

don't feel like I fit around people." Around people, he is giving a sort of performance. "But an honest performance." Sometimes he loves it, performing, fronting a band, officiating at weddings. "There's tension, but fun tension, like scary movies. I like the attention and the tension."

So ask to watch him work, ask him to ignore you, and it doesn't work. That's a private part of him, reserved for himself and the animals. He'll start offering you books or telling you stories, and if you patiently sit around, pretending to use a computer in his office until he forgets you're there, he will not forget you're there. He will grow slightly agitated and need some alone time with the lemurs after you're gone.

His last day is a whirl of well-wishers, friends, leftover food from the party the day before, paperwork, gifts, tears and hugs. "I don't like to be touched," he says to one hugger, "but being hugged is fine."

He hadn't been assigned to do the lines that morning—the shift that starts before sunrise, when the animals get their breakfast and their enclosures are cleaned out. He had e-mails to read, but people kept coming by for hugs and predicting he'll be back. He says no, never coming back. He seems to mean it.

Even friends who aren't physically present are distracting him. "Happy birthday to you," he sings into a friend's voice mail, gurgling the last line. "Happy Jimmy Page's birthday, happy your birthday, happy your aunt's birthday yesterday." He attends to the needs of the humans for hours, their need to say goodbye, to say they would miss him. He almost always has a specific memory or thought for each, as he thanks them and assures them he won't miss this place and, after some time, they won't miss him.

He's proudest of his work with William the gibbon in 1978. William was a juvenile living with his parents when he got stuck in the enclosure and broke his arm. He was in the hospital so long—so long in the company of humans—that his parents rejected him when he got back. And because his hospital experience was scary and painful, people now made William fearful and angry. He was kept out of the exhibit for a while, off by himself.

Kessler sat in his enclosure each day, doing nothing except being nonthreatening. No mask, no gloves. Back then, this was acceptable zookeeper behavior—interaction not initiated or welcomed by the animal.

William would brachiate around in the farthest corner from Kessler, swinging limb to limb, elaborately ignoring the 130-pound human in the room. Over the course of a week, William came closer and closer, until his feet would brush his keeper's head as he swung by. Eventually he would put his head on Kessler's sweatshirt and go to sleep. There's a picture with William's arms around Kessler's head.

One thing he will miss from the zoo: watching the howler monkeys eat. Jolla likes beets but not the squiggly end of the taproot. She will pick it up, put it down, eat something else, return as if to see if the bit she doesn't like is still there. Maybe it got better! You can learn so much about optimism from her, Kessler says. "People tell me she's just stupid," he says, shaking his head at that human stupidity.

Twelve years ago, Kessler walked with a cane, couldn't turn his head and could sleep only an hour and a half at a time because of his arthritis.

Thirty-six years ago he called his psychiatrist to say he had everything ready to commit a tidy, no-fuss suicide, just a hose and towels in a car exhaust pipe. His doctor had him hospitalized for four days.

Then, at 27, he taught himself to be happy. "You learn from evolution, from animals. If

you have a strategy that doesn't work, change your strategy."

His new strategy was to avoid introspection. Completely. "Working with animals made me start thinking about other things more. And when I was able to start thinking about other animals more, I was able to include humans in that group." Understanding William the gibbon, for example, and building his trust, was a big "breakthrough with myself."

"The real change was Patricia," he says. "But I probably couldn't be with her if I hadn't been working with animals."

According to dominant psychology and philosophy, introspection is the key to living right. But Kessler's unexamined life is the only kind he wants to live.

For obvious reasons, it's difficult for him to explain how he stopped being introspective. Working with animals is one way, but there were others. When he worked alone off-exhibit, he narrated his novels in his head. He noticed that closing certain doors in the building was musical, producing two notes, a seventh interval: the first two notes of a song from "West Side Story": "Somewhere."

Sometimes he needs to go alone to see if Molly wants a belly rub. Lemurs and Reuben the howler are the only ones in the Small Mammal House to much enjoy the touch of a human. But lemurs are not pets. They did not evolve to be companions for humans, to cheer us up or give us something to love. Molly indicates if she wants a belly rub, not unlike a dog, and a keeper may administer it, but the belly rub is entirely for the animal. That's important to Kessler.

