

Anderson 'connects' with her listeners

By CECILIA LYNN CASEY

"I love to get people to tell about family stories" was the first thing 70-year-old Louise Anderson said during her interview with me in the bathroom of the Student Activity Center where she was wrapping up her hair for her fourth performance for students, faculty, and friends of NCWC.

From the second I stepped through the door and she began to talk to me and teach me about hair-wrapping and how different ways of wrapping showed different tribes (that night she picked the head wrap of the women from Nigeria) to the time I told her good night and thank you, I was moved and overwhelmed by this lively, yet motherly woman.

Her main point to everyone was to share their stories with people so that they can leave something for one another. Before the performance, she talked about her first memories of women sitting around in the evening combing each other's hair and telling stories to one another.

She talked about a job she had with the Reading Is Fundamental program and her reading to children, and how after awhile they liked to hear her stories better than they liked hearing the books. This delighted her because "I always want to tell something."

After a bit of time, all of the Wesleyan Singers and Oak Grove Inspirational Singers arrived for rehearsal, and Louise moved from a soft chair to one front and center so she could be able to catch everything. A loud "Amen!" told everyone that she had her approval when the practice was over. Then she added, "If I had known that you were going to cut up like this, I would have brought my tambourine."

As I watched her, I saw that

Visiting writer slated to read next Tuesday

The last visiting writer for the fall semester, Tom Patterson, will read next Tuesday at 8:15 p.m. in the Student Activities Center.

Patterson is an editor and art critic with a special interest in outsider artists.

He will be reading from his autobiographical collaborations with Eddy Owens Martin (*St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan*) and Howard Finster (*Stranger from Another World*) and showing slides of their work.

she stopped and talked with everyone who wanted to talk with her. No one was left out. It was amazing to see her tirelessly talk to everyone with the knowledge she held.

When she went back to her chair, I had a chance to talk to her companion, Victor Moffett, a writer for the *Jacksonville Daily News* who has been writing down and recording her stories for her. The two met a year ago when he was covering one of her performances for his paper. She liked what he wrote about her and asked him to work with her. They have been working together for about a month now.

I asked him why he agreed to work with her, and he said, "Louise is a living treasure. Someone has to record her stories or else they'll be lost." Then I asked him what it was like to work with her, and he said, "I carry a tape recorder all the time, because Louise is always performing, she has to much to tell."

At this point it was time to sit

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down for the performance, which started with both choruses singing. As they did, Louise sat on the side and, for the first time all evening, she was not talking, and for the first time I saw her look serious, far away. Was she sad or just moved by the song?

This question was answered indirectly a little later when she told the story of where "spirituals" come from. The story was about slave time and Sweet John the Conqueror. A very large blackbird carried a girl up to heaven along with some other folks and gave them gifts. One of the gifts was a beautiful singing voice so that when times became too hard they could remember that they never had to be alone.

After the story, the singers sang another song and everyone started clapping in time with the singers, maybe because of the beat, maybe because Louise's

story had reminded them of the value behind the music and what it meant to some.

She then told a few more stories and then the evening ended with everyone singing. During this last song she held hands with the children who had sat on the floor during her performance and sang the words of the song, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" from memory. She would stop here and there to change hands of one child for a new girl or boy, kissing each new child she met.

As people left for the night, she signed autographs for children and adults alike. One of the last things I asked her was if she had to pick only one group to perform for, either children or adults, which would she prefer?

"That's like a choice between if your mother was drowning or your husband was drowning, which would you save!" she told me at first, but then answered me by saying, "I rather do children so I can tell them to leave something."

Then she was one, leaving me behind with several pages of notes and a tape recorder full of stories. I normally would not dream of using the first person to report on something and would not now if I had any other way of telling you about Louise Anderson. For everyone who has met and talked with her will tell you that to really hear what she has to say, *you* have to hear her, *you* have to connect with her and find something personal from within to be able to understand her and what she says.

Her stories are priceless as a way of remembering who you are and where you come from. Every story she tells is a part of her and where she comes from. And if you hear her, you'll do the same and tell about yourself and where you come from.

I cannot possibly recreate her stories and how she tells them. I can only tell you what it was like to be with Louise Anderson and what she left me with — a need to hear more.

Come and enjoy a night of dinner, comedy, and music!

"Something For Everyone"

Tuesday, Nov. 19

6:30 p.m.

SAC

Music by the Wesleyan Singers and Vocal Jazz Choir

Special Entertainment by the NCWC Theatre Department

Tickets: \$5 at the door, \$3 in advance

For more information, contact Dr. Maria Manzo (5210) or Michele (5113)