

Oklahoma HUMANITIES

NOVEMBER 2009

TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM
AUTHOR & PHOTOGRAPHER YOUSEF KHANFAR
AN INTERVIEW WITH POET CHARLES SIMIC
SMITHSONIAN EXHIBIT TOUR CONTINUES

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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

NOVEMBER 2009

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The opinions expressed in *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES are those of the authors. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in the magazine do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Oklahoma Humanities Council, its Board of Trustees, or staff.

Reader letters are welcome and may be directed to the Editor at: carla@okhumanitiescouncil.org or by mailing to the above address. Include “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line of your message. Letters are published subject to editorial discretion and may be edited for clarity or space.

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ON THE COVER

Photo by Yousef Khanfar.
Read Editor Carla Walker’s
interview with Khanfar on
page 18.





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From the Executive Director
ANN THOMPSON

We recently partnered with the Oklahoma Arts Council in kicking off October as Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Month [see page 28]. We held a media event complete with dignitaries, music, dance, poetry, and a first-person portrayal of Thomas Jefferson. The mood was lighthearted and fun and the occasion served as an important reminder of the role culture plays in our lives.

October was also National Arts and Humanities Month. This was not just a state celebration, but a national effort to recognize the rich cultural opportunities available to us—in our own state and across the country. We encourage participation in activities not just because they are entertaining and educational. Our quality of life is improved when there is exposure to the arts and humanities; but, more importantly, the arts and humanities are necessary for us to be our best selves: informed about current issues, aware and tolerant of other viewpoints, and appreciative of cultural differences and expression.

Arts and Humanities Month celebrates the importance of culture in our daily lives. How barren our lives would be without the opportunities afforded us by artists, historians, philosophers, and authors. I like to think we celebrate these rich experiences always, every time we attend a concert or lecture, have a conversation about a recent film or book, or understand the nuances of an artist's work. I'm sure it's something we all take for granted, but having a designated month to recognize how our lives are enhanced is a wake-up call for us all to not take these opportunities for granted.

Make each month Arts and Humanities Month. Attend an event or support those who make them possible. Be entertained, enlightened, and enthralled by the shared expression of the human experience available to us through the arts and humanities.



STUDENT COMPETITIONS

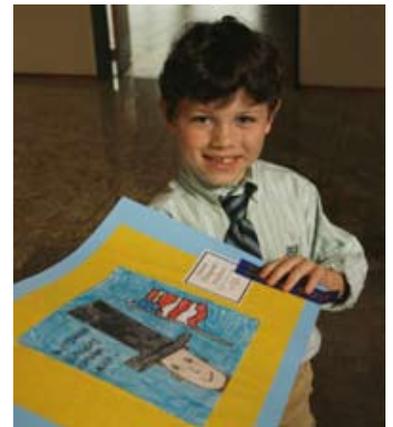
OHC is accepting applications for the *Lincoln Essay Contest* and *Poetry Out Loud* competitions for K-12 students. Public, private, and home school students are invited to participate.

The *Lincoln Essay Contest* awards cash prizes to winning students and their teachers in five grade-level categories. Students in grades K through 3 may draw pictures that reflect Abraham Lincoln's legacy. Students in grades 4 through 12 are asked to write essays. The entry deadline is February 12th. Winners will be invited to a reception at the Oklahoma History Center on April 10th.

Poetry Out Loud encourages high school students to learn about poetry through memorization and recitation. The state winner is awarded an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., to participate in the National Finals in April 2010. A total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends will be awarded to winners.

Poetry Out Loud curriculum materials are free for participating schools. Regional finals will be held across the state on February 13th. The state finals competition will be at Oklahoma City University, March 6th.

For information on participating in these programs, teachers may contact Jennifer Kidney, OHC Director of Literature Programs. Phone: (405) 235-0280; Email: jennifer@okhumanitiescouncil.org. For general information and entry forms, visit the "Programs" page on the OHC website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org.



OHC PRIVACY POLICY

Protecting your privacy is extremely important to us. For detailed information on our privacy policy, call us at (405) 235-0280 or go to our website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org

MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Judy Cawthon is deputy director of scheduling for the Office of the Governor. As a partner in Cawthon & Associates, she conducted workshops, developed human resource seminars, and provided public relations for clients. Her education experience includes teaching history in public schools and serving as director of the Learning Resource Center and director of community services at St. Gregory's University.

Lynn McIntosh is the director of the Chickasaw Regional Library System in Ardmore. She is an Oklahoma native and received her B.A. and M.L.S. from the University of Oklahoma. She is past president of the Oklahoma Library Association and served on its endowment committee. Lynn has served on the board of the Oklahoma Center for the Book and the advisory board of the OU School of Library and Information Science.

Senator Judy Eason McIntyre is a Tulsa native and received a master's degree in social work from the University of Oklahoma. She served in the Child Welfare division of the Department of Human Services for 31 years and served on the Tulsa Public School Board for 16 years. She holds memberships in the following organizations: 1921 Race Riot Design Committee; the Greenwood Re-Development Authority; the NAACP; Communication Workers of America, Local #6086; and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Lou Nelson is a retired library media specialist with Guymon Public Schools. She received a master's degree in liberal studies from the University of Oklahoma and studied at Oxford University through OU's continuing education program. She is active in philanthropic organizations and has been a program director and scholar for OHC's reading and discussion program, *Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma!*.

Dr. Gordon Taylor is the Chapman Professor of English at the University of Tulsa. His A.B. in English was earned at Harvard University; his M.A. and Ph.D. in English and American literature were received at University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Taylor has taught contemporary American literature, African American autobiography, and American culture at TU.

Brenda Porton is the Chief Development Officer at McCurtain Memorial Hospital in Idabel. She is responsible for marketing, public relations, and foundation development and is currently hosting a hospital lecture series on social issues. She has served as Senior Vice President and Idabel Bank Manager of 1st Bank and Trust of Broken Bow. She earned her B.A. and M.A.S. in business at Southeastern Oklahoma State University.



From the OHC Board of Trustees
ED BARTH, CHAIR

OHC's new program, *Humanities Forum*, had its genesis in discussions by the OHC Board of Trustees. During the commemoration of our centennial in 2007, OHC helped fund many events and programs that reflected on our state's history. Our evaluation of those programs sparked us to focus on how the humanities disciplines could be relevant to Oklahomans as we move forward into the new century.

That spark generated *Humanities Forum*, a public program that encourages conversation on contemporary issues while using a humanities text as a basis for discussion. The wealth of wisdom available through the humanities can inform our decisions on important issues. Our pilot program in Oklahoma City this past summer not only proved to be quite popular but also successfully met our objectives of fostering humanities education and community building.

The topics for the summer program were: the civic role of religion, the economy, poverty, critical patriotism, and more. Participants read short texts that related to the topic and were led in discussion by a facilitator. As an example, the reading selections for the session on peace and conflict resolution included excerpts from Mahatma Gandhi and Will Rogers, who had written about Gandhi's nonviolent resistance movement. These texts promoted an historical background and led to thoughtful conversation on current issues of peace and conflict resolution.

Humanities Forum has been launched statewide and will continue to engage participants in informative and topical discussions. We are confident that through programs such as this one, OHC will promote public engagement with the humanities in a meaningful way.

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

Send your letters and opinions to the Editor at:
carla@okhumanitiescouncil.org. Include "Letter to the Editor"
in the subject line of your message. We look forward to hearing from you.

JOURNEY STORIES

Smithsonian Exhibit Debut



OHC is sponsoring the debut tour of the Smithsonian traveling exhibit *Journey Stories*. Ours is one of only five states to debut the exhibit and six Oklahoma communities were chosen as sites: Okmulgee, Newkirk, Sand Springs, Miami, Durant, and Chandler. Festivities for the opening in Okmulgee drew a large, energetic crowd of families, supporters, and community leaders.

Lieutenant Governor Jari Askins was on hand to read a proclamation from Governor Brad Henry designating June 27th as “Journey Stories Day” in the State of Oklahoma. Okmulgee’s Creek Council House Museum

hosted the opening. Curator David Anderson described the chance to have a Smithsonian-produced exhibit as “just a dream.”

“*Journey Stories* proved the dream was more incredible than our imaginings,” said Anderson. “The entire community came together and spent over a year working and building relationships that have continued to grow. We had a 23% increase in visitors during the *Journey Stories* exhibit. Thanks to the Oklahoma Humanities Council for making our dream come true!”

(continued)





Feedback from exhibit visitors was equally notable: “Excellent community project”; “One of the most informative exhibits I have seen”; “Nothing but praise.” Turn to pages 12-14 to find out where *you* can catch the tour.



STATE POET LAUREATE

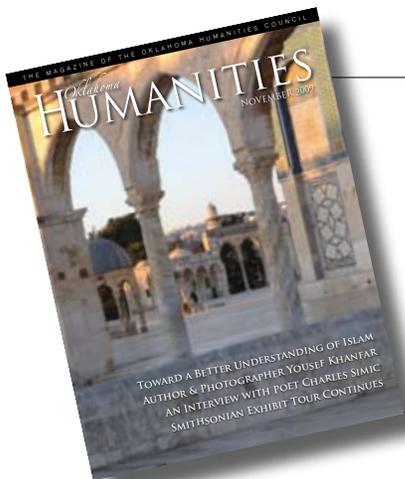
Jim Barnes gave a reading of his work in September at Full Circle Bookstore in Oklahoma City—just one of many appearances during his tenure as Oklahoma State Poet Laureate. He will be a featured reader at the 2010 Scissortail Creative Writing Festival, April 1-3, on the East Central University campus in Ada [*Information: 580/559-5557*].