It turns out Molly wants a belly rub on Kessler's last day, after he has finally gotten rid of all the people and sneaks off to see her.

Afterward, he keeps putting off leaving, until his shift stretches to 11 hours. And because the rock hyraxes have been moved away from the lemurs they were scaring, here's Gus, too present-focused to understand "goodbye" but seeming to say goodbye, popping his head up, watching the keeper leave for the last time, and the keeper—finished with crying, hugs and goodbyes with people—goes down, face first.

Suzanne Hough, the volunteer coordinator, is leaving with him, and she joins him on the floor. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he says. "No. No, no, it's okay."

After a moment, Hough speaks. "The floor can be tricky this time of night," she says, generously. She helps him up. He's fine, as far as he lets anyone know.

Moments later he is calm again, and performing. "Well, that was a surprise!" he says breezily. Hough and Kessler walk out into the cold night.

Inside the House, the hundred-odd residents have no sense that their time as keepers of David S. Kessler has come to an end.

TRIBUTE TO KATHERINE PATERSON

MR. LEAHY. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor today to talk about a treasured Vermont author, Katherine Paterson. Her award-winning prose has won accolades near and far, but her writing has reached more than just those who have read her published words. In 2004, she started a letter exchange with an American soldier based in Afghanistan. Upon his return, she helped him launch his writing career.

Trent Reedy of the Iowa Army National Guard was enthralled with Paterson's master work, "Bridge to Terabithia," while deployed to Farah,

Afghanistan. Reedy's wife Amanda sent him the book, and he loved it so much that he read it in one sitting and sent a thank you note to the author.

Katherine's husband John, whom I knew as a gentle soul, sorted her mail and made sure that his wife saw the letter from Trent. A correspondence began between the two, and Trent finally revealed his intent to become a writer. Upon his return, Trent visited Katherine and John in Vermont and at Katherine's urging, and with her recommendation, studied writing at the Vermont College of Fine Arts and later wrote his first novel, "Words in the Dust."

As someone who considers Katherine and her late husband to be special friends, I was thrilled to read Sally Pollak's article in the Burlington Free Press, "Soldier finds lifeline in letter exchange with Vermont author." In fact I was so pleased, I called Katherine the day the story was published.

In addition to being a Vermont treasure, Katherine is an acclaimed author whose stories will be read for generations. Marcelle and I have enjoyed them, our children have enjoyed them, and now our grandchildren enjoy her stories. Katherine's influence is also felt through the many writers she has mentored, including Trent Reedy.

In honor of Katherine Paterson, I ask that Sally Pollak's story from the February 23, 2014, edition of the Burlington Free Press be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, Feb. 23, 2014]

SOLDIER FINDS LIFELINE IN LETTER EXCHANGE WITH VERMONT AUTHOR (By Sally Pollak)

While serving in Afghanistan Trent Reedy wrote Katherine Paterson to say thank you; the friendship that emerged changed his life.

The truck pulled into the U.S. Army base in Farah, Afghanistan, on another scorching desert day. This July, 2004, delivery promised exciting things: The cook was expecting a load of steak. He had rustled up some potatoes to serve with the meat.

The soldiers in the unit, housed in a stable with a well that often ran dry, were eager for a real meal. They'd been eating field rations called MREs, meals ready to eat. Yet when the cook opened the coveted steak he almost vomited. The meat had gone rancid en route, recalled Trent Reedy, a soldier in the unit. The meal was scrapped.

The truck also carried the mail. In it was a package for Reedy, sent by his wife in Iowa. She had mailed him a book by Katherine Paterson, "Bridge to Terabithia."

Paterson, who lives in Barre, is an acclaimed novelist who writes books for children and teenagers. She is a former National Ambassador for Young People's Literature whose honors include two National Book Awards and two Newbery Medals, the first for "Bridge to Terabithia," published in 1977.

Reedy's wife, Amanda, read "Bridge to Terabithia" in sixth grade. She sent her husband the book after he mentioned to her that the stories he was thinking about concerned young people. Reedy had never read a Paterson book.

The day it arrived at the army base, he read "Bridge to Terabithia" in one sitting. It

would become a kind of lifeline for a frightened young man in a faraway place with dreams of writing. Reedy read Paterson's book in the place that would be the setting for his first novel. "Bridge to Terabithia" was also the starting point of a friendship between Reedy and Paterson.

