

VIEWPOINTS

EXPLORING
SOUTH DAKOTA

By Katie Hunhoff
Editor at South Dakota Magazine

The West And
The Universe

BY KATIE HUNHOFF

Badger Clark would be packing his bags for a return home to Deadwood if the old poet were alive today, because that's where this year's South Dakota Festival of Books will be celebrated Sept. 24-27.

Our state's annual book festival combines some of Badger's favorite things — writers, readers and the fresh Black Hills air. It's a special weekend in which local writers, readers and thinkers gather together to discuss and reflect from a regional point of view. This is already the 13th annual festival. The event has been alternating between Deadwood and Stoups Falls. Both are wonderful sites, but the northern Black Hills are especially tantalizing as the aspen and birch change color.

Badger Clark, who served as South Dakota's first poet laureate, had a special connection to Deadwood. He moved there in 1898 with his parents when he was 15 years old. His father, a Methodist minister, hoped the altitude would benefit Mrs. Clark's illness, tuberculosis. Deadwood was then a wild frontier town. But it was also an exciting place, rich with culture and home to a variety of people with interesting life stories. Clark attended school, loved to read and came to love nature. He was also able to spend time on his uncle's Wyoming ranch, the beginning of his cowboy career.

Unfortunately the mountain air did not revive his mother's health and she passed away shortly after they arrived. Three years later, Rev. Clark remarried Rachel Anna Morris. She was a drama teacher from Iowa, and also a poet and magazine writer. No doubt her presence greatly shaped Clark's life as a writer and thinker.

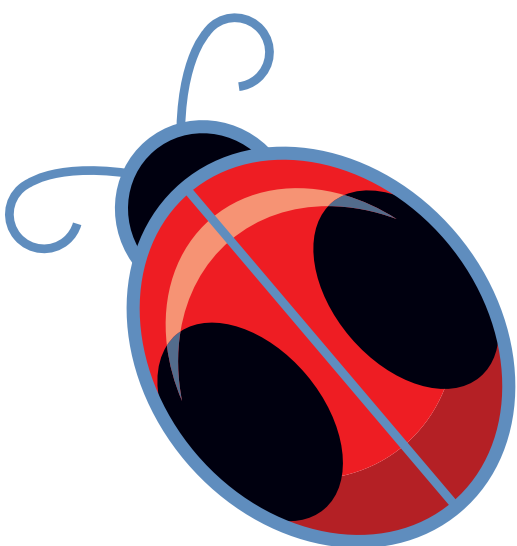
Clark graduated from Deadwood High School in 1902 and was at a crossroads on what to do next. He eventually enrolled at Dakota Wesleyan University for one year. Then, either for adventure or money, he signed up to help with a colonizing effort in Cuba following the Spanish-American war. He was employed on a plantation that bred razor-back hogs and he worked as a ranch hand and stevedore. He ended up in jail after his boss shot another plantation owner. A scrapbook of Clark's Cuban adventures can be seen at the DWU library. While in the Cuban prison his imagination was sparked by the personalities of fellow prisoners. You'll find some of Clark's earliest poems in that Cuban scrapbook.

He continued his cowboy adventure near the Mexican border, where he took up drawing and began playing the guitar. He began to write in earnest; inspired by the many people he met passing through the border country. In 1910 he returned to the Black Hills, living in Hot Springs first, to take care of his aging parents. After they died, he moved to Custer State Park where he lived in the Badger Hole, a log cabin, until he died in 1957.

