

Renowned Poet Arrives for Residency at Gettysburg National Military Park

Accomplished poet from the University of Arizona Poetry Center, Julie Swarstad Johnson, set as Artist in Residence program at Gettysburg National Military Park.

GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA, UNITED STATES, February 16, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Gettysburg National Military Park, in partnership with the National Parks Arts Foundation (NPAF), is pleased to announce that Julie Swarstad Johnson, a published poet, will become the NPAF Artist in Residence in February of 2018. Ms. Johnson will spend a month writing and being inspired by the Gettysburg battlefield. She will also give a free public poetry reading March 3rd at the Gettysburg NMP Museum and Visitor Center at 3:00 p.m.



Poet Julie Swarstad Johnson in Tucson

The event is sponsored by a grant from the Gettysburg Foundation and other generous sponsors.

Ms. Johnson will be writing poetry inspired by stories of pacifist faith communities around Gettysburg at the time of the battle. The experiences of the Sherfy family, owners of the Peach Orchard site, will provide a central narrative. Her personal practice as a member of Mennonite and Quaker congregations will furnish another strand of inspiration, linking the historical struggles of these communities with her efforts to understand the place of pacifism and faith in American public life.

“I propose to write poems engaging with the stories of pacifist faith communities around Gettysburg at the time of the battle. The experiences of the Sherfy family, owners of the Peach Orchard site, will provide a central narrative.” the poet commented.

Born and raised in Phoenix, Johnson completed her bachelor’s degree in anthropology and creative writing at the University of Arizona in 2010. In 2011, she moved to central Pennsylvania to earn a master’s degree in English (Creative Writing) at Penn State. Her master’s thesis, a poetry manuscript exploring the history of the nineteenth-century iron industry in central Pennsylvania, was the culmination of two years spent tracking down and visiting the sites of over thirty iron furnaces, and also conducting archival research at Penn State and county historical societies. Her manuscript went on to be published as *Jumping the Pit*, a collection of poems in the voices of people on the fringes of the historical record.

At her public reading, you will notice Ms. Johnson’s poetry will ask and answer Questions pertinent to contemporary audiences. She stresses that these questions are at the heart of the poems she envisions. Is violence part of the fabric of American culture? What do we gain or lose when we act

against— or with—the cultural norms of our communities? These questions interest her because they require complex answers, rooted in empathy and curiosity. For audiences she will read and discuss these new poems, emphasizing connections with ethical questions confronting us in the present.

The poet Brian Teare has described his own writing as a kind of “fieldwork,” requiring intense observation and immersion in an environment; Ms. Johnson also envisions her writing at Gettysburg as such fieldwork, relying on close attention to the battlefield through walking, hiking, and exploring.

“Gettysburg National Military Park has offered inspiration to artists for more than 150 years,” said Chuck Hunt, acting superintendent at Gettysburg National Military Park. “The Artist-in-Residence program engages new audiences and tells Gettysburg’s stories in new and compelling ways.”

Programs like Gettysburg National Military Park’s artist-in-residence series, in which acclaimed artists find inspiration from the beauty and history of our national parks, and share their ideas with park visitors, represent some of the highest aspirations of the National Park Service.

The program is offered thanks to the input and support of the National Park Service and the Gettysburg Foundation and the partnership with the Poetry Foundation, whose joint efforts make the park the foremost visitor destination for those interested in the epic history of the American Civil War. Gettysburg National Military Park preserves, protects and interprets for this and future generations the resources associated with the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg, during the American Civil War, the Soldiers’ National Cemetery, and their commemorations.

The National Parks Arts Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to the arts of the National Parks through creating dynamic opportunities for artworks that are based on our natural and historic heritage. All NPAF programs are made possible through the philanthropic support of donors of all sorts ranging from corporate sponsors, small businesses, and art patrons and citizen-lovers of the parks.

For more information about Julie Swarstad Johnson’s poetry reading event call 717-334-1124.

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