectual, and social foundations of our community.**

**Inspired by the energy and talent of our fellow citizens, educators, and artists, I am happy to say that I am as wholesomely busy now as I had ever been prior to my retirement.**

**All of this and more leave still let me find the time to read and write, usually between the hours and 3 and 6 a.m. or 5 and 8 a.m.**

**So, such are the things I do for a living or to put it more precisely, what I do to live, -- I mean, *really live*.**

**3. How would you explain to a child what you do?**

***“Just like you, I dream all night and think all day of unique things to make and new ways to do old things.” I would add, “Children, we share a playmate: imagination.”***

**4. When did you realize you wanted to be a poet and visual artist?**

**When I was 7 I was certain that I wanted to be a fireman. I had had the pleasure of riding in engine cabs or atop their mammoth apparatuses because my Dad let me tag along with firemen when as Mayor of Bristol, Pa., he maintained an office in the same building that housed the FD. The firemen hoisted me onboard and I traveled the local streets with them. No, not when they went to fight fires -- how I wished -- but instead at training exercises. During such exercises but also at the sites where actual emergencies occurred, I watched brave fireman (unfortunately at that time women had not yet been welcomed aboard) attack flames and douse fires. I loved the idea of tapping, managing and directing the course of powerful jets of water that if mishandled even for a second could knock a man down, and create chaos in the ranks, and allow a fire to grow out of control at the expense of lives. I loved the reality of humans confronting flames and, in fact, taking up the challenge of any**

**threat to the community. The real “artists” among firemen knew how to direct and control flames when they seemed to be an inextinguishable, insurmountable threat to human property and life.**

**Imagine that!**

**Later, in a writing exercise at school, perhaps when I was 11, an enlightened teacher challenged my classmates and me: “Sword, schmörd, give me your own metaphor (or did she say “metonymic adage”? I can’t remember) that makes writing so powerful a tool of expression, one that you can use to articulate your feelings about yourself and the world, and with which you can inspire readers to commit acts of right or wrong!” Huh? I was in only 8th grade, for crying out loud, but this teacher, bless her, believed in and, therefore, inspired us.**

**My teacher’s challenge made me recall the power of the fire hose directed by human hands, and no less to think about fire itself. Both potential forces for good or chaos and rescue or confusion, water and fire I came to see must be mixed in measures according to the needs of the cause they serve. I realized that like men who wrestled fire hoses and**

**confronted flames, writers and artists had to harness and control their own mighty forces that emanate from within them, and whether they wield a pastel stick, paint brush, sculpting tool, or in the writer's case, a pencil or pen, they have to honor the duty to turn the urgency and power of the fire in their bellies into art. As for water, I don't know what I wrote in my essay; the bell rang and I hadn't quite finished it. I do recall what the teacher wrote across the top of my paper: "Mr. N, kindly ask your father to see me."**

**In any case, think about it, all that energy pumping from the engine of the human mind and heart has to be outwardly, artfully expressed. Hence, behold the endless varieties of the fusion of the spirits of water and fire within every artist whose blessing (or curse) it is to render his or her own inimitable art. (In some other interview we can expand the metaphor to include earth and air, and maybe by then I will remember the metaphor I invented for water in eighth grade.)**

**I could not at age 11 have expressed myself as I now do, but in retrospect I see that it was no wonder I always felt such potential power when I took up a pastel or charcoal stick or chalk or pencil or pen; and it is no wonder that from**

**among the arts of writing, I chose poetry as my primary means of expression.**

**Poetry rises slowly into one's consciousness, no doubt sometimes after prolonged periods of smoldering; and at other times it strikes as suddenly as lightning, and then bam, eureka! Inspiring visions assert themselves, and the poet grasps just the right words to express them.**

**I am re-concocting and reshaping here the metaphor with which I responded to my teacher's challenge, and I thank her for inspiring me to become a poet, which until now I have avoided talking much about in this interview.**