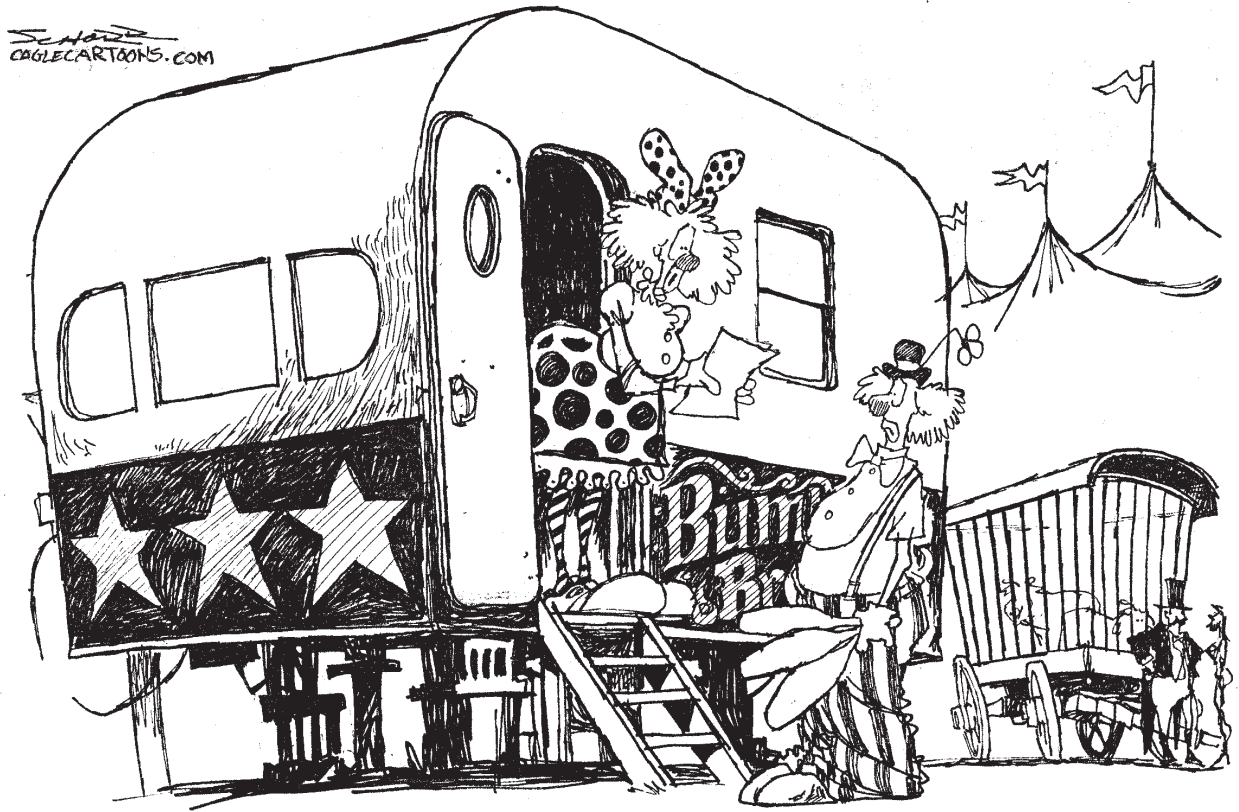
Clark was named South Dakota's poet laureate in 1939, an honor he held for life. Someone once said that Clark's talent was his ability to "tie the West to the Universe." That's a good way to describe what the book festival attendees and presenters do each year when they gather in September. We hope to see you out there.

Katie Hunhoff is the editor of South Dakota Magazine, a bi-monthly publication celebrating the people and places of our state. For more information visit www.SouthDakotaMagazine.com.

Something
bugging you?



E-mail a letter to the editor:
shauna.marlette@plaintalk.net



"IT'S A NOTE FROM JUNIOR... HE RAN AWAY TO JOIN THE TRUMP CAMPAIGN..."

Act Your Age: The Definition Of A Seener

BY PAULA BOSCO DAMON

"I am a Seener (senior teenager). I have everything I wanted as a teenager, only 50 years later. I don't have to go to school or work. I get an allowance every month. I have my own pad. I don't have a curfew. I have a driver's license and my own car. The people I hang out with are not scared of getting pregnant. And they do not use drugs. And I don't have acne. Life is great!" — Source unknown

Speaking of age, remember when the saying "act your age" was insulting. Not anymore. If anyone so much as hints at such a thing, my youthful instincts kick in.

Even though my body feels the pain of nearly 50 years of chasing the American Dream, good luck telling my head that.

When my dad was in his 70's, he always used to say, "In my mind, I'm still 35." I think that's what kept him young.

So you can imagine my elation when stumbling upon the article "You're not too old for that" published in a recent issue of AARP Magazine.

Thwarting any notion of aging, this piece really does think outside the box when it comes to pushing the envelope.

In fact, from all accounts, the sky's the limit for people over 50, although not without its risks.

I suppose that's why the article comes with those little warning labels, rating each senior challenge as "physically dangerous," "incredibly expensive," "potentially embarrassing" or "utterly impossible."

Things like playing drums in a rock band, becoming a fashion model and, yes, having a baby. [You've got to be kidding?] Although, while the health risks of giving birth after 50 are well documented, some 677 U.S. women did just that in 2013.

Other possibilities include scaling a mountain, piloting a plane, becoming a doctor and entering the ring as a prize fighter.

I know most of these ideas aren't exactly the retirements we've envisioned all these years, but in reality, I guess you're only as old as you feel.

Hopefully, as the largest generation ever, we Baby Boomers will age gracefully.

I don't care how old you are — something has to be done about TV remotes.

Talk about complicated. Not only do I struggle figuring them out, I look like a remote control idiot trying to make them work.

There's got to be a simpler way to watch my favorite shows and movies without having to fumble with all of those buttons and arrows [which, by the way, I can't see without my AARP magnifying glass.] Why not make voice

commands universal on all remote controls?

Talk about learning how to do the impossible, did you hear about the dog who rides the city bus in Seattle?

