



Fun at the National Book Festival



Kristina Nixon

Novelist Terry Pratchett keeps his Fiction and Fantasy audience laughing at the National Book Festival on Sept. 29. For more pictures and brief reports on festival authors, see pages 2 – 4.

Writers of Mysteries, Thrillers Keep Readers on Edge

Writers of mysteries and suspense keep readers turning pages into the night by playing on their anxieties: What will happen? How will this story turn out? Will the protagonist live or die? Will the killer be found out? Will good triumph over evil? Ten prize-winning masters of these genres spoke at the National Book Festival on Sept. 29; the four brief reports that follow are but a sampling from those whose books top popularity charts and inspire action-packed films.—Ed.

David Ignatius

By Helen Dalrymple

David Ignatius's dual careers as journalist and novelist shone through in his festival presentation at the National Book Festival on Sept. 29.

As a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, Ignatius was in
MYSTERIES, THRILLERS, Continued on page 5

Poetry Lovers Pack Pavilion to Hear Favorites

By Yvonne French

The National Book Festival crowd swelled to standing room only and youngsters sat on the ground in front of the stage to hear children's poet Jack Prelutsky. Mostly all of the 375 chairs in the Poetry Pavilion were taken and a good number of people were standing to hear Poet Laureate Charles Simic.

Librarian of Congress James H. Billington introduced Simic, whom he appointed on Aug. 2. Simic is originally from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and learned English when he was 15.

"Sometimes one who comes late to a language can do the best things with it," said Billington. Simic later told the audience that he did not really start from scratch: "From the age of 2, I heard English in movies and songs. I could sing all of Glen Miller's tunes. The language was already in my ears, like it was in everyone's."

He read his poem, "In the Library," which describes a librarian making her rounds.

*She's very tall, so she keeps
 Her head tipped as if listening.
 The books are whispering.
 I hear nothing, but she does.*

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) sponsored the Poetry Pavilion. NEA Chairman Dana Gioia interviewed Simic, who described what happened during the Nazi and Allied attacks during World War II. He said the bombs came every night. "It was scary, frightening. . . . As the sirens came on everybody would run down to the cellar in the middle of the night. There was a kid in our building who was just a bit older than I was, maybe a year older. He vanished. A couple of grownups went to find him . . . and he was . . . in the middle of the street sort of watching the sky. They brought him in—the air raid was still going on—and his mother started slapping him. . . . I don't remember being scared of the bombs, but I distinctly remember being scared of that mother."

As children's poet Jack Prelutsky prepared to take the stage, children, parents, teachers and librarians vied for seats or stood three deep around the edges of the tent to hear his catchy poems. Prelutsky described the origin of his poems that combine names for animals and food and utensils. *Bananaconda* was the first, coming to him one day in the kitchen, and then they just flooded in—the *sharkradish*, the *clocktopus*, the *spatuloon*.

At home within a blue lagoon,

POETRY, Continued on page 9

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL - FICTION AND FANTASY

Novelists Don't Make Up Everything They Write

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NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

There's more to creative writing than sitting down to a keyboard and turning on the imagination. Whether they're writing historical or futuristic fiction, an epic tale of a people or a region or an alternative history, a story about a family's response to a fatal illness of a beloved child or a shooting in a school, authors have to write what they know, either from experience or research. For a story to ring true, the storyteller has to ensure that historical events are described accurately, or that fictitious events could have happened as they are portrayed. They have to pay attention to details to set a scene that is realistic for the time and place in which the characters are situated. They may examine their own hearts, minds and emotions to understand how a character would think and act in a given situation, or they may seek expert information and opinions. As the following authors suggested in their National Book Festival talks on Sept. 29, writing is work.—Ed.

Jodi Picoult

By Helen Dalrymple

Jodi Picoult bounded onto the stage in the Fiction & Fantasy Pavilion to the loud applause of her legions of fans who filled the tent to overflowing.

