

## **Robert Steensma Interview Wallace Stegner Documentary**

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Bob tell me a little bit about Salt Lake City in the 1920s--the Salt Lake City of Wallace Stegner. What was it like?

### **Robert Steensma**

Salt Lake City in the 1920s when Stegner was growing up was a city of about 120,000 and it didn't extend much beyond 33rd South, and it was a very diverse community with some 16 different denominations and people of all ethnic persuasions: Asians, people from the Balkans, Blacks, American Indians, so it was a very diverse and interesting place.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Why did Wallace Stegner consider Salt Lake City his hometown?

### **Robert Steensma**

He considered it his home town because over the course of his life he lived in about 20 different cities and places and he came to feel later in life that Salt Lake City was the place that formed his character, stimulated his intellectual curiosity, and made him the writer that he later became.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about his days at East High. How did he end up there and what was East High like in that era?

### **Robert Steensma**

Well, East High... in those days East High was a relatively new school and Stegner entered that school in 1920, 21 rather, and he had skipped two grades. He graduated in 1925 with his brother, who was two years older. It was a school that was the best in Salt Lake City, and it was a school that Stegner remembered with a great deal of affection.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

You talk in your book about him being a baseball fan, especially with the especially with some of the Salt Lake Bees and some of the players.

### **Robert Steensma**

He was, because in those days the Salt Lake Bees were in the Pacific Coast League. Shortly afterward they dropped out and went to a lower classification, but in those years he haunted State Street, as he tells us in one of his essays, trying to get batting practice balls that came over the left field fence in the old park which was located on 9th South where Sears is now located, and one of the stars at that time was Tony Lazzeri, later of the New York Yankees Murderers' Row with Ruth and Gehrig, who set a minor league record with 60 home runs in 1925.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about how Salt Lake City looked in that era, and I'm talking about how the farm lands and running sheep down Foothill Boulevard and that kind of thing. What was it like?

### **Robert Steensma**

Well, Salt Lake was so much different then, for example, Foothill Boulevard-- there was nothing above Foothill except farmland, except St. Mary's of the Wasatch, the Catholic Girls School that was torn in 1972. Many of the streets in

Salt Lake City were gravel. The streets up in the higher avenues didn't exist and the streets in the lower avenues were gravel. In fact, if you were to drive over to Evanston or down to Provo, you would drive on gravel roads.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about Stegner as a tennis player at East High, the fact that he had a little bit of temper. I heard one of the stories. Why don't you tell that to me?

### **Robert Steensma**

Stegner played on the tennis team a bit at East High, but certainly at the University of Utah. At East High and the University of Utah he played with his friend Jack Irvine and also with David Freed who later became a philanthropist and a civic leader, and later captain of the Davis Cup Team. Stegner always had a hot temper like his father, but he managed to keep it under control, but in college he hadn't quite learned that yet and we know of one incident in which he became angry with his own playing so he smashed his racket on the court and had to go out and seek another one.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about George Stegner, Wallace's father. What kind of a man was he?

### **Robert Steensma**

George Stegner, Stegner's father was a man of immense talents. He had a good sense of humor and he, in many ways was very kind, but he was also an opportunist--somebody who is looking for *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* where the cigarettes grow on trees and the bluebird sings to the lemonade springs, but he had a violent temper and he was always looking for the main chance, and the result was that in Canada and in Great Falls, Montana and in Salt Lake City he engaged in criminal activities usually running a Speakeasy in the family home

and bootlegging liquor. But his life ended rather... in a rather sorry way because his business fortunes were going down in the 1930s, his wife and Stegner's brother were dead, and on June 15th, 1939 he committed suicide in the old hotel Heron where the Bank of the West is now on 2nd South. He killed himself after killing his girlfriend, Dorothy Leroy Webb.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me just a little bit about that incident. How did he commit suicide and what happened?

### **Robert Steensma**

The story is that he went to the Salt Lake police in the morning to get a gun permit, and he was asked if he'd committed a crime and he said, "Not yet." He went into the lobby of the hotel where he was living and where Mrs. Webb was living with her mother. Their relationship had been going sour and he accosted her and he lost his temper, pulled out a gun, she ran out the back door, put her back up against the door, and he shot her through the door and killed her and then he killed himself. That hotel I think was torn down in the very early 1940's.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about Hilda Stegner, Wallace's mother.

