



# Round Valley Reader



This activity is funded in part by the California Arts Council, a state agency, through the Upstate California Creative Corps program.

FREE FOREVER | VOL 1, ISSUE 34.

PAST\* PRESENT\* FUTURE

APRIL 5, 2024



## PRESENT: Remembering Local Yuki Poet William Oandasan in Celebration of National Poetry Month

Written by Michelle Peñaloza, picture courtesy of Cecilia Brainard

April is National Poetry Month, so it felt like a great time to learn more about and honor a poetic legacy here in our own community: William Oandasan, an award-winning poet of both Yuki and Filipino Ilocano heritage with deep roots in Round Valley. I had the privilege of talking with his sisters, Deb and Mona, to ask about their brother's life, legacy and achievements.

Born in 1947, William Oandasan was the eldest among his siblings, all of whom shared in the rich legacies of their Yuki and Filipino Ilocano heritage. The Oandasan siblings—Bill (as they called William), Bernardo, Deb, and Mona—grew up in Sebastopol. Their parents—father, William, immigrated from the Philippines in the 1930s and mother, Bernita, was Yuki and born and raised in Covelo—met at house party in the labor housing at a Fetzer vineyard. "Back then, there weren't really dance clubs, so people had dances at their houses," Deb explained. Their parents' courtship and marriage speak to the racism that motivated the miscegenation laws in place at the time. Mona recalled, "At that time, there were a lot of single Filipino men that came to work, and they were not allowed to marry white women. So, you saw a lot of Native and Filipino couples." Though the siblings grew up amid the multicultural agrarian community of Sebastopol, their family's connection to their Yuki heritage and to Round Valley was palpable, with their great-grandmother and grandmother always leading back to Covelo, where their ancestral lands resided and where the family went when they said they were "going home."

Covelo held a special place in Oandasan's heart, serving as a source of inspiration for his poetry as well as a connection to his roots. He visited the elementary, middle, and high schools as a guest speaker, engaging with students and, as Deb said, "Trying to show them there are so many things you can be." He interviewed many elders to delve into the richness of Yuki language and culture and to put those stories onto paper. His dedication to discovering and honoring his roots wasn't limited to his Yuki heritage; he was also the first of his siblings to journey to the Philippines.

Oandasan's journey into poetry began in high school when he began writing. He later grappled with the challenges of getting published, leading him to establish *A Press* in 1976 to amplify marginalized voices, particularly those of Native writers, as well as his editing of *A: A Journal of Contemporary Literature*, one of the first literary magazines devoted to Native writers. His family played a crucial role in his literary pursuits, with Mona and Deb offering support as proofreaders and editors.

Despite his many artistic achievements, including winning the 1985 American Book Award for his book *Round Valley Songs* (which can be found in our library!), Oandasan remained humble, embodying the values instilled in him by his upbringing. In addition to his literary pursuits, William Oandasan was a prolific teacher (he taught in more places than I could write down as Deb and Mona listed them off: UCLA, Chicago, New Mexico, Occidental College, New Orleans, to name only a few) and he was deeply engaged in activism, leaving an indelible mark on the movement for indigenous rights and education. He was involved in helping to establish the ANA (Administration for Native Americans) as well as initiatives such as the D-Q University Indian School, founded in the wake of the occupation of Alcatraz Island (of which he was also a part) for Native students seeking to reclaim their cultural heritage and identity. He believed in the transformative power of education as a tool for social change and cultural revitalization.

For the Oandasan family, William's legacy is not solely one of literary acclaim and activism, but it is also suffused with personal anecdotes and memories, as shared by his sisters, Mona and Deb. With smiles, they both fondly recall their older brother's love of blackberry jam—"He'd just eat it with a spoon, right out of the jar"—their parents' pride in all his accomplishments and the places his teaching and poetry took him, his hard work and his many degrees—"We joked he was a professional student given all the schools he went to!"—and his humility—"He did so many things but he never came home and said, 'Look at what I did!' He never acted like he was better than you. He was pretty earthy. He was always willing to help."



l-r: Vince Gotera, Virginia Cerenio, NVM Gonzalez, Cecilia Brainard, William Oandasan

His family remembers him as a loving and attentive father, a patient teacher, and a tireless advocate for his community. His passion for education and poetry was matched only by his commitment to social justice and cultural pride.

When I interviewed Deb and Mona about their brother, I was moved by their love for him and their grief of his passing. I felt a warmth and an aching for my own family, looking at their faces and embracing them as we said good-bye. A poet of Filipinx/a/o heritage living in Round Valley, I've felt kinship with William Oandasan since I learned of him and read his poems. I leave you, dear reader, with his words: first, from the biography he wrote for himself at the end of *Round Valley Verses*: "William Oandasan is a member of the Yuki tribe, which is one of six tribes constituting the confederation known as the Covelo Indian Community Council. Covelo is in the Coastal Mountain Ranges of Northwest California where Round Valley is situated. The Yuki have lived in the valley for at least 10,000 years. But Oandasan, like the majority of Native Americans in his generation, was not born and raised 'on the reservation.' Nevertheless, Oandasan's mind, as displayed by the poems in *Round Valley Verses*, has never been far from the spirit of his people." And finally in four lines that are among some of his sister Deb's favorites of his poetry, in the image below, also from *Round Valley Verses*:

from my mouth a song  
for warmth pours and becomes  
an arrow ready  
to take me all the way

Do you have archives from the past, present news, and/or imaginings for the future of Round Valley? Tell us in person at The Round Valley Farmers' Market, every Friday (where we will also have the latest issues of *The Round Valley Reader*!) Or email us at: [coveloarts@gmail.com](mailto:coveloarts@gmail.com)



This selection from the past was made by Michelle Peñaloza from the archives of Sandy Wake & Howard Wenz. We hope these reprintings of the past help our community reflect on where we have been so that we may dream where we want to go. Do you have any old copies of Covelo newspapers? We would love to borrow them for this section of *The Round Valley Reader!* Contact Jenn & Michelle at [coveloarts@gmail.com](mailto:coveloarts@gmail.com) or visit us every Friday at The Round Valley Farmers' Market.

