

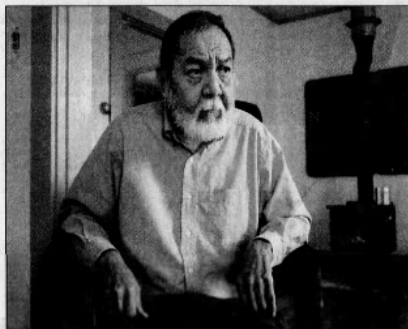
VICTOR CHARLO



Flathead Indian Reservation poet Victor Charlo and his daughter, April, walk along the Flathead River on Tuesday morning near their home at Old Agency. Victor's newly published book of poems, "Put Sey" ("Good Enough"), includes the title poem, which is also translated into Salish by April.

Spirit of a poet

Writer to debut first published book of poetry after more than 30 years



While Charlo has had many poems published in anthologies, "Put Sey" is his first published book.

"The river runs a thin bed down the useless flat where Flathead homes are spaced like friends ..."

— Richard Hugo poem written for Victor Charlo

By JODI RAVE of the Missoulian

DIXON — Victor Charlo can still see the elderly Salish woman quickly move her hand near her waist, as if abruptly drawing an invisible dash in the air.

"Put Sey," she would say in the Salish language — "Good Enough." The phrase now graces the title of Charlo's first book of poetry, a collection of work from a 70-year-old man who has been writing poems for more than 30 years.

"He's been a poet forever, since I was a kid," said April Charlo, one of his four children. She often reads and translates her dad's poems from English to Salish. "It's

On Missoulian.com

To listen to a Victor Charlo poem read in Salish and English, go to this story on Missoulian.com.



probably going to be the best experience of my life," she said. She will be with her father this week for a book launch and poetry readings.

Charlo will debut "Put Sey," on Wednesday at the University of Montana's Davidson Honors College at 4:30 p.m. On Saturday, he will participate in an 11 a.m. reading at the Holiday Inn Parkside during the Montana Festival of the Book. Finally, the

See CHARLO, Page A8

Charlo

Continued

poet will share in the honoring of a theater to bear his name at the Salish Kootenai College, an event scheduled for Oct. 30.

Even though he is celebrating the publication of his first book, Charlo seems to take the most pride in three-word phrase he crafted – Two Eagle River. He came up with those words more than 30 years ago during a competition to name an alternative grade school on the Flathead Reservation.

He suggested the name after seeing two eagles perch, almost daily, on a dead tree near the Flathead River, which flows close to the old school site. "My students went, 'Wow. That's it. That's it.'"

Charlo, a citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of Montana,

Signing, reading

A book launch and signing for poet Victor Charlo will be held at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday at the University of Montana's Davidson Honor College. Charlo will also join other poets for an 11 a.m. reading on Saturday at the Holiday Inn Parkside during the Montana Festival of the Book.

grew up on the Flathead Reservation. He is the great-grandson of Chief Charlot of the Bitterroot Salish. He spent seven years in a seminary where he studied to be a Jesuit priest before he took up the banner for Native causes.

He has since dedicated his time to working and writing about indigenous people.

Charlo earned a master's degree from Gonzaga University and went back to

the Flathead Reservation where he co-founded the Two Eagle River School in Dixon, near the old Bureau of Indian Affairs agency where he owns a home. The school is now located in Pablo.

Charlo attended the University of Montana before going to graduate school. While in Missoula, he became friends with the poet Richard Hugo. Charlo said he learned of Hugo from a classmate who told him: "Hey, we have a real poet now. Come to this class and meet this guy."

The two men palled around Missoula and made frequent visits to the Milltown Bar, Laundromat & Café. "You could go there, have a drink, get your clothes washed and they would feed us, too," Charlo said.

He took Hugo to the Flathead Reservation, where the elder poet often found sources of inspiration. "He liked old places that are falling down," said Charlo. They once visited a cemetery. Hugo later

penned "Indian Graves at Jocko," a poem he wrote for Charlo.

In his new book, "Put Sey," Charlo has a piece titled "Letter to Hugo From Dixon." The story and other poems in the book reflect on a lifetime of memories, stretching from the Flathead River to the Arctic Circle.

Charlo retired from the Kicking Horse Job Corps in 2001 after he suffered a massive stroke, a life-changing event that swiped his ability to walk, read and write. He has since successfully relearned basic skills, such as spelling his name. He now spends more time writing, a newfound luxury he said he owes to "a stroke of luck."

"It was a tough bounce back for him," said April Charlo. "He did it so beautifully."

Reporter Jodi Rave can be reached at 1-800-366-7186 or at jodi.rave@lee.net.