

Ian MacMillan

Imagine moving to a remote corner of a rural upstate New York town after having spent your whole life in the North Jersey suburbs of the Big Apple. Your father, after reading a book about the joys of living on a farm, thinks that the farm life is just the thing for his family. He somehow locates a farm that he can rent that is so far out from Garrattsville that the address is in Mount Vision.

When Ian was 14 his family made the move to the farm in August, 1955. Ian's family consisted of his mother, father, and four children, all boys. The oldest son, Charles, had joined the Air Force and was stationed in Maine. The second son, Duncan, was out of high school and left the farm to join the Marines. Ian was the third son and the youngest was Claude. Ian's mother was not well and passed away on Dec. 1, 1955. Ian's father didn't find any good paying work in the farming community and ended up going to Syracuse during the week to work in the telephone industry jobs that he had had in the suburbs. Ian's father died of cancer in 1960.

The boys were left on their own during the week in a poorly heated house with outdoor plumbing. They had to stay up nights to feed the stove to keep the house livable. It was so cold inside that one of their cats froze to death inside the house. They may never have seen a thermometer reading below zero in North Jersey. It must have been a lonely life for the boys, but somehow they made the most of it.

Their situation became known to the school and one of their teachers, Mr. VomSaal became their guardian. They got through Morris Central School on schedule, Ian Class of '59, and Claude, Class of '60. Ian was accepted and attended SUNY Oneonta then known to some as Oneonta Normal School and Claude went to Hartwick. I have no idea who financed their college costs.

In college Ian thought many of the students were a bit too normal and he made friends in the arts community. Some of those were also writers and Ian wrote one story that was published. One of his poetry teachers thought that it was good and urged Ian to try to get into the Iowa Writers Workshop. Ian managed to get in there and polished his writing skills. He applied for one job after finished his MFA at the Iowa Writers Workshop. The job was as a writing professor at the University of Hawaii. He stayed with that joy until he died in 2008.

Ian not only taught writing, he also wrote and published a large amount of work. Some of it was prize winning work. Julie Lynn Mitchell wrote this about his writing in her piece "In the Mail: An Homage to Fiction Writer Ian MacMillan" which appeared in *Bamboo Ridge*, No. 94, 2009,

"A prolific writer, MacMillan authored eight novels and five short story collections. His short fiction appeared in over 100 literary and commercial magazines, and was reprinted in *Pushcart Prize*, *Best American Short Stories*, and *O. Henry Award* volumes as well as other

anthologies. His books have been published by large and small presses, both with and without the help of agents.

MacMillan's most recent novels are *The Bone Hook* (Mutual Publishing, 2009), *The Seven Orchids* (Bamboo Ridge Press, 2006), and *The Braid* (Mutual Publishing, 2005). All three are set and published in Hawai'i, where he lived and taught for 42 years."

Late in his life Ian visited Morris Central School and set up a prize for budding writers. A collection of his books is available at the Village of Morris Library and at SUNY Oneonta. He is probably the most prolific and successful writer to graduate from Oneonta. Certainly he is the most famous one that nobody has never heard about.

Ian died of pancreatic cancer in December, 2008. His wife had died of lung cancer in November, 2008. He is survived by two brothers and two daughters and a few grandchildren .

*Contributions may be made to the  
Ian MacMillan Creative Writing Scholarship for Morris Central School,  
in care of:*

*Judy Matson, District Clerk,  
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