"Now I know what it feels like to be a rock star!" she exclaimed, having just autographed 500 books for readers of all ages.

Picoult has written 14 novels, each more popular than the last. Most recently she has taken on the issue of bullying and violence in schools with her book "Nineteen Minutes."

Picoult is Britain's best-selling female novelist, and readers love her books, which deal with difficult and controversial subjects such as stem cell research, date rape and teenage suicide. As an article this spring in *The Guardian* (London) said: "Jodi Picoult is one of those authors of whom literary editors



Jodi Picoult

have never heard, and readers can't get enough."

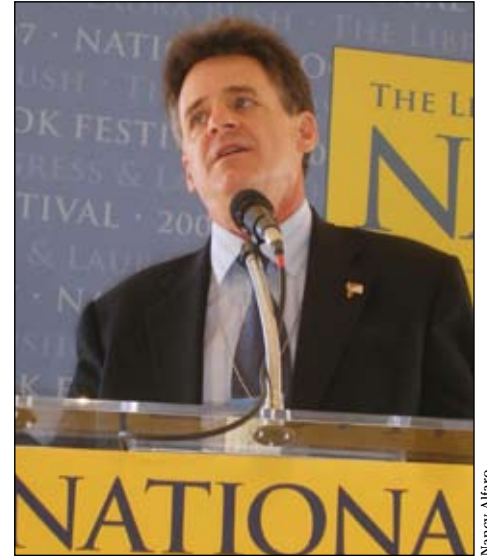
Her writing career got off to a rather inauspicious start in the fourth grade, Picoult said, when the students were asked to write about what they did during their summer vacation. Deciding to make the assignment a little more interesting, Picoult wrote "what I did during my summer vacation from the point of view of the piano that I practiced." She got an F on that one, she said, but other teachers were more supportive of her creative writing efforts in future years.

At Princeton University Picoult studied creative writing and was told to "write what you know. But I knew nothing! I'd had a happy life with not enough trauma."

As a result, Picoult now often spends more time on research for her novels than writing them, immersing herself in the subject until she feels confident enough to proceed. She has lived with the Amish, gone hunting for ghosts in abandoned houses and even spent time in jail, she said.

Asked how she picks the topics of her novels, she replied, "They pick me. I like stirring the pot and these are things I think about, worry about."

For her most recent novel, "Nineteen Minutes," she went back to Columbine and talked to the police who dealt with



Jeff Shaara

the shootings and with the grief counselors who were involved. She spoke with the survivor of a shooting at another school whose best friend was killed, and she talked with students in New Hampshire, where she lives, about bullying and cliques in school.

"Bullying is more insidious now," she said, "with the Internet, text messages and IMs [instant messages]. You don't have to look someone in the eye anymore; it's all done on the Internet.

"There will be more school shootings, and they will continue until we do something to prevent them and not just deal with the aftermath," she added. "We need to give the kids a chance to tell us what is to be done and how to do it.

"Difference is difference," she concluded. "We really have to teach kids from the beginning that difference doesn't mean less."

Terry Pratchett

By Matt Raymond

If Terry Pratchett ever hangs up his novelist gig, he might have a career as a standup comedian. The award-winning British writer kept his Fiction & Fantasy audience in stitches with his wicked wit.

The prolific author of successful series that combine fantasy and satire, Pratchett said his background as a reporter has

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brought discipline to his current career. "As a journalist ... you can't afford to have funny little ways," he said, "because if you don't produce the stuff, the editor comes and shouts at you."

As his 30-minute presentation showed, Pratchett's humor extends well beyond the printed page. He told of winning the Carnegie Medal for children's literature in 2002. "I like working on the children's books," he said. "Adult books give you money; children's books give you prestige."

At the Carnegie award ceremony, Pratchett had secretly switched the medal with a similar-looking chocolate coin. When the medal was presented to him, he greedily ate it up, to the stunned silence of the audience. "These were librarians," he said. "Chocolate had slipped through their hands, and they hadn't noticed."

