

## Terry Black Hawk

### Biographical Information

I, **Terry Blackhawk**, sometimes wonder what my writing life would be like if I'd been able to enjoy the opportunities that AWP has made possible for so many writers today. I wrote poetry as a child and teenager and, on the side, at Antioch College where I majored in Literature. After graduating in 1968, and impelled in part by anti-war activism, I moved to Detroit where I married, had a son and began teaching junior high English in the public schools. It would be almost twenty years before I would write a poem. In spring 1987, after I had recently transferred to high school, our English chair issued a call for teacher submissions to a start-up student literary magazine. Writing a poem then turned out to be a life altering experience. I soon began teaching and writing poetry with my students, publishing their work in our journal, and bringing writers into my classroom as guest artists.

I also began pursuing my own writing. I took workshops, joined writing groups, read and subscribed and began to familiarize myself with contemporary poetry as best I could. I completed a Ph.D. in Language Arts Education around that time, despite wondering whether or not I should just devote myself entirely to poetry, now that I had rediscovered it. My first poem appeared in *America*, Dec. 1988. I currently have two collections of poems—*Body & Field* (MSU Press 1999) and *Escape Artist* (BkMk Press 2003), which received the John Ciardi Prize; two chapbooks (including a *Greatest Hits* from Pudding House Press); poems in anthologies and essays in anthologies from Teachers & Writers Collaborative and elsewhere. My third collection, *The Dropped Hand*, comes out in April 2007 from Marick Press.

*ForeWord*, *American Book Review*, *Booklist*, *Poet Lore*, and *Calyx* have reviewed my books, and I have poems in journals such as *Marlboro Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Florida Review*, *Nimrod* and *Ekphrasis* and on line at Verse Daily and Poetry Daily. Poetry awards include four Pushcart Prize nominations, finalist in the 2005 Paumanok Prize, and the 1990 Foley Poetry Prize. I conduct college classes and teacher workshops on writing and art at the Detroit Institute of Arts and have taught college courses, workshops and seminars in writing for teachers. In 1992-93 I spent a sabbatical year studying Emily Dickinson thanks to a Teacher Scholar Award through the National Endowment for the Humanities and Michigan Council for the Arts. From 1998 to 2001, while I was building InsideOut (below), I also worked as artist-in-residence at Detroit's Henry Ford High School thanks to a grant from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. Other awards include the 2000 Michigan Governor's Award for Arts Education, the 1995 United Black Artists Pioneering Teacher in the Arts Award, Michigan Creative Writing Teacher of the Year (1990), a Detroit Metro Times Progressive Hero Award (1999) and the Renaissance Chapter of the Alabama A & M Alumni Association Arts Education Pioneer of the Year Award (2004).

In 1996 I retired from Detroit Public Schools, having—while still teaching—established the 501©3 writers in schools organization InsideOut Literary Arts Project. I began InsideOut [www.insideoutdetroit.org](http://www.insideoutdetroit.org) at the grassroots level, with the support of fellow high school teachers. From five schools, InsideOut has grown into an organization with an annual budget of over \$500,000, serving ca. 2,500 Detroit students yearly, grades 1 through

12, with 25 weeks of creative writing instruction, publication and performance. In 2005-2006, InsideOut conducted programs in 23 Detroit schools, publishing a professionally printed and bound literary journal for each school. InsideOut collaborates with many arts groups in the Detroit area and has ties with universities and other cultural institutions. Our work connects writers who are passionate about sharing their love of creativity and the word with young people in some of the most underserved neighborhoods in our country. Although I miss the classroom and the joys of connecting directly with kids, it is fulfilling to be working on a broader scale to bring the gifts of language, imagination and creativity to young people. I believe that InsideOut plays a significant social role in cultivating the voices of our city's youth and, through performance and publication, celebrating them in the wider community.

## Campaign Statement

"It is an honor to be nominated to the Board of Directors of AWP, an organization that has made such great strides on behalf of creative writing and teaching. I look forward, if elected, to contributing to AWP's valuable work. My experiences as a presenter at the last three conferences have been extremely positive. I have found camaraderie, insight and dialogue among participants, and I have also sensed and appreciated an interest in greater outreach to the community on the part of many writers and writer/activists.

"InsideOut has benefited from this growing commitment in the literary world. InsideOut's collaborations with the MFA program at the University of Michigan as well as colleges and universities in Detroit have brought the energies and talents of many emerging writers into our classrooms and after school programs. From the community side, the spoken word movement, which is most vital and alive in Detroit, has opened our youth to the power of physically embodying their words. This excitement at the grass roots level for 'the stage' benefits from the professionalism of the page that AWP has cultivated, while at the same time it can enliven and bring current, palpable, immediate social meaning to writing programs in colleges and universities.

"I also believe that AWP also represents synergy and mutual support among writing programs. Such support enabled me to turn InsideOut from a part-time hobby into a full-fledged non-profit organization. Thank to the leadership of WITS, Houston's veteran Writers in the Schools program, I participated in training and mentoring through an NEA-sponsored consortium for leaders of writers-in-schools programs that WITS initiated. Since 1998, we have met to learn from one another about many matters: non-profit management, fund-raising, PR, and the art of nurturing writers and classrooms dedicated to writing. InsideOut is now a member of WITSA, the national Writers in the Schools Alliance founded in 2005 as an outgrowth of that consortium, whose members bring the power of poetry and the imagination to thousands of children and youth every year. I believe that we have much to contribute to AWP, as well as much to learn from the standards of excellence that AWP has helped to articulate.

"I am convinced that experiencing the beauty and empowerment of poetry, as both readers and writers, can have an essential impact on children and youth. Gifts of the spirit cannot easily be taken away, and the challenge to think long and specifically about how to best express one's inner world can only strengthen young people. This is more necessary than ever in the face of lock-step curricula and the mandates of standardized testing, not to mention an increasingly coercive and merciless commercial culture. I hold hope that AWP will keep alive and spread the flames of clarity, diversity, and beauty of the word.

"As a person whose writing career developed apart from the standard fare of MFA programs, I think that I can speak with authority on behalf of the growth and support of individual members of the organization. I also hope that my experiences as community arts leader, educator and teacher of writing from middle school through college will help me to serve the needs of AWP. I am excited to be asked to participate on the Board and look forward to helping AWP fulfill its mission and widen its reach. I extend special thanks to Linda Nemec Foster for this nomination and opportunity to be of service."