

“Paul Goble, Storyteller”: Addendum, April 2017

By Gregory Bryan

Paul Goble passed away at his Rapid City home on January 5, 2017, aged 83. During the final stages of his life, he was lovingly attended by his son, Robert, and Robert’s partner, Lacinda Kellogg. On the day of Paul’s death a reporter asked me what I thought of the coincidence of my biography being released just days after his passing. When he asked the question, I merely shook my head and said that there have been so many coincidences that I long ago stopped thinking of them as such. Paul’s wife Janet used to remark repeatedly, “It was meant to be.” The coincidences—the alignment of stars—were innumerable throughout the four years I worked on the book in earnest.

After the death of his beloved wife, Paul often told me that he was also ready to go. The last time I saw him, he expressed that same wish but then hastily added, “But I hope to be around to see your biography come out.” Since Janet’s death, that was the first time he had suggested a desire to delay his departure. The South Dakota Historical Society Press had told me that they usually received one or two copies of a book from the printer in advance of the main shipment. Knowing that time was running out, I asked them to send the very first copy of the book to Paul. I am so happy that he received it on the Friday before his death the following Thursday. His sons, Richard and Robert, were with their father when the book arrived. Robert reported, “The primary joy of the last months of his life was seeing the product of all of your hard work.”

Just hours before Paul passed away, Robert informed me that the doctor had visited and had concluded that his father probably had only hours to live. At that time Robert also told me, “The last and largest smile to cross Poppa’s face was when he saw your book.” In the *Rapid City Journal* newspaper report announcing the death, Robert is quoted as saying that his father considered the biography “the jewel in his crown; the thing that made his career complete.” For one with so many outstanding accomplishments to his name, that statement is staggeringly flattering to me.

As much as possible, I tried to keep myself out of the book. As such, I would like to take this opportunity to share a story of an experience I had. I had taken Paul for a drive into the Black Hills. I wanted him to show me the places he had lived when he first moved to the United States. His first American home was at Pactola Lake, and so we went there first. I rolled the car down a long driveway so that Paul could see his old home. One of the current residents was in the yard, and I suggested to Paul that we explain who we were and what we were doing. Paul was a shy and reserved man, and he stayed in the car while I went to explain our presence. The man immediately insisted that Paul should come inside. With great reluctance, he eventually agreed to the invitation. The man and his wife warmly welcomed him into his old home.

Given my Australian accent, the couple wondered what I was doing in that part of the world, and I told them that I was writing the biography of the man beside me. They became interested to learn just who it was who used to live in their home. It turned out that the woman of the house had once been a

school teacher, and when she learned that the person beside her was Paul Goble, she was beside herself with excitement. To think that someone so famous had once lived in her home and, what’s more, had worked upon his Caldecott Medal winner *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* while he lived there. “I just love that book,” she enthused. Yet her excitement and enthusiasm only made Paul even more uncomfortable. He was discreetly but desperately trying to edge his way out the door while the woman was gushing over him and insisting that he should sit down for a drink and a chat. I stood there, highly amused, fully knowing and understanding the two people’s emotions—I knew Paul’s humility, but I also understood the woman’s excitement.

Paul had a dry and understated sense of humor. When we eventually got back to the car and began to drive away, he said simply, “She was a *little bit* excited.” That, to me, summed up the Paul Goble I knew and admired.

On the day of his father’s death, Robert said to me, “I would like you to not be sad today.” He assured me, “Dad is happier now than he has been for a very long time, in company with Mom.” Paul’s 1989 book *Beyond the Ridge* has been a comfort to me since his death. In the book, a woman dies and her spirit climbs beyond a ridge to the next life—as Paul explained, “The Spirit World, the Land of Many Tipis, the place from which we came, and the place to which we shall return.” When the woman reached the top of the ridge:

She looked down towards the circle of tipis, and there was her mother walking with arms outstretched. She was smiling, and looked young and

happy. And behind her mother were her father and grandparents, and all the people she had known who had died long ago.

She felt strong again. The way down from the top [of the ridge] was so easy and beautiful. She even wanted to run.

Paul lives on in his art and his books, and he will live on forever in the hearts of those who knew him. According to Paul Goble: “Death? There is no death; only a change of worlds.”

Paul, I hope you are enjoying your time with your parents and wife, beyond the ridge.