



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Testimony of Matthew Dickman, Head Start Alumnus and Nationally Recognized Poet



Matthew Dickman, a Vulnerable Child in an At-Risk Community

Growing up in the Lents district of Portland, Oregon during the 1980s and mid-1990s meant, among other things, growing up within a community that was often belittled by alcoholic parents, gang violence in the form of The South-Side White Pride, and the ever present Gypsy Joker biker gang. I was lucky in that I lived in a supportive single-mother household. My siblings and I always had food, even if it was a box of macaroni and cheese, and our mother never abused us. Of course, many of my friends were not so lucky. The community at large did not support the Arts, nor did it support the artistic imagination of children.

Head Start Was Matthew's Oasis

But within this hand-to-mouth landscape there was an Oasis. One to which my mother sent my twin brother, little sister, and me every day over a course of almost two years.

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The National Head Start Association is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that believes that every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, has the ability to succeed in life if given the opportunity that Head Start offers to children and their families. It is the voice for more than 1 million children, 200,000 staff and 2,800 Head Start programs in the United States.

That Oasis was Head Start. Within the walls of Head Start we were given the access to, and freedom of creative and intellectual exploration. Though I could not have known it at the time this experience has deeply influenced my life as an adult. I believe my experience in Head Start allowed me, and gave me the tools to say no to the violent contract the neighborhood offered its young boys and, at that early age, helped to guide me into the adult I have become.

Head Start Helped Matthew Become a Successful Poet

I am a writer and the author of the book, *All-American Poem* (American Poetry Review/Copper Canyon Press, 2008). I am the recipient of The Honickman First Book Prize, The May Sarton Award from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Kate Tufts Award from Claremont College, the 2009 Oregon Book Award, and two Fellowships from Literary Arts of Oregon. I have also received residencies and fellowships from The Michener Center for Writers in Austin, Texas, The Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont, The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and The Lannan Foundation in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I have been profiled in *The New Yorker*, *The Oregonian*, *Poets & Writers Magazine*, and *the Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. I have published individual poems in the *The New Yorker* among other national magazines and reviews. W.W. Norton & Co. will be publishing my next book in 2012. I believe there is a direct line connecting my creative life, my sense of self-worth, my early success as a poet, and my experience in Head Start. I cannot imagine my young life, and so my adult life, without the dynamic experience of Head Start.

Matthew's Major Publications

Dickman, M. (2008). *All-American Poem*. Port Townsend, WA: American Poetry Review/Copper Canyon Press.

Dickman, M. (2009). *The End of the West*. (Lannan Literary Selections). Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press.

Dickman, M. (2011). *Flies*. (Lannan Literary Selections). Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press.