A new edition of Barnes’ non-fiction book, *On Native Ground: Memoirs and Impressions*, has just been released by the University of Oklahoma Press and includes a postscript by Barnes, added for this edition. The book reflects Oklahoma and Native American cultures and won the American Book Award in 1998.



Barnes has authored several volumes of poetry, including *The Sawdust War: Poems*, which won the Oklahoma Book Award in 1993; *Paris: Poems*; *On a Wing of the Sun: Three Volumes of Poetry*; and his most recent work, *Visiting Picasso* (University of Illinois Press, 2007).

The Oklahoma Humanities Council coordinates appearances of the poet laureate on behalf of the governor. For information on booking Jim Barnes for an event, contact Jennifer Kidney, OHC Director of Literature Programs: (405) 235-0280 or jennifer@okhumanitiescouncil.org.



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KITCHEN METAPHYSICS

An Interview with Poet Charles Simic

By Dr. Elaine Smokewood & Dr. Harbour Winn, OCU Professors of English, and Kelly Kinser, OCU English/Philosophy Student

Charles Simic was the featured poet at Oklahoma City University's annual Thatcher Hoffman Smith Distinguished Writer Series, supported in part by a grant from OHC. Simic was born in Belgrade in former Yugoslavia, where his early childhood coincided with World War II. He immigrated to the U.S. during his teens and earned his bachelor's degree at New York University. He is currently Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, where he has taught since 1973. Simic has authored more than 60 books, including *The World Doesn't End: Prose Poems* (1990), winner of the Pulitzer Prize. He served as U.S. Poet Laureate from 2007 through 2008.

Elaine Smokewood: I read in an interview that you turned to Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens for advice about revising your poems. I think it was a joke you made.

Charles Simic: Anytime you read a poet that you fall in love with, he becomes a mentor in a way. The great affection for the poet causes one to read the words over and over again, to get very, very close to the poetry; so something rubs off inevitably.

Harbour Winn: When I read your poems, I find many references to cinema. How has cinema influenced your poetry?

CS: I think it has influenced a lot of poets; it has influenced a lot of fiction writers. We never talk about the influence of the movies on contemporary literature for the simple reason that going to movies is all we ever did. From the time I was four or five years old, my mother used to drag me to the movies. Friday night, Saturday night, that's what you did, you went to the movies. My memory, my life, my dream life, my inner life is just full of images from movies.

HW: I have a question about the musicality in your poems. People often describe you as a jazz poet.

CS: I love jazz. I have spent a great deal of my life listening to jazz; and yet, I don't think there is really a connection. Old music, including classical music, can inspire one. To have Bach in the background or a little sonata by Mozart or a Haydn piano sonata, the rigorous quality, the measure, the precision is inspiring. You want to get a sense of form, a sense of pace, you want to set down things on the page with a certain kind of elegance.

Kelly Kinser: In a number of interviews and in your essays you talk about poetry as a medium that attempts to use language to convey what can't be expressed in language. Can you talk more about that?

CS: It's a kind of mystical view of the relationship of language to reality. Let's say, when I experience a world with all my senses and my mind in an exceptional state of clarity, I look at the landscape. Later, when I decide to write about it, I feel that words fail me, that language cannot do justice to the simultaneity, the richness of the experience. The intellect, the senses are all together. When you write, you have to pick and choose. I do believe you can find an equivalent for experience eventually. In a way you kind of evoke it, but there's always this sense of loss, of something that's left behind, that's ineffable.

ES: There's lots of philosophy throughout your poetry. Emerson says: "The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both." I suspect you might disagree with Emerson a little.

CS: I think there's a deep difference between philosophy and poetry. If Emerson is a philosopher, he is also a poet. I think in his case it probably applies, but poets are not interested in what philosophers are interested in. Philosophers are interested in understanding certain fundamental issues: the nature of reality; how we perceive reality, the metaphysical, the physical; the nature of being.

The kind of metaphysics that poets practice, I once read in an essay, is "kitchen metaphysics." Poets tend to start in the concrete reality of the world, with what is around them. A good poet has a feel for when an experience leads to larger implications. Frost was a genius about that; so was Stevens. They take a little incident and understand that this will raise the great epistemological questions; but a poet will not draw the conclusions—*don't press it up for the reader, let the reader experience fully the weight of these questions*—a poet will not put a label on it.

From Plato on there has always been a kind of quarrel between philosophers and poets. I remember once when I was at Idaho State University, I went to a dinner party after a poetry



WATERMELONS

Green Buddhas
On the fruit stand.
We eat the smile
And spit out the teeth.

By Charles Simic. From *Return to a Place Lit
By a Glass of Milk* (George Braziller, 1974),
used by permission of the author.

IN THE LIBRARY

for Octavio

There's a book called
A Dictionary of Angels.
No one had opened it in fifty years,
I know, because when I did,
The covers creaked, the pages
Crumbled. There I discovered

The angels were once as plentiful
As species of flies.
The sky at dusk
Used to be thick with them.
You had to wave both arms
Just to keep them away.

Now the sun is shining
Through the tall windows.
The library is a quiet place.
Angels and gods huddled
In dark unopened books.
The great secret lies
On some shelf Miss Jones
Passes every day on her rounds.

She's very tall, so she keeps
Her head tipped as if listening.
The books are whispering.
I hear nothing, but she does.

By Charles Simic. From *Selected Poems*
(Faber and Faber, 2004), used by permission
of the author.

STONE

Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river;
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.

By Charles Simic. From *What the Grass Says*
(Harcourt, Inc., 1967), used by permission of the
author.



Wilma Mankiller, 2007 Awardee



N. Scott Momaday, 2008 Awardee



Charles Banks Wilson (center), 2009 Awardee

SAVE THE DATE!

*2010 Oklahoma Humanities Awards
March 4th, 6:00 p.m., Tickets \$75
Reservation Deadline: February 24th
Information: Call OHC at (405) 235-0280
Event Location: Oklahoma History Center, OKC*

Communities large and small are providing cultural programming that impacts local citizens and broadens their experiences and perspectives. The Oklahoma Humanities Awards dinner is an opportunity to recognize that important work. Awardees will be announced soon and include individuals, organizations, and projects that have contributed to the understanding of the humanities in Oklahoma.

reading. I was sitting next to a fellow who was chairman of the department of philosophy. He turned to me and said angrily, jokingly, “What do you poets really want?” It is a very good question. We want to say everything the philosophers say without saying it the way philosophers say it.

ES: You often focus on seemingly marginal details in the world around you, and your poems shift from one peripheral detail to another. What, in your view, does an artist gain by focusing attention on the periphery rather than the center?

CS: I think it’s an early sense of experience of the world. I remember when I was 10 years old, my grandmother died. In those days, the wake was at home, with the body laid out and everybody sitting in the parlor. After I was sitting a long time, I began to notice little things about the room rather than looking, I guess I was afraid, at my grandmother. I noticed people around me, somebody’s shirt collar was frayed, a stain on the wall in the corner. I always had those kinds of experiences.

I began developing a belief that the key to a scene, to an experience, occurs out of sight, that it’s right there, but we sometimes don’t see it. Emerson and Thoreau speak about the importance of noticing the world. The most ordinary reality is miraculous if only we can open our eyes and notice. I wouldn’t write a great theory around this, but it is a fundamental aspect of my aesthetics.

KK: You’ve talked about your grandmother’s nonlinear, digressive storytelling style having a significant impact on your poetry. How did that influence the structure and narrative energy of your poems?

CS: She had a wonderful way of telling—not intentionally, for some people would go crazy listening to her. For example, I would ask her, “Grandmother, do you remember when World War II started?” and she would say, “Yes. This is the way the world war started in poor Yugoslavia. Hitler attacked Yugoslavia without declaration of war, April 6, 1941. That’s how the war started. I guess that was the night before your grandfather said to me, ‘You know, we haven’t had any veal chops’—or lamb chops, I forget—for a long time. Why don’t we have some lamb chops tomorrow?”

She replied, “Well, to get good lamb chops I have to go to that butcher.” So she described what’s so fantastic about this butcher, and then the lamb chops, and what happened to this butcher, his wife, and you still haven’t gotten to the war. You would think by then she would say that bombs fell, but she would say something like, “I looked down, and I said, *These shoes, I walk all the way.*”

I knew what was coming: a two-mile walk to go to this butcher. With any question you asked her, she would go into a wonderful series of digressions. It was never boring. It was so unexpected, so full of surprises that it was almost like a comic routine. Yes, it must have left an impression.

HW: I think that since Robert Pinsky was poet laureate, many people have high expectations

up at night and typing the works of Hart Crane or Stephen Vincent Benet. It’s incomprehensible! It seemed to me that to say we need more, when it’s really beyond human imagination to see how much there is, it’s ridiculous.

HW: You have talked about your love of teaching literature, how you have learned to love this or that poet. You were saying that in teaching literature you’ve become a better poet.

