

Clay Eals '74 faces the music with 'exhaustive' Goodman biography

By Rebecca Purice
Undergraduate student

Clay Eals '74 visited Eugene in May to promote his recently published biography of Steve Goodman, one of the most celebrated folk music singers and songwriters of the seventies, who lost his fifteen-year battle with leukemia in 1984.

Weighing in at a hefty 798 pages, *Steve Goodman: Facing the Music* is the product of more than eight years of extensive research and draws on more than 1,050 interviews with family members, friends, and celebrities, including Arlo Guthrie, Jimmy Buffett, Steve Martin, and Goodman's high-school classmate Hillary Rodham Clinton.

"I'm pretty sure that in years to come if you were to look up the word 'exhaustive' in an English-language dictionary, all they will need to do is put a picture of Clay Eals beside the word and everyone will understand the meaning instantaneously," wrote online magazine editor Richard Marcus in a recent book review. Marcus was commenting on the 2,200 total contributors Eals acknowledged in the book.

Eals first became a fan of Goodman while attending the UO. By the time he saw Goodman in live performances in Eugene—for the first time in 1977 when he opened for Randy Newman at McArthur Court and then in a solo show in 1981 at the WOW Hall—Eals owned all of the singer's albums.

"He was the best entertainer I ever saw," says Eals of Goodman who is known for such songs as "You Never Even Call Me by Name," "Banana Republics," and "City of New Orleans," which Johnny Cash deemed "the best damn train song ever."

"I wooed my wife, Margaret Bakken '71, with Goodman's songs by sending her tapes, and it must have worked, because we just celebrated our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary," says Eals.

It was in January of 1999, after attending a Goodman tribute show in Washington, D.C., that Eals decided to pay his own tribute to the legendary singer. But instead of putting on a concert to honor his idol, he began writing his biography instead. Shortly thereafter, Eals opted to work part-time in order to travel for research and interviews, and by 2003 he quit his job of thirteen years as a curriculum writer and publications editor for Seattle's Fred

Hutchinson Cancer Research Center to fully devote himself to the book. "Not to sound morbid, but this book, I discovered, is what I needed to write before I die, and I can die much more peacefully now," says Eals.

Eals first began his career as a journalist at the age of eleven, when he wrote a neighborhood newspaper. By the time he joined his high school's newspaper staff, he was also working for the local weekly, *The Mercer Island Reporter*. "Somewhere in that childhood progression it became clear to me that journalism was my future," says Eals.

In 1969, Eals came to the UO and spent the next five years earning his B.A. degree in journalism by completing the news-editorial sequence. "It took me five years to finish instead of four because I ended up skipping classes and withdrawing early from courses because the *Oregon Daily Emerald* work was so compelling," says Eals.

"While my journalism classes were invaluable, my true education came in implementing the classroom lessons in my day-to-day work for the *Emerald*."

Eals' most vivid memory from his years as a journalist student includes spending a night in the Eugene jail after being arrested while covering a war protest for the *Emerald*. According to Eals, then-President Robert D. Clark wrote the police chief late that night to verify that he was on duty as a reporter, an action that triggered his release. "The SOJIC's hallmark was that it provided valuable shoe-leather training in how to be a journalist. If you took to heart the principles and practices that the courses offered, you could walk out of there with a degree and have no trouble landing a job and thriving at it," says Eals.

After graduation, Eals immediately found employment as the Eugene correspondent for *The Oregonian*, a position he would fill for eight years. "I was quite floored and fortunate for my first 'real' job to be for the Northwest's largest newspaper, but that would not have been possible if not for the UO SOJIC," says Eals.

After leaving *The Oregonian*, Eals spent the next fifteen years working as a reporter, photographer, and editor for four other publications. He then spent two years teaching journalism and headed several book projects. "Basically, everything I've done has involved putting ink to paper," says Eals.

As he continues his nationwide tour to promote Goodman's biography, Eals remains what he calls a "gainfully unemployed" journalist. "My first priority is to land a real job again," says Eals. "I'll be looking to work for an organization or cause with a conscience," he added.

Eals hopes his work will inspire future students in the SOJIC. "Embrace the delicious characteristics that make writing sing, such as concrete, sensory description and impact words placed at the beginning or end of sentences," said Eals, offering advice to up-and-coming print journalists. "Most of all, wear your passion on your sleeve because nothing happens without it."

If you would like to purchase *Steve Goodman: Facing the Music*, look for a copy at your local bookstores. For a discounted price and autographed postcard, you may purchase the book at www.clayeals.com. All books include a CD with music recorded by folk musicians whose lives have been touched by that of Steve Goodman.

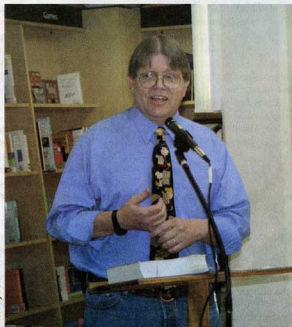


Photo by Jim Gleason

Clay Eals '74 at a reading of Steve Goodman: Facing the Music at the UO Bookstore in May.