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Local Poet Denver Nunley gets his Heart's Desire

By Moya Stone



Denver Nunley Photo Moya Stone

Denver Nunley has a very special day coming up. On August 21 he will not only be celebrating his 95th birthday, but he will, for the first time, be reading his poetry to a public audience at the Orinda Library. Nunley lives at Manor Care Center in Walnut Creek and thanks to their program called Heart's Desire he will finally realize a long held dream of sharing his verse with the world. Heart's Desire was implemented by Manor Care Center ten years ago to offer something special for their residents. The program is modeled after the Make a Wish Foundation, which gives wishes to terminally ill children. Manor Care Activities Director Kelly Hardman says they have fulfilled dozens of wishes. "It's a lot of fun for us and for the residents," says Hardman. "It's really a blessing." Wishes are submitted by residents and chosen by a committee, but no one is ever turned down. "It's such a pleasure for us to see the residents' faces when they get their wish," says Hardman. Over the years, wishes have included a dinner cruise on the bay for one resident and his family, a Notre Dame football game, a hot air balloon ride, and a day grooming and feeding horses. Nunley couldn't be happier about his wish and hopes people will be caught up and entertained by his poetry. Heart's Desire is planning to take Nunley's collection of over 200 poems, titled Poems from the Heart, and have them printed and spiral bound. Hardman knows someone in the publishing business who has volunteered to look into

getting the collection published.

Born in Texas in 1914, the young Nunley had to grow up quickly living in poverty and losing his mother to Dust Pneumonia. Life has been challenging but always interesting for the poet. He worked on a farm, flew planes for the Navy in World War II, became a hypnotist, practiced yoga, and taught Human Relations at Contra Costa College for 13 years. Sorrows have not spared Nunley, having lost two of his four children and more recently his wife. But he speaks of his life with good humor and can easily recall minute details of events long past. He recounts meeting his future wife as if it just happened yesterday, not in 1942. "I can still see Patricia sitting in that nightclub," he shares. "Her hands and face fascinated me." His experiences and zest for life are fodder for his poetry, of which he says, "It lives, it breathes, it's me." Energetic and engaged, Nunley can still recite poems he learned in grade school and counts Longfellow among his favorite authors.

Although he had always dabbled in writing poetry, it was after an accident 21 years ago that Nunley experienced a shift in his work. He fell off a BART platform onto the rails and was hit by an oncoming train. He survived four months of rehabilitation and writes of the experience in the poem titled, This is More: "Mentally I found a new life full of confidence and began writing poetry with a feeling that the creator was directing my mind and hand." Join Denver Nunley for an afternoon of his life in rhyme on August 21 at the Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way, Orinda, 3PM.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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