### **Robert Steensma**

Hilda Stegner was a woman of... a daughter rather, of Norwegian immigrants... Hilda Stegner was a magnificent woman in many ways. She was a woman who had grown up with Norwegian immigrant parents in Iowa. At a very early age, because of her mother's death, she had to take over the raising of the family. She met George, who was very impressive as we know from a letter from Stegner's aunt. She married him and he proceeded to drag her all over the

country, and she never had what she wanted most, that is, what the pioneers called a nest. That is a family, a home, a permanent home, a neighborhood, friends, all of those things that I think most of us want, but George never gave her that chance. She was very patient despite his abuse, but in 1933 she died of breast cancer in an apartment on West South Temple.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about Wallace Stegner being there at her death and being at her side and what she said to him and what his response was.

### **Robert Steensma**

George Stegner, during Hilda's illness, was not very near. He simply couldn't stand the idea of being near his sick wife. He took it too much to heart, and so Wallace in many ways was closer to her, and he was with her at the time of her death on September 27, 1933, and in a later essay called, "A Letter Too Late" which he wrote 50 years after her death, he says that the last words that she said to him were, "You're a good boy Wallace", and during the rest of that essay that line hurts him because he says that, "I wasn't always a good boy", and I think that he was always very close to his mother because he had no relationship with any good type with his father George.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about Cecil Stegner. What kind of a boy was he?

### **Robert Steensma**

Cecil Stegner was a much different boy than Wallace. First of all he was a superb athlete, and I think his death in 1931 hit George Stegner particularly hard because he had high hopes that Cecil would become a professional baseball player, but Cecil in High School didn't care much for academic studies, although

he was a good singer who took part in a lot of the operettas and the choral activities of East High. He died in 1931 as a result of a Good Samaritan thing in which he tried to help a stalled motorist out of the deep snow up at Alta. Stegner himself I think always mourned the loss of that brother.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about George Stegner's bootleg activities and what is a blind pig?

### **Robert Steensma**

Stegner's activities were of a criminal nature. He ran the blind pig, which was a Speakeasy. These were the days of prohibition when liquor was not legal for sale.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Let me ask you that once again. Tell me about about George Stegner and the blind pig.

### **Robert Steensma**

George Stegner and the blind pig is a long episode of criminal activities on the part of George Stegner. A blind pig was a Speakeasy which sold illegal liquor in hidden places--sometimes in private homes, sometimes in the basements of various establishments, and he ran the blind pig way back in North Dakota. He continued it in Saskatchewan and in Great Falls and finally in Salt Lake City. With the legalization of alcohol, that of course became a kind of activity that was no longer profitable.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

What did Wallace Stegner think of his father George and how did that relationship affect him and his writing later on.

## **Robert Steensma**

George...Wallace's feelings about his father were quite complicated. If you go to the Salt Lake Cemetery, up in the Northwest section you'll see that there is a Stegner plot and there is a marker for Cecil Stegner, the brother, and for Hilda Stegner, but to the right there is no marker for George Stegner. Jackson Benson, the Stegner biographer once asked him, "Wally, have you ever forgiven your father?", and Stegner hesitated for a moment and then said, "No!" He was never able to reconcile himself with his father.

## **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about how Wallace Stegner related to the Mormons in Salt Lake City. What did he think of the LDS population?

## **Robert Steensma**

Stegner's relationship with the LDS population of Salt Lake City was a rather interesting one. As he grew up in Salt Lake, went to East High and to the University of Utah, he played basketball, for example, in a lot of the local ward or stake gymnasiums. Some of his best friends were LDS. His closest friend Jack Irvine was LDS but not a practicing one, but Stegner respected the Irvine's and other LDS people for their sense of family, for their belief in integrity and loyalty, and he says that even though he could disagree with their theology, he still had a respect for their ethics and for their family unity, and in one essay he says that if he were to go to a LDS home on a Monday evening and ask for a crust of bread he's probably be asked in, he'd be given a crust of bread and he'd end the evening with them at family home evening and probably would join in a few hymns with them. A number of years ago Gordon B. Hinckley, the late president of the LDS church spoke of Stegner as being a friend to the people and also praised his book, *The Gathering of Zion* as a fine rendering of the history of the

westward LDS movement.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

How did his feelings regarding the Mormons affect his writing?

