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Author brings 'Barking Spiders' to Conesville Elementary
BY JAN MYERS • Correspondent • January 30, 2010

COSHOCTON TRIBUNE/Coshocton, Ohio --

Popular poet and children's author, C.J. Heck, was a special guest at Conesville Elementary School Friday. She shared with each class some of her children's poems from her book, "Barking Spiders and Other Such Stuff."

Heck, who now lives in Pennsylvania, is originally from Coshocton. Her maiden name was Parrish.

"I was the oldest of six children," she said. "I graduated from Coshocton High School in 1967 and still have family in the area."

Heck spends a lot of time traveling to schools throughout the country encouraging the love of poetry.

"I've visited schools as far west as Illinois and as far south as North Carolina and all along the East Coast," she said. "I tell kids they can write poetry about anything and explain to them how to play the 'mind candy' game to think of all the things they like or don't like. These things can become perfect topics for their poems."

Heck also writes poetry for adults and said her inspiration for her work comes from many places such as things from her own childhood, her siblings, her own children,

her grandchildren and people she meets. Poetry is everywhere she tells the students.

"Did you know poems touch your life every single day?" she asked. "How many of you have a favorite song? Did you know these songs have lyrics and lyrics are poems? What about greeting cards and tongue twisters? These are poems, too."

Heck began writing poetry when she was in elementary school.

"I had a teacher in third or fourth grade who made poetry so much fun that I decided to write poetry forever," she said. "The first poem I wrote was called 'Eat-Eat' when I was in the fourth grade."

She also asks the kids if they know what a barking spider is. Once she reads the "Barking Spiders" poem from her book, the students all understand. Heck's inspiration for that poem came from her brother, Chip.

"When my daughters were very young, we were visiting my brother," she said. "My girls were playing a game on the floor in the living room, and one of my daughters passed gas. She was so very embarrassed. My brother jumped up, ran to the kitchen, yelling that he needed to find some Raid to kill the barking spider they had in the living room. Well, this made my girls laugh, and my daughter wasn't embarrassed anymore."

Many of the students were able to recite Heck's poems along with her as she read to them.

"There is no greater compliment to a writer than to have others know their work," she said.

Third-grader Megan Magee was one of them. "I loved it!" she said. "I've heard all her poems and my favorite one is called 'Yes or No.' I want to try writing my own poem about fruit."

Another third-grader, R.J. Hammond said he also might start writing poems. "Her poems are really good," he said.

There are about 60 short poems in her "Barking Spiders" book. Some of them are sad, such as "Grandma's Apron," which was written about her own grandmother, and others are funny, such as "Playing Cowboy," which Heck said is about her own childhood cowboy game, where she put more miles on her mother's broom than her mother did.

Conesville Elementary Principal, Joel Moore, asked Heck how she came up with some of the unusual names, such as the poem about Schlossenfuss.

"My dad used to blame things on imaginary people such as 'Schlossenfuss,'" said Heck. "It's fun to use these names in my poems."

Heck was invited to the school in honor of the upcoming Right-to-Read Week. "She was highly recommended by one of our teachers," he said. "Her visit has been a good way to get everyone excited about the plans we have to celebrate Right to Read Week. We've had the sixth-grade students reading her poems during the announcements over the loud speaker the past several days, and the upper grades have been studying poetry recently."

Along with a number of other reading activities during the next couple of weeks, Conesville students will be working on their own poems and will present them during their Family Night on Feb. 11.

"That's the night when we will host a sweetheart café and young author's stand up mic night for parents," Moore said.

Heck has a new book coming out in February, "Barking Spiders, too." Her books are available at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble online, The Book Nook, and soon, her website. For more information on the work of C.J. Heck, visit her Web site at <http://www.barkingspiderspoetry.com/>.



