

Author, poet, former professor to return to campus for reading

by Alex Hummel - Thursday, October 04, 2012

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/21884/author-poet-former-professor-to-return-to-campus-for-reading/>

Three years ago, Alex Kuo came as close to the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh as he would in 40 years.

Kuo intended to visit but ended up driving past the campus. He couldn't set foot on it. It was his first and closest brush with the institution where, in late 1968, his teaching career took a serious detour after the events of Nov. 21 that year. The day would become known as "Black Thursday," the day escalating racial tensions and students' concern that the then-Wisconsin State University-Oshkosh wasn't doing enough to encourage multicultural curricula and support minority students led to demonstrations.

Ninety-four students were expelled as a result of protests that day. And Kuo, who had personally experienced discrimination while at Oshkosh, walked away from the job he had, that same day, been notified he earned tenure for.

"It was a bad experience for me," Kuo said. "It went pretty deep."

For the first time in decades, Kuo – a professor in the United States and abroad and an award-winning novelist, essayist, poet and documentary photographer who co-founded the literary magazine "Wisconsin Review" -- will return to UW Oshkosh on Thursday, Oct. 11 and share some of his work. His reading is scheduled for 7 p.m. in Room 1239 of Sage Hall at UW Oshkosh. The event is sponsored by the Wisconsin Review.

"I am going to write a couple of new pieces just to be read at UW Oshkosh, starting with an essay on how my experiences at Oshkosh, especially Black Thursday, had impacted my work as a novelist," Kuo said, adding he'll also share a short story related to the 2004 shooting of six Wisconsin hunters by a Hmong hunter and some of his poems.

He said while his experience in Oshkosh in the late 1960s was challenging, it has informed his work and art. He describes his experience here as "an awakening to a certain kind of cultural reality."

"I was in Shanghai at the end of World War II when B29s were dropping bombs down – friendly fire," Kuo said. "Hardship is not new to me."

He and his colleagues founding of the "Wisconsin Review" was, itself, a bit unexpected. The literary magazine remains the oldest of its kind in Wisconsin, founded in 1966.

"We had just gone through a Vietnam poetry read-in," he said. "About 10 different poets came to campus, including three Pulitzer awardees... Some people's reactions in town were fantastic. We said, 'Why can't we carry on with this? Why can't we start a magazine?'"

Kuo's international experiences have been equally rich and rewarding, and he has invested much of his time and talent examining and writing about the people, the culture and the modernization and economic forces that have impacted China. He will return there in May, planning to teach in Beijing.

"There's no doubt that (the Chinese) are definitely a world power to contend with, and there are some serious internal problems they have," Kuo said. "As a nation, we're not dealing with it in a fully informed way."

During his visit to UW Oshkosh, Kuo will also visit classes and participate in an English Department writer's workshop on campus. His diverse experience and contributions demonstrate his passion for the humanities and how important it is they remain woven into the tapestry of a university education.

"I've never viewed education, especially higher education, as a job factory," he said. "Humanities or arts education helps a person lead a rewarding fulfilling life."

Learn more:

- [Alex Kuo](#)
- [Wisconsin Review](#)
- [Black Thursday Remembered](#)