

## TOM AVERILL ON EDGAR WOLFE

**E**d Wolfe once wrote: "... [T]he facts of a man's life accumulate and get complicated and all tangled up, especially if he lives at all in his mind (and writers do that), and it's hard to remember and truly account for anything, hard to weigh the importance and appraise the value of experience, and hardest of all to express it all adequately."

Hard though it may be, that is the writer's job. Anyone who has read Edgar Wolfe's work—poems, short stories, novels, personal essays—knows that he has done the writer's job extremely well. He would not say that, for Ed is a modest man, but that doesn't mean I have to be modest about him. Few of his friends are.

Ed is a fine writer because, for him, the written word speaks best. I have known him for more than 15 years. During my years at the University, which coincided with his last years there, Ed was my mentor in two of my passions, writing and handball. But it wasn't until I left town and started receiving Ed's letters that I realized I had not known the whole man until I'd seen his voice, his thoughts, his keen perception and even his affections, in writing.

George Edgar Wolfe has had much to make him a whole man, a wide range of experience: a childhood in Ottawa, where he claims to have been small, shy and nearsighted; an education at the then-small University of Kansas from 1924 to 1928; a four-year high school teaching career that included his being the only teacher at Weta (S.D.) High School; a return to KU for graduate school, which did not culminate in a degree, but which saw

him win the 1933 Intramural Singles Handball Tournament; a two-year job as a door-to-door salesman; a seven-year stint as a caseworker for the Wyandotte County Relief agency; and another teaching job, this time for the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth.

Then, in 1947, Ed returned to KU to complete his master's degree and stayed until retirement. Since his undergraduate years, he had wanted to be a poet or novelist, and he was encouraged by his literary mentor, R.D. O'Leary. He became both—his creative thesis, a novelette, won the William Allen White Award, and his poetry was widely published—as well as a fine creative-writing teacher.

During his 30 years on the KU faculty, he taught, wrote, published and played handball. He first took up that game on the advice of Dr. James Naismith, who thought it would enlarge what he diagnosed as "an unusually small heart." I'm sure handball did the job. He also cared for his first wife, Nina Winters Wolfe, '29, who died of multiple sclerosis in 1973. As a student in Ed's class, I remember feeling it a great compliment when he told me he'd shared one of my efforts with Nina, and that she'd enjoyed it.

**A**fter retirement, Ed married Marguerite Everett, '60, and moved to Kansas City. In recent years, he has written some remarkable pieces, especially the lyrical tribute to old Fraser Hall, which appeared in a 1979 *Kansas Alumni*. He recently has been fighting a cancer, and one of his greatest laments was that he was, for a time, too weak to write. Recently, I had a letter. A good one. It was Ed Wolfe, still

writing "adequately," as he would say. But then, perhaps Ed is a writer not only because the written word becomes him, but also because he is compelled to share the whole person he is with other people. If so, this is a good opportunity to celebrate his presence in these pages, and to thank him for sharing himself, as he has, with all of us.

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