Notes From the Director
Susan Shillinglaw

Ten years ago the National Endowment for the Arts launched the BIG READ program. In 2007, the second year, The Grapes of Wrath was added to the list and communities in eleven states chose Grapes from the expanded selection of novels—among them Salinas. Communities who read together, the thinking went, might be more cohesive. Reading binds.

In 2007, when the National Steinbeck Center launched their first BIG READ, Amanda Holder, Director of Marketing, distributed copies of Grapes at the Salinas market. Anthony Newfield and I gave a talk on the book that year in Salinas, and I was fortunate to speak about Grapes in other small communities that I otherwise would never have visited: Havre, Montana (a city whose name I mispronounced until I arrived at the airport in Montana) and Enterprise, Oregon; Bath, Maine and Roxboro and Salisbury, North Carolina. Grapes resonated in each town because Havre had lost a railroad line and jobs; because logging no longer drove the economy in Enterprise, Oregon; because textile mills had closed in North Carolina and cotton fields lay fallow; Steinbeck's narrative spoke to people in these communities, as is the case each time I've been fortunate enough to talk about the book in cities around the U.S., my own "Travels with the NEA" not dog but book by my side.

I hope that Sun, Stone, and Shadows: 20 Great Mexican Short Stories means something equally compelling to Monterey County this September and October, as our community reads the book together. This is the first BIG READ I've helped coordinate, and I've been delighted by the enthusiasm of the NSC staff as well as our partners. Archivist Lisa Josephs and Coordinator of Marketing Eric Mora led the charge; they co-wrote the NEH grant and have organized outreach programs.

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CALANDER
Call 831.775.4721 or visit www.steinbeck.org for more information on our upcoming events.

September 16, 4pm
BIG READ launch: Archives tour; partners' pop up exhibits; Western Stage, "My Life with the Wave"; CSUMB Sharp Nine band; Director Susan Shillinglaw on "Steinbeck's Mexico." Tacos! Complete BIG READ calendar inside.

October 1 & 2, 11-5pm
"From Pen to Brush" As part of Salinas Open Studios, Hijos del Sol will show 20 original paintings by Salinas artists, each inspired by the 20 stories in Sun, Stone, and Shadows, the BIG READ selection. Come to the NSC to create a cempasuchil (marigold) for a loved one and experience the work in progress for the upcoming exhibit, "Days for the Dead."
A Longtime Member from Bonn, Germany, Patrick Moore

Eric Moore, Marketing and Membership Coordinator

My first involvement with the National Steinbeck Center was as a volunteer, greeting visitors at the docent’s desk, providing them with general information about the museum, and urging them to sign our guest book.

If you ever glance at our guest book, one of the most salient trends you’ll notice is just how far some of our visitors come from. I always knew that Steinbeck was an internationally renowned author and that his works had been translated into other languages. However, it is quite different to know that an author’s works have been translated into another language than to meet real people who have been so moved by those works as to travel to the author’s hometown and namesake museum.

Similarly, when I began to work for the National Steinbeck Center as a marketing and membership coordinator, I was struck by how far some of our members come from. One day, when I was processing membership renewals, Patrick Moore’s renewal form stood out to me because of his German address. I decided to reach out to him to find out more about why he has chosen to support the National Steinbeck Center for many years.

The following is the result of an email exchange between Patrick Moore and me:

When Patrick Moore first heard of the National Steinbeck Center, it was still under construction. He was in California visiting his parents, who moved from Detroit to San Jose in the late 1970s. However, his connection to John Steinbeck started long before the Center was built in 1998.

Between 1977 and 2008, Moore worked as a political analyst for Radio Free Europe, an international news and broadcast organization. He first worked for Radio Free Europe in Munich, then in Prague. “Steinbeck visited our offices for several weeks in 1954 and wrote broadcasts for our listeners in Eastern Europe because of his commitment to freedom and democracy, especially to the right to receive and exchange ideas without government interference,” writes Moore. “He was particularly concerned that the communist authorities in Czechoslovakia prevented his friends there from receiving the books that he had sent them.”

In a 1954 speech for Radio Free Europe, Steinbeck said that “Everything around you is trying to destroy you as individuals. You must remember and teach your children that they are precious, not as dull cogs in the wheel of party existence, but as units complete and shining in themselves.”

For Moore, “This dedication to freedom and the rights of the individual makes Steinbeck relevant today and will still ensure him a wide audience tomorrow. He delivers his message in a straightforward prose that most everyone can appreciate.”

