

# WORDS WITH WINGS



Michael Rothenberg is currently Florida State University's Libraries Poet in Residence. BOB HOWARD

## POETS AND FRIENDS INTRODUCE CHILDREN TO THE JOYS OF VERSE

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

There's a buoyant poignancy within poet Michael Rothenberg's chirpy children's poem "Delightful Bird!" Rothenberg — author of a notable body of poetry and founder of Big Bridge Press — is currently Florida State University's Libraries Poet in Residence. His "fabulous, flittery...sweet singing twittery, feathery bird" shimmers line after line for listeners young and old before concluding

with a provoking contemplation.

"That pink-feathered, blue feathered, // green-feathered bird would sing and sing / and always be heard // I hope you don't think that I am being absurd / but I wished I could be that always heard bird," recites Rothenberg.

Its relevancy speaks not only to Rothenberg's involvement in environmental activism, but the fundamental mission of the grassroots organization, 100 Thousand Poets for Change (100TPC), founded by Roth-

enberg and his partner Terri Carrion.

Created in 2011, 100TPC began as a call to arms for poets to address issues of peace and sustainability within their communities. During that first year TPC100 hosted over 700 events globally, completely reorganizing Rothenberg's sense of community.

Eight years later, 100TPC has grown into an international platform that encompasses interdisciplinary

**See POETRY, Page 9D**

### If you go

**What:** "Read A Poem To A Child" 100 Thousand Poets for Change

**When:** Sept. 24-29

**Where:** Various Locations

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information, visit <http://100tpc.org/signup/>.

# Poetry

Continued from Page 1D

year-round events.

This September's event gives participating individuals and groups an additional focus with the "Read A Poem To A Child" initiative. For Tallahassee this means over 30100TPC events will be taking place at local businesses and schools throughout the city from Sept. 24-29.

"I love the idea that people around Tallahassee will be reading poems to children," says Rothenberg, whose co-sponsor, FSU Libraries Special Collections is also home to the extensive John MacKay Shaw Collection of Childhood in Poetry. "It's bringing the community closer because everyone is doing something together. It's a moment with a parent, brother or sister, grandparent, teacher and child where they can connect and have something to remember."

A quiet, introverted child from Miami Beach, Rothenberg heard his future inside the recordings of Allen Ginsberg and Michael McClure. Poetry was the vehicle for his unspoken thoughts, propelling him towards the University of North Carolina where he earned a BA in English. Rothenberg moved to California after graduation and opened a tropical plants nursery that soon became pollinated with his childhood heroes.

Rothenberg talked about horticulture and writing with these leaders of the Beat Generation — a group of authors that questioned mainstream politics and culture — as they became his close mentors and friends.

His writing processes followed Philip Whalen's poetic assertion that "poetry is a graph or picture of a mind moving," and every time he pulls out his journal to write he hears Joanne Kyger telling him to "date it." The practice is to write the date at the top of the page, and even if Rothenberg writes one line or 10, to record the continuous stream of what he thinks and sees.



**September's event gives participants an additional focus with the "Read A Poem To A Child" initiative.**

BOB HOWARD

"If you look at that thing and ignore the dates for a moment, you'd see that your mind has been telling you a story all along," says Rothenberg.

He considers himself a humanist in writing and art, responding to the political atmosphere while immersed in nature. He's lived among the Golden State's Redwoods, and now is situated on Lake Jackson. Rothenberg's poetry is peppered with the rhythmic earmarks of a Beat poet as he renders images from his natural surroundings and internal landscapes, however he maintains his own individuality just like the poets he most admired.

"That's what I loved about being surrounded by

Beat poets because they really are nothing alike," remarks Rothenberg. "If you sat down and listened to these people and paid attention you'd see that their voices are entirely different from each other. Every one of them was some kind of exotic creature of their own expression and rhythm and breath and attention and focus."

As Poet in Residence, he's working on an exhibition dedicated to poetry and activism, and is constantly engaged with the power that poetry gives to others. He believes in 100TPC's ability to forge a common bond across state lines and countries' borders, and hopes those who take part in "Read A Poem To A Child" will unearth that same potential.

100TPC has partnered with the Black Dog Café on the Square, Midtown Reader, My Favorite Books, Books-A-Million, libraries and schools in the area.

There will be featured readings by Rothenberg, Sandra Gerrell Kelley, Katie Clark, Yolanda Franklin, Ravi Howard, David Kirby, Mat Wenzel, Barbara Hamby, and Joaquin Zihuatanejo to bring about a week of poetry that is accessible for all. Rothenberg notes that those interested in organizing or attending these events can visit the 100TPC website for more information and to sign up if they wish to participate.

In the same way that poetry transformed Rothenberg's understanding of the world, he sees the same magic being shared between families, teachers, children and the community at large. And for the young poets that it might inspire, he adds a final thought.

"I don't want to hear you be somebody else," says Rothenberg. "You're like this bird, like an Amazonian bird of paradise. You've got your own song. I don't want you to sing like a pigeon. I want to hear you sing like the rare bird that you are. Otherwise, why bother?"

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*