### **Robert Steensma**

I don't think it had much of an affect other than in the *Mormon Country*, of course, he dealt with the situation of the Mormons in the Valley, some of their...

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

What kind of affect did the Mormons have on his writing?

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Their affect on his writings I think was not direct, but in many ways he used the Mormons as in *Mormon Country*, for example, the book published in 1940 in which he writes with a great deal of affection about certain Mormon leaders and also Mormon culture. Later he did *The Gathering of Zion*, the subtitle is the story of the Mormon trail which many people consider to be the best one volume history of the Mormon movement westward, and he had many LDS friends, so I think his relationship was quite good, but the affect on his writing I think was rather negligible.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about the University of Utah in that era. What was that like?

### **Robert Steensma**

The University of Utah in Stegner's era was a place much different than it is today. The enrollment varied from about 3,000 to 3,900. It consisted of about a dozen buildings around the President's Circle. It was a University where the

cost of tuition was very cheap. In 1925 when Stegner entered it was \$13 a quarter. By the time he left in 1937 to take a job at Wisconsin it had risen to the price of \$35 per quarter. It was a University that was not nationally known or internationally known as it is today, but it was pretty much a rather parochial university, but Stegner felt that it was a place that really influenced him in so many ways and he has one very fine essay called, "It Is the Love of Books I Owe Them" that deals with his four years at the University as a student.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me just a little bit about Vardis Fisher and his influence on Wallace Stegner.

### **Robert Steensma**

Vardis Fisher was a man who was very influential on Stegner. He had come out of Idaho near Rigby, came to the University of Utah in 1925 with a fresh PhD from the University of Chicago. He taught there for three years and then moved on, but he was a man who was very demanding and had a very condescending attitude toward his students at the University. He told Stegner's class that I intend to take a can opener to your minds, and even though he was quite demanding and quite acerbic, in many ways Stegner felt that he was very influential on his own career because it was Vardis Fisher who encouraged him to write and gave him some very close and valuable guidance.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about The Radical Club and how Stegner fit into that.

### **Robert Steensma**

The Radical Club during the 1920s was an informal group of students at the University, and in a period from 1925 to '28. It was led by Vardis Fisher. Stegner was a member of the group and he was quite attracted to it because it was

intellectually stimulating. They gathered together and they talked about diverse topics such as birth control and the historicity of Jesus Christ. They also invited in speakers who were quite controversial like Scott Nearing, the professor who had been fired from the University of Pennsylvania for unpopular ideas. I think that Stegner, in part, attended this group because it was kind of intellectually fashionable to be a part of a group that went against the prevailing ethics and morality of the university in the state of Utah.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me a little bit about Juanita Crawford. Who was she and how did she fit into Wallace Stegner's life?

### **Robert Steensma**

Juanita Crawford was a woman who had been born in Ferron, Utah who came to the University of Utah and became the fiancé of Wallace Stegner. They were engaged for a while but then she broke off the engagement when Stegner decided that he did not want to get married right away. Instead he wanted to go onto graduate school. After the broken engagement she later married one of Stegner's friends Marvin Broberg, but she's the original for Nola in *Recapitulation*, and her daughter Anne Riordin is a Professor of Modern Dance at the University.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me about the significance of Fish Lake and the cabin there on Wallace Stegner. Tell me about Fish Lake.

### **Robert Steensma**

Fish Lake of course was a very high altitude place and the Stegner's had a summer cabin and they went there quite frequently, and apparently Stegner

took his friend Juanita Crawford there as well as some of the others. We have a couple of pictures of Stegner at Fish Lake, one in which he's wearing his red and white Ute tennis letter sweater and another one with Juanita Crawford in which he's very heavily armed with a gun belt and a pistol at his side. It was a place that provided away from home--a place where they could go for the summer and relax.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Who was Mary Page and how did she fit into his life? How would you describe Mary Page?