CS: I think I have learned and read poetry in a way that I would not have read it by myself. When you read for yourself, you like certain lines, certain things; but when you have to teach a poet every week, you basically become a salesperson for each poet. You tell students, “Today, there is no one more exciting than so-and-so; today I’m going to make you believe that so-and-so is the

[Poets] want to say everything the philosophers say without saying it the way philosophers say it.

that a poet laureate *invents* an incredible project. I am wondering how you approached this expectation of a poet laureate.

CS: I was sort of skeptical for two reasons. First of all, most of those terrific ideas didn’t work out. Joseph Brodsky thought there should be a poetry anthology in every motel room in America, next to the Bible. Wonderful idea, but who’s going to pay for [it]? Even Ted Kooser couldn’t get poems in newspapers because newspapers don’t even have book reviews now; they’re all collapsing. So many projects that sounded like terrific ideas were not realized. Instantly people asked me, “What is your project going to be?”

I felt American poetry is in pretty damn good shape. More people read poetry, write poetry. You just have to go on the Internet and see the thousands of websites and blogs. There’s terrific stuff out there: The American Academy of Poetry, *Poetry* magazine, a webpage called “The Page,” “The Daily Poet.” It’s astonishing to realize how much poetry is out there. I mean, who are these people, where do they find the time to put this poetry on the Internet? No wonder we have such a huge divorce rate in this country. Obviously, one of the spouses, instead of being in bed, is sitting

greatest poet who ever lived.” You have to read these poems very carefully because a student is going to say, “I don’t understand this line.” You have to be prepared. If you don’t understand it yourself, you have to have the confidence of saying, “I don’t get it either.”

HW: I’m not sure that any other poet we’ve brought to OCU in the past 12 years has continually taught in a university. Many of them are writers in residence, but only for one semester periodically. You’re really distinctive in that sense, I think.

CS: The difference with many of my contemporaries is they wanted to teach creative writing. I lucked out. I taught American literature, comparative literature, and even literary criticism for a while years ago; so I was forced to read. You know how it is when you teach: you don’t just read the poetry of the poet that you are teaching, you feel obliged to go to the library and read books about poets. There’s always a lot of new stuff to read. I would complain, “So much work, so much work!” But I’ve learned a lot and I’m glad. ■

Transcribed by Oklahoma City University (OCU) students Diana Silver and Arin Warren.



Kim Henry, Executive Director

SARKEYS FOUNDATION

A Lebanese immigrant who came to the United States when he was 17 years old created a legacy for Oklahoma in 1962 when he formed Sarkeys Foundation. On his way to South America, S. J. Sarkeys stopped to visit a brother in St. Louis who showed him a new invention, the carbide lamp. Sarkeys found a market for the lamps in Oklahoma and, as he peddled them around the countryside, he began to buy farmland and, later, oil and gas leases. The successful production from these holdings became the basis for the several fortunes he made and lost during his lifetime.

S. J. Sarkeys was 90 when he died in 1965, three years after setting up the Sarkeys Foundation with 2,750 shares of Sarkeys Inc. stock. At the time of his death, the Foundation had made contributions of about \$14,000. Since that time, grants totaling over \$55 million have been awarded. With assets of around \$100 million, the Foundation provides grants to a diverse group of Oklahoma non-profit organizations.

Under the bold leadership of its trustees—Teresa Adwan, Richard Bell, Fred Gipson, Dan Little, Joseph Morris, and Terry West—the Foundation continues to invest in organizations that work diligently each day to make Oklahoma even better.

“Preserving Oklahoma’s rich history and culture is important to both Sarkeys Foundation and the Oklahoma Humanities Council,” said Kim Henry, executive director of Sarkeys Foundation. “OHC does an excellent job of helping people learn, understand, think, communicate, and make connections with others. As a partner of Sarkeys Foundation, their work helps us fulfill our mission of improving the quality of life in Oklahoma.”

STOP # 4: MIAMI

Miami Public Library
200 N. Main
Information: 918/541-2292
November 21-December 30



Miami has fostered great creative talent: notably, artist Charles Banks Wilson; Heisman Trophy winner Steve Owens; National Baseball Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle; Native American ballerina Moscelyne Larkin; and country singer Keith

Anderson. The beautiful Coleman Theatre has showcased much of that talent.

Built by mining magnate George Coleman, Sr., as a vaudeville and movie palace, the “Coleman Theatre Beautiful” opened in 1929 to a full house: 1,600 seats, admission one dollar. The opulent Louis XV interior dazzled audiences. Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and Will Rogers performed at the Coleman. Restoration efforts have returned the “Mighty Wurlitzer” pipe organ and the magnificent twelve-foot-tall chandelier. Free tours are available.

Eat: Waylan’s Ku-Ku, with its giant cuckoo clock, is an icon on Route 66. Stop in for hamburgers and fried green tomatoes. For south-of-the-border tastes, Milagro’s in historic St. James Court has a variety of Mexican dishes.

Play: Playland Lanes is great for families, with bowling and pool in a smoke-free environment. The Miami Cineplex features first-run movies and an arcade. Miami is also the Northeast Oklahoma hub for casino entertainment with 11 area casinos.

Explore: The Spooklight, a few miles north of Miami, is a phenomenon that has been attracting visitors since 1866. The Army Corps of Engineers officially concluded that it is a “mysterious light of unknown origin.” Just south of Miami is an original section of Route 66 roadbed, listed as an Oklahoma National Historic Landmark. The three-mile stretch is one of two sections of the original nine-foot-wide road that remains intact.



SMITHSONIAN TOUR CONTI



The Oklahoma Humanities Council is proud to sponsor Museum on Main Street—a service that brings Smithsonian exhibits to small-town America. Visiting a Smithsonian exhibit may well be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many Oklahomans, especially those in rural communities. *Journey Stories*, the first exhibit to tour Oklahoma, examines travel—from the search for a better life to fun and frolic on the open road.

The exhibit uses images, audio, and artifacts to explore individual journey stories and the role of travel in building a diverse, American society. Themes such as immigration, migration, innovation, and freedom illustrate American mobility and how it has evolved as an assertion of individual freedom.

Journey Stories has a limited run before it moves on to other states. You can still catch the tour

N EXHIBIT NUES

STOP #5: DURANT

Three Valley Museum
401 W. Main
Information: 580/920-1907
January 9-February 19



Durant was named the “Magnolia Capital of Oklahoma” thanks to Professor E.B. Robbins, who spent 40 years filling the Southeastern University campus with stunning magnolia trees. Durant is also home to the headquarters of the Great Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Downtown Durant is a great place to eat, explore, and relax, with tea rooms, shops, salons, and day spas. During the *Journey Stories* tour, downtown businesses will host a variety of activities, including an art show and photo displays of town history. Local programming will feature Tuesday and Thursday “Topics” and Saturday “Seminars” that relate the historical journey stories of the region.

Downtown is home to the Three Valley Museum, named for the book *Queen of Three Valleys* by Henry McCreary, which describes Durant’s location in the fertile bottomlands of the Red, Blue, and Washita River valleys. Exhibits include early Durant photographs, Durant GIs’ baseball team memorabilia, and displays on Robert L. Williams, Oklahoma’s third governor.

People drive from afar to eat at Roma’s Italian and Salita’s Mexican restaurants. Roma’s is known for mouth-watering rolls and authentic Italian food. Salita’s offers Tex-Mex, from quesadillas to fajitas. Looking for a burger? Try George’s or Sherrer’s—which has a reputation for great pies, too.

Kid-friendly offerings include the Durant Multi-Sports Complex, city parks, a skate park, movies, and bowling. Lake Texoma and its recreational facilities are nearby. When completed in 1944, the dam was the largest earthen dam in the world.

“We look forward to an educational and entertaining experience,” says Durant Main Street Program Manager Donna Dow. “Our local programming will generate interest in families and their heritage as well as the history of our area.”

in Miami, Durant, and Chandler [see sidebars for information]. Host sites tie their own local journey stories to the national themes of the exhibit, along with other community events, which makes for a different experience at each stop. Host communities have been preparing for your visit for an entire year, so make your plans to attend—before the journey ends! If you can’t travel, make a virtual visit to the MoMS website: www.museumonmainstreet.org/journeystories.

Journey Stories is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the Oklahoma Humanities Council. Funded in Oklahoma by: Beaver Express Service, Communities Foundation of Oklahoma, Chesapeake Energy, Sarkeys Foundation, and the *We the People* Initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities. ■

STOP #6: CHANDLER

Museum of Pioneer History

719 Manvel Ave.

Information: 405/258-2425

February 27-April 11



Chandler is nestled in tree-covered hills along iconic Route 66. The town is the county seat of Lincoln County, home to many notable Oklahoma citizens: Olympian athlete Jim Thorpe; “Okie Poet” Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel; and U.S. Marshal William M. (Bill) Tilghman.

The Museum of Pioneer History is housed in the historic Mascho Building. Its territorial architecture places it among more than 40 Lincoln County sites listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Gracing the entry are five murals by Western artist Frederick A. Olds depicting early settlers and pioneer life. Museum exhibits include Miss Fay’s Historical Marionette Theater, showcasing a large collection of vintage marionettes. Young visitors can create their own shows with string puppets and a public stage.

