

Remembering Lucille

By Susan Thornton Hobby

The history of the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society and the career of **Lucille Clifton** entwined as tightly as a double helix. Clifton's sudden death in February wrenched the organization, its staff and board members.

Clifton read poetry from her first and second books, *Good Times* and *Good News About the Earth*, at the first event that HoCoPoLitSo founder Ellen Kennedy organized, in November of 1974. Over the years, the former Maryland Poet Laureate and National Book Award winner read for HoCoPoLitSo more than a dozen times, shining her star power on this small, lucky community of literature lovers.

"She had a beautiful diction, a wonderful speaking voice and a powerful presence," remembers Kennedy. "And she moved you."

Whenever HoCoPoLitSo needed her, Clifton stepped in, asking poet friends to read for the society for well below their asking fee. And those poets gladly did it, because they loved Lucille. "I only pimp for the best," Clifton said, laughing, as she dialed the phone to petition faraway poets.

Clifton's loyalty to HoCoPoLitSo grew from her friendship with Kennedy. It started with a road trip – that most American of bonding experiences. Kennedy had written a book, *The Negri-*



tude Poets, and one of those poets, Leopold Senghor, then the president of Senegal, came for a state visit to New York, and was reading at the 92nd Street Y's Poetry Center. Ellen invited Lucille to come along.

Ellen took the wheel, and Lucille rode shotgun, since she never learned to drive, in the Kennedy's old Ford LTD. When they arrived in Manhattan, they stayed in the Park Avenue apartment of one of Ellen's college friends, went out to dinner and listened to poetry at the Y. Afterward, they ate and drank and talked at a party at poet Bill Smith's apartment. They returned from their trip fast friends.

"I think it was a mutual voyage of discovery," Kennedy recalls.

In 1991, when Clifton moved to Columbia,

Kennedy recruited her for the board. Despite her many obligations – readings and teaching positions across the country and the world – Clifton brought her humor and no-nonsense artistic sensibility to HoCoPoLitSo's board meetings.

"I miss her," Kennedy says simply, sitting in her home office, dotted with photos of Lucille's smiling face at readings and ceremonies honoring the road trip buddies.

The world – and especially HoCoPoLitSo – was lucky to have Clifton for 73 years, and we miss her.

won't you celebrate with me

By Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up

here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

A Year Of Partnerships & Public Programs

SEPTEMBER 27, 2009 In partnership with Maryland Humanities One Maryland One Book, Howard County Library, Kit-tamaquandi Community Church and several other local organizations, HoCoPoLitSo welcomed **James McBride**, author of *Song Yet Sung*, to a reading at Bridgeway Community Church. A book discussion facilitated by Susan Thornton Hobby with guest Wy-lene Burch of the Howard County Center for African-American Culture, followed on October 15.



Donald Hall

OCTOBER 4, 2009 Poet **Elizabeth Spire** introduced nationally-acclaimed poet **Donald Hall** for the 36th season opener at a reading in the Monteabaro Recital Hall at Howard Community College.

OCTOBER 20, 2009 As part of Book Connection HoCoPoLitSo, in partnership with Howard Community College and Howard County Library, featured novelist **Julie Otsuka**, author of *When the Emperor was Divine*.

February 19, 2010 HoCoPoLitSo celebrated its 32nd Evening of Irish Music and Poetry with Rooney Prize winner **Claire Keegan**, author of story collections, *Antarctica* and *Walk the Blue Fields*, at the Jim Rouse Theatre. His Excellency **Michael Collins**, Ambassador of Ireland, introduced the evening. The celebration included a prelude by bagpiper **Jared Denhard**, a concert with musicians **Linda Hickman**, **Brendan Mulvihill**, **Terence Winch**, **Jesse Winch**, and **Eileen Korn**, and stepdancers from the **Caulkin School**.

APRIL 29, 2010 Howard Community College's Blackbird Poetry Festival paid tribute to Lucille Clifton (1936-2010), with

HoCoPoLitSo providing book prizes.

JUNE 11 – 13, 2010 In conjunction with Columbia Festival of the Arts, Columbia Archives and Howard County Library, HoCoPoLitSo participated in the second Book Fest at Lake Fest. Readings and books by participating authors were available for purchase, including literary offerings from the Maryland Writers Association, Howard County Chapter and Wine Glass Court Poets.

JUNE 17, 2010 In cooperation with the Festival and Howard County Library, Maryland Poet Laureate **Stanley Plumly** read and discussed "The State of Poetry: Making Poetry Accessible" following readings by students **Kunal Thapar**, **Amy Greaney**, **Tera Trauernicht**, **Zuri Chavers** and local notables **Ken Ulman**, **Dr. Kathleen Hetherington**, **Beverley Francis-Gibbons** and **Philip Nelson** at "My Favorite Poem High Tea" at Historic Oakland.



Stanley Plumly

JUNE 22, 2010

The Festival and HoCoPoLitSo presented South African novelist **Sheila Kohler** at the Rouse Company Foundation Student Services Hall, at Howard Community College.



