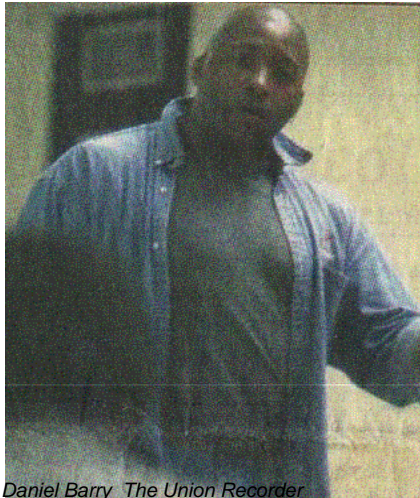


The Union Recorder

Milledgeville, Georgia

Speaker knocks down ivory tower myths of life



Daniel Barry, The Union Recorder

Above: Hasan Davis talks to students at Oconee Valley on Wednesday.

**By Jennifer James -
The Union-Recorder**

The best preachers and teachers in life don't usually come from an ivory tower.

Hasan Davis surely didn't, and he is at peace with that. Having lived the role of gang banger and high school dropout, Hasan will admit he has been kicked out of every school he ever attended.

But today he is a Berea College graduate who holds a law degree from

University of Kentucky College of Law as well. Also, he is chairman of the Kentucky Juvenile Justice Advisory Board on the National Board of the Coalition on Juvenile Justice.

Now, he is in Milledgeville on a residency that began Wednesday and will end on Tuesday. During this time, he is using his personal story and the story of a personal hero to motivate others.

Davis is a shining example of how someone can turn around and fight a label that can be given to a youth early on and which many keep. To the many children who don't have a strong mother or parental figure in their life, Davis hopes that the youth will reach out and that an adult will be there to answer the call.

The Council is a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. Hasan Davis' residency is funded by a grant from Alternate ROOTS whose residency programs made possible through funding by the Georgia Council for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts: Access Theme and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Davis said his one philosophy that sums up the reason he does what he does was something that just flowed out in one of his presentations: "The only people we cannot reach are the ones we refuse to touch," he said.

His Milledgeville residency began Wednesday morning at Oconee Valley School when he greeted the group with "Good morning" and didn't hear the early "good morning" greeting from the group he wanted. So he did what any individual who cares about each and every member of the audience would do: He again greeted the group of about 30 students with a cheery salutation - individually.

"I have one brother in jail doing 25 years for murder and another doing 57 years. I was on that path, but I had to decide how much I valued myself," Davis said. "Respect is something you earn. I'm going to ask you to get up in front of this group and get goofy today and get silly, but we are all going to do it. I'm going to ask you to trust me. If the only person you can depend on is yourself, then you don't have a lot of options in the world."

Davis proceeded to lead the Oconee Valley students through a barrage of exercises that he developed largely himself. He said the exercises are based in trust and force most students beyond their comfort zones to speak in front of a group.

"When I was in school, I couldn't read. I had a learning disability and dyslexia," he said. "For one assignment we had to read 'The Scarlet Letter,' and give an oral report. Monday morning I went to class, and asked Suzy what she thought of the book, and she tells me she thinks it symbolizes this and that. So I proceeded to interview her for about five minutes then I went to the next guy and said, 'Hey, what did you think about that book, wasn't that deep?' and he told me what he thought.

"After I interviewed a few people, the teacher came in and asked who wanted to go first. I did what nobody else did - I raised my hand to go first," Hasan said. "Then I gave the report. I got an A plus on the oral report and a D on the written. Now, other law students and I have debated later on in life whether or not this was cheating. I say it was survival. I

had what it took to get up in front of a group and speak. I had to survive to get out of place of uzis and shotguns and fools trying to take whatever you got."

Davis grew up in Atlanta and he credits his mother, who was a struggling poet herself, with being the major positive influence in his life. When she picked him up at the police station as a youth, he said she wouldn't scream or fight, just



Above: Students look at poem written about themselves.

explain to him that she saw something better in him - and expected better things.

"Children will live up or down to your expectations," Davis said.

"You have to find somebody, whether it is a teacher or a counselor," he said. "That person might be at the Boys & Girls Club or somewhere else, but there has to be an adult there that believes. I'm not here to tell them what they can't do. They are going to have people their whole lives telling them what they can't do. I had to go all the way to Kentucky to find a group of people who I could relate to who could help me.

"My message to youth is if you believe you are better or different, then you need to stand up and start to prove it," he said.

Davis also incorporates the life of A.A. Burleigh in his performance. Burleigh was a slave before emancipation who became a soldier during the Civil War. He later was the first black graduate of Berea College and went on to become a teacher and preacher in Illinois. He even once served as chaplain of the Illinois State Senate.

Davis will perform his one-man show, "The Long Road to Freedom," that incorporates the life of Burleigh as part of the Town & Gown Performing Arts Series at 8 p.m. Friday in the Georgia College & State University Arts & Science Auditorium.

Tickets on are sale at the John Marlor Arts Center, 201 N. Wayne St. Ticket prices are \$10 for adults, \$8 for senior citizens and students age 10 and over, and \$6 for students under the age of 10. GC&SU students are admitted free with their valid university ID. Group rate ticket prices are available by calling Allied Arts.

In addition to his mainstage performance, Davis will give a lecture-demo on "The Civil War Experience: The Untold Story" at 10 a.m. today in the GC&SU Arts & Sciences Auditorium. This lecture-demo is co-sponsored by Allied Arts and the GC&SU Office of Multicultural Affairs. It is free to the public.

Georgia's Antebellum Capitol Museum and Allied Arts will co-sponsor a workshop/lecture-demo on gathering, writing and performing works based on local history at 7 p.m. Monday in the Allen's Market Building.

This workshop is being hosted by the Milledgeville Players. It is free to the public.

Davis' performance is co-sponsored by Milledgeville-Baldwin County Allied Arts and GC&SU Arts Unlimited Committee with additional support from the Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly.