

The Valentin Krustev Award for Translation

I believe it was in 1978 when William Meredith first met Valentin Krustev. Valentin had been assigned to visiting dignitaries during one of the international writers' meetings, Peace the Hope of the Planet, sponsored by the Writers' Union in Bulgaria. He remained an extraordinary friend right up until his premature death this past year in Sofia.

Valentin acted not only as a translator of various languages, but translated the culture to William Meredith and me as well, over many visits to our second homeland. (We were made citizens by presidential decree after a Fulbright year in 1996 in Blagoevgrad.)

He helped us navigate political waters, and understand the subtext which always seemed to be an important current beneath the surface that an outsider could rarely appreciate. He walked a delicate tightrope as an "official" translator for the government, as well as someone who became a personal friend and could fill us in from a personal, more private perspective.

Over the years, we worked together translating American and Bulgarian poets, especially that of his colleague, Lyubomir Levchev, incorporating beautiful visual art by Levchev's wife, Dora Boneva. Valentin visited the United States on occasion, and can be seen here at Waterford beach making a fire to keep us warm at the end of the day.



He took it on himself one fall afternoon to move an entire cord of wood to bring it closer to the Yotul wood stove. He was a strong, stocky man, and his enthusiasm sometimes got him into trouble (he stacked the wood at the front door, when the wood stove was at the bottom floor near the back door. No matter. He showed us his work when we got home with great pride.)

A recent Washington Post feature article traces the significant rise in translations as well as presses specializing in this art form since 9/11. This work enables us to reach across political and cultural differences to appreciate our common humanity, an insight sorely needed in this presently troubled moment in history. Beyond the window into other worlds that her poems offer, Goldberg has provided lucid epiphanies into the art of translation, remarkable analyses in themselves for which a reader can be grateful. We consider it some of the best writing on the subject we've seen, and are honored to include it as a preface to the launching of the Krustev Award for Translation.

Valentin was a clever lawyer and great host to many visitors who came as part of the Griffis art exchange program as well as visiting writers such as Andrew Oerke and Anitra Thorhaug. He was a loyal son and father, and exactly the sort of friend who could challenge you with idealistic projects envisioned here and abroad. At the time of his death, he was working with the Irish writer Jack Harte to set up a website for Levchev's poetry, translating with generosity of spirit, giving his time and energy, often without compensation other than a poet's gratitude. He'll be missed by many Americans who visited under his tutelage. He was a lovely guy, a good poet and translator, and a fountain of energy. This prize hopes to honor his memory and keep his legacy alive, as well as that of his friend, William Meredith.



Richard Harteis (left) and Valentin Krustev (right). William Meredith's portrait by Dora Boneva during the 2009 exhibition at the Hygenic Gallery in New London.