

Human Library opens up the dialogue on difficult topics



Terris Harned is a Street Roots vendor

BY TERRIS HARNED
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Have you ever been reading a book or news article, or watching a documentary and found yourself wanting to ask a question of your own? Have you ever really wanted to know what was going on inside someone else's head, but were afraid to ask? Well, that's what Librarian Alison Kastner was hoping to help alleviate when she decided to coordinate Multnomah County Library's adaptation of the Human Library project, "A Mile In Their Shoes."

The idea is to take one curious audience, one person with a lifetime of experience to share, one host, and create a recipe for communication and understanding. Each session will involve a Q&A session with the host, Emily Harris of OPB's "Think Out Loud," and also an opportunity for questions from the crowd. People are encouraged to check out other human beings.

"It's an opportunity for people to exercise their curiosity in a safe place, and to challenge stereotypes," Kastner said. "Perhaps (people are) worried that they will be viewed as ignorant, or racist, or any other number of things that prevent a conversation getting started. The Human Library project offers a safe place to overcome those barriers." Overcoming barriers is something Street Roots is intimately familiar with.

When I asked Kastner and Harris how this compares to formal interviews or lectures, they offered the following: "We hope this is a lot more interactive than just a speaker in front of an audience. We're hoping for some discourse and dialogue," Kastner said. "We welcome everyone to the conversation." Harris compared the project to her radio show: "There's a lot of similarities, in that, one thing we try to do is talk to people about their firsthand experience ..."

One obvious difference is that it's a live audience, Harris said. "So people can see as well as hear each other. Also, on "Think Out Loud" we usually invite several guests who talk with each other and bring different experience or perspective to a conversation. This will feature one person with a unique experience; we hope the audience will help create a dialogue."

When Kastner first approached me in February with an offer to participate, I was flattered. I saw in this a chance to advocate for myself and my friends who sleep outside, to educate and inform.

Also speaking will be Muna Abshir Mohamad is a Muslim woman, originally from Somalia; and Jessica Richardson, a victim of human trafficking.

As for me, I have been homeless off and on for about 9 years. I have to admit, next to those two, I feel almost intimidated; I don't think my story is quite as impressive as

theirs, but as anyone who has met me while I sell Street Roots will testify, I have the gift of gab, and love to share that story with others. It will also help answer people's question about what it's like to live outside, and hopefully some of the why.

While I was speaking with her, Harris shared her enthusiasm for the project.

"It gives a chance for people to talk to the guests. I hope it's going to be a forum where people can ask questions that they really want to know, that they haven't felt they had another place to ask them." I couldn't agree more.

Kastner says that if attendance is high, and feedback is positive, she would like to see the program continued in the future. I look forward to seeing you all there!

Mile In My Shoes

All Human Library events will take place at Central Library's US Bank Room; 801 SW 10th Avenue
Phone: 503-988-5123

What's it like to be Muslim?

Muna Abshir Mohamad, Somali-born Muslim and civil rights advocate.
Saturday May 7, 1-2:30pm

What's it like to be Homeless?

Terris Harned, homeless advocate.
Saturday May 21, 1-2:30 p.m.

What's it like to be a victim of human trafficking?

Jessica Richardson, human trafficking survivor and Gresham businesswoman.
Sunday June 5, 1-2:30 p.m.

For more information, go to www.multcolib.org/events/mile_shoes.html

EVA GOLINGER

ON WIKILEAKS AND THE EMPIRES WEB

Friday May 6th
7pm
First Unitarian Church
1011 Southwest 13th
Portland, OR 97201

Best-selling author, award winning journalist, and foreign policy advisor to Venezuela, Eva Golinger will speak about US efforts to undermine peoples' movements in Latin America, as revealed by the Wikileaks cables and MORE!

WEST COAST TOUR

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.PCASC.NET

Organized by the Hands Off Latin America committee of PCASC. Many thanks to our co-sponsors: KBOO, Jobs with Justice, Vets For Peace Ch 72, Oregon Jericho, and the B-media Collective.

I'd like to thank all the people who attended the Powell's Smallpresspalooza. I sold ten copies of the book I read from (Jason Breedlove 1065131) as well as several copies of a fictional short story I've written called "The Junkie Manifesto." I also gave away over 30 copies of my daily desktop calendar.

Jason Breedlove

Reading Frenzy and Powell's carry both of my books as well as my short story. My latest book and short story are also on Kindle. My book of short stories should be out by June 2011.

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