### **Robert Steensma**

Mary Page was a young lady that Stegner met when he was a graduate student at the University of Iowa. She was a fellow graduate student and they soon fell in love and then they got married in 1934 and moved to Salt Lake City. She and Wallace were the mother of Page Stegner. She was a woman who was quite talented. Later in life she became an editor for a number of eastern publishers including Houghton Mifflin. She was a woman that with whom Stegner was deeply in love I think until the very end. They were a very devoted couple and she was a very talented and lovely woman.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

If you were describing Wallace Stegner in terms of his temperament and demeanor, how would you describe him?

### **Robert Steensma**

Wallace Stegner, as most people knew him, had a temperament and a demeanor that was quite gentlemanly, polite, concerned, low-key, and yet we know that he inherited a very hot temper from his father, but like most civilized

people, he learned to control it and it very rarely broke out. He was a man who loved music. Obviously he loved books. One interesting sidelight is that he loved square dancing. He loved to participate in square dancing and to call square dances, but his temperament was such that he had no time for anybody who goofed off during square dancing as most people do who are not addicts. But I think Stegner - that Stegner was a man who had no real enemies. He had a way of adapting his manners to the people he met, although he did hold grudges and I suppose that's one part of his character that isn't quite so pleasant. If you got on the wrong side of him he might hold that grudge for a long time.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about his students at Stanford. Some of the best writers in the country came from that program. Why do you think that was? Why do you think so many talented writers went through that program?

### **Robert Steensma**

So many talented writers came through that program at Stanford, I think in part because of Stegner's personality and the way he ran his writing seminars. He was not a man who was liable to lash out as a student, as some creative writing teachers have done over the years. He encouraged them. He allowed them a great deal of latitude in the kinds of things that they wrote, and in his seminar, for example, he never had the students read their own work, but instead he would read them aloud so that the other students in the class could not pick upon somebody that they didn't like, and I think that worked rather well.

Another aspect is that when Stegner started the creative... or I should say when he took over the creative writing program in 1945 there weren't many creative writing programs across the country. Probably the most famous at that time was the one at the University of Iowa.

## Interviewer-John Howe

Some of the students seemed to have some disagreements with Wallace Stegner, especially students like Ken Kesey and I guess some of it was probably the times of the '60s. Talk about that just a little bit.

## Robert Steensma

There were a number of students who came through Stegner's class who had no problems with him, in fact I know of only one and that was Ken Kesey. There was something about Kesey's personality that went against the grain of Stegner's own personality and I think they clashed head on almost from the start. Furthermore, Kesey was part of the counterculture that Stegner couldn't stand. As we know Stegner left Stanford in 1971 on an early retirement and in many ways it was because he could not stand what was going on on campus. Although he was opposed to the war, he could not... he couldn't stand the burning of buildings, the riots, the usurpation of classes, and he saw Ken Kesey as a symbol of that particular attitude toward life, and I think that led, in many ways, to the disagreements. Furthermore I think Kesey was not very amenable to criticism of his work, and that of course can create problems.

## Interviewer-John Howe

Talk about Stegner's nonfiction work like *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*. How important of a work of nonfiction is that?

## Robert Steensma

Stegner's nonfiction is an important part of the cannon. The book, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, which is a story of John Wesley Powell is still I think the finest work on that particular aspect of American history. Stegner was also very much interested in the Mormon movement westward: *The Gathering of Zion* is an excellent book. He was also very much involved with biography and his

biography of his friend Bernard DeVoto--a book called *The Uneasy Chair*--is the only full length biography of Bernard DeVoto, who by the way was born in Ogden.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

How would you describe Stegner's vision of the West, and I'm talking about his vision of demystifying it.

### **Robert Steensma**

Stegner's view of the West was one that departed greatly I think from the traditional mythic interpretation of the West, as found in novels like Zane Grey's, *Riders of the Purple Sage* and Owen Wister's, *The Virginian*. Stegner at one point somewhere in his writing says that, "The American cowboy in the 19th century was a man who was, in effect a wage slave. If he lost a job on one ranch he was blacklisted at all of the others." Furthermore, by the time he was in middle age he was badly crippled with almost all of his bones broken and his fingers... some of his fingers missing, and so Stegner objected very much to that view of the West. He wrote a story later called, "Genesis," a novel that is considered by many to be the best western novel ever written, but in that story, which deals with a cattle drive in Saskatchewan in 1967, there are no gun fights, no bar rooms, no soiled doves, but just the hard work of a group of seven cowboys moving the cattle.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me a little bit about Eastend and Saskatchewan and that influence on *Wolf Willow*.

