

Kratz Center *for* Creative Writing

A T G O U C H E R C O L L E G E

DAVID GUTERSON AT THE KRATZ CENTER INAUGURAL LECTURE

The following is the introduction of David Guterson that Madison Smartt Bell offered on September 13, 1999, in the Kraushaar Auditorium on the occasion of the Kratz Center's first visiting author event:

"David Guterson appeared to have come out of nowhere when *Snow Falling on Cedars*, after its sharp and sudden ascent of the bestseller list, won the Pen/Faulkner Award in 1995. Like a lot of writers who seem to come out of nowhere, he had actually been somewhere for many years before, working in what he describes in interviews as "a kind of stillness." He taught highschool English for many years on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound, and became an advocate and practitioner of home-schooling. His first nonfiction book, *Family Matters*, addresses this topic. His first work of fiction, *The Country Ahead of us, the Country Behind*, is a collection of short stories whose restrained and understated manner recalls the best of Ernest Hemingway, and whose seriousness of moral purpose reminds the reader of the great Russian writers whom Guterson has claimed as his masters.

"Thus we see that the overnight success of David Guterson's first novel was, in fact, a good many years of hard work in the making.

"Both *Snow Falling on Cedars* and this year's *East of the Mountains* are, in a sense, historical novels. The first novel is set in 1954, two years before Guterson was born, and like the current novel reaches back into the World War II era. Both books are very sensitive to the ways in which culture, place, and history make people into what they are. It is their deep historical rootedness, especially, which gives their readers the sense of handling a meticulously well-made and durable work of art.

"We are fortunate to have David Guterson here for the opening of the Kratz Center, not only because of the extremely high quality of his work, but for the example he sets, not only for our own students but for anyone who wants to write seriously. I also think it is a nice thing, a happy coincidence, that he has his record as a very committed teacher. Despite the distractions of success--bestsellerdom, prizes, the forthcoming film of *Snow Falling on Cedars*, he seems to have preserved the integrity of his inner sense of purpose, as well as "the sense" (I quote again from an interview) "that this world is an illusion, that desire is the root of suffering." Beyond doubt a very fine literary artist, David Guterson is also a model of modesty, industry, and commitment to the craft."