

National Poetry Month: Clifford Brooks teaches and hosts radio show while working on second poetry book

By David R. Altman

So what's a poet to do?

His first book of poems is in its third printing and he was nominated for Georgia Author of the Year and a Pulitzer Prize for his debut as an author. Where does one go from such early success?

To paraphrase a line from a Langston Hughes poem, you "keep climbin'."

That's what Cliff Brooks, Pickens High School graduate, author, writer, editor and now college instructor and part-time radio host, is doing. He's climbing fast, like NASA rocket that has not yet lost its solid rocket booster.

Brooks is a 30-something author from Jasper who's first volume of poetry *The Draw of Broken Eyes and Whirling Metaphysics* was published in 2012. After a book tour across the South last year, Brooks knew he wanted to do more. And he wanted to engage a special group of creative friends to help.

So he formed the Southern Collective Experience, a hand-selected group of creative artists that brought music, writing and artistic craftsmanship together. The group meets occasionally at

Brooks' family estate outside Athens, a place he grew up and where his dad still lives.

While his efforts with the Southern Collective were ongoing, Brooks was asked to teach a civics class at Chattahoochee Technical College's Appalachian campus, a job which he never thought about doing but which he instantly loved. He told the *Progress* that he now teaches just about "everything except math and science" in Jasper and Canton.

But even that wasn't enough for the insomniac Brooks, who now is co-hosting a radio show with radio personality Matt Youngblood on Jasper's WYYZ 1490 AM called "Dante's Old South" - a show that twice a month showcases arts and music of the South. Youngblood is also the station's co-owner.

Brooks, a graduate of Shorter College who grew up outside Athens and here in Jasper, is an author with a seemingly endless amount of energy - always looking for new experiences.

He is at work on his second book of poetry titled *Athena Departs*. Brooks told a Dahlonega interviewer that the new book "will pick up where the other one

left off." He says his writing is experiential - and while poems in his first book covered his life from ages 18 to about 37, this one is based on where he is now and also explores some "myths" about the old South.

Writer Dinty Moore, a National Book Prize winner, said Brooks' poetry provides "mindful attention to every facet of human existence."

Brooks, whose first book of poetry is laced with references to lost relationships and coming to grips with age and life's harsher realities, is regarded as one of the South's most promising young poets.

This poem is from the *Whirling Metaphysics*, the second volume of poetry in his first book:

"Midnight Alley Wolves"

There's a 3am bleakness
to some people.
They are ghosts
paying homage
to a dead city.
Disheveled, furtive
traveling
outside daylight's periphery,
the pavement
devours their memory.



Photo by Mary Judkins
Jasper Poet Clifford Brooks, who was a finalist for "Georgia Author of the Year" for his first book *The Draw of Broken Eyes and Whirling Metaphysics*, is now at work on his second. Brooks will be reading at an event at Chattahoochee Tech library on April 24 starting at 10 a.m.