Chandler’s walking tour runs through “Silk Stocking Row,” featuring turn-of-the-century homes, churches, and architecture. Families can enjoy first-run movies (a bargain at only \$4.00 per ticket) at the H & S Theatre, which first opened in 1926. Picnics are perfect for Rainbow Park or Tilghman Park, where the kids can spend a lazy afternoon on the playground. Tilghman Park and Bell Cow Lake offer boating, fishing, and full RV hookups. Bell Cow Lake also features equestrian camping with horse-friendly riding trails and hitching rails for overnight neighbors. Dogs are welcome.

Feeling hungry? A 20-minute cruise east on Route 66 takes you to the historic Rock Cafe in Stroud, erected in 1938. If you’re feeling adventurous, order the Alligator Burger, reported by some as “the best meat ever.”

Settling Oklahoma: WOMEN’S

While researching documents held in the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma, I came across a letter by a Choctaw woman that transported me to 1841. Rhoda Pitchlynn’s letter to her husband, Peter, is written while he is in “Washington City” on business. She relates her fear that “white people might kill” him and how his children miss him. The letter sparked my interest in the experiences of women of that time and I wondered: Were they like us? So I began to look for clues.

The search led me to interviews collected in 1937 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). To curb the job losses of the Great Depression, the WPA, as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, put thousands of Americans back to work with government-supported projects. One of those projects sent fieldworkers to interview Oklahomans about the settlement of the Oklahoma and Indian Territories—the Twin Territories—and the condition and conduct of life there. The Indian Pioneer History Papers, held in the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society, include typescripts of thousands of these interviews, a treasure-trove of memories from Oklahoma’s pioneering women.

Journey stories are a common theme in the WPA narratives. Women in nineteenth-century

Oklahoma, much like women in 2009, traveled as a part of life—to work, to entertainment, to church, to funerals, to visit relatives. They came with husbands, children, and extended family, from all points of the compass and by many modes of transport: in wagons, on trains, on foot, and on horseback. Some women spoke of traveling alone with children in a railcar, while their husbands made the journey with a covered wagon and herds of cattle. One woman recalled proudly that she rode sidesaddle.

The journeys weren’t easy, spanning a whole day or up to several weeks. Often travelers were beset by thunderstorms, floods, and high winds. One woman described a four-day trip from Atoka to Doakville in January 1884. Consider her description of camping in winter:

We built up a log heap, burned it and warmed the ground, spread grass on that, then our beds on top, pulled our wagons up on either side, with a wagon sheet across from one wagon to the other and across the back, making a shelter from the snow and kept a log heap burning all night out in front.

Because these women were fairly isolated, news of the world came as they encountered and visited



JOURNEY STORIES

By Dr. Terri M. Baker

with travelers—even outlaws, as this woman recalled from her childhood: “We got our news from the outlaws who came across the river to escape the officers. They told us what they knew about the outside world, and as far as they were concerned, we asked no questions.”

A small number of interviews record family experiences during the Indian Removal Era. An interview recorded by an 84-year-old Choctaw woman recounts a frightening time of disease and loss, memories of a young child traveling with her family up the Mississippi River:

Cholera was raging in New Orleans, and we were anxious to take the first boat out. It was an old boat and not a very safe one, by the name of Alvarado. We had not gone up the Mississippi very far, when we found we were not in a first-class boat. Never the less, we would have taken anything to get away from the cholera. We found that nearly all the officers and hands were thieves.

After removal, Plains tribes raided into lands occupied by the Five Civilized Tribes. A Chickasaw woman told the story of her grandmother as a girl living near the Arbuckle Mountains during one of these conflicts. The girl and a friend

rode to a neighbor’s house to do some sewing and encountered a man they assumed to be a slave for the people they were going to visit. For fun, the girls began to race with the man, but soon discovered he was a Comanche. The girls attempted to retreat, but, as the narrative relates, “a host of Indians appeared” and gave chase. The surviving girl, the interviewee’s grandmother, jumped from her horse and hid. Her friend, who tried to outrun the Comanche band, was shot as she entered her home.

The interview provides details of the girl’s fear, the underbrush where she hid, and the cloth the girls carried: “As the Indians raced by, they stooped from their saddles and picked up the cloth.” Like many stories in the WPA papers, the narrative clearly relates a family story retold many times. It begins in fun, ends in sorrow, and stays with the young girl for the rest of her life.

A number of Anglo women came to Oklahoma when the area was opened to White settlement. One woman recalls the fear and fun of travel as a child—camping out, hearing the night calls of owls and frogs, fearing the Indians, and roasting peanuts around a fire until bedtime. Women spoke poetically about their experiences, as in this interview with a pioneer from Texas, born in 1867:

NOT JUST A HOUSEWIFE:

The Changing Roles of Women in the West



A: O. Babel, *Cow Boy Pianist*. Miss Mattie Babel, *Cow Girl Cornetist*; [RC2009.011.09] E. I. Rugg, photographer; ca. 1890; Photographic Study Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum
1700 N.E. 63rd Street, Oklahoma City
Phone: (405) 478-2250
www.nationalcowboymuseum.org
Open 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Exhibit on view through January 10, 2010

A new photography exhibit at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum profiles women of the late 1800s and early 1900s who stepped beyond the expectations of traditional gender roles. *Not Just a Housewife: The Changing Roles of Women in the West* was assembled from the Museum’s collections and its Donald C. & Elizabeth M. Dickinson Research Center.

Taken between 1890 and 1920, the photos depict the lives of 13 women who challenged societal norms by engaging in activities that were atypical for women of their time. The exhibit delves into three categories: early Western women, traditional Western families, and nontraditional Western women.

Among the women spotlighted are: Oklahoma’s first female state official, Kate Barnard; Oklahoma artist Augusta Metcalfe; U.S. Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin; Rodeo Hall of Fame bulldogger Fox Hastings; and professional gambler Alice Ivers.



Cowgirls at the 101 Ranch; [H.154.22] Unknown photographer; ca. 1905-1910; James A. Carson Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.



Kate Barnard as she appeared at height of her political activity. This was her last photograph; [RC2006.068.2.00025] Unknown photographer; ca. 1895; Glenn D. Shirley Western Americana Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

Many women spoke of journeys to get supplies. One woman, caught by storms and high water, spent several weeks on the journey with her father, while her mother at home ran out of supplies and had to survive by her wits. Today, we drive to the supermarket and are back home in an hour or two.

The Red River figures in many interviews. Travelers journeying between Texas and Oklahoma had to ford the river or cross it by ferry. One woman was so frightened of the turbulence of the Red River that she exclaimed, “I will never forget the looks of that water to my dying day.”

Often, just getting to the waterway or ferry was a fearsome experience, as related by a woman traveling to Texas with two babies and her husband. She told of the wagon getting stuck in sand, one of the ponies falling under the wagon tongue, and her husband having some sort of heart attack:

I forgot the horses and began to work with my husband and rub him; he always carried a bottle of camphor in his pocket for such emergencies and I found this bottle and applied the camphor. After awhile the attack wore away and he was able to get up. We got the horses out and the team straightened out. Then we unloaded everything in the wagon and carried it on our backs up the hill. Then we hitched the team back to the wagon and drove on to the Red River.

We call 9-1-1 in an emergency. This woman and her family simply had to carry on or die.

There are stories, too, about Oklahoma’s early dining experiences: the provisions such as poultry and flour that travelers took with them, wild game and native fruits found on the trails, the utensils they carried—buckets for coffee (which masked the taste of water that was often described as “gyp”), skillets, and Dutch ovens for baking bread. Meals required time to build a fire and let the coals die down, food preparation, cooking, serving, eating, clean up, then repacking

The rhythmic pounding of horses feet and the swishing of knee-high sage grass against the wagon were hardly audible above the bawling and bellowing of a herd of frightened, frenzied cattle which were surrounding and following the little caravan headed west through the old Wagoner Pasture of Oklahoma.

After the Civil War, from the late 1870s through the 1890s, buffalo bones littered the plains. Commercial hunters killed vast buffalo herds that grazed there and sold the hides for use as industrial machinery belts, robes, rugs, and for export to Europe. Buffalo bones made valuable fertilizer, which companies back East sold, and offered a source of income for residents of the Twin Territories. This woman spoke about gathering the bones to trade for flour, sugar, coffee, and cloth:

Quanah, Texas was the place where we got our supplies. We would gather up a load of buffalo bones and take it with us to trade for supplies. . . . Now those bones which we took brought eight dollars a ton. It took us three days to make the trip.



Mexican family; [2000.005.3.0654A] Henry Madison Wantland, 1864-1953, photographer; ca. 1915; Robert E. Cunningham Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

everything—a great deal of activity that figured into travel time.

Families also traveled to gatherings such as church services, ice cream socials, box suppers, fruit suppers, spelling bees, popcorn parties, and singing groups. A woman born in 1888 had this to say about dances:

My husband and I went around lots to parties and dances; the older people liked for us to go with the young people. We always went in wagons and buggies and took lots of wraps and quilts in the winter to keep warm.

Just as we travel to see new things, so too did curious people in the nineteenth century. One interview records, “When we heard the first railroad was coming through, we got up a crowd and drove ten miles to see the men laying track and the work train following right along with them. We had to tie our team a long ways away and walk over to where they were working. . . . It was a sight.”

