

Remarks from President Jerome Supple



Good morning. We wanted a warm welcome for Mrs. Bush and for all of you, and we certainly have it.

On behalf of Southwest Texas State University, I want to thank all of you for coming. At this milestone in the life of this house, we are grateful to those who have led us to this occasion. Special thanks go to Mary and Jack Giberson, Bob and Tutta Barton, Mary and Eddy Ethredge, Lila Knight, Carroll Wiley, and Tom Grimes.

Thanks as well to the Clayton Fund, the Austin Community Foundation, and the Lower Colorado River Authority for their generous support; to Barnes & Noble for establishing the library at the Katherine Anne Porter House, and for its

continued support in building that library and hosting signings for visiting writers; and, especially, to our two biggest and most visionary supporters, Bill Johnson and Curt Engelhorn.

We can thank Bill's wife, Kate Johnson, for her interest in historical preservation, which led her to the Katherine Anne Porter project. She became interested and mentioned it to Bill. As Bill visited the house and read Porter's work, he discovered connections between the author and his own family's Halifax Ranch. In fact, Porter mentions the Halifax in one of her stories. That personal, intimate connection to place sparked Bill's fondness for the house and his work on its behalf.

So it is with sincere gratitude that we thank Bill Johnson and the Burdine Johnson Foundation of Kyle for making possible the purchase and meticulous historical restoration of the house. Their continuing support now provides the inspiration and opportunity for a new generation of Kyle schoolchildren through the Katherine Anne Porter Young Writers Program. We're happy to have those young writers with us today.

Our connection to Curt Engelhorn came through the memory of Mary Giberson. Mary remembered that Curt's mother, Anita Schlemmer, had been a childhood friend of Katherine Anne Porter. Curt visited the house during the restoration period and wanted to honor his mother's memory, as well as that of Katherine Anne Porter, by supporting it. He now provides support to operate the house through the Angel Foundation.

We are happy to have Curt's sister, Elizabeth Hoskins, with us today.

Southwest Texas is pleased to have had a part in saving this landmark from destruction. This house helped to shape a little girl with dreams into one of this nation's greatest prose writers and possibly its greatest short story writer. It is fitting that we honor her in this way and inspire future writers through their contact with a part of her.

Thanks to Porter scholar Sylvia Grider, we have found a couple of interesting references to Kyle and this house that I wanted to mention this morning.

The first concerns Katherine Anne Porter's wrath when the Texas Institute of Letters passed over her in order to give J. Frank Dobie its first ever Best Book award. The piece is a limerick that began to circulate in literary circles.

It reads:

There was a young lady from Kyle,
Whose temper Frank Dobie did rile.
She left in a huff
Won Pulitzers and stuff
And came back to Texas in style.

Then Dr. Grider quotes a poem written by Porter in 1936 after her first pilgrimage home in fifteen years. During that pilgrimage, Porter visited both her mother's grave and what she referred to as "the small, dreary, empty house, full of dust."

It is that house full of dust, so marvelously preserved, where we gather today. The house welcomed her and the poem read:

This time of year,
this year of all years, brought
The homeless one home again;
To the fallen house and the drowsing dust,
There to sit at the door—
Welcomed, homeless no more.

Again, we are delighted to have all of you today.

It is my pleasure now to introduce to you the holder of Texas State's Mitte Chair in Creative Writing, National Book Award-winning author Tim O'Brien. Tim...