***Double Life, With Dogs*: An Amazon Exclusive Essay by David Wroblewski**

We write the stories we wish we could read. There's no other reason to do it, to spend years pacing around your basement, mumbling, pecking at a keyboard, turning your back on a world that offers such a feast of delicious fruits. *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* came about because some time ago I wished I could read a novel about a boy and his dog, one that integrated our contemporary knowledge of canine behavior, cognition, and origins with my experience of living with dogs; if possible, something flavored with the uncynical Midwestern sense of heart and purpose so familiar from my childhood (and something which, in truth, I've spent much my adult life being slightly ashamed of, as if either heart or purpose were embarrassing attributes for a grown-up to display). I'd recently come to know a good dog, maybe the best dog I'd ever met, and the subject of people and dogs and ethics and character suddenly seemed urgent. But when I went looking for such a story, I had to go back almost a hundred years, back to Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. That was a surprise. A little while after that, an idea for a story came to me — not the whole thing, but enough to start.

I read novels because they create within me a double-life, something no other art form can or even aspires to do. I'm a slow reader. It takes me a couple weeks to finish a good sized novel. But when that novel is working for me, I wake up mornings with parallel concerns, speculating on what is going to happen both in my immediate, personal world and what is going to happen in the inner, secret world I've constructed out of the novel. At odd points during the day a kind of daydream presses itself into my consciousness, a daydream having to do with the story — a turn of phrase that insists on more consideration, a detail supplied by my own memory that must also have been true, even if it wasn't on the page. By chance, my gaze is caught by the sight of a map of, let's say, Indiana, and because the novel I am reading is set in Indiana, I pause and locate the story's setting on the map with my finger. I notice the silky texture of the printer's ink on the paper. Almost incidentally, my parallel life has acquired a latitude and a longitude.

Writing is like that, too. When you are in the middle of an unfinished story, you carry the narrative frontier through the world with you like a seine, capturing anything relevant that floats by. Some bits end up in your story. Most bits lodge only in your memory. I'm sitting on the porch of a hotel in Ojo Caliente, New Mexico as write this. A friendly dog is sniffing around in the bushes a few feet away. He comes and goes and comes back again. I want to leave my laptop and crouch down and call him over, but I won't. He's probably not unlike the village dogs that lived in this area 1000 years ago. I have no idea if this dog might show up in some later story of mine, but I know for the moment I'm struck by his rough, brindled fur, the white tip of his tail, the pleasant set of his lips, as he wanders what he clearly considers his home territory, panting softly in the May sunshine. I'm reminded of how my dog Lola sometimes sleeps in the sun until she gets so hot she pants, and I grow alarmed and walk over and lay a hand on her side, then shoo her into the house. I'm reminded of the stray dogs that live among the ruins at Pompeii, Italy; dogs that sleep on the weather-worn stone streets, unconcerned and apparently unaware of the thousands of tourists streaming past them each hour. They seem as ancient as their surroundings.
The Story of Edgar Sawtelle is a boy and his dog story for grownups. If I were looking for this book, the way I once did, that's all I would want to know. Hide the dust jacket away. Don't look at it again until you close the book for the last time. Read the blurbs afterward, like I do, when I need someone to talk to right away. A novel is a daydream machine. I wish for you a long, slow read, a two-week daydream. A double-life, with dogs.