Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel (1918–2007) was born near Stroud and attended schools in Creek County. Her father, of Cherokee descent, was a sharecropper, and her mother was a homemaker. Wilma was “wrenched” from Oklahoma at 17 years of age when her family migrated to California’s Central Valley in 1936. She began writing poetry at a tender age but did not publish until she was in her 50s, ultimately producing over 50 chapbooks of poetry and prose.

Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel’s free verse poetry is written in everyday language, and her writing is uniquely placed by time and geography. McDaniel’s writings convey the migrant experience of children, youth, and adults, her appreciation of working-class people, perceptions of world events and popular culture, religious beliefs, and cultural and gender differences. Anthologized in American working-class literature, her poetry reveals a deep appreciation for common people and for her Oklahoma roots. McDaniel’s words frequently expressed her feelings about her childhood in Oklahoma, her experiences of leaving and settling in a new place, and her observations of everyday life. Place mattered greatly to her, and even though she left Oklahoma, she proudly identified as an Okie and continued to write about her home state throughout her life. Her love for Oklahoma and its people was unshakable.


McDaniel also was the subject of an award-winning documentary, Down an Old Road: The Poetic Life of Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel by Chris Simon, Sagelanda Media LLC (2001). More recently, Jeanie Harris authored a young adult biography of McDaniel, Chasing Fireflies: The Dust Bowl Childhood of a Poet (2010).

“I love my native state of Oklahoma. It took the first seventeen years of my life and molded them for better or worse. My character and attitude toward life was fairly well set by my last birthday in the state before starting the Dust Bowl exodus to California. I regard the experiences of those early years as my precious legacy.” — Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel (1980)

Selected Poems by Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

Buried Treasure
Elbie Hayes ruined his expensive shoes squashing around the autumn desolation of a sharecrop farm In Caddo County

Oke boy turned fifty searching for anything that had belonged to his father when he was fighting the Great Depression

Kicked at a lump behind the caved-in cellar and uncovered a rusty Prince Albert tobacco can

Stowed it away as he would a sain’t’s bones in his Lincoln Continental and headed back to Bakersfield

Changes of 1936
Poor girl with Oklahoma straw braided in your hair forget back there The dark blue call of whippoorwill slow purpling skies of warning Here is here California night falls instantly draws a black firefly over vineyards not a single firefly will light your way home


Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel (1918-2007)

In 2013 the Stroud Public Library was designated Oklahoma’s eleventh national Literary Landmark™ in honor of Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel.