

THE CARAVAN

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF LOREN EISELEY

Vol. 4, No. 3

FALL 1990



Loren Corey Eiseley
September 3, 1907 - July 9, 1977

*"We have joined the caravan, you might say, at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know."
-- The Immense Journey*

FALL MEETING

Gale Christianson, author of Fox at the Wood's Edge: A Biography of Loren Eiseley, (see Dick Herman's review within) will be in Nebraska September 16th and 17th to talk with us about his book, to sign copies, and to appear on Book Talk on Nebraska Public Radio--so join us for:

RECEPTION, BOOKSIGNING, AND CONVERSATION
WITH GALE CHRISTIANSON
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH AT 4:00 P.M.
VISITOR'S LOUNGE, THIRD FLOOR, MORRILL HALL
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA STATE MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA LINCOLN CAMPUS

AND/OR

BOOKSIGNING
GEORGE KIESER'S BOOKSTORE
312 SOUTH 15TH STREET, OMAHA, NEBRASKA
12 NOON TO 1:00 P.M., MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17TH

AND/OR

RECEPTION, BOOKSIGNING AND CONVERSATION
(CO-SPONSORED BY BISHOP CLARKSON COLLEGE)
OMAHA PUBLIC LIBRARY
215 SOUTH 15TH STREET, OMAHA, NEBRASKA
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17TH, 7:00-8:30 P.M.
THE PUBLIC IS CORDIALLY INVITED TO ALL OF THESE EVENTS.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

At long last, Gale Christianson's definitive biography of Loren Eiseley is in the bookstores and the author will be in Nebraska in September to talk with us about it. Meetings are scheduled both in Lincoln and Omaha for greater convenience of people in both areas. We hope you will be able to attend one or both--this is a red letter event! Here, at the Newsletter, we will welcome your reactions to the book and will report on them in our next issue. Good reading!

Mary Liz Jameson of Lincoln, first winner of the Loren Eiseley Memorial Scholarship Essay award and most recently Outreach Educator for the University of Nebraska State Museum, Morrill Hall, will be leaving soon for the University of Kansas at Lawrence. She received her B.S. in biological science and Great Plains Studies in 1986 and her Masters in Entomology in 1988 from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. She will be studying at the University where Eiseley had his first teaching job--an appropriate place for an Eiseley scholar. We will miss her as a Board Member.

Our regular Spring Meeting was held April 28 at Charles Gere Library in Lincoln. Morrie Tuttle, Treasurer, reported that there were 93 respondents to our first annual Dues Appeal in January and that we are solvent. Bob Boyce, Vice President, reported on the work being done in the Heritage Room at Bennett Martin Library in Lincoln, to catalogue the Eiseley material there.

Naomi Brill, Acting President, reported on the year's activities which included working with various organizations to promote knowledge and use of Eiseley's writing in teaching on various levels. These organizations included the Friends of Nebraska literature; the Nebraska Groundwater Festival and the Nebraska Center for the Book.

Contact was renewed with Bishop Clarkson College in Omaha whose annual Loren Eiseley Memorial Award was given to Dr. Jean Watson, Dean of the College of Nursing at the University of Colorado. Darlene Ritter, Friend's member, wrote an article on Eiseley for the Leaves From a Nebraska Notebook program which places articles about Nebraska writers in weekly newspapers around the state. Burt and Marian Schultz located a monolith on which Eiseley's bust will be placed in the Nebraska Hall of Fame in the State Capitol.

The program was given by Mary Liz Jamison, Outreach Educator at the University of Nebraska State Museum, and Vicki Wood, Coordinator of the Young People's Division at Bennett Martin Library, on their teaching Eiseley's essay, "Flow of the River", to 4th, 5th and 6th grade children at the Groundwater Festival.

It has been a busy and rewarding year but, still, we are troubled with a shortage of people interested in becoming active in the work of the organization. Please think about it and volunteer your help--we need you!
Naomi Brill, Acting President

Books

Indiana State professor u

A strange.

