

4
VABook!
2008

6
African American
Exhibits

8
Ladino and
Gospel CDs

10
Verizon Foundation
Grant

vfth **Views**

The Newsletter of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities | Winter 2008



Research Within Reach

What *With Good Reason* Brings to the Airwaves

BY LYDIA WILSON

You're dialing around your radio, maybe at home cooking dinner or in the car taking the kids to violin practice on Saturday. A lively Irish jig slowly fades under a rich, thoughtful voice assuring you that James Joyce's famously daunting novel *Ulysses* deserves to be dusted off from your bookshelf. Another voice chimes in: "Joyce's writing is not what you'd call 'page-turners.'"

It is Radford University English professor **Jolanta Wawrzycka**. "Joyce's task when he was composing *Ulysses* was to render the working mind, the thinking mind, and how senses and sight and smell... participate in prompting thoughts and steering memories.... You are in someone's mind and you are looking out through them, rather than a narrator telling you: 'And next he went here... and then he felt this...'"

Demystifying an intimidating topic is par for the course on *With Good Reason*, the weekly 30-minute public radio program broadcast statewide in Virginia. Host Sarah McConnell invites faculty from Virginia's public colleges and universities into the studio to explore topics touching every corner of academic research in

the Commonwealth. Listeners are as likely to hear University of Mary Washington psychologist **Christopher Kilmartin** argue that some males are stuck with an outdated sense of "toxic masculinity" as they are to laugh as J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College lecturer and wildlife photojournalist **Lynda Richardson** recounts her naked plunge into the ocean to escape fire ants, only to be forced to flee by tiger sharks.

No other public radio program calls on public college and university faculty to share their professional passions, which cover the map. "It's been for me, and I suspect many listeners, a kind of graduate education," says host Sarah McConnell. "During an interview with

Henry Wiencek about his research on George Washington, it finally dawned on me just how the complexities of slavery are still powerfully influencing racial mistrust today."

With Good Reason Associate Producer Jesse Dukes works closely with McConnell to schedule guests and conduct research. In between phone calls to nail down times for an upcoming interview, Dukes reflects that he is still struck by the show's unique focus on Virginia's public scholars. "We seek out guests who are not the 'usual suspects' that other media outlets rely on. *With Good Reason* finds great people who should be on the radio, but maybe have not had the chance. And because of that, we bring unique perspectives to the airwaves."

**Virginia Foundation
for the Humanities**

145 Ednam Drive
Charlottesville, VA 22903-4629

(434) 924-3296
fax (434) 296-4714
virginiafoundation.org
vfinfo@virginia.edu

Robert C. Vaughan, III, PRESIDENT

DEVELOPMENT

Sheryl Hayes, DIRECTOR
Lynda Myers, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE

ENCYCLOPEDIA VIRGINIA

Matthew Gibson, MANAGING EDITOR
Karen Wikander, ASSOC. EDITOR
Matthew Gaventa, MEDIA EDITOR
Tori Talbot, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE

GRANTS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

David Bearinger, DIRECTOR
Jeanne Siler, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE PROGRAM
Christina Draper, PROGRAM DIRECTOR
VIRGINIA FOLKLIFE PROGRAM
Jon Lohman, PROGRAM DIRECTOR
VIRGINIA INDIAN HERITAGE PROGRAM
Karenne Wood, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

MEDIA PROGRAMS

Andrew Wyndham, DIRECTOR
Lydia Wilson, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE
"WITH GOOD REASON" RADIO SHOW
Sarah McConnell, PRODUCER AND HOST
Jesse Dukes, ASSOC. PRODUCER
Nancy King, FEATURE PRODUCER
Elliot Majerczyk, ASSOC. PRODUCER

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Andrew Chancey, DIRECTOR
Gail Shirley-Warren, BUSINESS MANAGER
RECEPTIONISTS
Judy Moody
Jeannie Palin

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Roberta Culbertson, DIRECTOR
Ann White Spencer, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE

VIRGINIA CENTER FOR THE BOOK

Susan Coleman, DIRECTOR
VIRGINIA FESTIVAL OF THE BOOK
Nancy Damon, PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Kevin McFadden, ASSOC. PROGRAM DIRECTOR

NEWSLETTER STAFF

David Bearinger, ADVISORY EDITOR
Christina Draper, TEXT/WEB EDITOR
Kevin McFadden, CO-EDITOR
Lynda Myers, DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
Ann White Spencer, CO-EDITOR
Lydia Wilson, TEXT/WEB EDITOR