He's a two-year-old black Lab mix named Eclipse. His owner taught him how to take the bus all on his own to the local dog park and back. [Now, that is one smart puppy!]

Eclipse isn't the only canine hopping public transportation these days.

According to a Huffington Post report, there are stray dogs in Moscow, Russia, that have learned how to commute in and out of the city on subways.

Now, if dogs can navigate big city public transit systems, maybe I could learn how to fly a plane or become a doctor. But I'd be happy settling for knowing how to work the remote.

SOURCES: "You're not too old for that," Brennen Jensen and Jim Meyer, AARP Magazine, June/July 2015; "Seattle dog figures out buses, starts riding solo to the dog park," Huffington Post, Jan. 13, 2015

Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning writer whose columns appear weekly in regional newspapers of the Upper Midwest. For more information, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com.

THINKING ABOUT HEALTH

Consumers Are Becoming Fed Up with Skyrocketing Drug Costs

BY TRUDY LIEBERMAN

Rural Health News Service

Late this summer the Food and Drug Administration approved two new drugs for lowering cholesterol. Repatha and Praluent are aimed at patients with very high cholesterol levels who haven't been helped by commonly used statins or other therapies. The new drugs' debut was marked by the usual hype touting the wonders of the latest pharmaceuticals.

"I can tell you there is a lot of hope on the part of our patients," said Dr. Seth Martin, associate director of the lipid clinic at Johns Hopkins. "There is such a high need for these medications."

This new drug launch, though, was different from others I've seen. This time there was serious concern from insurers, state Medicaid programs and others about the price tag for both drugs, which are expected to cost between \$14,000 and \$15,000 per year. Patients take an injection of the drug every two weeks at a price of around \$560 for each shot. Multiply that by the millions who will take the drug, and that's a good chunk of change by any standard.

"The approval of Repatha is another example of a breakthrough medication with too high a price tag," says John Rother, who heads the National Coalition on Health Care and its Campaign for Sustainable Rx Pricing.

Rother's campaign has had some success raising public awareness about the high cost of medicines spurred on no doubt by the rising prices for generic drugs and the increasingly common practice among insurers of shifting the cost of expensive specialty drugs (those for complex, chronic, and costly conditions) to patients themselves by requiring them to pay high deductibles and high coinsurance. Coinsurance for specialty drugs can mean paying between 30 and 50 percent of a drug's price out of pocket.

No wonder consumers are asking, "What's going on here?" The latest Kaiser Health Tracking Poll offered some surprising findings. Seventy-two percent of Americans think drug costs are unreasonable. About the same percentage said drug companies put profits before people. While about three-quarters of those questioned said paying for their medicines was easy, one quarter did not, especially those with low incomes and those who use a lot of drugs.

The poll findings are significant considering that historically Americans have been in love with new drugs and medical devices and have been willing to pay almost any price for them.

That love affair may be cooling as the cost implications of Sovaldi, the \$84,000 drug to treat hepatitis C, and the ever-increasing price of medicines to treat common diseases like

diabetes begin to sink in. This summer the California Association of Health Plans estimated that even though hepatitis C drugs are very effective, to treat just 10 percent of the 175,000 patients who have coverage from insurance programs run by the state—such as Medicaid and the state employees plan—would cost California \$1 to \$2 billion for one year.

The cost for treating diabetes is zooming up, too. In its latest drug trend report Express Scripts, the pharmacy benefit manager, found that for the fourth year in a row spending on all diabetes drugs was higher per person per year than it was for any other class of traditional drugs. The reason: Some people take three or four different diabetes medications, and more people are taking them.

What's the solution? While the answer up until now has been "let the market prevail," the Kaiser poll discovered that large numbers of Americans both Democrats and Republicans favored greater transparency in how drug makers set their prices.

A handful of states are calling for drug makers to disclose the costs of manufacturing and developing their pharmaceuticals for drugs that cost more than \$10,000 for a course of treatment. Some states are trying to limit what consumers pay by capping the amount insurers can charge them for coinsurance and copay-

ments, flat dollar amounts. The drug industry opposes these efforts.

Perhaps the more important question is whether these state initiatives will make drugs cheaper. Many experts including Rother don't think so. "The underlying cause is the incredibly steep prices that are unsustainable regardless of how we handle the insurance," he says. "The problem is not who pays but that drugs cost too much."

The Kaiser poll found that more than 80 percent of Americans want the government to negotiate prices of drugs for Medicare, something the law forbids thanks to lobbying pressure from pharmaceutical companies. Negotiations are precisely what drug makers fear.

But if more drugs with \$84,000 price tags show up, something has to give. Will the public make high drug prices a campaign issue?

What are your experiences with high drug prices? Write to Trudy at trudy.lieberman@gmail.com.

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