



OAK BLUFFS

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Renaissance House, in its fifth year, is a retreat for artists who come from all over the country. Located at 31 Penacook, it is sure to become the down-Island happening place for writers and other artists if last week's salons are any indication of their intentions. Janet Hill, vice president and executive editor of Doubleday/Harlem Moon, spoke Tuesday evening informally and candidly on how an editor makes decisions as to whether or not to accept a book for publication. Ms. Hill was both delightful and as one would expect extremely knowledgeable. Attendees left armed with information that will no doubt improve their submissions.

The Friday evening Salon was equally exciting. Abby McGrath, niece of Dorothy West and program director, always opens the season with those residents who have participated in the program since its inception (five years ago.) They come together each year to rekindle their professional relationships and to continue their individual work. I met this very talented group of five residents last year for the first time, and how exciting it was on Friday to see them all together again and learn of their progress since then. They are Arleigh Prelow, Russell Robertson, E. Gerald Parsons, and Carol White. Makani Themba-Nixon, a four-year resident also joins this group.

Arleigh Prelow, founder of InSpirit Communications and Film, is an independent producer, director, writer, and researcher of documentary film and video from Berkeley, Calif. Arleigh refers to her work as "Ken Burns with soul." She is moving towards completion of her film, Howard Thurman, which will be the first feature-length documentary chronicling the spiritual journey of Dr. Howard Thurman (1899-1981), a visionary theologian who had a profound influence on "millions of people across the divides of race, faith and culture." I have learned so much from Arleigh about this religious leader. Howard Thurman's books and counsel often inspired Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who carried a copy of Thurman's "Jesus and the Disinherited" in his briefcase. Howard Thurman traveled to India in fall 1935 and in the following spring, he met Mahatma Gandhi. He became aware of the parallels between the plight of the people of India and African Americans in their struggle for freedom and drew spiritual sustenance from this experience. Dr. Thurman is credited as being the first African American to have a conversation with Gandhi and it was his trip to India that

inspired colleagues Mordecai Johnson and Benjamin Mays to go to India. As a result these two men brought the concept of non-violent direct action to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which fundamentally underpinned the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

How unexpected it was on Sunday at Union Chapel, where Arleigh was in attendance, to hear Dr. Lawrence Carter Jr., dean of the Martin Luther King International Chapel, and Professor of Religion, Morehouse College, discuss Howard Thurman in the context of his 1923 graduation class from Morehouse, along with colleagues, Mordecai Johnson, former president of Howard University and Benjamin Mays, former president of Morehouse College. Equally surprising were the dedication of the altar flowers by summer residents, Kathy and Richard Taylor to Howard Thurman, James Nabrit and Richard's grandfather, F.W. Taylor Sr. who was also a member of the Morehouse class of '23.

Other Friday Salon presentations were poems by Makani Themba-Nixon of Washington, D.C., author of *The Politics of Pain: Rethinking Black Politics*; Russell Robertson of West Chester, N.Y. read from his manuscript, *Sushi and Collard Greens*, and is moving right along with this memoir about his cross-cultural experiences as a young man living in Japan; E. Gerald Parsons, of Miami Beach read from his manuscript, *The Silence of Blackbirds*, the story of 44 men who go missing from a community never to return again. He read a powerful piece called *Marker Day*, an annual memorial service for the men which conveyed the bereavement of the community and their loss. Carole White, actor from West Hollywood, Calif. and a regular on the award winning television show *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983) read a comedic monologue of her trip to the Vineyard. The program concluded with Mary Wheeler, of College Park, Ga., reading several poems based upon her journey to heal from domestic violence.

Come out to Renaissance House Monday and Tuesday. Two Island writers, Jessica B. Harris and Brooks Robards, will host salons at 8 p.m. On Monday, Jessica B. Harris, food anthropologist, who has written nine books will be talking about her new book: *Cooking and Memories on Martha's Vineyard*. July 17, Brooks Robards, author of *Off Season*, a collection of poems and photographs will read and talk about his book. Both authors will sign books.

Planning a wedding, family reunion, special tribute? Have guests coming? Let me know. This column shares memories, upcoming events and all that's new and exciting in Oak Bluffs. Be sure to state Column on the e-mail subject line. Let me hear from you, and don't forget to open your gifts!