The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities Newsletter is published three times a year. The VFH is an independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

Research Within Reach

Continued from cover

Those perspectives are sometimes uncomfortable, questioning the assumptions of our identity as Americans. University of Virginia Law Professor **Risa Goluboff** argues that the Civil Rights movement in the United States was only a partial success. She says that the 1954 Supreme Court mandate for school integration was certainly a landmark decision, but that the public outcry that led to *Brown v. Board* stopped short of demanding full economic equality as well. The interview ends with Goluboff's assertion that Supreme Court rulings in 2007 blinded local governments to consideration of race in public policy, leaving America today at its narrowest point since *Brown* in what we think the Constitution requires for racial equality.

Working on that segment ("The Lost Promise of Civil Rights"), Associate Producer Elliot Majerczyk spent hours researching the legacy of *Brown*. "The interview opened my eyes to the issue of our complacency towards an unrealized ideal of full racial equality in America. The discussion of the correlation between race and poverty is still somewhat of a taboo topic: we often don't hear these hard questions being asked even in public media."

"It was a real effort"

Taking a break from managing his new community newspaper *The Crozet Gazette*, **Mike Marshall** can't quite believe that *With Good Reason* marks its 15th anniversary this year. "We didn't know if it would last 15 minutes, much less 15 years," he laughs fondly. Marshall's entrepreneurial spirit sparked the concept for *With Good Reason* in the early 1990s. At the time, he had been editing a newspaper for UVa long enough to be used to stereotypes about university professors, perceptions that the academy was too far removed from the taxpayers who fund it. "To do research," Marshall

observes, "you have to have conditions that look like leisure: time to read, to write, and to have conversations. We have to be patient and let scholars work at it for a while. But the public is not always convinced that is 'working.'"

Marshall believed that opening that process to the public was both necessary and possible. Harvard University's staff newspaper offered a potential model for effective outreach, running transcripts of interviews with faculty discussing new research. But Marshall thought that radio was a better venue for those explorations than print. "What you really need to be able to do is hear these conversations," he remembers realizing. "It humanizes the faculty when you listen to someone on the radio and you hear their voice, and it turns out what they've spent their life research is interesting."

Since a media product created by all of Virginia's public colleges and universities was completely unprecedented, the challenge was immense. **Mike McDowell** of the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia spent enormous energy pitching the idea to all of the institutions. But, no one knew how to produce radio: who would conduct interviews and who would edit the conversations for broadcast? Listening in on an early brainstorming session was **Brenda Barnes** (then Brenda Pennell), then station manager of Harrisonburg's WMRA Public Radio. "As everyone was breaking up to leave," Marshall recalls, "Brenda approached me and said, 'I think you can do it.'"

With one radio station willing to broadcast the show, *With Good Reason* was born. WMRA issued a challenge from the beginning, insisting that the host be a journalist that could meet the standards of National Public Radio programming. Area journalist **Laura Womack** served as the first host, driving from WMRA's donated studio space in Harrisonburg all

across Virginia to interview college professors. Transitioning from bi-weekly test broadcasts to regular weekly production in the fall of 1993, *With Good Reason* eventually secured time slots on other Virginia stations. "Really, it was one of those things that made so much sense that all the stations were willing to carry it," Barnes says matter-of-factly. "Because we said 'let's make this a good radio show,' we were able to succeed on all levels."

Production had moved to



VFH Radio staff (from left) **Lydia Wilson, Andrew Wyndham, Nancy King, and Sarah McConnell**

Richmond NPR affiliate WCVE by the time **Carolyn Elliot** became host in 1995. Elliot found her six years at the show challenging, a lot of long hours and full of generosity from station staff (nearly every public radio station in Virginia, at some point, donated studio time to make *With Good Reason* possible). “We were really committed to making this work because we thought it was exciting and new,” she remembered. “You would get a topic that was something obscure like birdcalls. But then the professor would turn out to be fascinating!” The nomadic program was adopted enthusiastically by VFH at the urging President Robert Vaughan in 1999, just as Elliot was ready to stay home to raise her son.