Fox at the Wood's Edge: A Biography of Loren Eiseley.
By Gale E. Christianson.
Henry Holt; 517 pages;
\$29.95.

The vision of a coachman steering feverishly through a storm-grained night is a Loren Eiseley literary invention. It does not leave a reader's mind.

Across the sky, lightning cracks. The electrical flare suddenly illuminates the coachman's face. One side is smooth, normal, but the other is grotesque, horrible, enraged, almost subhuman.

If intended as a large metaphor for the duality of man, this serves. As a smaller insight into how the strange, gifted boy-man from Nebraska viewed his own damaged personality, it has a certain utility as well.

Gale E. Christianson, a talented Indiana State University history professor with a special affinity toward men of science, provides the latest, largest Eiseley biography. Thirteen years after the subject's death, it likely will be the definitive biography. It is a work for which those caught in Eiseley's magic word web patiently have been waiting.

They should not be disappointed. The biographer rounds the complicated, layered man, frequently timid and indrawn but just as often a compelling baritone performer in the classroom and on the lecture stage.

A few surprises

Even for many who consider they knew Eiseley or his background reasonably well, Christianson has unearthed a few surprises. All to the good, he does not shrink from necessary judgments along the journey. Some may discover, at the end, a tincture of disappointment in Loren Corey Eiseley. He could have been still greater; if not as an artist, or a scientist, then as a human being.

Out of his ingrained paranoia, his primal consciousness, out of a permanently scarred psyche, with "a chronic case of emotional hemophilia," the anthropologist-poet created a unique, autumnal prose style. He also made -- I want to think -- an enduring contribution to American letters.



A crip
Loren
mothe
tery.

It goes
popular

Closin

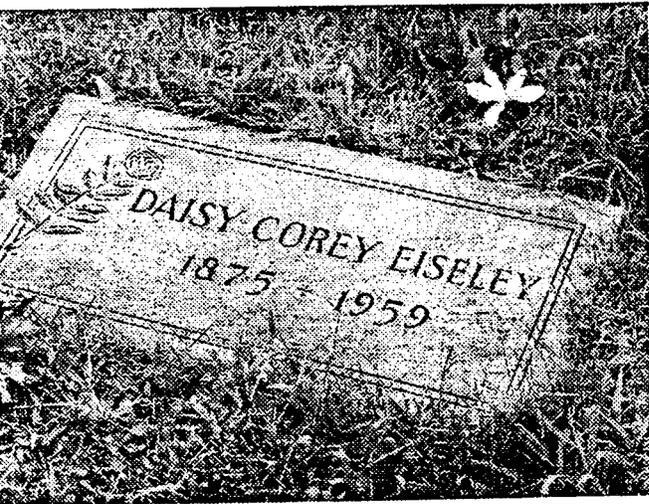
Chris
is that
sense, t
somew
[going
glory."
wished
project
was the
ing sch
left to h

This
mask of
biograp

Rem
boyhoo
braska
sage th
hatred
lusted f
life (35

rites definitive biography of Loren Eiseley

gifted boy-man from Nebraska



HARALD DREIMANIS/SUNDAY JOURNAL-STAR

ing home environment in his boyhood and youth left
Daisy Corey Eiseley with an unsoftenable hatred for his deaf
Daisy Corey Eiseley, who is buried in Wyuka Ceme-

beyond being a transient
er of science.

assessment

anson's closing assessment
Eiseley's story can, in one
laid out as that of "a shy,
backward Nebraska boy
down] the path to literary
the favorite image Eiseley
get across publicly, "one he
repeatedly in his writings,
of a humble, self-deprecat-
ar who wanted only to be
own devices."

was a cover, though, the
a fox. Reality differs, as the
er documents.

mberring a lonely, alienating
and youth in a crippling Ne-
ome environment — a pas-
left him with unsoftenable
r his deaf mother — Eiseley
r recognition and honors in
onary degrees). The word

and the scientific deed (which were
negligible) were insufficient as per-
sonal satisfaction. The hunger was
greater.