**Should I go on?**

**Well, anyway, at about age 11 or 12 when my head was so full of colorful images, I realized that I wanted to be an artist *and* a writer, and thanks to that demanding teacher and others like her, I was determined to be someone who would never stop creating powerful images with physical materials *and* the written and spoken word.**

**Frankly for a long time I confused writing, read: handwriting, print and script, with two-dimensional drawing. Certainly for me this was a glorious confusion. That is to say, I blithely gave up control over the shaping of letters and words while I was writing and I began instead to draw or at the very least to create calligraphic and arabesque forms, much to the dismay of my teachers of penmanship. But that's another story, to be sure.**

## **5. How do your ideas and inspiration to create come to you?**

**As I pointed out a moment ago, sometimes inspiration arrives slowly – almost not at all. That is to say, like any artist or writer, I experience proverbial dry spells. I have strategies to deal with such periods, but sometimes, frankly, I enjoy the respite. Why? Because art of any kind is hard work, demanding labor. It demands every ounce of one's effort, psychic and physical. Creation of art of any kind can be painful -- but what blessed labor does not lead to birth, new life, wisdom, new ways of seeing, knowing!**

**Sometimes inspiration arrives with sudden force and in such frequent waves that I could be overwhelmed, drowned on the flood plane of ideas, but when that happens, an instinctive energy arises and I methodically albeit furiously write down all of my ideas. From whence does that energy arise? Who knows, good genes**

**perhaps, and also in my case it arises from wholesome ethics and values that my parents and older sister instilled in me. It is they who taught me to value the talents I have and to receive them humbly as I might receive a gift, a magical, powerful, and sometimes-fearsome gift.**

**Is something lost in the process of trying to manage the frenzied rush of ideas? Yes, but something is always gained. Besides, don't fool yourself: that idea, which you thought you lost, always lurks within you. Why else do dreams recur albeit in mildly or even wildly altered forms! Don't force the search for what seems to be lost; let the mind retrace its path on its own terms and in its own time. Trust it, love it.**

**The combinations of sounds a poet hears, or the rhythms a poet feels as they course through him, -- they, too, will assume words sometimes slowly, sometimes fast.**

**To live the good life is to open at all costs to the unpredictable and sometimes extreme changes of the seasons of inspiration.**

**6. What was the most fun you ever had while getting paid to do it?**

**To serve students as their teacher and to serve teachers as their administrator (note the verb within: "to administer" as in "to administer to"), -- such are the**

roles I found to be rewarding far beyond any rate of pay I received. Amazing, isn't it, to be paid to do what one loves to do, -- utterly astounding, practically unbelievable, but oh so true.

## **7. What's one thing about you that few people know?**

I enjoy looking at the surface of an object and imagining its reverse. In fact, I "float" the various surfaces of objects and objects themselves in my mind in a manner much like turning the elements of an exploded diagram into a 3D projection on a screen. I recall doing these mental gymnastics at a very early age, certainly pre-Kindergarten. All it took was to gaze upon an object. My gaze lifted the object into the realm of mind where I could manipulate, disassemble, and reassemble it - not always in its original fashion. I was and still am interested in the relationship of parts to the whole and looking at an object in myriad ways. What its meaning or place in a narrative is I reserve for later consideration. I am in no hurry to shape a narrative; I honor the image, the sound, the sensation, and trust that when I render it as it demands to be rendered, it will assert its own meaning.

Because I once flirted with the occupation of tool-and-dye making, I learned during several summers of intense work side-by-side with some of the

**world's greatest tool-and-dye makers that someone has to conceive of then make the machines that produce the gadgets and appliances we want to own and use. Tool-and-dye making taught me not only to look from multiple angles at objects while I made and machined them but also to conceive of and make the tools that produced them, based on blueprints that my shop chief or engineer or tool-and-dye mentor – and later, I -- drew.**

