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2008 Distinguished Achievement Award - Humanities

Claude J. (C.J.) Hribal '79

Taking time for others and trying to understand and express the meaning of their lives are two principles that C.J. learned at St. Norbert College, and that he has continued to practice ever since graduating summa cum laude with a creative writing major.

C.J.'s first thoughts of becoming a writer/photographer for National Geographic were happily redirected to creative writing after he took a writing course from Stan Matyshak, then received encouragement and guidance from his advisor, Dan Giovannini, and from John Bennett, Bob Boyer, Tom Davidson and Ken Zahorski, all from the English faculty.

After he had earned an M.A. in creative writing from Syracuse University in 1982, C.J. began his long teaching career: first as a teaching associate and part-time instructor at Syracuse University; then for four years at The Loft, a community writing center in Minneapolis; then as an assistant professor of English at Memphis State University; and, since 1990, as director of undergraduate education for the humanities and as professor of English at Marquette University, where he teaches a wide variety of courses in writing and literature.

C.J.'s many years as a teacher of creative writing and literature parallel his own successful career as a writer of short stories, novellas, essays and novels—doing notably what he teaches others how to do. His first book, “Matty’s Heart” (1984), was a collection of five short stories and two novellas. Two novels, “American Beauty” (1987) and “The Company Car” (2005), will soon be joined by “War Babies” and “Fade Farms,” works in progress.

But that’s just the tip of C.J.’s literary iceberg. A collection of novellas and short fiction (2000) and the editorship of an anthology of Czecho-Slovak writing (1991), join numerous essays and reviews in magazines, as well as short stories and novellas in magazines and anthologies.

Professionally, as a teacher of writing, C.J. has helped other writers and would-be writers through 30 or more papers he has presented at writing conferences, workshops, conventions and M.F.A. programs for writers. He has also done more than 50 readings at colleges and universities, libraries, bookstores, high schools and public venues.

All this “production” has resulted in C.J.’s receiving, to date, 15 fellowships and grants, including the highly prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 2003. In addition, he has received

nearly 30 honors for his writing, including four nominations for the highly regarded Pushcart Prize in Fiction. In 1985, he received the Writer’s Choice Award from the Pushcart Foundation. Anne Tyler, one of America’s finest novelists, nominated him for this award.

As a faculty member at Marquette University, C.J. has served the university, its students and faculty, as well as the public, by making numerous presentations, bringing guest writers to the community and campus, sponsoring student publications, serving as a visiting writer, judging writing awards, serving as writer-in-residence at various colleges and universities, and organizing a marathon reading by Marquette employees to raise money for the hungry and homeless.

C.J. is one very accomplished writer and teacher, one who frequently refers to St. Norbert College as “the place that nurtured his talent as a writer.”

St. Norbert College

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