

SIUE's Eugene Redmond: A cultural icon



Eugene Redmond.

Posted: Friday, May 20, 2016 11:19 am

Segue/Logan Cameron | On this week's segment of Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Interim Chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD, is joined by Eugene B. Redmond, renowned poet and emeritus professor at SIUE.

An East St. Louis native, Redmond has compiled a fruitful career as both a poet and an educator, publishing thousands of literary works in numerous books, journals, anthologies and various other publications. The SIUE alumnus was one of the first students to register at SIUE when the University opened its doors in 1957. He left the University briefly to serve in the United States Marine Corps before returning to SIUE and completing a bachelor's in English Literature in 1964. He earned a master's degree in English Literature from Washington University in St. Louis in 1966.

A man truly committed to education, Redmond began as a teacher-counselor at Southern Illinois University's Experiment in Higher Education in East St. Louis before leaving in 1969 to teach at Oberlin College in Ohio. One year later, he joined the English faculty at California State University, Sacramento as a professor.

In 1985, Redmond returned to East St. Louis and served as the special assistant to the superintendent for cultural and language arts at the East St. Louis School District until 1989. He again left the area to teach at Wayne State University in Detroit for one year before returning home to join the faculty at SIUE, where he has since earned recognition as an emeritus professor of English.

Redmond has been writing since he was a child and realized his passion immediately. He explains that his love of poetry was cultivated through his writing experiences in the Marine Corps and mentorships through the SIUE faculty. While he has many literary influences, Redmond expresses a particular admiration for E.E. Cummings.

Today, Redmond primarily focuses his poetry toward the Kwanzaa and Kwanzaa Saba styles. The "poetry of sevens" contains exactly 49 words, consisting of seven lines, which feature seven words each, and words that are no longer than seven letters aside from minor rules for exceptions.

Redmond has gained national recognition for his poetic pieces, serving as a leader of the Black Arts Movement and contributing to countless large-scale publications. He has generated a plethora of literary works for the St. Louis region, while also engaging in work in California and along the east coast. Through his work, Redmond has created lasting friendships with several notable authors and scholars, including the late Maya Angelou.

Hansen and Redmond discuss the recent opening of the Eugene B. Redmond Collection, which is housed in SIUE's Lovejoy Library. A collection of more than 60 years of personal artifacts, the Eugene B. Redmond Collection features more than 100,000 photographs and thousands of printed literary treasures that Redmond has collected throughout his impactful career.

"Anything I came across, I got three of," he explains. "Any country I went to, I got newspapers. I didn't know the importance of these at the time. I brought them back to share with friends, relatives and my students. I didn't know what would happen to them, but now they have a home. I was so happy about that and thank SIUE for its support."

Hansen continues by adding that the collection is not only a unique feature to the campus, but also is a wonderful opportunity for learning and inspiration for students who peruse the artifacts.

“What’s great about the collection is that it not only contains your works, but also features you as a witness to a whole generation of cultural change and growth,” Hansen shares.

“These writings are from a time that is reflective of both our nation’s culture and the culture of East St. Louis. It was extremely generous of you to donate this wonderful collection to the University, and we’re so proud to have it at SIUE, because it’s part of who we are. You’ve given our students a part of the richness into this world that future generations will be able to observe and marvel at the inventiveness and creativity.”

The scholars conclude the show by discussing Redmond’s current work, which includes the creation of a Kwanzaa Saba poem as tribute to the great poet Michael S. Harper, who recently passed away.

Tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM every Sunday at 9 a.m. as weekly guests discuss issues on SIUE’s campus.

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