**Having since early youth grown comfortable with an intrinsic sense of classical perspective, I was euphoric when I discovered Picasso and Braque's cubism. You can imagine, I suppose, the sense of validation I experienced. In fact, I am just as ecstatic when I behold or create works without apparent perspective, e.g., works like those of the American Indian Space Painters and the work of the indigenous or Amerindian tribes that inspired them. Not least, I have embraced computer-assisted design with the same abandon that I embrace art and poetry. I enter fearlessly into its possibilities. I don't worry about making sense but rather I do seek to communicate with an audience in modes that are not necessarily rational or logical, at least not classically so.**

**As I say elsewhere, there are other ways of knowing and so are there other ways of communicating.**

**And what has this got to do with a poet's or any writer's words. Words have responded to the barriers that, some would argue, the visual arts seem to break first, and writers in each genre concoct their own linguistic responses to newly discovered territory. There's a long and intriguing story here, and it ought to include a discussion of physics as well, at least insofar physics attempts to explain the visions preconceived by writers and artists. I wish that in this interview we had more -- I mean, I wish we could bend a little more space and time.**

**If we could, I might also share with you my fondness for classical ballet and contemporary dance, choreography, and experimentation at the piano keyboard, but I've talked enough already. Meanwhile think of the multi-talented Rauschenberg and his circle, not that I presume to equate my talents with his or those other artists with whom he collaborated.**

#### **8. What do you do when you're not creating art?**

**I read extensively in a variety of genres, and I do not fail to include young adult, i.e., YA works alongside the so-called canon of Great Books. I thoroughly enjoy movies and I am shameless in my selection of them, e.g., a movie does not have to be critically acclaimed for me to be an**

**eager member of its audience. Likewise I listen to music of all kinds, and popular music of all sorts; no snob, I find power and beauty and truth in the playlists of lots of radio stations to which many “refined” folks I know would not, as the saying goes, “be caught dead listening to”. Ditto the habit for plays. Imagine subjecting oneself to such a cruel deprivation of the arts, missing the opportunity to be inspired anyplace, anytime, even if or especially if a play is not critically acclaimed. Great theater is everywhere!**

## **9. What makes your work unique?**

**No one creates in a vacuum. A writer and the visual artist conceive of and render works that are imbued with the influences of their times and with the influences of those writers and artists who preceded them. It is one’s own sense and sensibility that uniquely alter the mix of influences which one wittingly or unwittingly inherits.**

**If I seem to be dodging your question, I am; I need the time to think about this although I will venture a guess: All of us see the same world; each of us is compelled to interpret it according to his or her needs and talents. Nobody’s needs or talents are identical. In my case, this: I**

**render words and 2D and 3D art in rhythms that only I feel and hear and see. I happen to prefer a slowly pulsing beat that rises to a galloping crescendo in poetry and in painting, sculpture, “combines” and other mixed-media assemblages. I write poems and make art in order to offer the patient viewer a whimsical and often puzzling surprise. Other poets and visual artists do likewise; however, as the saying goes, each of us marches to the beat of a different drummer. Quickly google Klee’s The Drummer. I’ll bet we don’t see exactly the same drummer or dance to the same beat that his upraised drumstick will fall to strike, but we can dance as members of the same tribe!**

**10. Why do you support the West Orange Arts Council and what does it mean to you?**

**I feel that WOAC is at once a signpost and a destination for such a life as I have lived. That is to say, its address in the Valley Arts District points to good art and art making within it, and to an energizing dialogue among members who return to their studios or writing desks, and neighborhoods, inspired by the ideas they discuss in one another’s company and works that they share at meetings, salons, and exhibitions. WOAC is process, not solely product. This means that members of WOAC**

**become an evolving organism whose parts are responsive to one another and mutually influential; we resonate with each other but all the while every artist remains his or her inimitable self.**

**11. How many years have you been a West Orange Arts Council Member?**

**I just don't remember. I do remember that prior to my retirement from River Dell Regional Schools in 2007, I had become active with WOAC whose members' collective energies helped to transition or shepherd me into my next supercharged and fruitful phase of life and art.**

**Art and life just keep getting better, thanks in no small measure to the artists and members of WOAC.**

**Thank you.**