The alumni of *WGR* have spread out, moved on, but not forgotten the show. Today, Barnes manages a public radio station thousands of miles from Virginia: Los Angeles classical music station, KUSC. She’s seen a lot of projects start and succeed, and she’s seen some fail. “Part of the longevity of *With Good Reason*,” she believes, “was the decision to move the production to the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. That really stabilized the program because it is in a place where it belongs, where it can grow and thrive. *With Good Reason* is an institution now. None of us could have foreseen that.”

A Day in the Life of VFH Radio

It can be pristinely quiet at the cluster of *With Good Reason* offices in the basement of the VFH. The recording light flashes outside the studio, signaling technicians to stay buried under headphones as they both separately edit recent interviews. The studio door finally pops open and the host walks her interviewee out to the VFH entrance, as someone ducks in to set up for a Charlottesville resident coming into record an essay for Roanoke’s NPR affiliate WVTF. Majerczyk shouts across the hall to feature producer Nancy King—or anyone listening—in search of a song to pair with an interview about relieving road congestion. After much searching and sampling, McConnell laughs with delight as the team settles on James Taylor’s “Traffic Jam” (then wanders around humming it for the rest of the day).

Now heard by 3.3 million listeners statewide annually, the strength of *With Good Reason* today rests on McConnell’s creative and nurturing leadership. VFH Media Program Director Andrew Wyndham knew from the start that he wanted McConnell to host the show. After 20 years as

News Director at Charlottesville’s WINA, she had endeared herself to listeners throughout Virginia through her work with the Virginia News Network. In 1999, she was persuaded to host *With Good Reason*. “With Sarah,” says Andrew, “we went from strength to strength: creating sound-rich programs, adding ancillary news features, developing award-winning shows, and gaining attention and airtime from stations in Ohio and New York State.”

Wyndham and his staff find themselves doing more recruiting these days. Two new producers joined the VFH Radio team this February, **Tony Field** and **Rachel Quimby** (see *New Staff*, p. 11). The pair are already working with industry consultant **Tom Voegeli**, creator of American Public Media’s *The Splendid Table*, to shape the hour-long program built around the gregarious and sometimes unpredictable personalities of three



Elliot Majerczyk (left) and Jesse Duker editing a new show.

Virginia historians: **Ed Ayers** (now President of the University of Richmond) and University of Virginia faculty **Brian Balogh** and **Peter Onuf**. Like the Humanities Feature Bureau, the carefully developed new program is Wyndham’s brainchild, and he believes it furthers the VFH’s mission to creatively present the humanities’ historical perspective to the public. “VFH Radio is gaining critical mass, and is now poised to move forward as a major provider of excellent radio content, both within Virginia and beyond.”

What lies ahead in the next 15 years of VFH Radio? Stay tuned.

Lydia Wilson coordinates publicity for With Good Reason and is Assignment Editor for VFH Radio’s Humanities Feature Bureau. You can contact her with listener comments at lydia.wilson@virginia.edu.

with good reason

As Mike Marshall was setting up the offices for his new community newspaper called “The Crozet Gazette,” he found a box of archive material and brought it over to us at *With Good Reason*. Inside were fifteen years of letters from listeners and guests. Here is what they had to say:

“The guests which you have chosen for these programs are uniformly well informed and well spoken, the topics are timely. I would appreciate your passing along to Laura Womack my compliments regarding the hosting of these sessions. Her questions are insightful and a major contribution to each program.”
—Charles in 1993

“I have been interviewed many times, but rarely in such a thoughtful and smart manner. Your questions were tough and impressive. Thank you for an entertaining and very professionally run session.” —Diane from VCU, writing to Carolyn Elliott on 1996

“I can’t afford to sleep late on Saturday lest I miss your good programs.” —Mary in 1997

“Thank you very much for your program about the Racial Integrity Act of 1924. I am glad that you can provide so much to this community that would otherwise go unsaid.” —Mary Katherine in 1998

“I started listening to show by chance. Once listening, I’m stuck. Your selection of guests is incredibly knowledgeable with interviewers knowing how to probe for great insight. Only a handful of programs in all media do I truly incorporate what I learn into daily living. *With Good Reason* is definitely one of them. For example, in your program ‘The Art of Negotiation,’ I found myself practicing principles I learned from your guests the very next day. Your shows provide valuable content that have positively altered my way of thinking. And for that I thank you. And I look forward to listening to your program this and every Sunday night.”
—Franklin in 2005

“The segment ‘Why We Do Good’ was one of the most interesting and moving programs I have heard recently on public radio.” —Judy in 2006