

David Kirby: Post Visit Intern Journal

By Alexandra Holt

David Kirby: the most humorous, heartfelt advocate for living life to a poetic potential.

Before his visit, the student interns of Winter With the Writers were tasked to read his collection of poetry *Get Up, Please*. Within this collection is a poem called “You’ve Built Your Own Mosque” where Kirby reveals a fondness for generous natures and a joy for passing on the torch of tips and technique to further generations. Within the piece, a realization is uncovered, that living a life with an open mind for observation is the true nature of poetry, and only after you *live* the joy can you write it down. Or as he says, “You’ve already written/ the poem—all you have to do now is get it down on paper.”

It is with this philosophy that David Kirby welcomed us as students of writing. His laid-back manner opened up a discussion for anyone willing to enter, ranging from the joys of helping the less fortunate, to the benefits of Omega-3’s, to the foot count of a line and the joy of long sentences. He shared his experience and humor throughout his visit, cracking jokes, and dishing out that sideways smile, relishing the laughter of people who also enjoy the many oddities of life.

During the master class, Kirby taught a layered examination of poetic form, function, and the responsibility of a good beginning and great ending. For his students, as well as the participants of the audience, he was generous in accommodating all advice and critique for our submission, integrating it into efficient ways to improve each work. He also offered advice for workshoping in general, that a good rule of thumb is to judge the various critiques of your work by popular vote. He said that by offering three major pieces of advice, the author would be less likely to shred the mess of hand scribbled notes and adjustments. Rather than overwhelming the eye, the writer could use those three compared points to better understand major issues with the work. Looking down at my own critiques of haphazard scrawled notes, I realized this kindness of brevity might be appreciated. Duly noted.

The reading was equally wonderful. “The Kirb” (which his students fondly call him) lit up the audience with his performance, bridging the gap between stand-up comedy and poetry reading. Although mostly hilarious, he read a range of work, including a piece he described as taking forty years to come to fruition. He told us about the tragic car wreck he witnessed in his youth, so traumatic a scene he couldn’t translate it into his creativity. Once again embracing his love of teaching, he divulged how he finally communicated the trauma into the poem: “I Had A Girl.” Kirby, referencing one of many wonderful tips from his writing manual, described the poetic concept of “marriage,” where the author can take two ideas, images, events and “let them talk to each other, let them really work it out.” By combining his memories of the dying boys with the Iowa plane crash of 1959, he created a conversation between the events, making it less painful to relive the scene.

As an ending note to the evening and the visit of David Kirby to Rollins College, he read “Gnürszk,” a piece which reaches the humorous heart of selfishness in people, especially friends who are listening to your wondrous amazing fabulous travel tales to Poland or Italy or anywhere else, and invariably tell you that you did it. all. wrong.

Thank you, David Kirby, for all the laughs, and the selfless giving of writing advice.