The 1937 WPA interviews reveal widely differing emotions from women who coped with what the day brought. These women did not speak of courage, apparently considering what we today might label as remarkable bravery to be simply the norm for traveling on the frontier. One little girl accompanied her father on the “run” that opened the Cherokee Strip and recalled the thrill of



Wantland family; [2000.005.4.124] Henry Madison Wantland, 1864-1953, photographer; ca. 1915; Robert E. Cunningham Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

handing him the stakes and hammer to make his claim. Another woman remembered her mother's story of forced removal from Mississippi when Choctaw travelers “were driven like cattle.” Such are the extremes of the interviews; they present a complex story of growth and the interweaving of lives. ■

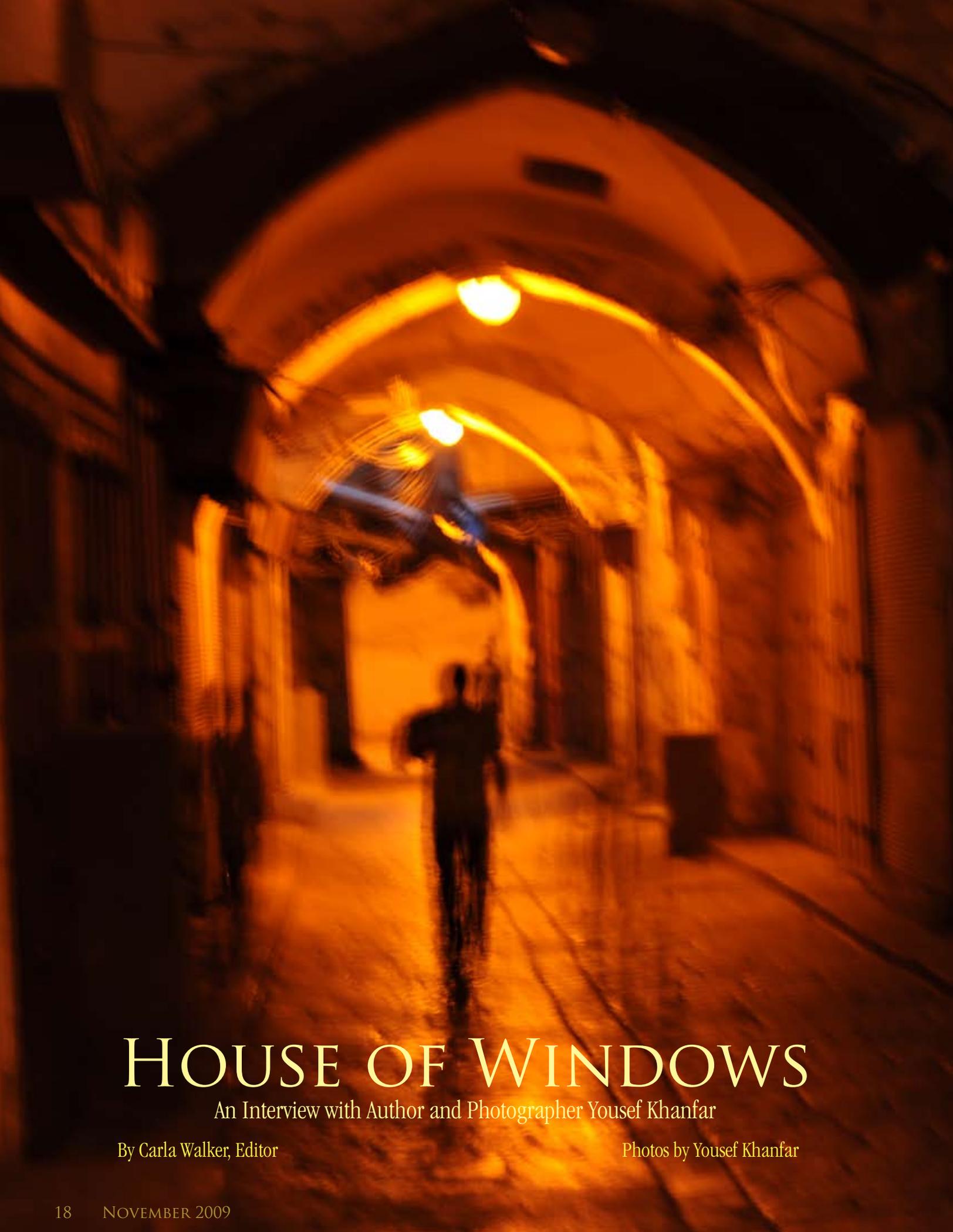
Dr. Terri Baker, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, is Professor of English at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The

interviews in this article are excerpted from *The Indian Pioneer History Papers*, held in the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society. More excerpts can be found in *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma, Stories from the WPA Narratives*, edited by Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

Images courtesy the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, *Not Just a Housewife: The Changing Roles of Women in the West* exhibit.



Ellen Jack; [RC2008.017.4] Unknown photographer; ca. 1914; Photographic Study Collection, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.



HOUSE OF WINDOWS

An Interview with Author and Photographer Yousef Khanfar

By Carla Walker, Editor

Photos by Yousef Khanfar

TO BE A GOOD LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER, YOU
HAVE TO BE A GOOD STUDENT OF NATURE: YOU HAVE
TO KNOW WHEN THE SUN RISES AND SETS, WHEN
THE SEASONS CHANGE, HOW THE ICE MELTS. YOU
CAN SEE A WHOLE FOREST IN A SIMPLE LEAF

— YOUSEF KHANFAR



Carla Walker: Welcome, Yousef. Tell us about yourself, your background.

Yousef Khanfar: My father and mother were Palestinians. They lived in the refugee camps after they were expelled from their homeland in 1948. When there was an opportunity for a job, my father went to Kuwait. I was born there and came to the United States when I was 17 or 18 years old.

When I was a little boy, five or six years old, I did not speak. The doctor said, "There's nothing wrong with him. Give him time and he will talk. Get him involved in something to express himself, like photography, painting, or making sculpture." My dad loved photography, so he took me to the sand dunes and started showing me how to take pictures. It was like magic. I was looking for a voice to express myself and photography gave me that voice.

CW: When did you know you wanted photography to be your life's work?

YK: I knew from a young age. A friend of my dad's came from the United States and brought a book by Eliot Porter. It was American landscape photography. When I looked at those images, I told him, "They are very beautiful paintings." He said, "No, no, no, these are photographs just like the ones you are doing." I realized at that moment that the whole world is not just sand dunes: there are trees, rivers, the ocean, the blue

skies—something larger than what we had in Kuwait. Kuwait gave me the foundation to fly. I found myself in photography.

CW: Tell me how you came to Oklahoma.

YK: I lived in New York about a year to study English. I came to visit my cousins at the University of Oklahoma, and I noticed the difference in the pace of Oklahoma, that Oklahoma people were down to earth. I love New York, but I also love the Oklahoma people, so I stayed and I travel the globe from here.

CW: What do you remember about growing up in Kuwait? Do you have impressions of the conflict in the region at that time?

YK: The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians was constantly covered by TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines. You could not escape the images and language of violence. You could not pull people out of that discussion, to see something different.

CW: In your efforts to promote peace, you say that you made a conscious choice to carry a camera instead of a gun. Tell us about that choice.

YK: I refused to hear all that violence over and over again. Photography became my escape. I decided to promote peace around the world. Ironically, I came to Oklahoma and we had a bombing *here*. When I saw that, I realized that terrorism has no

religion, no color, no discrimination. It can be Christian, Catholic, Muslim, it can be anything.

On the attack of September 11, I think there was a method and message there. The method was horrible, violent; but there was also a message saying we have disconnected. We have disconnected between the East and the West, in culture, religion, and custom, and we need to find ways to bring all of that together with respect.

I have lived in two zones, in the Middle East and in America, so I have two families and there's that big ocean between them. It was sad for me to see September 11, because I saw my people attacking my people. Somehow we have to build bridges of understanding between people, between cultures, between religions. We have to have more tolerance.

CW: Can you point to something or someone to which you attribute your philosophy for nonviolence?

Yousef Khanfar is an award-winning international author and photographer. His art has been collected and exhibited in galleries worldwide. His images appear in magazines such as *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *International Photo Art*; *Oklahoma Today*; *Persimmon Hill*; and *Outdoor Photographer*. Khanfar's most recent book, *In Search of Peace*, was selected by the Global Symposium of Peaceful Nations as a gift for delegates from around the world. In 2007, he was selected by Mont Blanc and UNICEF as Artist of the Year to work with the United Nations to promote literacy around the world. An exhibit of Khanfar's work, including the unveiling of his portrait of Sandra Day O'Connor, will be at the Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum, April 2-July 31, 2010.

YK: I grew up with the Muslim religion as a nonviolent religion, which had a big influence on me. It says that you cannot be a good Muslim unless you believe in Christianity, Judaism, and all the prophets; you have to respect all religions. Gandhi also was a big influence, how he used nonviolence. I watched the Civil Rights Movement and was moved by Martin Luther King. All of this shaped my thoughts and vision.