# ROUND VALLEY REVIEW

SPRING 1987



*An Anthology of Creative Writing*

ROUND VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
POST OFFICE BOX 276  
COVELO, CALIFORNIA 95428

## ODE TO MY CHEVY

With the power of  
a drag.  
She roars down  
the highway just over  
55.  
She acts like a  
jet swerving in and out.  
I try to hold  
back but she's over  
65 like a shuttle  
at take off to the  
sky and the stars.

Erik Heiken--10th Grade

She sat in her bed  
with three little balls  
of cuteness, two are  
black, one is gray  
they sleep all day  
entwined in a  
circular ball of  
fur.

Gabe McDowell--9th Grade

## LITTLE BROTHER

Running naked,  
my little brother.  
The only one to come  
to me when hurting.  
Carrying my old lunch pail  
laughing when I laugh  
jumping where I jump.  
They say he looks like me  
oh well my little brother and me.

Josh Winger--9th Grade

Otaka...  
Otaka Opens the Old Oven and  
Only once she goes Outside.

Otaka Lincoln--3rd Grade

## WIND

Wistfull  
Incorruptible  
Natural  
Deadly

Resha Cardone--5th Grade

## BART

Moving rapidly  
When we go on  
Under the bay  
We want to travel

Dove Oliver--4th Grade

You are so awesome  
and fast you fly  
along the ground  
like a racing locomotive  
sticking to your path,  
like a bird flying low  
to the ground  
first you swoop up and  
then you swoop down,  
twisting and turning like  
a string with no end  
along that long open road

Joann Williamson--11th Grade

He had a job  
not long ago  
He didn't like the  
grease or grime.  
His boss was tough  
and life is rough  
So he wanders aimlessly--  
aimlessly, living a dream.  
A dream full of nothing.

Jason Wolf--11th Grade

Spring! Spring!  
Come wherever you are.  
Winter  
is taking us  
over.

Stacy Brown--4th Grade

A frog jumps in a lake.  
Frog is on shore.  
The frog jumps on a log.  
The big blue heron swoops down  
and eats up the frog.  
End of frog.

Miss Lim's Kindergarten

## GRANDMA

Nice, old, helpful  
Helping, cooking, reading  
Grandma likes to play Jeopardy  
Happy

Amanda Pinola--3rd Grade



Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past Past

THANKS FOR READING THE ROUND VALLEY READER THANKS FOR READING THE ROUND VALLEY READER THANKS FOR READING

ROUND VALLEY LITTLE LEAGUE PRESENTS

# TEXAS HOLD EM' FUNDRAISER



**APRIL 14TH @ 1PM**  
ROUND VALLEY SENIOR CENTER

**COME OUT AND SUPPORT OUR YOUTH!**

SPAGHETTI PLATES FOR \$10  
DRINKS AND BAKED GOODS FOR \$1  
WILL ALSO BE AVAILABLE

ALL PROCEEDS GO TOWARDS  
ROUND VALLEY  
LITTLE LEAGUE YOUTH TEAMS

Molly Brodak  
HOW TO NOT BE A PERFECTIONIST

People are vivid  
and small  
and don't live  
very long-



**SATURDAY 4-20-24**

FEATURING MUSIC BY  
**BLUE LUKE SOUL CIRCUS MARJO WILSON TRIO**

A FUNDRAISER FOR Friends of the ROUND VALLEY public library



2024 Earth Day Celebration  
COVELO, CALIFORNIA

11am-Sunset  
RAIN OR SHINE

RESOURCE & EDUCATIONAL BOOTHS  
ARTS & CRAFTS  
CLOTHING SWAP  
SCAVENGER HUNT  
& MUCH MORE

LOCATION:  
**THE WALNUT GROVE**  
23925 HOWARD ST.

ARTWORK BY ALEJANDRA DAVILA

**Sponsored by**

**Grandmothers Land**

BY WILLIAM OANDASAN

around the house stood an orchard of plum, apple and pear a blackwalnut tree, one white pine, groves of white oak and willow clumps the home of Jessie was largely redwood

blood, flesh and bone sprouted inside her womb of redwood for five generations the trees now stand unpruned and wild

after relocating so many years before the War the seeds of Jessie have returned

afternoon sunlight on the field breezes moving grass and leaves memories with family names wait within the earth, the mountains, the valley, the field, the trees

little prayer

let ruin end here

let him find honey where there was once a slaughter

let him enter the lion's cage & find a field of lilacs

let this be the healing & if not let it be

By Danez Smith



3rd Annual  
**Round Valley History Day**  
May 4th  
Round Valley Methodist Church  
77940 Covelo Rd. Covelo, Ca  
10am-5pm  
10am - Coffee 12pm - Lunch  
1:30pm - Guest speaker

Sharing History in pictures, yearbooks, newspapers, movies and song!!

Special Guest Speaker:  
**William J. Bauer Jr.**  
@ 1:30pm

For more information contact:  
Donna Bushnell or Mitzi Frazier on this page.



**SPRING BEGINS SHYLY**

Spring begins shyly  
With one hairpin of green grass  
In a flower pot.

-Richard Wright