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Poet Laureate Report, 2009-2010

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Poet Laureate Report: July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

Summary: In talking with poets laureate from other states, I repeatedly hear that it takes about a year to get the hang of this position. Learning the potential of the position while also navigating through the economic crisis' impact on the arts, I found certain plans didn't pan out as expected, and yet there were many opportunities to put Plan B into action. In sum, my work this year encompassed over 50 public appearances (readings, workshops and talks), frequent media interviews and features, production of a large body of materials (writing circle guide, poet laureate brochures, poetry month postcards, poetry pen pal packet), many blogs and podcasts distributed to a wide audience and to media throughout the state, and delivering occasional poems for special events (KU's chancellor inauguration, Governor's Arts Awards), contest judging (Poetry Out Loud, National Federation of Music, Kansas Voices), frequent correspondences, and organizing the first Midwest Poets Laureate Convergence, which led to building a website, co-editing an anthology and co-planning a national poets laureate event for 2011.

What Didn't Work Out As Planned: One of my goals was to spark, foster and support ongoing writing circles in the state facilitated by community members I would train. I produced a 60-page guide on organizing, facilitating, and keeping going writing circles, and contacted hundreds of arts-related organizations in Kansas. As it turned out, the economic crisis severely cut into many organization's abilities to fund any part of this project, and only one community booked the full project (Iola). My other main project -- a monthly radio show on HPPR -- started with great promise after I contracted with the radio station. Unfortunately, my producer soon left the country on missionary work, only to resign several weeks after her return. The station, facing funding issues, put off replacing her until recently. I've been in touch with the radio station's director several times, and I hope HPPR will begin resuming the radio shows as we agreed upon. Finally, one thing I hadn't fully anticipated was how many people would write me with inappropriate requests (e.g. asking me to read all they'd written, help them publish their book, lead their writing group for infinity). Some of these requests came from a misunderstanding of the poet laureate position (seeing the poet laureate is a full-time employee of the state, available to all Kansans for their writing needs). I found that during the first six months of this term, I spent a lot of time thinking through kind and clear ways to respond to emails and phone calls of this nature. I am keeping records of responses so I can pass these onto the next poet laureate.

What I Did Instead: Because of the economic situation, I needed to find ways to reach people without it costing organizations funding, and to reach more listeners while HPPR re-

organized. I arrived at several solutions: 1) I mentored several people one-on-one and gave them copies of the writing guide so they could begin their own writing circles (including one with the homeless shelter in Lawrence); 2) I began a monthly podcast and accompanying column on my blog, and in Dec. of '09, started sending the links for the podcast and column to a large email list (Denise Low's list plus my list combined), and to all media outlets in Kansas; 3) I threw my energy into National Poetry Month activities, including weekly contests, starting the Poetry Pen Pal Project, producing postcards sent to arts centers around the state; 4) I was the lead organizer for the first Midwest Poets Laureate Convergence (Poet Laureati), held in Lawrence in March, and featuring six poets laureate from the Midwest.

Plans for July, 2010-June, 2011: For the second fiscal year of this position, I have the following in the works:

- **Poetry Across Kansas:** With the economy showing signs of improvement, I currently have three residencies lined up for this project, including Dodge City, Marshall County, and Ottawa.
- **Readings, Talks & Workshops:** I'm booked to present at Turning Point of Kansas City (for people living with serious illness), Hutchinson Community College, Bethel College, collaborative performances and workshops with Kelley Hunt, readings in Iowa and Minnesota, and more to come. I'm also talking with the organizers of the Symphony in the Flint Hills about an expanded project for 2011 as well as Johnson County Community College, and Kansas State University. I also have several possibilities to return to Wichita, and I would like to organize at least one reading or workshop in Topeka, possibly through the Brown V. Board of Education (I'm spoken to people there about this).
- **United Poets Laureate Book & Event:** I'm co-organizing with several Midwestern poets laureate a national convergence of poets laureate from around the country to be held in Lawrence in mid-March and featuring Ted Kooser, and I'm the lead editor of an anthology of poetry by state poets laureate to be published by Ice Cube Press in the spring of 2011.
- **National Poetry Month:** I plan to expand on these activities through sending out postcards listing activities much more widely, and publishing associated activities starting a month ahead of National Poetry Month. I'll again put out the call for participants in the Pen Pal Project after assessing its first year and how to tweak it accordingly. I will again organize four contests to be held throughout April.
- **Other: Contest Judging, Occasional Poems and More:** I'll continue judging appropriate contests, writing occasional poems when appropriate, and dive into other opportunities when they seem to be just the thing to do.

Following is a summary of all events and activities I participated in over my first year as poet laureate (and a little beforehand):

Events/Readings/Workshops/Occasional Poems/Contests/Talks & Residencies

- July 1: Imagination and Place book launch and honoring the outcoming and incoming poet laureate, Lawrence Arts Center -- Lawrence.
- July 10: Reading, The Writers Place - Kansas City, MO.

