

Jas Mardis

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POET / EDITOR / QUILTER / COMMENTATOR / EDUCATOR / STORYKEEPER

A dedicated researcher and writer, Jas. (James) Mardis has been called a cultural, poet-hero by those who write such things. By those who have benefitted from his Family Story Project he has been called simply, "Friend".

In every endeavor he has been known as a reminder of history and the importance of community, family and the story. He served for a number of seasons as a Touring Artist with the City of Dallas Neighborhood Touring Program presenting both poetry and storytelling. Additionally, Jas. performed for numerous seasons on various stages with the Dallas Museum of Arts' Arts and Letters LIVE series. He is also well known for many years of radio commentary on 90.1fm, KERA's, Morning Edition, for which he was awarded multiple awards and recognitions from the Dallas Press Club and The National Association of Black Journalists.

In writing Mardis finds a strong voice among remembrance and culture. His poetry is quick to the rhythm of the people from whom he borrows the story. He is living out their moments and bringing you along for the methodical rehashing of what your mind's eye missed, but will never again forget. Naturally, his educator's eye took the publishing opportunity that he was presented in 1998/99 and he edited the first anthology of black writers in the Southwest, "KenteCloth: Southwest Voices of the African Diaspora" introducing forty-two new and emerging voices. Among them are Bernestine Singley (When Race Becomes Real) and the already emerged, Tim Seibles (Body Moves, Hurdy-Gurdy, Kerosene). Mardis' own contributions were recognized with a 2000 Pushcart Prize.

In 1999 the Arts Editor of the Dallas Morning News deemed Jas. Mardis, "A Cultural Poet-Hero" after a series of performances that culminated with his "Quilts and Stories: Two Grandmother's Gifts" performance at The African American Museum at Fair Park. That presentation continues in part through various incarnations as Mardis' ability to quickly identify with all audiences and ages and cultures through storytelling and family history gathering builds community from home outward.

In addition, Mardis has fifteen years as an educator with the Gifted Student Institute at Southern Methodist University and myriad oratorical ventures throughout the region and nationally, including The National Black Arts Festival. Most recently he served as a poetry workshop presenter with the Dallas Public Library Children's Division for Express Yourself!

Among the publications where you can find the works of Jas. Mardis are: The Iowa Review, SLANT, Inheritance of Light, Out of Season, Texas and Christmas, Texas in Poetry: 150 Year Anthology, Texas Short Stories 1 & 2, African American Review; The New Texas Series, UNT Press/Center for Texas Studies, Kenya by Jason Laure and Etagale Blauer and many others. Jas also writes a quarterly column for OUR TEXAS Magazine and has upcoming articles and contributions in various publications, including Ancestry Magazine.

The Family Story Project is simply taking time to explore and document the story of our lives. Using genealogical methods Mardis assists patrons through the building of their family story with traditional documentation and media savvy. Along the way patrons come to understand that history is not 1870 so much as it is yesterday. Patrons further come to agree that history is a repetition that can be fleshed out with a study of what our ancestors have left behind.

Audiences of all genres leave with a memorable and actionable connection to their story after the Family Story Project presentations. As with the original Quilts and Stories: Two Grandmothers Gifts performance everyone agrees that Jas. Mardis is a "Cultural. Poet-Hero" singing back to us all the songs of knowing where to find ourselves..again.