

The



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Portland Observer 42

'City of Roses'



Read back issues of the Portland Observer at www.portlandobserver.com

Volume XXXXI, Number 6

Wednesday • February 8, 2012

Established in 1970

Committed to Cultural Diversity

years of
community service

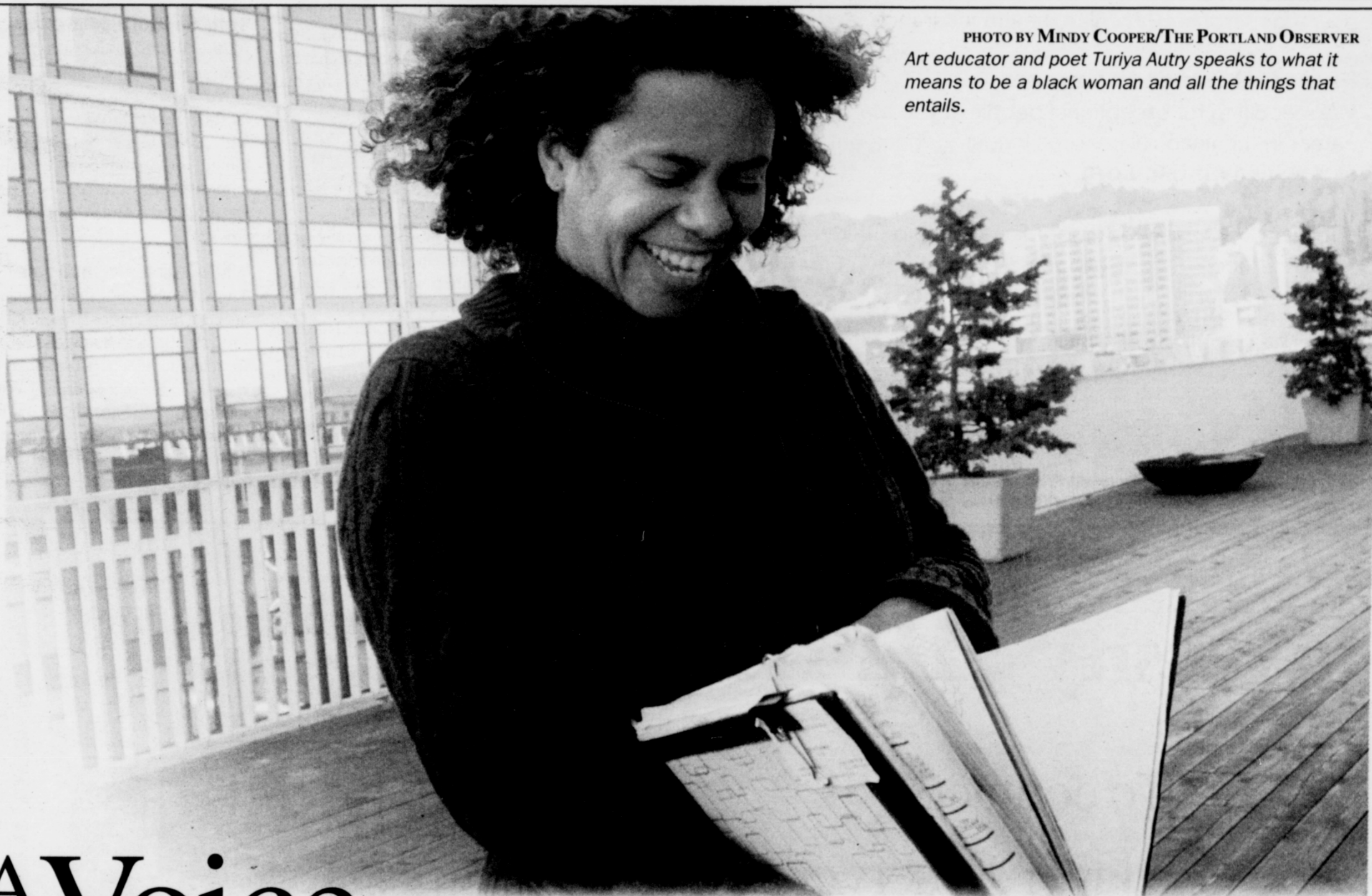


PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Art educator and poet Turiya Autry speaks to what it means to be a black woman and all the things that entails.

A Voice beyond Category

Local poet speaks of life as an African American woman

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Turiya Autry's work as an educator, artist and performer encompasses a lifetime of experiences as an African-American woman.

Whether teaching university courses on the role of black women throughout history, leading youth workshops, or slamming poetry on the mic, Autry is on a mission to encourage everyone to look more critically and lovingly upon the world around them.

Since moving to Portland in her 20s, she has competed in national competitions and performed in various venues, which catalyzed her career as both a teaching and a performing artist.

"My art and my work speak to what it means for me to be a black woman and all the things that entails," said Autry, a single mother of two teenagers, who has opened for well known figures, including Angela Davis, bell hooks, John

Trudell, Nikki Giovanni, Ursula Le Guin, Lyrics Born, Spearhead, Saul Williams, Kevin Garnett and Hillary Clinton.

Her love of literature, fiction and poetry, however, emerged in childhood through her own experiences reading the voices of other black women, including Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Ntozake Shange.

"I think coming into the words of women writers helped me to define my voice because I felt and understood so much

I have a really vested interest in a better reality for women, for women of color, and people of color because of the injustice that there is. — Educator and Poet Turiya Autry

of what they were speaking about," she said.

As a performer she's shared verse and vision to crowds throughout the country by sharing her work, which reaches thousands of individuals from all walks of life each year.

"I think my greatest hope with my work as a teaching artist and as an artist is really to help people find their voice and be true to their experience, and have a better understanding of the role they play in the world around them," she said.

Her experiences teaching art include various workshops and residencies with more than 50 different K-12 schools throughout Portland area.

She has taught 15 courses, totaling over 200 credit hours, at the college level, including classes on the movements of Black Feminism and Womanism throughout history.

"I have a really vested interest in a better reality for women, for women of color, and people of color because of the injustice that there is," she said.

"In Black Feminism, the idea is that the more we understand the things we are facing, the better we are to make sure everyone is taken care of."

Although the movement looks differently to everyone,

continued ▼ on page 5