

>> From the Library of Congress, in Washington D.C.

>> This is Rob Casper [assumed spelling] at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 12th year that booklovers of all ages have gathered in Washington D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival, which is free and open to the public, will be two days this year: Saturday, September 22nd, and Sunday, September 23rd, 2012. The festival will take place between 9th and 14th Streets on the National Mall, rain or shine. Hours will be from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Saturday the 22nd, and from Noon to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday the 23rd. For more details, visit [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest). And now it is my pleasure to introduce Joy Harjo, author of the new memoir, "Crazy Brave." Harjo has published seven poetry collections, as well as a collection of essays and interviews, a play, a children's book, and a young adult novel. She has also produced four music albums and performed solo and with her band, "The Arrow Dynamics." Harjo lives in the heart of the Creek Nation in Oklahoma. Thank you so much for joining us.

>> Joy Harjo: Well I'm glad I could be here.

>> In your new memoir, you talk of the essential role poetry has played in your life. What was it like to tell your story in "Crazy Brave," compared to the form and frame poetry offers?

>> Joy Harjo: Well it's totally different. It blew things open. Poetry is a totally different form. As I come to in the memoir, I talk about it as coming to poetry for you know, a kind of language that is beyond words. And a memoir has so many words and stories. It's very different form but I actually -- once it -- I was 14 years late in my -- in getting the memoir done. But once I got into it, it's just a different form.

>> Did you find it harder to write in that kind of form? Was the -- did the 14 year hiatus or the 14 year gestation period of the memoir have something to do with the process of it?

>> Joy Harjo: I think so. A part of it was running away from the story that wanted to be told. I wanted to write cool stories about different parts of my life. You know, become -- the poet -- I wanted to start it at the point after I started the road to poetry. Instead, I wound up starting at before I was born and I had a great resistance to it, yet, that's the story that wanted to be told.

>> And there are moments too in the memoir that are beautifully poetic, beautifully lyric. And did you think when you sort of arrived at those moments often when you're talking about the moment you were born or the moment before your birth or your ancestors or visions you would have, did you feel that sense of engaging the language as a poet would?

>> Joy Harjo: I think so. I probably did through much of the narrative because I just can't help it. I mean that's the -- that language, that poetic language, is you know, it's in the -- it's the same voice in my music. It's the same voice when I play saxophone. And I came to realize after finishing the memoir that it's the same narrative voice. It still

has that same sense of poetry which is about you know, the music in language and in the discovery of those places beyond words.

>> Yes. Well I was interested - speaking of place - in talking about how the memoir is structured in four sections, east, north, west, and south, in that order. And I wondered how did this directional structure help center your story?

>> Joy Harjo: That came -- that memoir went through probably a hundred drafts.

>> Oh wow.

>> Joy Harjo: And that came probably towards the -- about three-fourths of the way through. I had different drafts. I've probably thrown out at least a couple of full books. It used to be a lot longer. It was all short stories at some point. At another point it was riffs, you know, like musical riffs on tunes that dealt with life experiences and this, that, and the other. And then when I finally came to it, I thought, "Well in a way, it's a kind of ceremonial process." Because it's a coming of age for creativity. You know, kind of how you create -- you know, come of age as a creative person or as somebody who's going to embark on a life of creativity. And in our tribe, the ceremonial directions start east and then go north and -- and so once I got that into place, that helped with the final rewrites. Then it settled in. It's sort of like finding a title that's -- you know, or when you know if something is done, there's this feeling of settling or like it clicks into place. And the memoir clicked into place once those directions were in place.

>> Yes, no, that makes sense. I wanted to talk a little bit about your poetry and about my experience of hearing you perform poetry. When I heard you last, I was struck by how fluidly you moved between reading and singing. And I wondered if you could talk about the power of both ways you give voice to your writing?

>> Joy Harjo: Yes, I think that came about -- well, I realized writing the book too is that how much influence my mother had on poetry. She used to quote [inaudible] and she sang and she wrote, you know, original song lyrics and even recorded some. And I think I realized that part of it comes from her and you know, how she would move between poetry and -- you know, speaking poetry and singing. And then also, you know, as I wound up majoring in poetry. Went to the Iowa Writers Workshop and I kept thinking, "But where's poetry in my tribe?" We had Alexander Posey who was -- became a pretty well-known poet in America as well as a journalist. And you know, with written poems. And then when I went to you know, my tribal ceremonies, that's where I found poetry and poetry was -- sang. You know, it was also oratory but it was often included with music and dance too. And so that was the second part of coming to that.

>> Yes. I wondered too, in a larger sense, what it's meant for you to be such a rangee [phonetic] writer and performer? Someone who has taken on so many different ways of expressing herself. Do you find you continually search those new ways out? And what does your variety of creative work say about how one might live most fully?

>> Joy Harjo: Yes, I guess I can't -- don't think about it too much about you know, it just seems natural once the poetry -- if you look at the roots of all poetic forms, I would say 99 percent of them lead back to music. And so then there's music and then you pick up music, but then there's images. I've been doing a lot of work with images which is where I started. And I just think that the you know, creative -- you know and I just do what I do and I don't think about it too much. I just follow you know, the path I'm -- you know, I just follow it. I don't always understand it except what I do understand is that I think that we were all -- you know, we're all creative people. That we're all involved in you know, in terms of making our lives and making meaning in our lives, we always -- we're you know, we're actually you know, creativity in motion, each and every one of us. And to take up that act of you know, of being artists in the culture like you know -- a culture like you know what western society or America has become, which is absolutely an incredible experiment of multiple cultures and cultural expressions. Yet, the you know -- yet this country is one in which poetry has become somewhat obscure than what -- it's not at the center -- you know, not at the center of cultural expression.

>> In your memoir, you talk of studying at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, and you are now a founding board member of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation. And I wondered if you could talk about the work such institutions do to preserve and nurture future generations of American Indian artists and writers?

>> Joy Harjo: Well the Institute of American Indian Arts was started as a bureau -- it was a Bureau of Indian Affairs School that was also -- it was experimental in that it began in -- I guess it was 50 years ago, an arts curriculum because they found that Native students, especially the ones going away to boarding school, had a lot of emotional and you know difficulties. And the arts -- they found that you know, we were -- turned out to be really good artists and that -- and I remember being a high school student at the Institute of American Indians Arts and really feeling and being energized by being in a community of other Native artists and thinking about, "Okay, how do we refresh and grow our cultures, you know, in a way that yes, you know, I love you know our stop dance music, but I also love Jimi Hendrix and John Coltrane." And so how do we make a music that includes all of these and yet it is Muskogee and it also grows on Muskogean culture? And so becoming part of Native Arts and Cultures Foundation as a founding board member, I think that school, which is still going and now it's a college, you know, still deals with that. We're dealing with quite a wide scope of arts from traditional you know, traditional arts that have also become very contemporized and new arts and over 500 tribes.

>> Right.

>> Joy Harjo: And but I think the questions remain the same. It's what -- you know, what does art do? What is the function of arts and cultures in our society? Well it's soul food. It grows the soul. You know, it grows the soul. Every culture has a soul. I believe that every culture has a spirit. And it wants to be shared as well as it wants to take care of the

people until there's a process. And arts -- you know, and taking care of arts within ourselves, is really taking care of and feeding the soul of the people.

>> Yes, yes. No, and we're lucky to have you doing that invaluable work, both through foundation and in your own writing and performing. We've been hearing from Joy Harjo who will appear on Saturday, September 22nd, in the Contemporary Life Pavilion at the National Book Festival on the National Mall. Ms. Harjo, thanks so much.

>> Joy Harjo: Thank you so much, Rob.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).