CW: The humanities—disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, and ethics—teach us that there is much to learn from studying our past and in trying to understand each other across the boundaries of religion, race, and gender. In your book *In Search of Peace*, you state: “You will find that mountains of ego, boulders of ambition, dry sands of greed, and raging waves of anger belong to the enemies of peace.” You’re saying that the roadblocks to peace are ego, ambition, greed, and anger.

YK: Exactly. There is a higher plateau to being human, the absolute human, where people are truly *for* their neighbor. It’s going to be hell sometimes, but you have to make that first step to improve yourself, to make sure there is no ego, no greed, all those immoralities that build walls between us.

CW: Are you saying that leaders have to resolve their own inner conflicts before they can approach the larger problems of the world?

YK: Absolutely. If you want to come to the table of peace, you have to come with a noble heart. They have to start the process of peacemaking and reconciliation with themselves.

CW: There’s a passage in your writing where you encourage people to “listen through history to the voices of conflict, pain, suffering, and defeat.” That kind of “listening through history”

is exactly how the humanities teach us about human experience. Can you describe how people can accomplish that kind of listening? Take, for instance, the conflicts in the Middle East: How do we get leaders to listen to history and move beyond the resentment that often comes from looking at past conflicts?

YK: I think the first step is finding the truth, getting rid of all that dirt around it. This is like mining for gold. When you mine for gold, the first thing you do is move the dirt. If you’re looking for dirt, you’ll find dirt. If you start with the truth, then you can start the process of reconciliation, you start accepting. The more we educate ourselves about others, the less fear we have. The less fear we have, the more able we are to communicate.

CW: What about nations that control television and technology, that don’t allow the free flow of information? Is that a roadblock to peace?



YK: Democracy needs engagement with the citizenship. Democracy has the choice to live in two houses: the house of windows or the house of mirrors. If you live in the house of windows, you can see your citizens, you can see outside, you can see fresh ideas. When you live in the house of mirrors, you only see yourself. You only see *your* ideas, *your* thoughts; therefore democracy crumbles. If you think about it, both houses are made of glass. When that glass is coated with silver, the only thing you see is yourself.

We need to examine not only the information we receive but also, what is more dangerous, the information that we do not receive. The best thing we can do for democracy and for the world is to take the idea from the fathers of the United States which says that “all men are created equal.” If we set the example, other nations will follow.

CW: Let's bring it closer to home, our own state. Oklahoma has a rich Native American history. I was struck by a particular passage in your book *In Search of Peace*, because it so closely reflects the philosophies of the circle-of-life and reverence for the land that are inherent to Native cultures. That passage reads:

Tread lightly on this land, for you will find our ancestors sleep beneath your feet. They listen in silence when we seek their advice, and they comfort us from beyond. Today we walk on top of our ancestors' ashes, and tomorrow all of our ashes will be mixed together, regardless of religion,



race or status. The only enemy of man is himself, and the only enemy of nature is man.

Does that philosophy reflect your culture? How did you come to that understanding?

YK: It comes from our culture in the Arabian Peninsula. I grew up among an oral, tribal people and poetry is our oxygen. We find so much wisdom in the Arabian poetry; it's difficult to translate sometimes, but the wisdom is there. There is a proverb that says, “Wisdom has descended on the brain of the Greek, the hand of the Chinese, and the tongue of the Arab.” These elements of growing up in the Arabian Peninsula teach you to observe life and really think about what's going on around you. You learn a lot from the previous poets, artists, and culture.

CW: Looking back over your career, what are some of your favorite projects?

YK: I've worked on many projects and I've been very lucky, but my favorite so far was accomplished with the help of Chief Judge Robert Henry [U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals]. A few months ago I had the privilege to go to the Supreme Court and photograph Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. That was magnificent. She is an American icon.

Another was a commission in England to photograph one of the oldest Royal Air Force camps used in World Wars I and II. It's one of those projects where history and art cross. I was asked to photograph it before they demolished it. After looking at my images, they could not believe this place would be gone, so they borrowed about £91 million to revamp the airport and add a museum. Some of my images will be exhibited.

CW: What's next for you, Yousef?

YK: I was recently invited by Dr. Eid Mustafa, the head of Physicians for Peace, to document their medical mission in Palestine and Israel. It was a wonderful trip and I was very saddened to see so many people in need of medical attention. I am hoping to go back to start a new project of hope that has nothing to do with politics, just to send the message that those children's future depends on our decisions today.

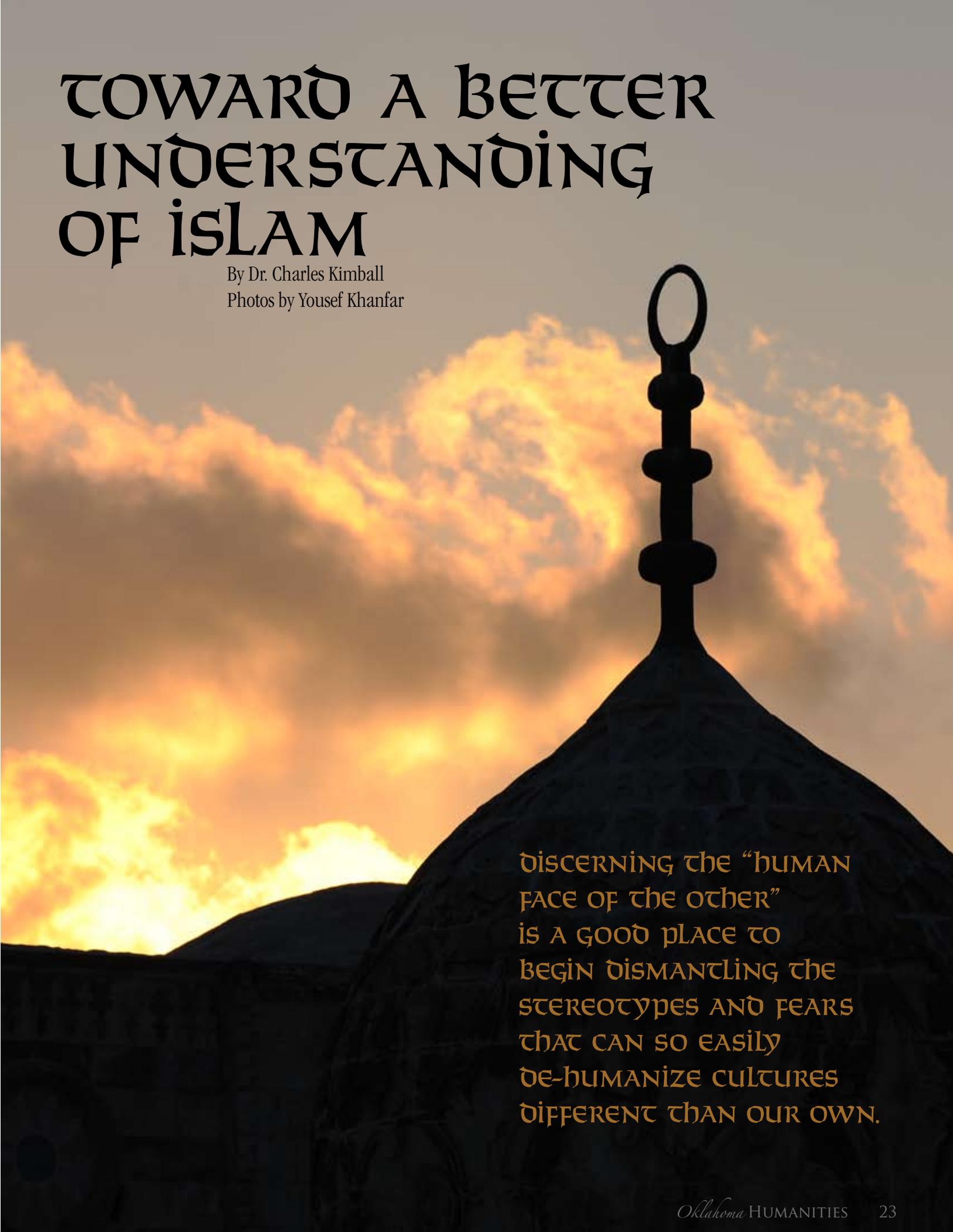
I think that in every person there is a giant. Sometimes we don't give ourselves a chance to be who we are. It's good to look inside, to be truthful with yourself and say, *I need to do something for humanity*. That path, that journey, is so rewarding. ■



TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM

By Dr. Charles Kimball

Photos by Yousef Khanfar

A photograph of a mosque dome silhouette against a sunset sky. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, and the sun is visible on the horizon. The dome is dark and occupies the right side of the frame.

DISCERNING THE “HUMAN
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Charles A. Kimball is an ordained Baptist minister and is currently Presidential Professor and Director of the Religious Studies Program at The University of Oklahoma. In October, he was the featured speaker for the 2009 McBride Lecture for Faith & Literature at Oklahoma Christian University, an event funded in part by a grant from OHC. Kimball is the author of four books, including *When Religion Becomes Evil* (HarperCollins, revised, 2008). He earned his doctorate in comparative religion with specialization in Islamic studies at Harvard University. He served as Middle East Director for the National Council of Churches based in New York from 1983 to 1990.