### **Robert Steensma**

Eastend, Saskatchewan hardly existed at the time that the Stegner's moved

there. The town itself wasn't founded until just a little bit later, but Stegner later on saw it as a place that was formative of his character. He made a visit back there in the 1950's and the memories came flooding back, particularly after he smelled and saw that plant called Wolf Willow. His book...

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me a little bit about Eastend and the influence of Eastend on *Wolf Willow*.

### **Robert Steensma**

Eastend, Saskatchewan was a very formative influence on Stegner's life as a child. Even though it didn't have many of the comforts of later life such as running water and flush toilets and sidewalks and libraries, nevertheless the river and the hills around, the people he played with--all had a major influence on him, and I think as Stegner looked back upon that in his book, *Wolf Willow*, he remembered that area with a great deal of fondness.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Describe Wolf Willow, the plant.

### **Robert Steensma**

Wolf Willow is a plant that is found largely in the Rocky Mountain areas all the way from Saskatchewan and Alberta down to Arizona and New Mexico. It's a plant that grows to a height of about six to ten feet and has yellow flowers. I can't think of the Latin name at the moment, but *Wolfei* is part of that title. I think it's *Silex Wolfei*.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Doesn't it have a pretty distinctive smell--pungent kind of smell?

## Robert Steensma

Yeah. In *Wolf Willow* he tells about picking up a handful of it and holding it to his nose for a few moments and the pungent smell brings back all sorts of memories about swimming in the river and about the people in town, about the Indians, about the royal mounted police.

## Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about Joe Hill. Who was he and how did that book come about?

## Robert Steensma

Joe Hill was a labor leader of the International Worker's of the World, popularly known as The Wobblies, who were very powerful and dominant in the mining regions of the American West. Joe Hill was one of their leaders, and he was a man who was involved in a double murder in a grocery store on West Temple at about 7th south. He murdered the Morrison grocer and his son. He was caught. He was tried, and after numerous trials and appeals he was sentenced to death and he was executed over at the old state prison in Sugarhouse, but his trial was quite controversial, and for years after and indeed down to the present, there are many people who still defend Joe Hill and feel that he was railroaded. Stegner wrote a book called first, *The Preacher and the Slave*, and then later he gave it its more modern title, *Joe Hill* in which he deals with the career, the trial, and the execution of Joe Hill. Stegner at one time knew the daughter of the warden at the state prison and he got the state warden to proceed to lead him through a mock execution all the way from the death cell to the chair where Joe Hill was shot. But the book was quite controversial, and for many years afterwards Stegner received a lot of adverse attention from some of the extreme labor interests. In fact, I think he had a few threats of death on his life.

## Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me just a little bit about *Angle of Repose* and the Pulitzer. How important is *Angle of Repose* in the legacy of the literature?

## Robert Steensma

*Angle of Repose* I think is the finest novel written about a woman in the American West. Up until the time of *Angle of Repose* and of some of the other novels of the American West and women, the woman was often portrayed as a kind of Madonna in a sun bonnet--a woman who always had the resources to bring her family through the most difficult circumstances, who always raised a family that would be the pride of the community, and very rarely as did the other novelists like Rose Wilder Lane, for example, get into some of the real traumas faced by the women who came West. And so in this novel we have Susan Burling Ward who follows her husband all over the West, and because of his very honesty, she is forced to support the family because he's constantly losing his jobs because he refuses to support the lies being put out by the eastern promoters.

## Interviewer-John Howe

Why did Stegner have such a problem with the eastern critics, especially *The New York Times*?

## Robert Steensma

Well, if you believe the current wisdom about the relationship of western writers with the east, you'll find that Stegner was not alone. I think that many western writers, people like Vardis Fisher and others have often complained about the fact that the East does not understand the West, and this misunderstanding is reflected in their attitudes toward western work. You may remember that *Angle of Repose* was never reviewed by *The New York Times*, and later they referred

to him as William Stegner, and they referred to his work as a kind of a variation of the old "Riders of the Purple Sage", and Stegner at one time said that, "To people on the east coast, the map of the United States is like a dumb-bell; New York on one end, L.A. on the other, and United Airlines in between." How much of that is paranoia? I don't know, but certainly it was a feeling that was shared by Stegner and by Vardis Fisher, and even Willa Cather in earlier days. Willa Cather was once told by an eastern editor, "I don't give a damn what happens in Nebraska."