"It was amazing," Reedy said the other day by telephone from his home in Spokane, Wash. "I needed that reminder that there was still hope and still beauty in the world. At that time in my life there was none. There was nothing except guns and fear. I was really not at all sure that I was ever going to get out of that place."

"This book gave me a little bit of beauty at that time, and I needed it. Not the way I need a new app for my iPad. I needed it to keep my soul alive."

EVERYTHING WAS DIFFERENT

Reedy, 35, was an English major at the University of Iowa when he enlisted in the Iowa Army National Guard. Clinton was president. Reedy never imagined he'd be deployed to fight in a war. He had graduated from college and was working two jobs: substitute teacher and monitoring a security camera at a store.

Ten years ago, on a shift at his security job, Reedy got a phone call from his sergeant.

"Stampede," the commanding officer said, using the code word that signaled the guard soldiers were activated for war, Reedy said.

"With one phone call, everything was different," he said.

After basic training at Fort Hood, Texas, Reedy was sent to western Afghanistan. Paterson's book reached him about six months after the word "stampede" altered his life. The day "Bridge to Terabithia" arrived, Reedy had a rare break from his three-part routine: the unit's mission (providing security for reconstruction efforts), guard duty, sleep. He read the book.

"Bridge to Terabithia" is about two friends—a boy and a girl—who create an imaginary forest world where they play together and share adventures. The world is shattered by an accident: the girl drowns in the river the friends cross by rope swing to get to Terabithia. Paterson wrote the book after her son David's close friend was killed by lightning when the children were eight.

After reading the book, even as he carried his loaded M16 "scanning my sector to make sure there weren't any hostiles in the area," all he could think about was Paterson's novel.

"I thought maybe I can keep going if I remember kids are still having friendships," he said. "And the adventures of growing up."

On Aug. 1, 2004, from Farah City, Afghanistan, Reedy wrote Paterson a letter. He sent it through her publisher—unsure if it would reach her. The letter begins with an apology that he didn't type it. Reedy explains that he is writing from Afghanistan, where he is on a mission "in support of Operation Enduring Freedom."

He thanks Paterson for a book that "mesmerized" him.

"You wrote an absolutely beautiful novel and I, like Jessie Aarons, fell in love with Leslie Burke," Reedy wrote, referring to characters in Paterson's book. "... Maybe it was because she was a spark of beauty in a land and a war where beauty is of so little importance."

In Vermont, where Paterson moved with her family 28 years ago, Reedy's letter made its way to her Barre home. It arrived in a batch of mail sent from her publisher. Paterson, 81, estimates she gets hundreds of letters a year, many from students who are encouraged by their teachers to write.

(Paterson described a humorous note: "You're the best writer in the world," the

student wrote. "Sometime I'm going to read one of your books.")

A WRITER ON MY HANDS

Paterson was married for 51 years to John Paterson, a pastor who died in September. They raised four children together, and have seven grandchildren. After John Paterson's retirement in 1995 from the First Presbyterian Church in Barre, he took up the practice of reading Katherine Paterson's mail. Each year, he passed on to Katherine Paterson a handful of letters among the hundreds he read. John Paterson selected Reedy's letter and gave it to his wife.

"You just read it and weep," Katherine Paterson said. "And you think this poor, lonely kid out there, not knowing what was going to happen to him."

She was struck by another aspect of his letter: "By the time I finished that letter," Paterson said, "I knew I had a writer on my hands."

The two became pen pals, a friendship whose beginnings remain a source of happy amazement for Reedy.

"I didn't need to hear back," Reedy said. "I just wanted to thank her for letting me keep going. And I thought she should know that what she's doing is really important."

Yet he received a response in October, 2004. "She talked about how special it feels for a reader to appreciate this story she had written that seemed, at the time of her writing it, to be almost too personal to share," Reedy recalled.

The next month, on leave in Iowa, Reedy bought all the Katherine Paterson books he could find and brought them back to Afghanistan with him.

"I read those and loved them," he said. "There were some Afghans who were learning English, and I passed along the books to them and talked about how much I enjoyed her books."

