We’ve Gone Global!

The Writing Life has been viewed in more than 25 countries on YouTube

BY SUSAN THORNTON HOBBY

All around the world, people are looking for something: food, oil, enlightenment, a good dry cleaner. Some seek words. Now, from HoCoPoLitSo’s tiny corner of the world, people can find words that open the world.

Go to YouTube and search “Martin Espada.” Up pops the full half-hour interview Espada gave in the Howard Community College television studio in April 2011, in which he recites portions of “The Trouble Ball,” about his father watching his first big-league baseball game. On August 21, 2012, a poetry lover in Turkey searched for Martin Espada, and watched the bushy-bearded poet sit in a cushy armchair in Columbia, Maryland, and talk about how his 11-year-old father sat in Ebbets Field to watch the Brooklyn Dodgers and along the way discovered racism. Perhaps something in Espada’s words resonated with that literary type in Turkey.

HoCoPoLitSo has gone global. Not to mention twenty-first century. Twenty-two of HoCoPoLitSo’s literary talk shows, The Writing Life, are now available in their full length on YouTube, with more being uploaded every week.

HoCoPoLitSo founder Ellen Kennedy began recording The Writing Life in 1986 when she decided these fleeting moments of literary epiphany HoCoPoLitSo was creating should be captured on film. These shows are gems. Where else can you get a full half-hour of Lucille Clifton, reading “good times” and “carved on a gravestone in a southern baptist churchyard” and laughing heartily with her friend and fellow poet Roland Flint? Both poets are gone now; they live by the resurrecting power of computers.

People from Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan and Canada watched Clifton’s show in August. The Writing Life videos have been watched nearly 15,000 times, by viewers around the world.

Literature lovers now have this treasure trove, easily discovered only by following the map of the Internet. If they can’t sit in a breathless hall and listen to Rita Dove and Saul Bellow and Frank McCourt, like the lucky ones who live close to HoCoPoLitSo and its programs can, they can watch and listen to the words go out into the world, one tiny screen at a time.
THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2012  HoCo-PoLitSo participated in the Blackbird Poetry Festival, “Poetry in Harmony,” with HCC’s English/World Languages Division. Two morning workshops were offered by Kim Addonizio and Michael Cirrelli at HCC. In the afternoon the poets joined HCC students in an afternoon reading, open to the community, in the HCC Kittlene Room. The festival concluded with “Nightbird,” a coffee house reading by Addonizio, Cirrelli and music & poetry by Mother Ruckus (poet Gayle Danley and songstress Sahffi).

FRIDAY – SUNDAY, JUNE 15 – 17, 2012  In conjunction with the Columbia Festival of the Arts and Little Patuxent Review, HoCo-PoLitSo hosted a table at Lake Fest. Staff and volunteers promoted literary events to the community and met a post HoCo-PoLitSo Book Award winner, a friend of Manil Suri, a couple who attended Irish Evening; and Bill Stanley who read for HoCo-PoLitSo in its early years.

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2012  HoCo-PoLitSo presented a workshop with poet Naomi Ayala at Long Reach High School, Ellicott City, MD as part of Howard County Public Schools’ teacher-in-service day.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2012  In partnership with the Columbia Festival of the Arts and Town Center Community Association, short-story writer Edith Pearlman read from her newest book Binocular Vision to a sold-out crowd at Historic Oakland. She was a 2011 National Book Award finalist and winner of the National Book Critics Circle award.