It wasn't all laughs, though. One fan tearfully told Pratchett how the book "Small Gods" had changed his life at the age of 14.

"They get me through bad times as well," Pratchett said of his books. "It's as if the writing is some kind of a big, stainless steel bulldozer of some sort which just keeps going and it drags me with it, usually banging my head on stones and things like that."

After an introduction comparing him to Chaucer, Pratchett was asked how he can create characters that seem to have such rich, well-defined back-stories. "It's all smoke and mirrors, everything. But I have to say very good mirrors and

often some quite classy smoke," he quipped.

"I think about it very hard for a very long time and stuff seems to sort of turn up."

Jeff Shaara

By Erin Allen

With book titles like "Gods and Generals," "The Last Full Measure" and "The Rising Tide," it's no wonder author Jeff Shaara packed the pavilion with an

audience of rapt readers, all there to hear him give voice to the memorable characters he creates in his historical novels about America's wars.

"I try to do what my father did," he said, referring the Pulitzer Prize-winning Michael Shaara. "I take you to places like Gettysburg and tell you the story from the real people that were there."

Shaara draws on history for many of his characters, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, Erwin Rommel, Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen ("The Red Baron") and John J. "Black Jack" Pershing. To make his novels as accurate as possible, he presents events as they happened and researches the diaries, letters and personal memoirs of historical

figures to portray them with accuracy. He imagines their dialogue and inner-turmoil.

"We rarely learn about these characters in our history classes any more, which is truly a shame," he said.

Discussing his latest book, "The Rising Tide," Shaara not only tells the story of World War II from "the top down" but also relies heav-



Sena Jeter Naslund ("A Novel of Marie Antoinette") poses with daughter Flora.

Nancy Alfano

ily on two fictional characters that are the embodiment of the war's enlisted men, the "grunts" as he calls them. Tank gunner Jack Logan and paratrooper Jesse Adams bring the viewpoint of the man in combat, who experiences the horror and suspense of warfare.

Shaara concluded his book talk relating a lesson learned from his father. "When I was 12, I remember walking across the battlegrounds of Gettysburg with my father," he recalled. "When we get to the stone wall marking where Union soldiers were, we see a monument with a Confederate flag marking where Gen. [Lewis] Armistead went down. My father began to cry.

"The lesson my father taught me that day was to walk in the footsteps of these characters. These people must be remembered."

Harry Turtledove

By Matt Raymond

Harry Turtledove doesn't just write about alternate histories, he lives them. The author of novels about what might have been if past events had occurred differently, Turtledove said the L. Sprague de Camp book "Lest Darkness Fall," an early work of alternate history, propelled his life in a new direction.

Turtledove says he "got hooked" on the genre of speculative fiction when he read de Camp. Had he not come across that book, he says, he would not have



Pulitzer-winner Edward P. Jones signs one of his books.

Nancy Alfano

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received his degree, written most of what he has written, be married to his wife, had his kids, or be living where he lives.

“Other than that, picking up this random book didn’t change my life at all,” he joked.

Turtledove described his early education and career path in a way that can only be described as byzantine—literally (he would go on to a doctorate in Byzantine history). His background included a year at Cal Tech before flunking out, a stint at UCLA, and a job as a technical writer for Los Angeles County. “You want fries with that?” he said of his varied past.

His first novel would come in 1979, to be followed by more than 70 other books. He quit his county job in 1991 to become a full-time novelist.

Now widely considered one of the definitive voices of alternate history, Turtledove said the genre goes back at least to the time of Christ when the Roman historian Livy speculated about what would have happened if Alexander the Great had tried to conquer Rome.

Sena Jeter Naslund

By Helen Dalrymple

Sena Jeter Naslund, who is Distinguished Teaching Professor and Writer in Residence at the University of Louisville, told her large audience in the Fiction & Fantasy Pavilion that a summer driving trip with her 12-year-old daughter in 1993, listening to books on tape, made her start thinking about the fact that there are no women in many of the great American novels, such as “Huckleberry Finn” and “Moby Dick.”