What Reedy initially kept to himself in his correspondence with Paterson was that he aspired to be a writer. He decided to share this when it occurred to him he might not make it home alive. But he never sent her any writing (apart from the letters), mindful of imposing on her.

Reedy did seek Katherine Paterson's advice about graduate writing programs, and she recommended Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. Paterson is a trustee of the college, whose low-residency programs include children's and adult literature.

"I said 'impose,'" Paterson recalled. "Plenty of people impose on me that I don't like nearly as much as I like you."

Based on his letters, Paterson offered to write a letter of recommendation for Reedy. He accepted only after a letter he expected fell through, she said.

Reedy was accepted at Vermont College of Fine Arts, the only MFA program he applied to. It was there that he wrote the manuscript for his first novel, "Words in the Dust." The book, published by Arthur A. Levine Books, tells the story of an Afghan girl and her family. It concerns the girl's love for words; and her search for a connection to her dead mother, and for beauty in a place where it's not so easy to find that.

Reedy's story was inspired, in part, by a girl he met in Afghanistan. Like the character in the novel he would write, the child had a cleft lip. Soldiers in Reedy's unit pooled their money to pay the girl's transportation to a hospital, where a U.S. Army doctor performed surgery to repair her face.

"She faced this whole thing with this wonderful sort of quiet courage, this incredible dignity," Reedy recalled. "I promised her that I would do whatever I could to tell her story. She couldn't understand me, but that's what I told her. In the army, we have

to keep our promises, so you don't make many. I think if I hadn't made that promise, I wouldn't have been able to stick through to the end to write that book."

He was also encouraged by Katherine Paterson to continue writing the book. Her support came amid concerns about cross-cultural writing: a white man from Iowa writing a novel about a disfigured girl in war-torn Afghanistan.

"I asked her if this made any sense, and if she thought it was a good idea to write this," Reedy said. "And she said, 'Well, I think you should try.' And that was all the permission I needed."

Paterson, who was born in China, has written books set in Japan and China. The notion that a writer can't write about a foreign culture, its people and places, essentially says imagination is worthless, she said.

"Ideally, she could write her own story," Paterson said of Reedy's protagonist. "But she can't yet. And somebody needs to tell it for her. And I do believe in the power of imagination. Tolstoy can write about women very well, and he has never been one."

TO BE A WRITER

Reedy's book, with an introduction by Katherine Paterson, was published three years ago. He dedicated it to Paterson and his father.

"I loved the book," she said. "And if my name was going to call attention to it and my name was going to help promote it, I'd write an introduction."

In her introduction, Paterson wrote in part: "I am profoundly grateful for an introduction to a land and culture that are foreign to me through this beautiful and often heartbreaking tale of one strong and compassionate girl. She will live on in my heart and, I feel sure, the heart of every reader of this fine book."

Before his first trip to Vermont, Reedy wrote once more to Katherine Paterson. He said he'd be honored, should he be accepted to Vermont College, to buy her a cup of coffee. Sure, she said, but Paterson also had an idea: Why don't you come and stay at our house the night before your residency begins?

In July, 2006, Katherine Paterson "and Mr. Paterson," to use Reedy's words, picked him up at the airport in Burlington and drove him to their Barre home.

He was very nervous about meeting Katherine Paterson, Reedy said, expecting her to show up in an expensive car and drive him to her rich mansion. But he found that Paterson, "arguably the most successful middle-school author who is really around," drives a regular car and lives in a "normal house."

The MFA program at Vermont College "gave me my dream," Reedy said. Yet Katherine Paterson taught him what it means to be a writer.

"Nobody has taught me more about how to be the kind of writer I want to be than Katherine Paterson has," Reedy said. "No one has taught me more about how to live as a writer. She has, I think, modeled the need for humility and generosity."

Once, feeling he didn't belong at Vermont College of Fine Arts and that he was "hopelessly outclassed," Reedy conveyed this in a letter to Katherine Paterson. He wanted to steal lines from Emily Dickinson and walk around campus saying: "I'm nobody. Who are you?"

Paterson wrote back that she, too, is nobody. If she ever forgets that, she's in big trouble.

VERMONT COFFEE COMPANY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermont is known for its small and large businesses alike. Vermonters take pride in