Of his favorite Steinbeck novel, 1936’s In Dubious Battle, Moore writes, “In Dubious Battle packs in the social and political dimensions I love in Steinbeck’s work and maintains an almost constant, riveting tension throughout. Although I am also fond of The Grapes of Wrath and East of Eden, there is something to be said for the punch that only a relatively short work like In Dubious Battle can deliver.”

Now, Patrick visits the museum every time he is in California and continues to showcase the power of the individual by supporting the Steinbeck Center. “I strongly believe in grassroots support for projects of great value to the broad public, such as the National Steinbeck Center. Membership enables me to help ensure not only that the wonderful exhibits and bookstore will still be there on my next annual visit from Germany to California, but also that important programs, such as encouraging young writers, can continue.”

Notes from the Director, Continued from page 1

Kudos to both, as well as to our newest hire, Jennifer Kim, who, in her first two weeks on the job, has thrown herself into helping organize the program.

We have a terrific schedule of events published in this issue of the NEWS. Please attend as many as you can. Reading and learning together is a joyful experience—appreciating the rich diversity of Mexican literary voices. Our BIG READ program also includes art, film, drama and music—a range that Steinbeck would appreciate.

Creative expression crosses boundaries.

Without our local partners, none of this would have been possible. All have enthusiastically embraced this book and the possibilities of a community read. Many thanks to each. (See page 8.) On September 16, come to the NSC to help us launch the BIG READ!
New Staff Introduction

Jennifer Kim, Education and Public Programs Coordinator

As a newcomer to the Peninsula and to the NSC in particular, I had to do my homework. I went online, on Yelp and a handful of other sites, to make a to-do list for myself. What must I discover here? What must I indulge in?

So I went about checking off the places on my self-made list: Aquarius, sand-dunes, 17 Mile Drive—check check check. For two months I did all things a conscientious new local had to do, and it was all fun. At the end of that time, when friends back home in San Diego asked if I were settled in, I confidently answered, "Yes. I think I have a grasp of this place now," and smiled with the phone in hand.

I then decided to read Cannery Row, a book I haven't read before. In one sitting, just a few chapters into the book, I realized how much I didn’t fully grasp this place I now call home, Steinbeck Country. School curricula on Of Mice and Men and The Red Pony were distant memories, and I was humbled to begin discovering the Peninsula in earnest, Cannery Row in hand as my guide. Steinbeck’s description of the raucous streets during the day and the quiet stillness at night (formally Ocean View Ave., changed to Cannery Row in 1995, in homage to Steinbeck’s book) fills me with excitement. Strolling down its street now, I feel I’m a part of a history that Steinbeck made come alive.

As I join the team at the National Steinbeck Center, serving as the Education and Public Programs Coordinator, I hope to make many other discoveries. I earned my B.A. in English Literature and M.Ed. at the University of California, San Diego. Since then, I’ve worked in a variety of educational settings, from teaching in secondary schools to counseling in higher education.

Get in touch with me at Jennifer@steinbeck.org. I would love to hear your thoughts on upcoming programs. Suggestions for what you want to see and do are very welcome!

Staff Picks: Favorite Stories from Sun, Stone, and Shadows

“History According to Pao Cheng” by Juan Jose Areola

In the shortest piece in the collection, Etzondo creates a fantastical imaginative piece about the origin of Ignition and vision. The proverbial question of whether it was the chicken or egg that came first is evoked on these three pages with an elaborate and somewhat disturbing twist. Etzondo, born in Mexico City and a lifelong writer and lover of conversations, plays the list between the writer and the character he creates, leaving the reader questioning what is real and what is imagined?

— Jennifer Kim

“The Switchman” by Juan Jose Areola

I have traveled on overnight trains on three continents. While airports in the United States, Europe, and Asia tend to blend together in my memory, train stations and trains do not. Even the problems associated with train travel are unique to a place and change with the seasons. This story captures all of these and location-specific problems in the most absurd terms. The hyperbole is hilarious, having suffered through more train delays than I care to recall. I think the absurdity also comments on the systems of organization we see around us, whether it is train schedules or social order.

— Lisa Josephs

“August Afternoon” by José Emilio Pacheco

If you liked John Steinbeck’s The Red Pony, you might want to give “August Afternoon” a chance. Both are coming of age stories in which the young protagonists are forced to come to terms with their realities. What I loved about “August Afternoon” is that it is told as a recollection from the second person point of view, and it perfectly depicts the self-consciousness and embarrassment inherent in growing up. Added bonus: no pony dies in this one and, at four pages in length, it’s one of the shortest stories featured in Sun, Stone, and Shadows!