“Moby Dick” turned out to be her daughter’s favorite, and “while I was pleased that she had a good ear and appreciated the language,” Naslund said, she thought it was too bad that there was no strong woman character in the book.

Naslund decided to do something about it. “I had a vision of a woman on a widow’s walk, looking out on the ocean waiting for her husband, thinking about her place in the world and not just as the wife of a captain.”

From this early notion came Naslund’s



Nancy Altaro

Joyce Carol Oates

book “Ahab’s Wife,” which took a long time to write, because, she said, it needed to be a “big fish” to compete with “Moby Dick.”

Naslund typically starts with an idea or hypothesis and then does the research that helps her to define and refine the original idea. “The danger,” she said, “is that you can do research forever,” but at some point you have to stop and begin to write.

She was on a book tour for “Ahab’s Wife” in Australia when the idea for her next book crystallized, after reading in

the newspaper that two men were finally being charged for the 1963 bombing of the church that killed four young girls in her hometown of Birmingham. That news story prompted Naslund to follow up on an old promise she’d made to herself to write a book about the bombing. The result was her novel “Four Spirits.”

Naslund’s most recent book, “Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette,” came about because she was always interested in the story of Marie Antoinette—a woman who was born to be a princess, got married and did not live happily ever after.”

Naslund started writing the book as a process of discovery, to look at what happens when we lose position and privilege and how we deal with the end of our lives. “If we’re all vulnerable as human beings, then we can at least be kind to one another,” she added.

Asked by a member of the audience whether “fiction” means “false” in her books, Naslund says that she researches the historical facts of her novels to make them as accurate as possible. “The challenge,” she said, “is to be true to the historical character and to try to pick up and create a new product by filling in gaps, developing a theme that wasn’t filled out in the original.” ♦

Larger Crowd Buys More Books



Barry Wheeler

Readers buy more than 10,000 books, an increase of 10 percent from 2006.

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MYSTERIES AND THRILLERS,

Continued from page 1

Beirut in 1983 and had just returned to his hotel following an interview with a top Marine official at the U.S. Embassy when he heard an enormous blast. The embassy was largely destroyed by a suicide bomber, the deadliest attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission up to that point; 63 people were killed.

"That event made me a novelist," Ignatius said; "I couldn't write about it as a journalist."

His first novel, "Agents of Innocence," was published in 1987. The title came from a Lebanese contact who had told him: "Americans are innocents; that's why you do so much damage. When the real trouble begins, you are gone."

"I have to say," Ignatius continued, "that is the story I have watched in each of our foreign adventures. Our country makes promises we're not prepared to keep. It's because we're a democracy; we need to understand ourselves better."

Ignatius said his new book, "Body of Lies," is on the same theme; it's about getting "inside the tent" of the terrorists, and it is about trying to make the other side believe that we have gotten inside the terrorist tent.

"They're already making a movie of it," he added with a laugh.

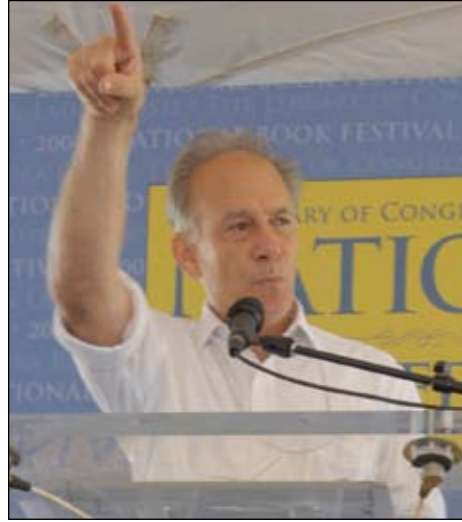
Putting on his journalist hat, Ignatius said that he had been writing about intelligence matters for almost 30 years. "We really need a good intelligence service now. . . . Americans are not popular in the Middle East, and we can't deal with [that fact] with invasions. We need to deal with it through intelligence operations.

