Punch: A Collection of Poetry on the Working Class
$15,600
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Creative and Performing Arts Grant Final Report
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Grant Program: Creative and Performing Arts Grant, Office of the Provost
Grant Title: Punch: A Collection of Poetry on the Working Class
Amount of Award: $15,618

Summary of Accomplishments, Expenditures, Overall Progress

Accomplishments
This grant provided salary for two summers, 2012 and 2013, for research and writing on the above project. The project examines the working class in South Carolina. I focused my observations on subordinate jobs in four main areas: clerical, retail sales, low-skill manual labor occupations, and low-level white-collar enterprises. Given some limitations, such as OSHA requirements and weather delays (Summer 2013 had an extreme record of rainfall), I decided to focus my attention on minor construction, the grocery service industry, clerical work, and mid-level to lower-level management. In conversations with both subordinates and superiors, I found that there was not a lot that separated the two beyond title and salary. In some cases limited education was the difference, but in many of the occupations I encountered, education had very little to do with it. I certainly felt the frustration and discouragement often voiced by employees I spoke with, as well as the stress and uncertainty that seemed to envelope their supervisors. Stress and uncertainty fluctuates generationally, whereas older workers feel more pressure to succeed than younger workers. However, despite age, one clear denominator seemed to prevail in all jobs no matter the stress of the individual – humor. In almost every occupation I observed (and in some cases participated in) humor became the opiate for the mundane. Whether workers joked around about their superiors or joked around at each other’s expense, workers maintained a certain light level of humor that at times was dark and cynical, but mostly meant to simply lighten the mood or break the routine. One of the custodians I observed said it best when he joked, “if you don’t laugh, you cry.” I tried to capture the bleakness of the future, the humor of the present, and the regret of the past as themes I observed in these people through my poems. In the 60 poems I wrote, I tried to record this group accurately by providing commentary through their perspective, and hopefully gave voice to the otherwise voiceless.
Expenditures
Grant money was for salary compensation for Summer 2012 (May 15-August 15) and Summer 2013 (May 15-August 15).

Overall Progress
I have written 60 poems that I have since culled into a manuscript of 57 pages that includes 45 poems. 17 poems have been accepted for publication in major literary journals, and 27 poems are currently under consideration in other major literary journals. The manuscript, titled *Punch*, is currently under review at Copper Canyon Press, Tupelo Press, Carnegie Mellon University Press, LSU Press, and Hub City Press. In addition to writing these poems and publishing, I have given presentations in following locations:

- Chicago, Illinois
- Lincoln, Nebraska
- Spartanburg, South Carolina
- Charleston, South Carolina
- Columbia, South Carolina
- Bismarck, North Dakota

There will be a presentation scheduled for the Spring 2014 semester on the USC Sumter campus for faculty and students.

Publications

- “Dog Box”
- “Disturbing Remains”
- “Staying in the Truck”

- “Saturday Mornings”
- “When we stopped talking about the weather”

*Blue Collar Review*, forthcoming 2014
- “Punching In”

*Hayden’s Ferry Review*, Fall 2013
- “Clearing Headstones”

*Steel Toe Review*, Fall 2013
- “An Offering”
moonShine Review, Fall 2013
“Receiving”

Barely South Review, Spring 2013
“Sixth Grade”
“The Extraordinary Dream of an Ordinary Person”

Pea River Review, Winter 2013
“Our Daily Bread”
“Rake/Chip/Spoon”

Pinch, Fall, 2012
“General”
“Dick”

Natural Bridge, Fall, 2012: #26
“To Give What You Get”
POETRY WRITING WORKSHOP FOR U-MARY STUDENTS
Wednesday, April 17, 2 PM, University of Mary Campus

POETRY READING • BISMARCK DOWNTOWN ARTIST CO-OP
Corner of 4th and Thayer, Wed. April 17th at 7:30 PM
Ray McManus & Nita Ritzke will read

POETRY SLAM WORKSHOP • JAMIE RIDENHOUR & NITA RITZKE
Thursday, April 18, 1 PM, University of Mary Campus

4TH ANNUAL POETRY SLAM • 7:30 PM, THURSDAY, APRIL 18
University of Mary, R.M. Heskett Hall – Hosted by Ray McManus.

READING & SLAM FREE TO THE EVERYONE!
WORKSHOPS FREE & OPEN ONLY TO U-MARY STUDENTS.

FEAR NO ART! POETRY NEEDS LEADERS TOO!