IOWA CITY POETRY MARATHON

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In November, 2008, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Iowa City as the world’s third City of Literature, along with Edinburg, Scotland and Melbourne, Australia. This summer there will be various celebrations of this event. The University of Iowa Main Library is having an exhibit from July through October, 2010, featuring books, broadsides, and other works by the UI Writers Workshop and by the Actualist Poets, who flourished here in the 1970s.

As a member of both groups, I am participating in the exhibit by writing a poetry marathon, the first one in 25 years. In the 1970s-1980s, as “Dr. Alphabet,” I wrote 60 poetry marathons and other public writings in Iowa City and elsewhere. These works included 1,000 Poems in 12 Hours, a Mile-Long Poem, Poem Wrapping a City Block, Poem off the Top of the Jefferson Building, Poem Whitewashed on Dubuque Street, Poem Across the Delaware River, and others.

The library is going to exhibit my original Dr. Alphabet outfit—white shirt, pants, shoes, tophat, and cane spangled with letters of the alphabet in different colors. As part of the exhibit, I am going to create a 10,000-page poem in 100 days. Most of the time, the writing will take place in the library’s exhibition area. Each day will result in a 100-page volume that will include a wide variety of writing and many stories about Iowa City. If the 10,000 pages could be placed end to end toward the sky, the result would be almost one hundred times taller than the Jefferson Building.

Previously, when I wrote a marathon poem, I made no plans in advance. When the time came, I wrote whatever I wanted to. Some of the resulting poems were published, but most of them, especially the longer ones, have wound up occupying space in my attic. When the library contacted me about displaying the Dr. Alphabet outfit, I asked if I could write a new poetry marathon, and the exhibit committee agreed to host it.

“Poetry City Marathon” will be the title of this work. In 1977, the Poem Wrapping a City Block was titled “Poetry City USA.” The spirit of the 1970s Actualist Movement in Iowa City had reached its peak. For me, the goal of this summer’s marathon is to get back to that spirit of creativity.
The rules of the new marathon are different from the previous marathons. First of all, I have done a lot of planning in order to ensure that most of the days have something unique going on. Second, I will include the text of many of the previous poetry marathons and other writings within the big marathon itself. Third, on some days, specific groups of people will be invited to join the writing, including senior citizens, grade school and high school students, hospital patients, and even a Scrabble expert who will play a game of Scrabble with me while I use the words formed in the game as part of the poem. There will also be a visit from Dan Coffey, the illustrious Dr. Science of NPR fame.

This marathon will have many surprises, and the ideas for it will change every day. A calendar of events will be placed on the wall to let people know what is coming up. I will be there doing the writing for four hours or more on the appointed days, and I will be glad to answer any questions. People will be able to follow the volume-by-volume progress online at my website: iowacitypoetrymarathon.com.

This gigantic writing will give me the opportunity to put the puzzle of my literary life together. In order to “return to Poetry City,” I will have to take a journey down a road that is 10,000 pages long. On the way, I will meet famous poets of the past, who will speak in words from their poems. When I finish on the 100th day, the librarians will remove the glass case with the Dr. Alphabet outfit in it. I will take the clothes into a dressing room, put them on, come back out to the exhibit room, climb in the glass case, and write an epilog in reverse letters for people on the outside to read.

Sackter House Media will be supporting the publishing process of the poetry created during the marathon. Please see the form below to become a part of the marathon poem. For more details visit:

www.iowacitypoetrymarathon.com

Thank you!

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BECOME A PART OF THE MARATHON POEM

Sackter House Media, a non-profit organization within the Extend the Dream Foundation, will be holder of monies received until the end of the marathon. All donations minus cost of materials received are tax deductible.

1. BOOK PATRON: $10
   * You write a poem or other text with your name below it, to be published in Volume 101, The Book of Patrons
   * At the end of the marathon, you receive an electronic file of The Book of Patrons via email.

2. BOOK SPONSOR: $100
   * You receive the benefits of Book Patron, plus:
   * One of the volumes is permanently named after you, your family, your business, or whomever you request, in the form of “The Book of (your name choice)” (See below for sample covers)
   * You receive a spiral-bound printout book of your volume, signed and dated by the author
   * You or your business receives a half page listing on—iowacitypoetrymarathon.com

3. MARATHON PATRON: $500
   * You receive the benefits of Book Patron & Book Sponsor, plus:
   * When the marathon is completed, you receive a CD of all 101 volumes in PDF format

4. MARATHON SPONSOR: $2000
   * You receive all the above benefits, plus:
   * When the marathon is completed, you receive spiral-bound printout books of all 101 volumes, signed & dated by the author

I want to support The Iowa City Poetry Marathon, as marked in the boxes below. I am including a check for the amount designated. My check number is: ________________.

☐ BOOK PATRON: $10.00
☐ BOOK SPONSOR: $100.00
☐ MARATHON PATRON: $500.00
☐ MARATHON SPONSOR: $2,500.00

Send my materials to: ____________________________
(name & address)

For electronic mail, here is my email address: ____________________________

Check should be made out to: Sackter House Media
This form and the check should be mailed to: Sackter House Media
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