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## PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Beloved Author Steve Sanfield Passes Away at Age of 77**

*Highly Acclaimed August House Author Steve Sanfield to Be Honored*

*San Juan Ridge, California – February 19, 2015* – STEVE SANFIELD, an award winning author, poet, folklorist and professional storyteller, as well as a long time resident of San Juan Ridge in Northern California, died at home on Wednesday, January 28 at the age of 77. Sanfield was the author of more than 30 books, including *The Adventures of High John the Conqueror*, *Bit by Bit*, *The Great Turtle Drive*, *A Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry*, *American Zen by a Guy Who Tried It*, *The Rain Begins Below*, *The Perfect Breeze* and the recently published *The Right Place: 77 At 77*. Throughout his life, Steve enjoyed corresponding with other writers, poets and storytellers. He actively encouraged other writers and poets, critiqued their work, and enjoyed collaborating with other artists throughout his distinguished career.

Sanfield's creative work not only spanned many decades, it also took many forms. Called "the master of American Haiku" by Michael McClure and "the master of myth, lore, and word-hoard" by Gary Snyder, Leonard Cohen wrote that, Sanfield "writes about the small things / which stand for all things." Sanfield enjoyed collaborating with musicians since his college days when he read with various jazz groups at George Wein's Storyville in Boston. He continued his exploration of poetry and jazz working with small jazz ensembles at the original Troubadour in Los Angeles. Sanfield collaborated with accomplished musicians and composers as varied as Terry Riley and Jay Seideman. *Five Seasons: A Concerto for Voice and Musical Instruments* was his first collaboration with Paul Humphreys.

His thirty-five year collaboration with artist poet John Brandi produced a wealth of Haiku poems. Their work was regularly published in elegant small press editions. These titles include "Circling: A Cycle of Linked Hoops," "No Reason at All," "Postage Due," and "Clouds Come & Go" (to be published later this year).

Considered one of the founders of the American Storytelling Renaissance, Steve became the first full-time Storyteller-in-Residence in the United States in 1977

under the sponsorship of the California Arts Council. Although he was known as one of the country's foremost Jewish storytellers, his versions of African-American folktales were highly regarded and critically acclaimed. Founder and artistic director of the Sierra Storytelling Festival at the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, he had been featured at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee and numerous venues throughout the United States.

In a recent interview with *The Union* in advance of his November 2014 performance at the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, Sanfield reflected on his life: "The one thing I want to get across is simply to bring back an awareness that poetry can be vital, can be important, can be a necessary part of our lives. If we let it in, it can transform." This poem from his new book says it all:

"embracing his years  
he looks around and says  
yes, this is the right place"

Born Aug. 3, 1937 to parents Harold and Rose Sanfield, Steve grew up in Lynn, Massachusetts. Sanfield loved telling the story of becoming the state yo-yo champ as a boy there. After receiving a BA from the University of Massachusetts in 1957, he moved to Los Angeles. At the age of 22, Sanfield became a Freedom Rider, joining other mixed racial groups who challenged segregation in public lunch counters in the South. In Houston, Sanfield's group was arrested for disturbing the peace after integrating a lunch counter at the union station. A few years ago, Sanfield and others were made honorary citizens of Texas, "an amazing turnaround," Sanfield said, and they were invited to the Oprah Winfrey Show in Chicago, which gave Freedom Riders from around the country a chance to meet each other. Although he had been beaten while in jail, Sanfield reflected recently that, "It was just the right thing to do, and I'm still grateful to this day for the opportunity to do it."

As a young man, Sanfield spent two years traveling in Europe and North Africa, eventually settling on the Greek island of Hydra. Steve returned to Los Angeles in 1963 where he became the first American student of the late Zen teacher Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi. With his first wife Jacqueline Bellon and their young son Aaron, Sanfield moved to Nevada County in 1969, where he built a house on the San Juan Ridge. In 1974 Steve and Jacquie's marriage ended though they remained friends. Sanfield met Sarah Sparks in 1982 while performing at a storytelling festival in New Mexico. Married in 1985, Steve considered his relationship with Sarah a true blessing that he was thankful for throughout the rest of his life.

Steve is survived by his wife, Sarah Sparks, his son, Aaron Sarde-Sanfield, daughter-in-law, Mikaela Sarde-Sanfield, and grandchildren, Violet and Miles. Steve Sanfield will be sorely missed, not only by his family and close

friends but also by all those from around the country who were touched by his humor, his stories and his poetry. He was truly devoted to living life fully and celebrating life through his art. A memorial will be held at the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center in Nevada City, California on March 7th at 1PM.

Donations in his memory may be made to the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, located at 17894 Tyler Foote Rd. Nevada City, CA 95959.

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