Late-arriving primate

This was an essayist whose writ-
ings underscore the slight footfalls of
a late-arriving primate called man —
and that animal's bent for arrogance
and world eating — in the great
cavalcade of evolutionary continuity.
We are all as cosmic dust. Neverthe-
less, a kind of personal immortality
is inferred as the artist's ambition.
Perhaps as lasting as mineralized
bones from the Ice Age, perhaps as
evocative, but never as mute.

The chronology and architecture
of Eiseley's life and career are well
known among Nebraskans who un-
failingly consumed his essays and
poetry. The boyhood of the future
Hall of Fame member was impover-
ished in several respects. Memories

of those days permanently etched
into an uncommon sensitivity be-
came material for subsequent re-
tracing in prose.

Only one semester

There was only a semester at Lin-
coln High School, then a more con-
genial and rewarding University
Teachers High experience. It was
there that his writing talent quickly
was spotted, with more encourage-
ment and exposure during the eight
broken years needed to graduate (in
1933) from the University of Ne-
braska (BA in anthropology and Eng-
lish).

Following acquisition of graduate
degrees at the University of Pennsylv-
ania, to which he later returned as a
professor in 1947, never to leave,
requisite faculty stops were made at
the University of Kansas and Ober-
lin. And marriage in 1938 to the
smart, stylish, confident — and, yes,
noble — Mabel Langdon.

Blessedly, Christianson fleshes out
Mabel's true role in this life drama,
in several vital ways a supporting
role that was simply pivotal. She
made him famous, the biographer ob-
serves, that damaged soul who
"could never get enough mothering."
A friend called Mabel Loren's surro-
gate mother. Mabel is remembered
by her own sister as being "very ag-
gressive in getting him on with his
work and into school . . . getting
scholarships . . . getting people to no-
tice his work." She believed in him,
an enabler without peer. She was
there at all the creations. "Mabel was
his mother, sister, cousin, friend; she
was his stay" is the testimony of a
close companion.

Three generations

The centrality of Nebraska for
Eiseley touches on three generations
of men and women in the local uni-
versity community, with C. Bertrand
Schultz and wife Marian being the

most lasting bond, through time and
professional interests. There are no
Eiseley loyalists today greater than
Bert and Marian.

The cast of local characters them-
selves now memorialized include
some still here, most others gone:
Letta May Clark, Emery Blue, Mylan
Stout, Preston Holder, Erwin Bar-
bour, Lowry Wimberly, Bill Gaffney,
Louise Pound, Rudolph Umland, Wel-
don Kees, John Campe, Kenneth For-
ward. Then there would be Clifford
Hardin, Virginia Faulkner and Bruce
Nicol. And lastly Steve Sample, who
unknowingly ripped opened a time-
buried scab.

Nebraska novelist Wright Morris
chummed with Eiseley in early
Pennsylvania years. His recollec-
tions are of a writer with a sunnier,
charming disposition. Morris' con-
dolence letter to Mabel after Loren's
death is itself a most affecting,
memorable piece of writing. Read it
slowly.

Psychological trap

For biographer Christianson, Eise-
ley could not escape a psychological
trap: "The constant search for a fa-
ther who could measure up to his
every fictional ideal of a vanished
Clyde, the craving of love and com-
fort from women who treated him as
a vulnerable hero and child. The en-
closed world of his Nebraska youth
proved so crucial imaginatively that
it set limits on the degree of his ma-
turity, barring full entry into man's
estate. The Odyssean status he so
craved was an impossibility, given
his failure to surrender to something
larger and grander than himself."

But from such a matrix, literature
was born and burnished and litera-
ture remains. Perhaps the keenest
and most compressed assessment of
Loren Eiseley came from his father.
This was written in a letter:
"Remember, the boy is a genius, but
moody."

— Dick Herman