"How do we do better at this and make it consistent with our country's values and traditions?" he asked.

For one thing, Ignatius said, we don't make promises that we can't keep. Also, we need to know more about the Middle East and realize that "America's power in that part of the world is our culture."

He cited the great successes of the American University of Beirut and declared that the U.S. should "get more into building institutions like that and less into military invasions."

Asked about how he goes about writ-



Barry Wheeler

Author-journalist David Ignatius

ing his novels, Ignatius responded: "Creative writing is pre-conscious; a lightbulb going off kind of feeling. The whole point for a writer is to get out of the way and just let it happen. The characters do have a life of their own and [often] take the story in directions you weren't expecting."

He also said his advice for aspiring authors is just to write. "You need to do it for the pure pleasure of creating; to make the characters come alive. You have to love it."

Inevitably there was a question about what he thought about the current situation in Iraq.

Ignatius said the consequences of a rapid withdrawal are worse than staying. Although some contend that if the United States pulls out, surrounding countries will be scared into action, he said, "I don't see it happening."

He added: "Trying to [bring about] a soft partition of Iraq is not what we should be doing; that is up to Iraq."

He elaborated on this same point about a week later in his regular political column in *The Washington Post*.

Stephen Hunter

By Donna Urschel

Stephen Hunter, the *Washington Post's* Pulitzer Prize-winning movie critic and author of 13 novels, told the audience at the Mystery and Thrillers Pavilion how he fell truly, madly in love with all things samurai after seeing the movie "Twilight Samurai" in 2002.



Kristina Nixon

Stephen Hunter

"It was a brilliant movie and a wonderful story," Hunter said. "That's what a great story does. It makes the world go away. It refreshes the spirit. It's like a vacation. There is no better antidepressant than a good story."

"After that movie, I couldn't get enough samurai," said Hunter, who studied sword fighting and swords, read about Japan and the samurai tradition, and bought more samurai movies on the Internet. "I was even into the flip-flops, bathrobes and ponytails," he joked.

The fascination led to the writing of his recently released novel "The 47th Samurai," which he set in modern Tokyo. The story unites Bob Lee Swagger, a Vietnam War sniper, with his dad, Earl Swagger, a World War II hero. Both are protagonists in many of Hunter's previous novels.

Hunter doesn't like samurai movies when the white guy, who suddenly learns to sword fight, is superior to his Japanese counterparts. "I wanted my man to go to Japan, take lessons, only to hear the sensei say, 'You're no good. You will never beat them. You need to cheat,'" Hunter said. "So Bob cheats real good."

The year he was writing the novel was his favorite. "I had a wonderful time writing the book. I hope you enjoy it."

Hunter left plenty of time for questions from the audience. He talked about the recent movie "Shooter," starring Mark Wahlberg as Bob Lee Swagger, which was based on his novel "Point of Impact." Hunter said the film was "pretty good,"

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considering that the book was complicated and difficult to turn into a movie.

Asked if he had a role model, Hunter said, "No, I really can't name a writer." He said he had attended public schools in Evanston, Ill., and had to do lots of reading during his formative years. "I'm influenced by everybody and nobody."

Stephen Carter

By Helen Dalrymple

Stephen Carter, a law professor at Yale University making his second appearance at the National Book Festival, arrived a little late because of traffic problems but was immediately comfortable on the stage before the capacity audience. He said that he has taken nine book tours over the years (he is the author of seven nonfiction books and now two novels), and he has discovered that "talking about novels is more fun."

But he added that he finds writing fiction extremely difficult. Although he tries to prepare an outline before he begins to work, as he does with his other books, "the characters take over the story," he said. "That may be a reason why my novels were five years apart."