At the international level, the necessity of cooperation across religious and cultural lines is obvious. Major economic, ecological, medical, and other challenges require unprecedented levels of collaboration. But the challenges are also increasingly important at the local level here in the U.S. Most American cities of 100,000 or more are now microcosms of the entire world community. A growing sector of that microcosm is Muslim, followers of the Islamic faith.

If it has not done so already, Islam will soon pass Judaism as the second largest religion in the U.S. Despite intense media attention since September 11, 2001, most Americans still know very little about Islam. Much of what people think they know is both incorrect and highly distorted. The dominant images

of Islam in the U.S. are distinctly negative. This is a dangerous dynamic in our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Now, perhaps more than ever, it is important that people seek to overcome the ignorance, bias, and fear that have too often characterized relationships between the U.S.—frequently perceived as a Christian nation—and the Middle East, which is assumed to be largely Muslim.

THE MEDIA MAZE

Media images combine with a long history of mutual antipathy and contemporary rhetoric from leaders on both sides who seek to portray the “other” as menacing and evil. The American media’s tendency to focus on “the sensational” results, quite understandably, in extensive coverage of the violent rhetoric and actions of Osama bin Laden, *al-qaida*, Taliban leaders, hijackers, kidnappers, and suicide bombers. While violent extremists pose serious threats, these individuals and groups constitute only a tiny fraction on the fringe.

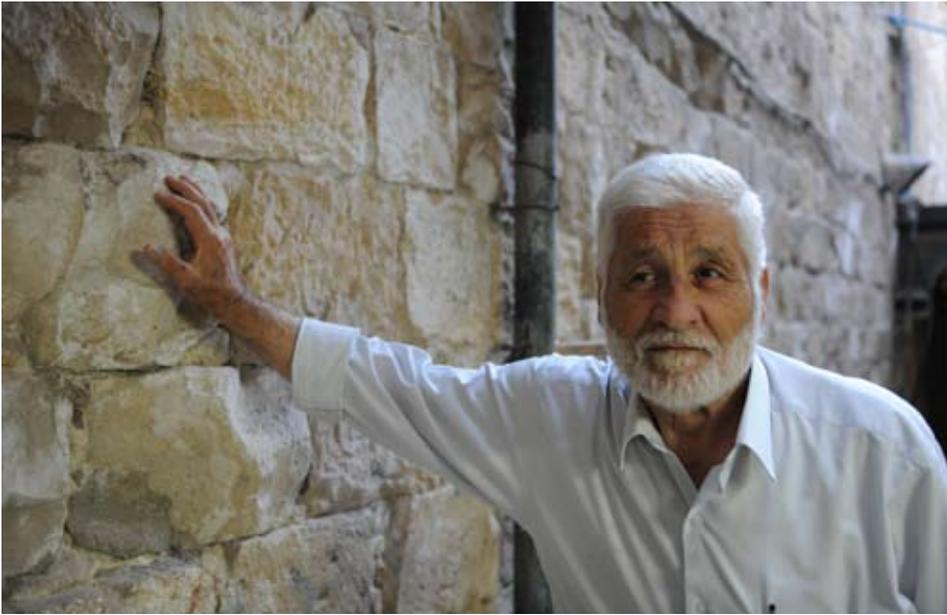
The vast majority of the 1.4 billion Muslims all over the world are like the vast majority of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and people of no particular religious faith. They are raising families, working to put food on the table, helping neighbors in need. Discerning the “human face of the other” is a good place to begin dismantling the stereotypes and fears

that can so easily de-humanize cultures different than our own. It is a vital step toward respectful and peaceful coexistence.

A similar set of problems in perception and misunderstanding permeate many of the predominantly Muslim countries around the world. Large numbers of Muslims in lands as diverse as Algeria, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Indonesia often develop stereotypes of Christians and Western cultures associated with Christianity based on the actions of extremists.

Imagine yourself to be a citizen of Bangladesh, an impoverished country with almost 150 million Muslims. Your images of Christianity may be shaped by media reports in recent decades on violent confrontations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, horrific atrocities suffered by Bosnian Muslims at the hands of Serbian Christians, and gruesome pictures from the confrontation with David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. Add to this the perception of insulting depictions of the prophet Muhammad in Danish and other European newspaper political cartoons and the hostile rhetoric of TV preachers who label Islam an “evil” religion. If these images dominated your worldview, it would be easy to think of Christianity as violent, aggressive, and menacing. When one puts these contemporary perceptions against the backdrop of centuries of Crusades, European colonial rule, and more recent superpower domination of Muslim populations, the human face of other is easily obscured.





THE LANGUAGE OF ISLAM

For Muslims, the imperative to seek peaceful relationships and co-operation with others is a central tenet of Islam. The Arabic language makes clear this basic orientation for Muslims. Most Arabic words are derived from three consonants, which convey a basic notion. The root meanings of the consonants *s-l-m* have to do with submission to the will of God and peace. Three familiar words derive from this root: *salam*, Islam, and Muslim. “*Salam*” means “peace”; it originates from the same Semitic root as the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*. “Islam” literally means “submission to the will of God” and the “religion of peace.” Those who submit themselves in obedience to God are “Muslims.”

Allah, the Arabic word for God, is clearly understood by Muslims as the same God that Jews and Christians worship. Having spent a substantial portion of my professional life working with mission and service ministries of U.S. and Middle Eastern churches, there is simply no ambiguity on this point. Fifteen million Arabic-speaking Christians in the Middle East pray to Allah. While their understandings of revelation clearly differ, Christians, Muslims, and Jews are talking about the same God.

CONSTRUCTIVE ROLES FOR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Numerous churches in the U.S. are pursuing educational initiatives with interfaith dialogue and extended study series. At the same time, many Christian leaders and churches appear to reject any effort to learn more about Islam and other world religions. For those who harbor fear

that such inquiry is threatening, it is important to remember that more accurate understanding of other people and religions does not require or imply agreement. In my view, pursuing an accurate understanding of Islam or any other religion relates to central biblical teachings: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 19:19; Gal. 5:14). “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18). How is it possible to love one’s neighbor or to live together in peace if your fundamental understanding about your neighbor is inaccurate or distorted?

The most visible and celebrated Christian leader in recent decades, Pope John Paul II, was deeply committed to interfaith understanding and cooperation. He wrote about the need for education and modeled respectful engagement with Muslim neighbors. He was the first Pope to visit a mosque—in Egypt and in Damascus. He

was the first to visit a synagogue (in Rome) and to travel to Jerusalem to meet with Jewish and Christian and Muslim communities. In 1985, he addressed 80,000 Muslims in Casablanca. His words are as relevant today as they were 25 years ago:

“We believe in the same God, the one God, the Living God who created the world . . . In a world which desires unity and peace, but experiences a thousand tensions and conflicts, should not believers come together? Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more urgent than ever. It flows from fidelity to God. Too often in the past, we have opposed each other in polemics and wars. I believe that today God invites us to change old practices. We must respect each other and we must stimulate each other in good works on the path to righteousness.”

In 1986, John Paul II invited leaders from all the major religions as well as many other religious communities to Assisi for a day of prayer and dialogue. He continued these efforts throughout his papacy.

Increasingly, Muslim institutions—local mosques and groups promoting understanding across religious and cultural lines—are also taking the lead in educational initiatives. Muslim leaders in local mosques (*imams*) often participate in civic events, provide media interviews, and so forth. Campus organizations like the Muslim Student Association or national groups like the Institute for Interfaith Dialogue (IID) and the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) host lectures and educational programs.





EDUCATION—THE WAY FORWARD

While negative stereotypes and misinformation are widespread, there are also clear signs of hope for the future. Although we cannot easily control what people and governments do in other lands, we in the U.S. can pursue educational initiatives that offer balanced, objective views and accurate information.

Approaches to the study of religion in public schools can be tricky, if not volatile; however, increasing numbers of school boards and local schools are clarifying appropriate ways to learn about world religions and cultures. It is a useful

step toward understanding how the large majority of people, both past and present, approach questions about human existence, the meaning of life, and how to live in society.

Numerous colleges and universities have increased the number of courses on world religions, Islam, and politics in the Middle East. I have worked with a number of schools as they shaped new course offerings along these lines. For students and interested citizens who don't have access to such classes, organizations like The Teaching Company offer a variety of courses on world history, literature, and religion on DVD

and CD-ROM. Other forms of education are available through public lectures, conferences, and television documentaries.

The collective impact of these educational initiatives can help raise the level of informed discussion. In the process, we reduce prejudice fueled by ignorance and model the affirmation of pluralism and the principle of religious freedom that are cornerstones of America.

CONNECTING THROUGH THE HUMANITIES

The humanities offer ways to connect, understand, and even celebrate human commonalities in the midst of differences. In addition to history and language, as we have discussed, other disciplines of the humanities—archaeology, ethics, philosophy, comparative religion, etc.—foster conversation and new perspectives. In the process of such exploration, we discover how Western civilization has been deeply influenced and shaped by Islam as well as the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, architecture, geometric design, mathematics, and astronomy have deep ties to Islamic culture.

Literature, another humanities discipline, is a readily accessible tool in propelling the discussion of Islam. Two superb novels by Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, humanize the people of Afghanistan. Hosseini's characters come to life in the real-life,



historical context of that war-torn land. Readers experience warmth, generosity, love, and devotion in the lives of various Muslims. At the same time, thuggish, sexist, and racist attitudes are also evident. All the endearing and offensive human qualities one sees in any community are manifest in Hosseini's novels. He helps put a human face on Islam.

