When I began in the writing trade, as a young western workhorse harnessed to a newspaper job—as my family referred to it, “back east in Illinois”—I dreamed ahead from that daily newspaper wordage to somehow joining one or another of the literary lineages aboard Shakespeare’s ark—the lions of narrative, the foxes of mystery, the griffins of science fiction and fantasy, the watchful herons of history, the gazelles and dolphins of poetry, the badgers of biography, the lop-eared leopards of memoir. Little did I imagine that finding my way up that gangplank would bring me southward from Puget Sound to the
verge of Oregon at Willapa Bay, following the trail of pioneer diarist James G. Swan in *Winter Brothers*, and then onward to the mouth of the Columbia and Astoria at the climax of my first novel, *The Sea Runners*—and now up that great river of the West to where it joins the storied waters of the Willamette, for this heart-and-soul-moving occasion.

First of all, I must thank you for crossing the Columbia in your consideration of a fellow practitioner of words for this award. So, I'm here as an admiring neighbor, among other roles. The one I had better add to it now, at Jenny's request, is a few minutes
of reflection as, shall I say, a veteran at what my agent calls making and peddling quality literature.

Half a century or so ago, when a technological marvel invading every American household was going to wipe out books--the thing was called television--Flannery O'Connor was asked, "Is the novel dead?" She said she didn't know about that, she only worried about whether the one she was writing was dead or not. Myself, earlier in my career, I'd get unblinking academics asking me in awful seriousness, "Is there a Pacific Northwest literature?" I'd always say, I guess so or you wouldn't be sitting here talking to me, would you.
We have long known the answer, that serious writing is alive and well out here. Rain is the ink of this area, after all—the Great American Raincoast that we live in, extending from northern California to way up in Alaska, I believe encourages and puts a distinctive mark on creativity out here. In a historical sweep, this can be seen from the native coastal art born in longhouses in long stints of carving and painting and dance and storytelling during rainy seasons, to our own time and field of literature, in such work as Ken Kesey's epic novel Sometimes A Great Notion, born of the rainy woods down the coast, and Tom Robbins' atmospheric reaches into the mists of the imagination in the rain-
fed Skagit River country up near where I live. And to add myself to it as someone who has hunkered in and precipitated books during the other precipitation, I daresay the work of the three of us, and so many others, could not happen in, say, Kansas.

"They call it regional," my late great friend and your late great poet, Bill Stafford, wrote in his telling poem, "Lake Chelan"--"They call it regional, this relevance: the deepest place we have." For my part, as someone who writes about both the Rocky Mountain slopes where I grew up and about the Pacific Northwest where I’ve spent the majority of my years, I’ve always felt that those of us who ground our writing out here in sagebrush
country or coastal capes are doing what worthwhile writers have
done from time immemorial, from Homer on, paying homage to
our home territory--that "deepest place we have" that Bill Stafford
saw so well.

In the end, miraculous things, books. Every so often, I wish
we could re-weave time and bring forth a writer from his own
neighborhood of history to an era where we need his particular
eye and skill. Shakespeare, for instance, to write about the
massive murderous idiocy of the trench warfare of World War
One a century ago. Joseph Conrad to be aboard a moon voyage
and tell us of the cold ocean of space.
If I could shuffle time, tonight, there is a trio of historical figures whom I passionately wish could witness this gathering of Willamette Writers, so that they could know how far their imagination has led. Thomas Jefferson, that one-man academy of arts and sciences, who sent his explorers toward the mouth of Columbia River with instructions to write and write and write--to keep journals “with great pains and accuracy, to be entered distinctly and intelligibly for others as well as yourself.” And those two superb diarists, that odd perfect couple Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. It was Clark who wrote in simple pride in having stuck to the task, as wordmakers must, when the Corps
of Discovery broke camp after the winter of rain at Fort Clatsop:
"(We) have lived as well as we had any right to expect." Not a
bad creed, for those of us who explore that great raincoast of
imagination and language.

I believe that those three early figures who touched, with their
pens, the land which would become Oregon, would grin
astonished approval tonight at this tribe of writers gathered here to
confer this honor on one of their own, north of the great rivers or
not.

Thank you.