Carter's recent novel, "New England White," is set in the fictional town of Elm Harbor, where his popular "Emperor of Ocean Park" also took place. This novel focuses on some of the minor characters



Mystery writer Carolyn Hart's audience was typical; fans filled every seat and stood around the edges. One fan complained he found seats only twice all day.

who appeared in the earlier novel and, according to the author, "looks at what would happen if we take a family that looks like they're living a perfect life and put them into situations that are difficult. Then see what happens."

He is often asked three questions about his novel writing, Carter said, and he proceeded to discuss those before taking specific questions from his fans in the Mysteries & Thrillers pavilion.

The first had to do with the difficulty of writing a novel from the point of view of a woman, as he did in his first novel. "Serious imagination is required to come up with a point of view to tell the story," he said, "and that's part of the fun and also part of the work of writing a novel."

Carter said the second question he is often asked is why

so many lawyers write mysteries and thrillers. His answer to that is that lawyers are very good at thinking about what can go wrong in any particular situation; that's the way they are trained.

And finally, why did he decide to write novels? "I always wanted to write novels," he said.

"I write because I love the language, and I have ever since I was a child." But he added that writing fiction makes him a little nervous, because, as a scholar, "I want to include footnotes. I do do research to make sure the details I use in the novel are accurate."

Then he turned to the audience and was asked whether he writes his novels to give voice to the black upper class or whether he writes to entertain.

"I don't write as an anthropologist; at bottom, I want to write books that all kinds of people enjoy reading," Carter responded. "If along the way some ideas are challenged, that's fine, too."

Another questioner asked what reactions he gets to his novels from colleagues and his students.

"At exam time, my students love my novels!" he responded to general laughter and applause.



Writer-law professor Stephen Carter signs for "great fan" Veronica Dabney

Nancy Alfano

Barry Wheeler

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL - MYSTERIES AND THRILLERS



Nancy Allaro

Brian Haig chats with a fan at signing tent.



Barry Wheeler

Carolyn Hart talks about her writing career.

Carolyn Hart

By Helen Dalrymple

A prolific writer of mysteries, with 39 published books and many awards to her credit, Carolyn Hart was immediately at ease with her large audience in the Mysteries & Thrillers Pavilion.

She began her talk by thanking Laura Bush for her support of the National Book Festival and paid tribute to public libraries.

“Americans need to be cognizant of the fact that our public libraries are one of the nation’s greatest treasures,” she said.

“They were very special to me as a child, when I would get on a bus and go down to the Oklahoma City Public Library and get my stack of books.”

Hart also complimented the members of the audience, saying that, as readers of mysteries, “you believe in a just world . . . you believe in goodness. When we pick up a mystery, we know that justice will be served.”

A native of Oklahoma City and a child of World War II, Hart said that she always wanted to be a reporter and studied journalism in college. She envi-

sioned herself “wearing a trenchcoat and smoking Chesterfields,” but that all went by the board when she met a law student and soon married and started a family.

As a stay-at-home mom, Hart said she didn’t want to return to the stress and long hours of a career in journalism, but she missed writing. So she entered a writing contest she saw in a magazine in 1964, wrote “Secret of the Cellars” and won the contest. Her new career was off and running.

She said she is often asked where she gets the ideas for her books and said, like other authors, they are a product of her past, her childhood, of her interests and fears.

World War II features in many of her books, because it had a large influence on her childhood, she said.

Hart described some specific incidents from her childhood that she eventually worked into her books and said “all of these things that happen to novelists get incorporated into their books.