— Eric Mora
Thom Steinbeck, 1944-2016
Susan Shillinglaw, Director

I think I last saw Thom when Rachael Maddow accepted the John Steinbeck Award at San Jose State University on February 25, 2012. The pictures from that event tell a small story about Thom, I think. For the formal poses he was solemn—Rachael mimed his frown, teasing him a bit. As she does so well, however, she soon drew out the best from Thom—as they chatted he was engaged, laughing, joking with her.

I first met burly, energetic Thom in 1988, soon after I became Director of the Steinbeck Center at SJSU. Then he was working on a script for In Dubious Battle, a hefty typescript he showed me proudly. Later he wrote his own books, and he was immensely proud of his fiction, as well as he should have been. Thom and I enjoyed sharing stories of our shared interests—his father, California, the ins and outs of the Steinbeck world, his family.

Perhaps the best time I had with Thom in the not so distant past was interviewing him at the Carlsbad Library in 2010, an interview that was taped. Thom recounted “the colorful stuff” about his father. That afternoon he was at his best, wearing a blue work shirt and white fedora, relaxed in a comfortable chair on the stage; he was personable and very, very funny as he read his own piece on Travels with Charley, recalling his memories about “two highly opinioned people in a truck crossing the country.” Charley loved to be sung to, Thom said, and his father wrote a song for him:

Oh Charley dog,
They’re calling you a frog,
Such an insult pretty people never had.
But you sit there in the flood,
With your whiskers full of mud
And the pollywogs refer to you as dead.

Thom recalled his father teaching Angel, the next dog, how to swim in the Sag Harbor pool: “Angel went right down to the bottom, standing… I had to die to get the dog up.” Thom was hilarious and had the audience chuckling throughout. That afternoon he went to perform places as well. “Cathy (in East of Eden) was not all of my mother, but she could be ruthless at times.” He willingly answered audience questions: “How did your father balance writing and family?” “He didn’t.” Thom quickly responded. “All he wanted to do was write…” although he did “his level best” to be a good father. He made slideshows for his sons—“the kind of thing he had as a kid.” When Thom was a child, “I was fairly sure my father was out of work” Thom quipped. “I had no idea what he did” because he never talked to his young sons about writing.

By the time Thom was 13 or 14, he asked his father why he wrote books: To “remind people of their humanity.” Steinbeck told his son. Maybe Thom’s life and work did the same, reminding us of the range in all of us—Thom’s hearty laugh float through a life that wasn’t always easy as a famous author’s son.

I think I sent this letter to Thom, I hope so. In 1982, John wrote his sister Beth about Thom, comparing his two sons, as a parent should never do—and yet we can’t help ourselves: “I’ve always felt that Tom was the deeper… Tom is moody and inward and not nearly as good company, but I think there is more there if it can ever get out… there has always been a difference. For one thing, John does not do original thinking but Tom does…”

In fact, in darkness and in light there was a lot of his father in Thom Steinbeck—the first son named after his father’s favorite uncle, Tom; (Uncle John in The Grapes of Wrath, Tom in East of Eden). All were deep, “original” thinkers.
NEA Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.

In May, the National Endowment for the Arts awarded the National Steinbeck Center a BIG READ grant, one of 77 communities in the United States to receive funding for 2016-17. From September 16, Mexico's Independence Day, to November 1, the Day of the Dead, Monterey County will read Sun, Stone, Shadows: 20 Great Mexican Short Stories. Copies are available in English and Spanish at the NSC bookstore.

JOIN THE BIG READ! Check inside for full schedule of Big Read events in your community!

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"Voices of California," Stanford University

"At Everett Alvarez High School the genre of the short story is alive and well with assistance from the National Steinbeck Center and the BIG READ Grant support. Our students at all grade levels study and write short stories including classroom instruction of Steinbeck's Mice and Men to writing their own stories for a Salinas Union High School Annual Short Story Contest. The past two years our students have won awards in the local District Contest. Trying to make literature relevant to today's student can be a challenge. Culturally the short stories in the Sun, Stone, and Shadows book will add meaning for them."

--John Wood, Everett Alvarez High School (Salinas, CA)
Reading Sun, Stone, and Shadows at Everett Alvarez HS

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Salinas Valley Comic Con
Hartnell College Building C (Student Center)
411 Central Ave., Salinas
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