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

What was Stegner's response and the writing community's response to the Pulitzer for *Angle of Repose*?

### **Robert Steensma**

So far as I know it was generally favorable. I know of only one instance of an unfavorable reaction. That was the one that accused him of plagiarism.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Talk about that a little bit and the validity of that charge.

### **Robert Steensma**

The charge of plagiarism was generated by a professor at Idaho State University, Mary Ellen Walsh, who claimed that Stegner had misused the letters of... The controversy regarding *Angle of Repose* was generated by Mary Ellen Walsh, a professor at Idaho State University, who said that Stegner had borrowed, without proper credit, the letters of Mary Halleck Foote, a pioneer artist and writer who followed her husband throughout the West. The truth of the matter is that it's probably not plagiarism, but just a case of Stegner's not being aware of the reactions on the part of the family. The family had given him

permission to use the letters of Mary Halleck Foote and Stegner proceeded to use them, often verbatim. I think that the family finally objected to the love affair in the novel where Susan Burling Ward falls in love with one of her husband's lieutenants, Frank Sergeant and in the end the affair may have caused the death of a daughter. We don't know. Stegner doesn't go into details to suggest that there was a sexual relationship, but it was a kind of thing that spoiled the relationship between Susan Burling Ward and her husband Oliver. Stegner, I think, was simply naive in the way he used the letters. He didn't intend to plagiarize, which is a dishonest thing, but instead he probably should have cleared his use more clearly with the family--with the granddaughters. I think Phil Fradkin in his new book, *Wallace Stegner and the American West*, handles that controversy quite well.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Tell me a little bit about his environmental legacy, especially the wilderness letter. How important is that to the environmental movement?

### **Robert Steensma**

Stegner's wilderness letter was a document based upon a letter that he wrote to a government official, and it's a book that... or rather a letter that points out that wilderness is very important to our culture and to the continuation of our civilization--that if we lose our wilderness, we lose much that makes us human, and I think that that letter in a way epitomizes everything in Stegner's career as an environmentalist. He felt that the West was in danger of becoming something undesirable because first of all with the lack of water, the overdevelopment, and the refusal of people to recognize the limits placed upon the American West by the lack of water. He was very influential in a number of things, for example, the prevention of the building of dams in the Dinosaur National Monument.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Can you talk about that controversy at all, especially what happened in Dinosaur and leading to the building of Glen Canyon Dam?

### **Robert Steensma**

In the 1950s the federal government proposed building a series of dams in Dinosaur National Park. The Sierra Club...

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

Let's start one more time. Tell me about the controversy about Dinosaur National Monument leading to the dams in Glen Canyon.

### **Robert Steensma**

In the 1950s the federal government proposed the building of a series of dams in Dinosaur National Monument. Almost immediately various environmental and conservation groups like The Sierra Club and others began to agitate against the building of the dams. Stegner became involved when he was asked to edit a book, which was eventually published as, *This is Dinosaur*--a book that was very influential in stopping the building of those dams. Stegner later, however, realized that they had made a mistake in stopping those dams because in order to get them stopped they had to agree to the building of the dam at Glen Canyon, and he seemed to feel that later on that they had made a pact with the devil in getting the dams in Dinosaur stopped, but allowing the dam at Glen Canyon to be built.

### **Interviewer-John Howe**

When you think of Wallace Stegner's legacy, what do you think that legacy is, and how should he be remembered?

## Robert Steensma

Stegner's legacy I think is two-fold--first of all there's the matter of the fiction. He was a Pulitzer Prize winner. He won the National Book Award. He published a dozen novels, and he's ranked as one of the foremost American novelist of the last half of the 20th century. He's also remembered, I think, as an environmentalist, and certainly he didn't get caught in to the extremes of the environmental movement, but he was very influential in everything that he wrote about the West and its history and its limitations. But it's interesting that even today he is considered by many to be kind of a saint of the environmental movement and yet he said a number of times that he wanted to be remembered as a writer of fiction. I think he'll be remembered as both, and justifiably so.