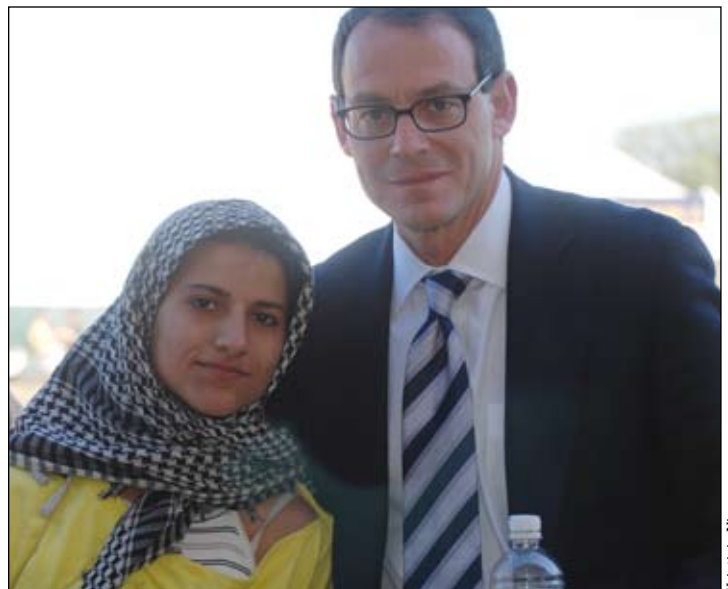
“Being able to write fiction is just a grace from God,” she added. “[Authors] always have to remember,” she added, “that that gift is not theirs, but was given to them.”

In response to a question from the audience, Hart concluded: “Writing is a commitment; you can’t fulfill it unless you have that higher power behind you.” ♦



Nancy Allaro

Deborah Crombie and author escort Joanna Roussis greet fans.



Kristinia Nixon

Daniel Silva meets Al-alawi Aishaeva after an interview.

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL



Nancy Alfaro

Popular children's poet Jack Prelutsky, author of more than 40 books, signs one here.



Nancy Alfaro

Megan Thomas, left, seeks autograph of Lisa Scotoline.




Doug Barber

Poet Kevin Young



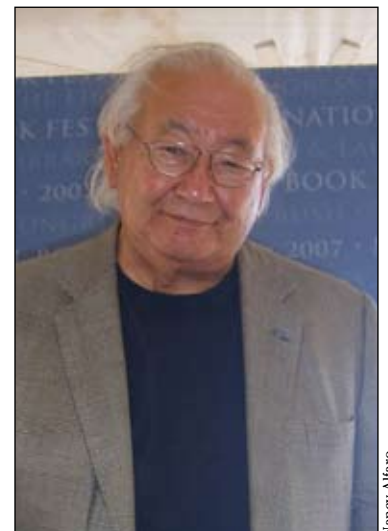
Nancy Alfaro

Attorney-turned-writer David Baldacci signs for a fan.


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Contributing Photographers: Nancy Alfaro,
 Helen Dalrymple, Michaela McNichol,
 Kristina Nixon, Barry Wheeler

 Library of Congress
 101 Independence Avenue, SE
 Washington, DC 20540-1620
 ISSN 1049-8184
www.loc.gov/staff/gazette



Nancy Alfaro

Poet N. Scott Momaday

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL - POETRY

POETRY, Continued from page 1

*The solitary SPATULON
Calls longingly as it glides by—
“Syrup!” is its plaintive cry.*

Charismatic poet Kevin Young held up his cell phone to read a new poem from screen text. “The one thing that can solve most of our problems is dancing and sweat,” he said. He read several mourning poems written because a friend was killed in Kenya. “Redemption Song” says “Grief might be easy/ if there wasn’t still/ such beauty.” Young was born in 1970. He is a professor at Emory University and curator of the Raymond Danowsky Library, which is renowned for its poetry.

Two poets described American scenes. “Sometimes, I can hear the nation speak through the accumulation of the suburbs—/ Olive Garden and Exxon, Bed, Bath & Beyond, the stars that throw their dimes/ around us all,” read Kevin Prufer who lives in Missouri.

