

Allison Stegner Interview Wallace Stegner Documentary

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking a little bit about Wallace Stegner's books and the two that you had read, *Angle of Repose* and *Wolf Willow*. Tell me what you thought about those books as you read them, and especially thinking, this is my grandfather that wrote this.

Allison Stegner

Well I think one of the things that most stands out about those books is the sense of place. I mean *Wolf Willow* especially is - it's about that place from so many different angles, you know. That's obviously a big aspect, and the way he makes place into a character. The West is one of the major characters in *Angle of Repose*, and I think in some ways than the actual people in those books.

Interviewer-John Howe

What do you think of his literary legacy? What does that mean to you and your family? When you think of him and his body of work, what do you think his legacy is and his accomplishments and things and what does that mean to you?

Allison Stegner

Well I think he has a number of different accomplishments, you know. He has a lot of non-fiction work, conservation work that has its own legacy, in some ways apart from the fiction legacy, and to me that's particularly important because I'm interested in environmental biology, so I think his conservation legacy sort of provides a really wonderful moral and rational framework for doing conservation work. And in terms of his fiction legacy, I don't know what to say other than he's a wonderful fiction writer and it's nice to have that in the family, I don't

know...

Interviewer-John Howe

Did he influence you in your decision to pursue environmental biology?

Allison Stegner

I didn't think so for a long time, but now that I'm older I definitely think he has, because you know I was pursuing biology for a long time, but I recently decided to pursue Environmental Biology in American Studies and to sort of try and unify that under agriculture and development in the West.

Interviewer-John Howe

Let's do this on camera. We're not rolling right now. How did your grandfather influence your decision at college?

Allison Stegner

Well for a long time I didn't think he had a big influence on it, but I recently decided to do Environmental Biology and American Studies and try to unify that under agriculture and environment and development in the West, and that I think was largely because of my family history and my parents and I have spent a lot of time traveling around the West, you know just because of my grandfather's writing and because it's a beautiful place that we love to be in. So that environmental history, that conservation history has had a big impact on me and what I hold important and what I value.

Interviewer-John Howe

What has your father Page told you about your grandfather Wallace Stegner? What kind of man did he tell you he was?

Allison Stegner

All I know is that he was, you know, a very chivalrous man, a very honest man, a hard-working man. Those are the things that stand out to me.

Interviewer-John Howe

So much of his legacy, especially the national parks and the creation of Canyonlands and Capitol Reef and things are very much directly responsible to him and Stewart Udall and others. When you think of that today, especially given your field of study and things... and also what that's leaving behind for other people your age, what do you think about that?

Allison Stegner

I think that it's amazing work and I only hope that I can do the same sort of things to make that sort of an impact, and can you ask the last part of your question again?

Interviewer-John Howe

Well I was going to say, what kind of legacy do you think that is for people that are coming along of your age, coming through school? That's quite a legacy to leave in terms of the creation of national parks and being so instrumental in that, especially in that era--the Kennedy Administration and Stewart Udall and that kind of thing, and I'm curious how you feel about that legacy and what you think the important of that legacy is.

Allison Stegner

The importance of the actual land being preserved?

Interviewer-John Howe

Yes, and the creation of the parks and protection forever and that sort of thing.

Allison Stegner

I think that it's really important. I think that it's so easy for people my age to think there's this vast land out there that we can just use, but when they actually go visit these national parks and see the desert, it has a really visceral feeling to it, you know you have a really visceral reaction, so I think it's important that those things are preserved forever. It's easy to forget if you don't go see the wilderness like that.

Interviewer-John Howe

What do you think of carrying on the Stegner name? Does that give you any special burden you think? How do you feel about that?

Allison Stegner

That's a multi-faceted question. I'm very proud to carry on the Stegner legacy and I hope I can live up to it. I think that there is a certain burden that comes along with it. It just holds me to a higher standard in my own mind, you know. I'd like to do as well and do as much as my grandfather did and I hope I can. ... I've spent so much time driving around the West and camping, and you know seeing it all, but most of my friends haven't been to those places.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking a little bit about your mother... Mary Stegner... your grandmother Mary Stegner. Tell me about her and your relationship with her. What kind of woman is she?

Allison Stegner

I had a really wonderful relationship with my grandmother. She was an amateur artist, and she sort of started me drawing and painting and that's been a big

part of my life since then. We used to look at art books together. The other thing that she did with me that I really appreciated was she used to take me on fern walks. She had a lot of, you know, fern manuals with images and we would go through the woods and find ferns and identify them and preserve them and those sort of naturalist walks have also had a pretty big impact on my field. I've always been interested in botany and I've been working in a plant biology lab at Stanford for a while now, so what kind of a woman was she? I don't know. I don't know what to say to that.

Interviewer-John Howe

What can you say about her values and integrity? Or even this... what kind of influence did she have on Wallace Stegner?

Allison Stegner

I think she was a solid, constant partner. I think she was very supportive and I've never heard her say anything negative about him in any way, you know, not even "Wally's in a bad mood." She was very supportive and I think she admired him deeply.