

# OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES  
BY Kathryn Hall Bogle



TWO PORTLAND POETS, Nathaniel Scott and Lois Marie Lewis, recently spent a cool spring afternoon in the park sharing their poetry, their thoughts on creativity, themselves, and life. Each is a published poet; each will participate in the Friday, May 18th, "Festival of Cultural Events" planned by Scott with the general student body of Portland State University.



Poets Nathaniel Scott and Lois Marie Lewis read their works in the South Park Blocks.

(Photo: Kenneth Howell)

The festival, a mid-day event to which the public is invited in the South Park blocks of the PSU campus, will feature other poets and their works also. Those expected to participate include Primus St. John, Vern Rutsala, Kim Stafford, Doreen Gandy and Lisa Steinman.

The next day, Saturday, May 19th, Lois Lewis, and her "Professional Amateurs", will conduct a "Leel-Light" workshop production entitled, "A Hint of Sunshine". A small donation for this one will allow a "peak through the window of poetic minds" at the display Lewis has arranged. Poetry presentations, lectures, musica, mini-workshops and story telling will be featured during the evening dinner hours at the Old Wives Tales on East Burnside.

Scott, who credits Lewis for showing him the ropes of getting his first two poetry books, "The Theme Is" and "A Man and His Moods," into publication, had his first poem published in 1960. The poem, "Time," appeared in the *Miami Times*, a Black weekly newspaper where he was then employed.

"Poetry—or rather rhyming—began with me as a child in Macon, Georgia," said Scott as he picked out some milestones in his artistic pursuits. "My two brothers and I were always called to entertain my parents' friends when they came to our house to visit. I recited, I could play a little on the trumpet, the bugle and drums, and we all could sing. We even had a little gospel song group when we joined in with three of our cousins. We had no real training for any of this but we enjoyed performing and sharing our joy. It was just something in us."

Scott said that he later dropped out of high school, enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces and was sent to Korea. Circumstances of the unpopular war, the army, separation from his family and friends served to bring many changes in Scott's life. He turned to alcohol, he said, to alleviate the pain and loneliness

that had altered his life. Once out of the service, he found it was not easy to re-enter civilian life and to find old patterns that fit him.

He changed his residence to California. Eventually, he began to recognize himself as an alcoholic with a number of attendant troubles. The years rolled by with a remarkable sameness, he said.

Scott knew he wanted to write. He wanted to set down his feelings about what he had learned, about the social and racial injustices in the world. He fell in love, and out again. He wrote words and music to two love songs, one a ballad, the other blues, but his life remained a tangle. And the years continued to roll by. It took a brush with death on the streets of Sacramento to change his life, Scott said.

The change came when, one night, a thug confronted Scott to rob him at gun point. The assailant sent four bullets into Scott's body, one bullet missing his heart by only a fraction of an inch. Afterwards, a long recuperation gave Scott a long time to think, he recounted. He remembered staggering to a Black man's porch to ask for help after he was wounded by gun shots. He recalled hearing the man say, "You can call an ambulance after my wife gets off the phone—she's talking now." He remembered leaving the porch and finding a police car to report his plight. The blessed relief of the care given him by the paramedics is clear in his memory. It was in the remembering of all that, Scott said, that he decided to set his life on a new course. With the

decision came action.

By 1980, Scott had received his high school equivalency certificate, recovered from his acute alcoholism and moved to Portland. He enrolled in journalism courses at Portland Community College and he began, again, to write his poetry. After two years, Scott became a PSU student. He is looking forward now, to his graduation in June of this year.

### A SALUTE TO THE PAST

*Did you have to ride on the back of a bus?  
or have to drink water from a tin cup,  
hanging beside a hydrant?  
or have to squat behind an outhouse meant for white only?  
or have to shuffle and scratch your head to get your day's wages?  
or have to cringe in shame while a five-year-old child called your mother "gal"?  
or your father "boy"?  
If you haven't, you don't understand the implications of:  
"RUN, JESSE, RUN"*

By Nathaniel Scott

"Share, Teach" and "Learn" are part of the credo of Lois Lewis, the accountant-tax consultant and creative artist. Lewis has her degree in business administration and another in teaching. "Yet," she said, "there came a time in my life when none of the scheduled things I had accomplished had value in my situation. All that I had was not enough to be comfortable, to be happy and loving and confident."

"In an exercise class, I met a judo and karate teacher. I chose to do the judo and found it interesting. The

Tae Kwan Do was the next phase. I enjoyed it and gained confidence in mastering the physical skills of the performance. Still, I needed more. The real confidence in my life style eluded me," Lewis said.

"I became interested in yoga and enjoyed the postures. I moved on to breathing methods, to meditation and then began to shift my eating patterns. For a year and a half, I ate only fruit, vegetables, seeds and nuts and brewers yeast. I had high energy levels—I could work all day and maintain that high level of energy. Medical examinations showed my physical condition to be perfect. "I discovered I had learned and found my own self identity with this strict regimen—there was a revelation of the innate gift—the gift of creativity, Lewis said softly.

"The gift of writing poetry had been, up to now, a buried talent. It was a discovery and it was a foundation of other creative skills I possessed. Music was found in my words. I wrote a play. I shared my creativity with others through my reading performances in an ever-widening sphere. I wrote children's stories. I wrote "Tuffy", about a little fox terrier. I wrote "The Flower and the Weed" an allegory telling of the slave trade. I wrote a seven section book, "Relationships, Thoughts and Other Stuff", Lewis said with a twinkle.

Scott broke his silence saying, "I think we all have a contribution to make, our purpose on earth is to share. I can write out my frustrations, my philosophies, my inabilities. As I read what I have written, sometimes I feel that I've been a vehicle to express the thoughts of others.

"Sometimes," Scott continued, "I feel good about something I've written, sometimes I feel that I have not fulfilled that which I aimed to do, but I forgive myself—for at least I tried, and, another time, there will be one closer to the aim."

"I feel that I must use my talent," the poet said. "I feel an allegiance to my creativity."

In the Production Workshops conducted by Lewis, they (the students) work on their materials looking for titles, copyright information, refining and keeping excellence as the goal, learning about self—from a teacher who knows herself.

Said Scott, "I'd like my epitaph to read: "I tried to be truthful to mankind and faithful to myself'."

### A STRANGER TO MYSELF

*I use to be a stranger to myself  
While laying open/bare  
For all to see  
Not knowing what  
They're looking at*

*A stranger to myself*

*Secrets well kept ...til now/ ...til now*

By Lois Lewis

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