- Aug. 30: Reading and book launch for *Landed*, new collection of poetry, with Kelley Hunt performing (book includes CD of me reading poetry and Kelley performing four of our songs), Lawrence Public Library – Lawrence.
- Sept. 11: Reading at Borders in North Kansas City, MO.
- Sept. 15-16: workshops at Iola High School and at local college, reading, and training of poetry circle facilitators (if funded) – Iola
- Sept. 17: writing workshop for graduate class, meeting with faculty, and reading at Pittsburg State University -- Pittsburg
- September: Throughout month: writing workshop and follow-up with A'capella choir at Lawrence High School for songwriting/poetry joint project with Kelley Hunt -- Lawrence.
- Oct. 14: Debut of song co-written with Kelley Hunt and performed by Lawrence High School's A'Cappella Choir -- Lawrence
- Oct. 16: Reading at Borders -- Overland Park.
- Oct. 17-18: Narrative Medicine weekend: forum, reading and Lawrence book launch for *The Sky Begins At Your Feet*, and community writing workshop on memoir and ecology; cosponsored by KAW Council, The Raven, Ice Cube Press, Lawrence Arts Center, Committee on Imagination and Place, Community Mercantile, and Lawrence Memorial Hospital -- Lawrence.
- Oct. 27 & 28: Readings at Watermark Books and Eighth Day Books -- Wichita.
- Oct. 29: Dangerous Curves: Breast Cancer Awareness performance with Kelley Hunt – McPherson.
- Nov. 18: Reading at K.U. bookstore -- Lawrence.
- Nov. 21: Reading at Borders -- Olathe.
- Nov. 16, 23, 30: Osher Class on Writing from the Prairie (and Kansas Poets), Brandon Woods – Lawrence.
- Dec. 2: Visiting grades one through nine at Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy -- Overland Park.
- Dec. 3: Shaping an Working Artists' Community (Kansas Arts Commission event) -- Kansas City, KS.
- Dec. 5: Reading at Signs of Life -- Lawrence.
- Feb. 26: Keynote speaker/reader, Kansas Author's Club -- Wichita.
- March: National Federation of Music Clubs Music in Poetry: Judge of children's poetry.
- March: Kansas Voices Contest, Winfield Arts & Humanities: Judge of poetry.
- March 11: Governor's Arts Awards, wrote and read special poem, "What's Right Here," written to honor winners -- Topeka.
- March 11: Speaker, Endicott Society, KU -- Lawrence.
- March 12: Poetry Out Loud judging -- Topeka.
- March 14-15: Organized with Iowa Poet Laureate "Poet Laureati: A Convergence of Midwestern Poets Laureate," featuring poets laureate from four states, and including a public reading and "Lunch Laureati: Brown Bag It With the Poets Laureate." Event sponsored by the Kansas Arts Commission, Lawrence Arts Center, Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence Public Library, the Raven Bookstore, Community Mercantile and Free

State Brewery -- Lawrence.

- March 28: Writing workshop for people with serious illness, Turning Point -- Mission.
- April 10-11: Wrote inauguration poem for new chancellor of University of Kansas, Bernadette Gray-Little, which was featured in inauguration program distributed to thousands of students, staff, faculty, alumni and friends of KU at April 11, 2010 inauguration. I also read the poem as part of the dinner and dance for the chancellor attended by 300 people -- Lawrence.
- April 16-17: Keynote speaker and workshop presenter, Wordpress Annual Writing Conference -- McPherson.
- May 4: Keynote speaker, annual meeting of Jewish Community Women -- Lawrence.
- May 15: Sierra Club annual auction, invocation reading -- Lenexa.
- May 9-14: Brave Voice: Writing & Singing for Your Life with Kelley Hunt – led five hours of writing workshops, three hours of sessions on integrating writing into work and life, two hours of private consultations, and three hours of performing (a solo reading, and a collaborative performance with Kelley Hunt) -- Council Grove.
- June 12: Reading as part of panel at Symphony in the Flint Hills -- Bazaar.
- June 9: Writing workshop for metastatic illness support group at Turning Point -- Mission.
- June 19: Poetry in Motion writing and yoga workshop, Bhaktivana Yoga -- Baldwin.
- June 24: Reading and Talk at Women Spirit Connection, keynote speaker for annual meeting, Lawrence, KS.
- June 27: Reading at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Topeka as part of services -- Topeka.