Children's Author Visits Conesville Elementary Coshocton County Beacon, January 29, 2010



PHOTO: CJ Heck, famed children's author, visited the students at Conesville Elementary on Friday, January 29, to promote her book, "Barking Spiders" which was published in 2000.

Famed Children's Author Visits Conesville Elementary January 29, 2010

Students at Conesville Elementary received a rare treat on Friday, January 29, when famed children's author, C.J. Heck came for a poetry reading and a book signing. Heck was there the whole day entertaining the students with her brilliant poetry. Although she is an adult, Heck's writing reflects that of a child's to more accurately portray her own childhood memories and so that she may also better relate to her targeted audience.

Heck is a Coshocton native and grew up on Elm Street. She said that most of her children's poetry is based on her own experiences when she was a child. Some poems are based on her siblings, her children, grandchildren, and even the students she meets when doing school readings.

Her first children's poetry book is called "Barking Spiders". But these aren't your

traditional eight-legged fiends she's speaking of.

“We were all sitting on the floor playing chutes and ladders,” Heck said, “it was a wooden floor and all of a sudden, my sister passed gas. She said, ‘Oh I’m so embarrassed’ and covered her face. But my brother stood up and yelled, ‘Hey Sue, you’d better get some Raid. We’ve got some barking spiders in here.’ We all cracked up laughing and my sister wasn’t embarrassed anymore. So I got the idea for the poem, ‘Barking Spiders’.”

Heck started each session by introducing herself to the kids and teaching them a little about poetry. She explained to the kids that poetry can be found in everyday life through greeting cards, songs, and even tongue twisters.

For the next ten minutes or so, the class giggled and laughed as they tried their best to master the tongue twisters Heck taught them. The class split up into two sections and tried to out-do each other in both speed and accuracy. By the end, the classes were pretty good with those tongue twisters. Even the teachers were expert tongue twisters!

After the class had untwisted their tongues, Heck began reading some of her poetry. Heck’s writing was amazing and her subject matter was something both children and adults could relate to. The children could relate more to Heck’s style of writing and the adults sat back listening, remembering their own childhood.

At the end of the hour, Heck left time for questions. She really has a gift with children, because those students were actively engaged for the whole hour. Even the ones who admitted to not liking poetry were asking questions about writing and Heck’s childhood in the end. She also answered other very important questions when asked such as, “What’s your favorite poem?” and “What’s your favorite animal?” and “Do you have any poems about dirtbikes?”

“My inspiration comes from anyone,” said Heck, “It started out with being just a part of my life and my childhood, and when my kids were born, I started writing funny things they did. Now I have grandchildren. I’ll call them up on the phone and read a poem to them and they’ll tell me if it’s good or not. If it’s not, I’ll rip it up and start on another one, or put it in a drawer somewhere. They’re my greatest critics.”

Heck does readings throughout the state of Ohio and has travelled to many other states as well sharing her gift of writing with others. She also has written some adult poetry, which can be viewed at www.authorsden.com and includes the poem she wrote for her first husband, who was killed in the Vietnam War. She is still debating whether or not to publish her adult poetry in book form.

Most poems Heck writes has a subtle message in them, such as “The Quarter”. It’s about a little boy who finds a quarter and is wondering what to buy with it. As he and his father are walking downtown, they see a blind man in a wagon with a cup. The little boy decides to give his only quarter, all the money he has, to this blind man. Thinking his daddy will be mad at him for giving away all his money, the little boy is shocked when his daddy says he’s proud of him.

“There’s no money in books,” said Heck, “but if you’re not shy and can go out and visit these students, that’s where all the fun is. I get a high every time I talk to these kids.”

C.J. Heck has eight books that are ready to be published. She is also planning on publishing a new book of children’s poetry sometime next month. To learn more about Coshocton native author, C.J. Heck, visit her web site at <http://www.barkingspiderspoeetry.com/>. There, you can read some of her children’s poetry, high school poetry, view information about her school and public visits, tongue twisters, and her biography.

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