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State Poet tries hand at fiction

By **JOSH KRAUTER**
Senior staff writer

William Kloefkorn is primarily a poet, but he's been obsessed with the narrative story as long as he can remember.

Kloefkorn, the Nebraska State Poet, grew up in Attica, Kan., a town of about 600 people. Kloefkorn's love of stories and storytelling began there.

"I knew everybody, and I listened to their stories," he said.

Kloefkorn says his stories come from people and events in his past. He has four children and 11 grandchildren, and he gets stories from them.

"There are stories everywhere," he said.

He didn't tell his own stories until college, he said, and he didn't get serious about writing until graduate school.

"I didn't write at an early age," he

said. "(In college), my professors' interest rubbed off on me. I wrote partly out of an admiration to tell stories and partly out of envy."

He was envious of writers such as Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and books such as "Other Voices, Other Rooms" by Truman Capote. The ability of these writers to put their lives into their art influenced Kloefkorn then and now.

"I wanted to transfer my own experience into writing," he said.

His new book, "A Time to Sink Our Pretty Little Ship," is a collection of four short stories published by Logan House Press. It's a change of pace for Kloefkorn, who usually writes poetry.

"I've wanted to write fiction for a long time," he said. "I've dabbled in it for a long time... I've just always had a kind of fascination for stories, whether they're told orally or on the page."

Kloefkorn said the book was "rather

loosely" thematic.

"Three of the four stories have kind of an initiation theme," he said. "Not all four of them follow that strictly."

Later this month, Kloefkorn will give a reading for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln English department, though the official date has not been set. He said he would read excerpts from two of his stories and would discuss his creative process.

Kloefkorn said fiction writing was harder for him than poetry.

"Fiction takes a lot more time for me," he said. "I have to sit down and stay with it for a long period of time."

He said poetry doesn't require the research and attention to detail that fiction does.

"Fiction writers are nuts," he said. "They're crazy, but they're wonderfully crazy. I admire them greatly."

But Kloefkorn's dabbling in fiction probably won't extend into novels.

"I wrote a novel for my master's thesis," he said. "And it's unpublished, thank God."

Kloefkorn, a retired Nebraska Wesleyan University English professor, has received a lot of attention for his poetry. In 1982, a governor-appointed committee made a recommendation to then-governor Charles Thone for Kloefkorn to be named State Poet. Thone passed the recommendation along to the Legislature, which made the title official.

"There were quite a number of people nominated," he said. "I was both happy and surprised (to be named State Poet) — I still am."

It's a title Kloefkorn will hold for his lifetime.

"I'm hoping it's a long time," he said.

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