Student Programs

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2011  HoCo-PoLitSo and Howard County Public Schools presented Bill’s Buddies, a troupe of Shakespearean actors from the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, to Clarksville and Elkridge Landing Middle Schools and a class from Marriotts Ridge High School, which hosted the program. Poet-in-residence Sandra Beasley made presentations at ten county high schools and the Homewood Center from November to March and Howard Community College in April 2012. HoCo-PoLitSo held its 31st All County Writing Competition for county high school students. This year’s judges were Patricia Van Auken, poet and HCC professor; Joyce Braga, young adult author; and engineer Mark Braga. The creative writing winners were Amy Farb (Central), Wei Yue Lu (Central), and Mary Simpson (Centennial) in the personal essay category; Caroline Crowder (Mt. Hebron), Jocelyn Andrews (Howard), Patricia Carmona (Mt. Hebron), and Bridget Mackell (Mt. Hebron) in the poetry category; and in the short story category, Rebecca Curran (Mt. Hebron), Julia Dunn (Howard), and Sydney Channan (Mt. Hebron). In addition, 26 students were chosen by their English Departments to receive HoCo-PoLitSo’s Promise and Achievement Award in Language Arts. The honorees were Lauren Berman, Jacob Smith (Atholton), Sarah Calvert, Wei Yue Lu (Centennial), Emily Schweich, Anneliese Faustino (Glenelg), Sierra Simpson, Jason Schoenfeld (Hammond), Sierra Peters, Rachel McMurray (Homewood Center), Lindsay Sablowski, Madeline Studd (Howard), Jacinda Guerrero, Justin Biegel (Long Reach), Courtney O’Hara, Jonathan Matthews (Mariotts Ridge), Nicholas Cortina, Hannah Vaughan (Mt. Hebron), Lynn Coumoyer, Ross Riehigans Yoo (Oakland Mills), Haley Sweeton, Alexander Shaw (Reservoir), Iredwia Ulahoji, Christina Romano (River Hill), Emma Boone, Joe Han (Wild Lake). HoCo-PoLitSo board members and staff made book award presentations at 12 public high schools and Homewood Center.
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Ensure HoCoPoLitS’s FUTURE. Gifts and pledges to the HoCoPoLitS Fund at the Columbia Foundation from February 1996–November 15, 2012. In FY 2012, $11,000 in operational funds were provided.

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Plan to join us
Friday, March 1, 2013

35th Annual
Irish Evening

THE WRITING LIFE

Throughout the year, The Writing Life, HoCoPoLiSo’s writer-to-writer talk show, airs encore and debut editions on Maryland educational cable channels, HCC-TV and YouTube, accessible world-wide.

Five new editions were produced: “The Promise of Poetry” with Terrance Hayes and Tara Betts (2011); Alice McDermott hosted by Ron Charles (2012); Hugo Hamilton hosted by Terence Winch (2012); Kim Addonizio and Michael Cirelli (2012) and Edith Pearlman hosted by Carrie Brown (2012).

Three (3) editions debuted: Martin Espada hosted by Naomi Ayala (October 2011); Colm Tóibín hosted by Belinda McKeon (February 2012); “The Promise of Poetry” with Terrance Hayes and Tara Betts (April 2012).

TWL ON-AIR SCHEDULE

In July 2011 Madison Smartt Bell hosted by Michael Collier (1991); in August W. S. Merwin hosted by Roland Flint (1994); in September Philip Levine hosted by Elizabeth Spires (1998); in October Martin Espada hosted by Naomi Ayala (Debut 2011); in November Li Young-Lee hosted by Michael Collier (1996); in December “A Literary Gathering of Women, Pt 1” and in January “A Literary Gathering of Women, Pt 2” with Thrity Umrigar, Donna Hemans and Helen Elaine Lee hosted by Tara Hart; in February Colm Tóibín hosted by Belinda McKeon (Debut 2012); in March Stanley Kunitz hosted by Gregory Orr (1993); in April “The Promise of Poetry” with Terrance Hayes and Tara Betts (Debut 2012); in May Joy Harjo hosted by Barbara Goldberg (2009) and in June “Celebrating Sterling Brown” with Roland Flint and Michael S. Harper (1994).

SPECIAL APPRECIATION

We thank Sarah Cotner, who drafted a preservation plan for The Writing Life; Lee Waxman for documenting HoCoPoLiSo events with photographs; and Sebastian Warren, a fellow with The Mission Continues, for his organizational and strategic thinking.