Greg Mortenson and David Relin's non-fiction thriller, *Three Cups of Tea*, tells the story of one man's mission to repay people who saved his life and to provide opportunities for underprivileged children in Pakistan by building schools in remote villages. This narrative does not sugar-coat real problems. The dramatic events that dominate media attention are put in a wider context.

Three Cups of Tea goes further in another important way. As Mortenson and his well-intentioned friends work to build schools and supply materials and teachers, they encounter stiff resistance from narrow-minded Muslim

leaders who oppose education for girls. Readers learn a good deal about the closed system and incendiary indoctrination in many strict Islamic schools (*madrasas*), as well as the massive funding provided by oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia. Education is vitally important; but it cuts both ways. Some types of "education" serve more to reinforce biases and dehumanize the other. This book identifies the serious challenges facing people in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It also reveals ways many Muslims and supporters around the world are seeking constructive alternatives and more hopeful futures through education for all children.

SHARING ACROSS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

An increasingly popular and valuable point of connection between communities is experienced through meals shared across religious traditions. The Oklahoma Center for Community Justice (OCCJ) sponsors an "open table" program. Over a six-month period a group of people (at least

two people from three different faiths) agree to meet for dinner at least three times. At the end of the six months, all participants come together to share ideas and opinions on what they learned. A similar effort took place last year under the auspices of "Amazing Faiths" in Oklahoma City. Sponsored by several churches and interfaith organizations, families from different religions sat down together for dinner and conversation in homes across the city.

The actions detailed here may seem modest steps, but they are enormously important. Education, conversation, breaking bread, and sharing in the religious and cultural traditions of others are ways to dismantle stereotypes and overcome biases. All of us can do a great deal to educate ourselves and "put a human face on the other" if we will but open our eyes and learn from the rich diversity in our communities. The ways in which we seek to understand one another and interact during the 21st century will have profound consequences for all religions—and for the world. ■



Arts & Humanities Month

The Pearls of Partnership

The Oklahoma Humanities Council and the Oklahoma Arts Council partnered with thousands of cultural organizations across the country in celebrating National Arts and Humanities Month in October. The councils hosted a joint event at Kerr Park in Oklahoma City to draw attention to our partnership and the myriad cultural events we support across the state.

The two organizations support different aspects of culture, but our missions intersect as we work to expand cultural opportunities and enrich the quality of life for all Oklahomans. The partnership began three years ago when the arts council asked OHC to facilitate the *Poetry Out Loud* competition for high school students and to coordinate the selection and appearances of the State Poet Laureate. Partnering in these efforts has allowed the organizations to share resources and expand our reach beyond what either could do alone.

Activities at the kick-off event included music by the Red Dirt Rangers and a poetry recitation by *Poetry Out Loud* state winner Renae Perry. Thomas Jefferson, portrayed by Gary Gray, was on hand to shake hands with the crowd. Secretary of State Susan Savage read a proclamation by Governor Brad Henry declaring October as Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Month.



OHC Executive Director Ann Thompson (left) and Suzanne Tate, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Arts Council.



Celebrates Culture in America

Conversation Kicks off the Month

David Denby, film critic for *The New Yorker*, made his first-ever Oklahoma appearance as the featured speaker for the 2009 *Oklahoma Conversation in the Humanities*. The event was held on October 1st—to coincide with Arts and Humanities Month—at All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa. This was the second year for the conversation, an OHC event designed to engage audiences directly with authors, scholars, and other dignitaries in the humanities field.

Denby was met by an enthusiastic audience, eager to ask questions about his experience as a film critic, the future of film and film preservation, and the negative tone of criticism he addresses in his new book, *Snark* (Simon and Schuster, 2009). Denby began with personal remarks on how film criticism and movie viewing have changed radically during his career.



“The current obsessions, for me,” said Denby, “are the future of journalism and the future of movies. They’re both in states of crisis.” He explained that newspapers and other publications are downsizing and no longer publish film reviews as they once did; in many cases, even print ads for movies are disappearing. Denby also noted that the content of movies and the way we view them have changed over the last decade, citing the proliferation of computer-generated special effects, versus “live action” production, and the ability to watch newly-released movies at home with services like Netflix.

An audio recording of the conversation is posted on the Council’s website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org. Go to the “News/Media” page and click on “Audio/Video Downloads.”

Funding for the event was provided in part by KOSU—The State’s Public Radio; KWGS—Public Radio Tulsa; and the National Endowment for the Humanities.



CALENDAR

Exhibits

The Masterworks of Charles M. Russell: A Retrospective of Paintings and Sculpture



February 6-May 2
Gilcrease Museum
1400 N. Gilcrease Museum Rd., Tulsa
Information: 918/596-2700

Includes more than 30 rarely seen artworks from the Gilcrease permanent collection. A symposium on February 20 will bring authorities from across the country to speak on the artist. *Image: "Salute to the Robe Trade." Adapted from the collection of Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

Let's Have a Party! Oklahoma's Women of Rock 'n' Roll



Pioneer Woman Museum
701 Monument Rd., Ponca City
Information: 580/765-6108

Exhibit features artifacts and memorabilia connected with the women of Oklahoma rock-and-roll. *Image courtesy Pioneer Woman Museum.*

Arte en la Charrería: The Artisanship of Mexican Equestrian Culture



Through January 2
Natl. Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum
1700 NE 63rd St., Oklahoma City
Information: 405/478-2250

Carefully crafted objects, many dating from the 1800s, reveal the rough work of the fields and the craft and dedication of Mexican artisans. The exhibit comes directly from Mexico and prestigious collections rarely seen outside that country. *Image credit: Gala Saddle, c. 20th century, courtesy of Luis González Cárdenas. © Arte en la Charrería.*

Events

38th Annual Symposium on The American Indian



April 12-17
Northeastern State University Campus
600 N. Grand Ave., Tahlequah
Information: 918/444-4350

With the theme "Oklahoma Fancy Dance," the 38th Annual Symposium on the American Indian will discuss current issues of tribal sovereignty and sustainability. Activities include a film series, lectures, presentations, and the annual NSU Powwow. *Image courtesy Northeastern State University.*

Miami Journey Stories



The Miami Public Library will present events while hosting the Smithsonian traveling exhibit *Journey Stories*, on view through December 30. All events are open to the public. *Image by Mike Klemme.*

- November 24, 6:30 p.m. *Bones of the Old Road*, a documentary film on historic Route 66. Dr. Andrew Vassar will discuss the film from a historical and sociological perspective. Coleman Theatre, 103 N. Main. Information: 918/541-2292
- November 30, 6:30 p.m. *Celebrating Route 66 in Pictures*. Mike Klemme, official photographer for the Oklahoma Centennial, will discuss experiences in photographing Route 66. Miami Public Library, 200 N. Main. Information: 918/541-2292
- December 17, 6:30 p.m. *Women's Journey Stories*. Dr. Terri Baker will discuss early Oklahoma women's journey stories. [Don't miss the article by Terri Baker on page 14]. Miami Public Library, 200 N. Main. Information: 918/541-2292

 Funded by the Oklahoma Humanities Council



Photo by Youssef Khartar

End Notes From the Editor ~ Carla Walker

Serendipity: a seeming gift for finding good things accidentally.—Webster's New World Dictionary

If you're paying attention, you can find inspiration—and the humanities—everywhere. Case in point: while flipping through the September issue of *Vogue* magazine, I came across a two-page ad for fashion designer Alberta Ferretti. I'm not a slave to fashion, but the ad fascinated me.

The scene evokes the interior of an English manor: leaded glass windows, dark wood moldings, tapestry furnishings. There are no words on the pages aside from the designer's name, website, and the West Hollywood address of her boutique. Four beautiful, fan-blown models occupy the space, two standing and two draped like wool Afghans over the furniture.

What captured my attention are the books. Each model holds a book. There are books stacked on the floor, on the sofas, in the window sills: old

books and new books; some with paper jackets, some with well-used fabric or leather bindings. The combination of air brushing and sunlight filtering through the windows blur most of the details, save for an open volume of poetry filled with yellow *Post-it* notes (not unlike my own favorite volumes of poetry) and another book turned face down on a stack in the foreground. I could almost make out the title.

This had better be good, I think as I open and close drawers and search the dark recesses of cabinets for something to magnify the image. I settle for a magnifying mirror, flip the magazine upside down, and concentrate to read the title backwards in the reflection: *The Women Around Jesus*.

Eureka! History, religion—the humanities—in the slick pages of a fashion magazine. A quick

online search yielded the author's name: Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. I also wanted to know more about the woman behind the fashions. Could the inspiration of books as set dressing be hers? Very likely. Clicking through the Ferretti website, I found the following quote she gave to *InStyle* magazine, November 2009:

To do my job, you need to be curious. I automatically archive information. Anything can be a source of inspiration for me, from art trips to books, stories I listen to and nature.

How about that? Ferretti *is* a woman of substance. Art history, literature, and perhaps a bit of folklore are woven in her designs. Keep that in mind next time you're searching the closet for that special dress or your favorite jeans. You just mind find the humanities—they're hanging everywhere.



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