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## Native American Poet Sees Through Eyes Of Ancients

BY SUSAN USHER

Barney Bush moved easily through the sixth-grade classroom at Leland Middle School, shaking hands, looking intently into eyes quickly cast down as each speaker revealed his or her name.

"I like your names," he told them, sparking a gleam of pride in scattered eyes that turned toward him in surprised pleasure.

Currents of electricity began to flow through the classroom momentarily shared by students of both Kathy Rublein and Thelma Clemmons.

A hint of the philosophy behind the careful introductions lies in Bush's resume.

"I first make contact on a level that springs from my native American background, which is that we treat each other as relatives," a note in the resume explains. "I find that all approaches for causing an individual to discover his or her creative experience are interchangeable."

Bush, a poet and Shawnee Indian, is the fourth in a series of visiting artists at Brunswick Technical College. He had come to the middle school to give a creative writing workshop, only to find the school expected programs on Native American culture. He obliged: "I'm always prepared to talk about the Native American experience."

And so he was, for the Native American experience figures largely in Bush's life and in his writing.

"I feel a strong sense of responsibility to be teaching these children correctly," he explained.

Most history texts were written by the people he calls "the conquerors of America" and their descendants, who give a distorted, Anglo-American perspective of the settling of the country—that doesn't reflect Columbus' view of the natives he met as "surely of God," not "Indians," a world in which scalping was unheard of until brought to the continent by Dutch trappers.

"I give a candid version, a straight story of what was happening several hundred years ago to Native Americans and what is happening today," he continued.

"It wasn't very pleasant then and it still isn't." Added Bush, "In their early tribal history, all peoples of the world were given the same understandings about truth."

Like his grandfather, a Southern Baptist minister, he has found the "truth" as given to the Shawnees not incompatible with the teachings of the Bible. "But man became greedy," he continued, and those understandings diverged.

Born near the close of World War II, in what the Shawnees remember as "the year the blueberries didn't ripen," at 16 Bush left the reservation in east central Oklahoma where his tribe has lived since a forced retreat from the Ohio River Valley in the 1800s. He traveled the North American continent, the home of his people.

"I hitchhiked all over to see through the eyes of many different people," said Bush.

And he saw the scars and road signs of a homeland he says is fast disappearing as the world at large makes a choice . . . between living with dignity and pride, in harmony with the earth and their creator, "or the other way."

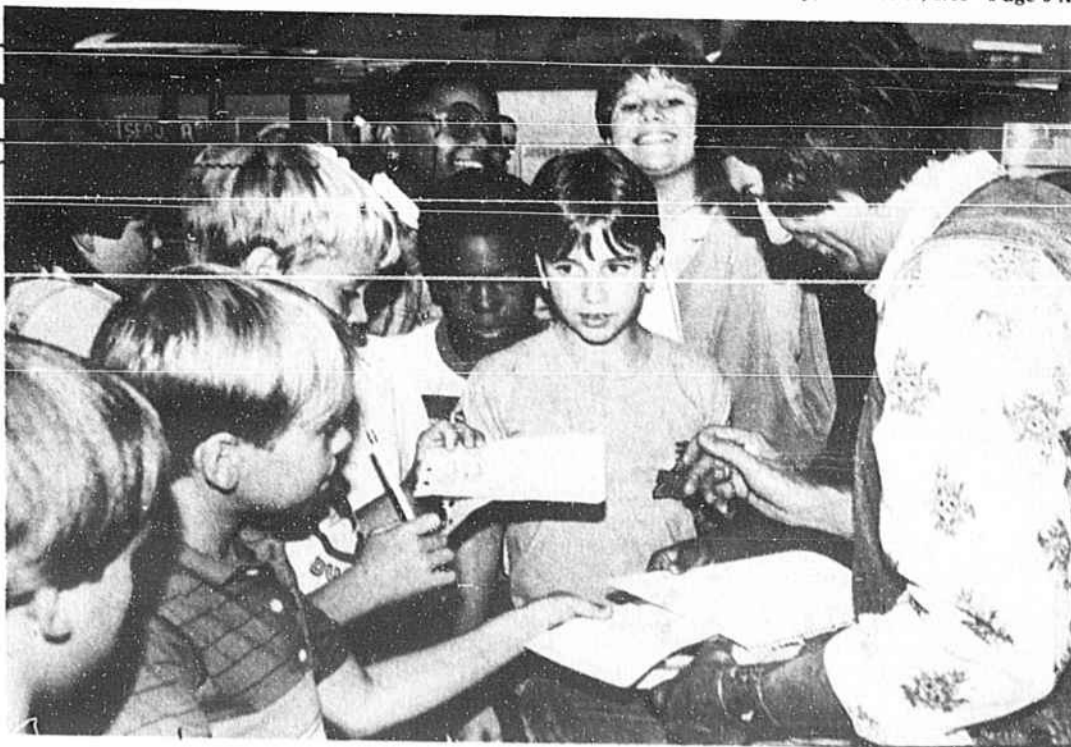
These themes of the hitchhiker, of balance with nature or the lack of it, reoccur frequently in his work, including his current project, a volume of short stories.