Sheila Kohler

Student Audiences

DECEMBER 11, 2009 HoCoPoLitSo and Howard County Public Schools presented **Bill's Buddies**, a troupe of Shakespearean actors from the Folger Shakespeare Library, to over 600 middle school students from Wilde Lake, Murray Hill, Ellicott Mills and the Homewood Cen-

ter, and a class from host Marriotts Ridge High School.

OCTOBER 2009 TO FEBRUARY 2010 Poet-in-residence **Terence Winch** presented at 12 county public high schools, Homewood Center and Howard Community College.

In the spring HoCoPoLitSo held its 29th All County Writing Competition for high school students. This year's judges were **Virginia Pausch**, former Howard High School English Department leader; **Timothy Singleton**, haiku poet and entrepreneur, **Nora Scanlan**, former Howard County high school guidance counselor and Joyce Braga, young adult author and entrepreneur. The nine creative writing winners were: **Daniel Negulescu**, **Hannah Keyes**, and **Shuning Li** (Centennial) in the personal essay category; **Sara Bailey**, **Genevieve Lyons** (Centennial), and **Dave Dozat** (Homewood Center) in the short story category; and in the poetry category, **Hamza Husain** (Glenelg), **Brian Tich** (Marriotts Ridge), and **Stuart Russell** (Mt. Hebron).

Twenty-four students were chosen by their English Departments to receive HoCoPoLitSo's "Promise and Achievement Award." The honorees were: **Shana Mansbach**, **Sebastian H. Beckmann** (Atholton), **Sean Huang**, **Shuning Li** (Centennial), **Katrina Hufnagel**, **Ellen Dimmick** (Glenelg), **David Kaiser-Jones**, **Sarah O'Malley** (Hammond), **Catherine Thompson**, **Emily Scheerer** (Howard), **Davonte Williams**, **Ashley Ashman** (Long Reach), **James Hebler**, **Caroline Journey** (Marriotts Ridge), **Rachel E. Richardson**, **Hojung Deena Lee** (Mt. Hebron), **Grace Calvin**, **Esther Lou Robinson** (Oakland Mills), **Mariam Ogunsanya**, **Jennifer Schiller** (Reservoir), **Anne Park** (River Hill), **Noel Marsh**, **Sohrab Hajarian** (Wilde Lake) and **Virginia Kendall** (Homewood Center).

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Ensure HoCoPoLitSo's FUTURE. Gifts and pledges to the HoCoPoLitSo Fund at the Columbia Foundation from February 1996 to November 15, 2010. In FY 2010, close to \$6,000 in operational funds were provided.

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Plan to join us!
Friday, February 18, 2011



33rd Annual Irish Evening



THE WRITING LIFE

23 Years On The Air

HoCoPoLitSo's writer-to-writer talk show *The Writing Life (TWL)* airs debut and encore editions on Maryland educational cable channels, accessible to more than two million viewers year-round, four times a week in Howard County on HCC-TV, Comcast Channel 96 or Verizon Channel 41 on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Four new editions were produced in FY 2010 and three editions were processed for copyrights through the Library of Congress. A portion of the show "Introducing Grace Paley" (1988) was used in a documentary entitled "Grace" by Four Corners Production, New York, NY.

TWL On-Air Schedule

In July 2009 Eavan Boland hosted by Grace Cavilieri (Encore 2008); in August Roland Flint hosts Robert Hass (Encore 1996); in September Jane Hirshfield hosted by Michael Collier (Encore 2008); in October Thrity Umrigar, Donna Hemans & Helen Elaine Lee (*The Craft of Writing*) hosted by Dr. Tara Hart (Debut 2009); in November Thrity Umrigar, Donna Hemans & Helen Elaine Lee (*Exploring Themes in Literature*) hosted by Dr. Tara Hart (Debut 2009); in December *An Afternoon with Seamus Heaney* (Encore 1989); in January 2010, Laura Lippman hosted by Mary Kay Zuravleff (Debut 2010); in February Frank McCourt (1930-2009) hosted by Terence Winch (Encore 2009); in March Terence Winch hosts Colum McCann (Encore 1998); in April Donald Hall hosted by Elizabeth Spires (Debut 2010); in May Julie Otsuka hosted by Gene Oishi (Debut 2010); and in June Michael Collier hosts Edward Hirsch (Encore 2000).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, February 18, 2011

The 33rd Irish Evening with Colm Tóibín and music by Narrowbacks. Tickets are currently available at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/136973.

Sunday, March 27, 2011

An Afternoon with Alice McDermott

VOLUNTEERS

- Board Member Virginia Pausch was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award at Howard County's Volunteer of the Year Ceremony.
- HoCoPoLitSo is grateful for the service of the following volunteers: Sandra Barrett, Joyce Braga, Helen Carter, Richard Carter, Yvonne Carter, Sue Cavendish, Danielle Du Pree, Isaiah Du Pree, Imani Henderson, Michael Homas, Carolyn Marie Jensen, Richard Jones, Allan Kohn, Kristina Leigh Markman, Andrea Martinez, Bernadette Michaels, Nora Scanlan, Kathryn Simonson, Shari Spearman, Lee Waxman and Rebecca (Kyung) Yoon.