Media

- Aug. 16 -- Article in *Kansas City Star*
- Aug. 22 -- Radio interview on KLWN-FM, Lawrence
- Interview for KPR Presents (aired in November as part of special program on Poet Laureate and on collaboration with Kelley Hunt)
- KPR Presents on Poet Laureate gathering, recorded in March, 2010. Aired in April
- KCUR New Letters on the Air on Poet Laureate gathering, recorded in March, 2010, aired in April.
- KCUR New Letters on the Air interview, aired in April
- Sept. 16: Interview on KRB Radio in Pittsburg, and with Pittsburg Collegian.
- Sept. 21: Interview with *Lawrence Journal-Word's Go Magazine*.
- Artist in Residence for 2010 at *Main Street Rag/Present Magazine* in Kansas City, featuring one original and new poem from me monthly at website:
<http://presentmagazine.com/voices.php>.
- Featured artist in *Connotations*, an on-line journal, includes interview and poetry:
<http://presentmagazine.com/voices.php>
- June 16: "Praising God," Interview on <http://insearchofgoodness.wordpress.com> (last part on interview focuses on poetry and goodness).

Correspondence

- Oct. 14: Interview with Richmond, WA Poet Laureate on what poets laureate do
- Over three dozen email correspondences with people who seek me to out for advice on their poetry, the writing life, publishing, and connecting with community.
- Email correspondence with 30 poets laureate from around the country in preparation for anthology and national convergence in 2011.

Materials Produced

- Brochure on Poet Laureate position, including background, responsibilities, possibilities, biographical information and a poem.
- *Poetry Across Kansas: Writing Circle Facilitation Guide*, 60+ page guide on leading ongoing writing circles, covering all aspects of starting and maintaining group, plus ample selections of writing exercises.
- Writing exercises for each poet featured in *To The Stars: Kansas Poets of the Ad Astra Poetry Project*, edited and with commentary by Denise Low, Mammoth Publications and Center for Kansas Studies of Washburn University, 2009.
- Poetry Pen Pal Packet: packet of pen pal etiquette, writing prompts, revision considerations, and effective ways to work with pen pals; distributed to participants in pen pal project in April, 2010.
- Created and built website for new organization forming, United Poets Laureate, which will host annual convergences of poets laureate (first one was Poet Laureate! in Lawrence, KS. on March 13-14, 2010): <http://UnitedPoetsLaureate.wordpress.com>.

Writing Across Kansas: Reading & Writing Ourselves Home: Iola piloted this project in September. I plan to present the workshop, reading and writing circle training in Marshall County, Ottawa and Dodge City in coming months. Because of limited Arts on Tour funds, I will soon find out how some of these residencies may be scaled down.

Poetry Pen Pal Project: There are 11 participants in the first year of the pen pal project, matched up in pairs (with one triplet). Next spring, I will contact participants to assess the project and revise it accordingly.

Poetry Contests for National Poetry Month: We had over 45 participants in the contests this year. Unfortunately because of an old email address linked to the KAC website (that led to a dead email previously used by Denise Low), we missed out on about 30 of those participants during the first three weeks of the contest. I rectified the problem by holding additional contests. Everyone who participated received an email explaining all this, and all who responded were gracious and grateful.

Radio Show: HPPR's "High Plains in Words" will feature a monthly segment with me entitled "Write From Your Life." Each segment (4.5 minutes) will feature a Kansas or other Great Plains writer's work along with a writing prompt based on that work. The features aired are available as podcasts.

Podcasts: Monthly podcasts have been uploaded to my blog, with the link emailed out widely, since December of 2009 (with the exception of February, 2010) on "Write from Your

Life." Additionally, links to HPRR podcasts for shows HPPR hasn't yet aired are on the blog, all geared toward helping people do their own writing.

Blog and Website: Regular columns on my blog, including podcasts, at <http://CarynMirriamGoldberg.wordpress.com>, and regular news at my website, <http://CarynMirriamGoldberg.com>.

Email News: News sent out with each new podcast/column on blog, and for other general news of poet laureate activities to large email list (compiled from my work, previous poet laureate email list, and other contacts along the way).

Book Tour: Although my book tour for my memoir, *The Sky Begins At Your Feet*, and my new book of poetry, *Landed*, was not officially part of my poet laureate work, it afforded me the opportunity to represent the state of Kansas while giving readings in Vermont, New Jersey, Connecticut, Tennessee, Arizona, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, and Oklahoma, radio and newspaper interviews, and a blog tour.

The Next Poet Laureate of Kansas: Wherever I traveled, I encouraged appropriate candidates to apply for this position in the future, and I stressed the benefits of being in this position. Prospective candidates I've spoken with include Kevin Rabas (Emporia State University), Bill Sheldon (Hutchinson Community College), Wyatt Townley (Kansas City, KS), Elizabeth Dodd (Kansas State University), and Jeanne Hathaway (Wichita State University).

Keeping in Touch: I kept in touch in Christine regularly, and met with Christine and Llewellyn three times in Topeka during the year to assess how the position was going, seek their advice on being more effective and future planning, and talk about future of poet laureate work. I felt wonderfully supported by KAC staff and board members throughout the year, and it was always a treat to be doing an event somewhere when a board member approached me to delight in the good work of KAC.