### Of Two Worlds

Bush's work has been described as having "the conscious elegance of a writer living in two realities: Shawnee and English . . . walking in two worlds/belonging to none."



BUSH answered students' questions honestly and directly, offering a different perspective from the one in their textbooks.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

THE INQUISITIVE students in Kathy Rublein's class also wanted Visiting Artist Barney Bush's autograph.

And he does walk two worlds, living entirely in neither. One is the world in which he would prefer to live; the other one he lives in by choice, by commitment.

"I worked hard to learn to use this language (English) and I'm still learning. That knowledge brought with it an unconscious responsibility to repay the Spirit of Knowledge and Experience . . . unfortunately."

On his journey through an unfamiliar world, Bush has paused to earn in 1972 an undergraduate degree from Ft. Lewis College, Durango, Colo., to study at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Sante Fe, N.M., and to complete in 1980, a master's degree in English and fine arts at the University of Iowa at Moscow. The following year he was awarded a writer's grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

His compulsion to see, to write and to teach history "correctly" has taken Bush as a writer-in-residence or visiting writer to New York, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Vermont, Kentucky, Texas and North Carolina. Since beginning his professional writing career as an undergraduate, Bush has published extensively, mostly poetry but other writings as well, all reflecting an archetypal experience.

Bush plans to use mornings to work on a new collection of short stories. The Visiting Artist Program, a joint effort of the N.C. Arts Council and the N.C. Department of Community Colleges, brings artists into the communi-

ty to increase awareness of and involvement in the arts while also providing artists their own time.

Bush will spend afternoons and evenings working in the community, visiting in the public schools but concentrating more on adults out in the county.

"I think it will be an exciting nine months," Bush noted. He plans to offer writing workshops, with an "arts month" in the spring during which professional writers will visit and participants in Bush's own workshops will share their writing with the community. Native American musicians and perhaps local musicians may also be asked to participate, he said. Groups interested in setting up workshops or other creative writing experiences can contact him weekdays through Brunswick Technical College, 754-6900.

While eager to get started and obviously excited about the creative possibilities of the people he will meet, the other side of Bush's world is there, always—the passion, the sorrow, the commitment of the hitchhiker in the poem, a man such as himself.

If Bush had his druthers, or as he put it, "the greedy chance to do something for himself," he would choose to live in the hills of Oklahoma "and never again speak this language (English)."

"I would do my garden and attend my ceremonies as long as they lasted. I would listen to the whippoorwill, age and die."

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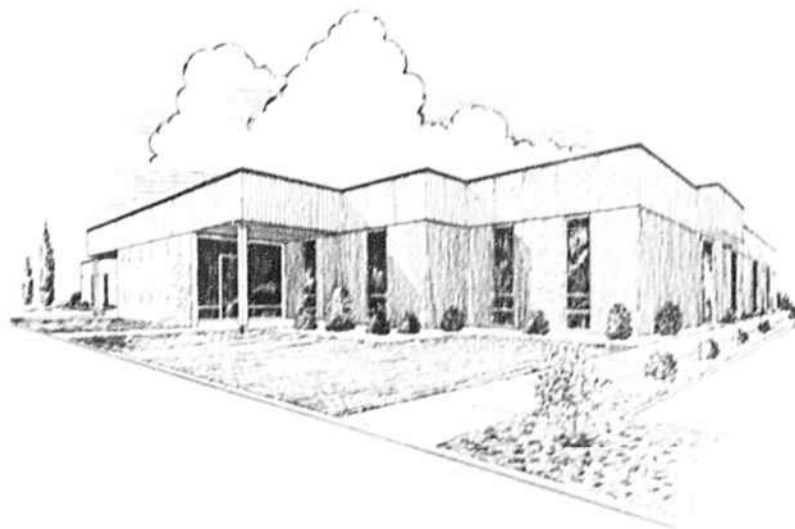
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