Diane Thiel, who grew up in Miami, read “South Beach Wedding,” which describes a wedding in a walled garden that is glimpsed by a passerby, who hears “Cut, cut! . . . Wedding scene, take 29. Let’s get it right this time.” She also read “Resistance Fantasies,” in which she questions how she would have reacted if she had lived during the time of the Trail of Tears, the slave trade, the potato famine or the worker exploitations. “How we’d like to think we’d all be heroes,” she said.

Distinguished Native American poet N. Scott Momaday read “The Great Fillmore Street Buffalo Drive,” which takes the listener back in time from the present corner of Broadway and Fillmore in San Francisco’s Pacific Heights to the past, when only the buffalo were there, outlined by the setting sun.

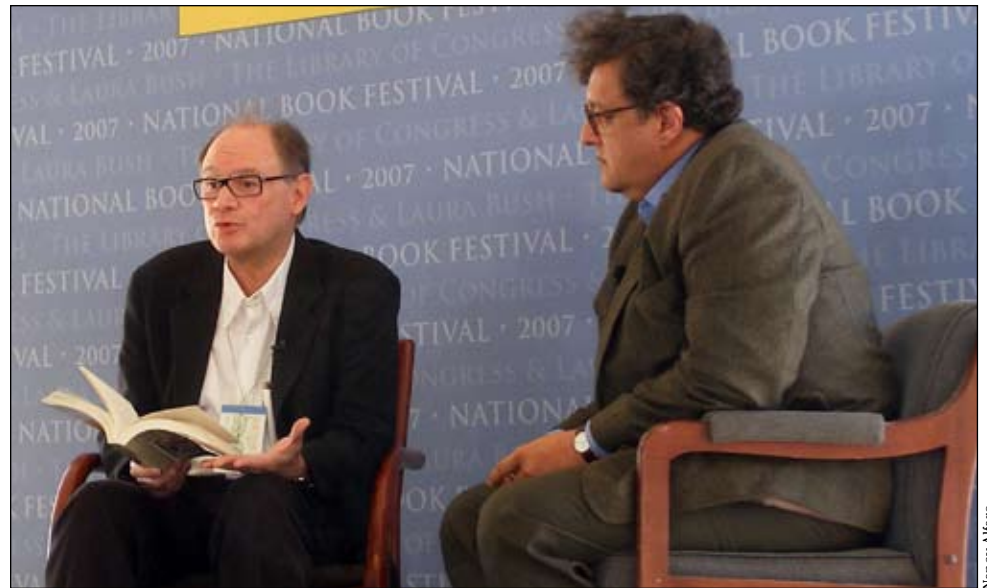
All of the poets talked about writing or the art of poetry itself. Jon Stallworthy, a British poet who spent nine years teaching at Cornell University, said “poets are roving war correspondents . . . reporting on other people at moments of crisis.”

Anne Stevenson, another British poet, said “poetry is a language that goes beyond the prose statement or adventures in therapy.” Thiel, who has published books on creative writing, described poetry as “that constant search for whole-



Kristina Nixon

Charles Simic makes first public appearance as poet laureate. He opened the poetry and literature season at the Library on Oct. 18.



Nancy Alfaro

Francisco Hernández reads his poems in Spanish, and Jorge Hernández translates them into English.

ness, alignment, kin.”

Francisco Hernández, who was born in Veracruz, Mexico, read, “The poet doesn’t rest. Time wears him down to prove it exists.” He read in another poem of a “bone sharpened so fine that it passes through the tongue . . . and the blood floods the throat.”

During the day, the NEA hosted the winners of its recitation contest for high school students, “Poetry Out Loud.” This year’s winner was Amanda Fernandez

from the District of Columbia. She read Martín Espada’s “Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100,” which is about restaurant workers killed in the Windows of the World restaurant atop the World Trade Center on September 11—the “cook with the shaven head/ and tattoo on his shoulder that said Oye,” the busboy, the dishwasher, and the waitress. They look out from 107 flights up and “could squint and almost see their world, hear the chant of nations.” ♦