



Tuesday, February 25, 2003

Undertaker brings words to life

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Thomas Lynch doesn't think it's odd for a funeral director to also be known as an award-winning essayist and poet.

"It's like a cop who sings opera or a wrestler who becomes governor," Lynch said. "There's nothing about being a writer that keeps him from doing other work. Although other funeral directors I know probably think I should spend more time at the rotary club."

Aside from his 25 years at Lynch & Sons Funeral Home in Milford, Lynch is quite accomplished as a writer. He's authored three collections of poetry and two books of essays, "The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade," which won the Heartland Prize for nonfiction and was a finalist for the National Book Award, and "Bodies in Motion and at Rest," which won the Great Lakes Book Award.

He published his first volume of poetry, "Skating with Heather Grace," in 1987. He is regularly featured on the op-ed page of The New York Times, The Boston Globe and The Times of London, as well as in the pages of Harper's. He has appeared on C-SPAN, MSNBC, the NBC "Today" program and the PBS series "On Our Own Terms." And in 2001, OU recognized his literary achievements and community service by awarding him an honorary doctorate.

Lynch returns to OU to read selections from his work on Thursday, March 6, at 4 p.m. in Varner Recital Hall. The reading is free and open to the public and will be followed by a reception and book signing. That evening, he will visit with OU students in ENG 386, a workshop in Creative Nonfiction.

Lynch came to OU in the 1960s and wrote his first poems here. He remembers former faculty member Michael Heffernan as a profound influence on his love for writing.

"I owe my writing career to Heffernan," Lynch said. "He was a poet scholar who introduced me to Yates and various American writers. Heffernan was a living poet who also had a Buick, mortgage, girlfriend and a day job. The idea of being an ordinary citizen and writing extraordinary things was new to me then."

Lynch turned to the family trade after leaving Oakland and pursuing his degree in mortuary science. He also left poetry behind, but returned to it after a 10-year absence.

"I think it was about 1980 when I started writing again," Lynch said. "At that time, the last of my children had been born, my business was up and running, and there was vacancy in my intellectual and emotional life that the reading and writing of literature had filled. For me, writing was a natural thing to return to.

"I think, to a certain extent, my profession and poetry both feed into each other because both involve rituals, ceremonies and symbolizing. The common themes for me are sex, death, love, grief. The past, present and future – pretty much the same thing most writers write about."

Lynch also will return to OU as one of the guest faculty for the third annual **Far Field Retreat for Writers**, which offers an opportunity to study the craft of fiction, poetry or creative nonfiction with faculty who are committed teachers and prominent writers, both locally and nationally.

For more information on Lynch's upcoming reading, contact the **English Department** at (248) 370-2250.

SUMMARY

Award-winning essayist and poet Thomas Lynch, who also is a funeral director, will read from his work on Thursday, March 6, at Varner Recital Hall. Aside from his 25 years at Lynch & Sons Funeral Home in Milford, Lynch is quite accomplished as a writer.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, February 25, 2003
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, February 25, 2003
Article Start Date: Wednesday, October 15, 2003

