

PARTING SHOTS

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



A log is sprayed with WD-40 to resemble a smile before a crosscutting round at the Timber Festival at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds Feb. 7.

JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Beat: 'It's so big and so difficult to define'

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Voices rising

One by one, people read. They shared their own poems and stories and recited the work of authors whose writing cheered them, excited them and touched them.

Some selections — like Ginsberg's poem, *America*, read by Tracy Abel, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *I Am Waiting*, read by Mark Mizell — fell neatly into the Beat genre. Others — like what Peter Lindsey called a "piece of doggerel" by a Reed College professor about his unapologetic love of tobacco — rather defied classification.

Lisa Kerr, the program coordinator of the arts colony who organized the Beachnik Café, read her poem, *Habana*, recently published in the fall issue of *Agave*, a literary and art magazine. Her daughter, Ariel Kerr, inspired the biggest laughs of the evening with her deadpan reading of poems by Bill Watterson, creator of "Calvin and Hobbes."

Keyaho Rohlf, who has written plays performed at the Astor Street Opry Company, read a stream-of-consciousness-style monologue he composed.

Jeanie McLaughlin read three original poems: a haiku called *Impressions*, written when she was pregnant with her one "blood son"; a free-verse piece called *Ode to Beach Log*; and a third about meeting a family who taught her the meaning of "mi casa es su casa."

In honor of Valentine's Day, Vinny Ferrau read a poem he wrote at age 19 upon falling in love with the woman who later became, and still is, his wife. And Jennifer Childress, whose husband, Watt Childress, emceed the event, read a passage from David James Duncan's novel



Frank Milan, aka "The Red Snapper," reads from his recently published book, *Beat Poetry from the 1980s* at the Beachnik Café. He snapped his way through the performance, which often sounded like hip-hop.

The River Why: (L)ove really is like poison oak: it's highly contagious. Scratch it, it gets worse. Touch other people with it, they catch it, too."

Then there was "The Red Snapper" (aka Frank Milan, a Portland pianist).

Dressed for the occasion in a scarf, black turtleneck and red-rimmed sunglasses, his wavy gray hair pushing out from beneath a tilted green beret, the Snapper read from his recently self-published anthology, *Beat Poetry from the 1980s*. True to his name, he snapped his fingers to the rhythm of Kerouac's free verse, his lyrical delivery suggesting that Kerouac had written the hippest of hip-hop.

What is Beat?

Though the Beachnik Café was open to everyone, it was also a reward for the roughly

10 folks who had attended the arts colony's two-part Beat Poets workshop held at Tolovana Hall that Friday and Saturday.

Taught by Mizell, an English teacher at Seaside High School, the workshop covered the usual household names, as well as the underappreciated women writers of the Beat movement, including the still-living Diane di Prima. A conversation ensued about whether the Beats had marginalized women, consigning them to groupie or cheerleader roles. At the time, "they didn't get much play," Kerr said.

The workshop also touched on the role drugs played in the movement, she said, producing questions like: Were drugs necessary for the Beats? Were they a catalyst for creativity? Could the Beats have

"loosened up" without them? Would the Beats have been the same artistic and intellectual forces without marijuana, peyote and LSD?

But there remains an underlying question, one that is perhaps unanswerable: What, finally, is "Beat"?

When Steve Allen, on his show, posed the question to Kerouac, the writer responded: "Sympathetic." Childress posed the same question at the Beachnik Café.

Beat is so much larger than a subculture, fashion statement or literary style. As with anything humans affix a label to, naming the Beat movement somehow narrows the movement, "deprives it of something," Childress said.

"It's so big and so difficult to define," he said. "But it means something compelling, because we're all here."



Mark Mizell, right, an English teacher at Seaside High School, chats up Watt Childress, co-owner of Jupiter's Rare & Used Books, moments before the Beachnik Café kicks off at the Cannon Beach Gallery. Allyn Cantor, manager of the White Bird Gallery, mingles in the background.



Wearing a headlamp to help him read in the dimness, Peter Lindsey, a Cannon Beach resident, recites his own work and others' work during the Beachnik Café. He was the first of many readers that evening.

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