



Head Start An Effective Program? Sometimes!



What's Inside

- WSOS Head Start - Page 6
- UT's NURTURES Program - Page 7
- Adult Illiteracy - page 12
- **The Collegiate Compass - Page 8**
- Building Blocks for Young Reads - Page 15

Gregg Tyler Milligan: Author of: A Beautiful World and God Must Be Sleeping

By Sharon Arquette

Toledo Reads Reporter

By the time he was 11 years old, author Gregg Tyler Milligan, the second youngest of seven children, was removed from the home of his extremely mentally ill, abusive, alcoholic mother and placed in foster care.

His father had left the home when Milligan was only two years old and Milligan's survival from day-to-day was the priority in his early childhood, not education. By the time he was turned over to foster care, psychological damage was only one of his problems.

He was also totally illiterate which meant he did not know how to read even the most basic of children's books. What happened to him next changed not only his life, but also started the transformation of the young boy into becoming the man he is today.

A kind and caring English teacher, Mr. Schantz, who taught at the junior high school that Milligan had started to attend, realized the new student's shortcomings and worked hours with him, teaching him how to read. The first book he ever picked up and was

able to read was the childhood classic, Green Eggs and Ham.

That small victory was the beginning of his life-long love of reading and education.

Over the following summer, Schantz gave Milligan an assigned reading list and by the time he returned to school that fall, not only had he read all the books on the list but additional ones as well.

By the time he was 12, he was in the seventh grade and his favorite subjects were reading, English and math.

"I credit education with saving my life," says Milligan. "When I was 11, I couldn't envision what I wanted to do when I grew up, because I didn't see myself living that long."

Over the next few years he was shuffled from one foster home to another, and he ended up attending four different high schools, finally graduating from Ypsilanti (Michigan) High School. He thought college was an improbable dream until he was introduced to Patrick Palmer, who was then a track coach and the admissions



director of Siena Heights University.

Palmer encouraged Milligan to attend a "trial semester" at the school and take a few courses to see if he wanted to take his education to the next level. He thrived in the university atmosphere and continued on this course, determined to further his education.

show in the spring of 2009, which led to skyrocketing book sales and consistent speaking engagements.

Milligan's second book, *God Must Be Sleeping*, is also based on his experiences as a youth, detailing the 11 years following those in *A Beautiful World*.

"Education is not the filling of a pail,
but the lighting of a fire."
-William Butler Yeats

During his sophomore year in college, the leftover feelings and memories of the horrendous experiences suffered during early childhood caught up with Milligan and he suffered a nervous breakdown. It was one of his professors at Siena Heights who helped him while he was going through therapy, and encouraged him to keep a journal of everything he could remember, all his feelings, his thoughts and the changes he went through.

Not only was this cathartic but, as it turns out, also the journal eventually, over the years, morphed into his first book, *A Beautiful World*. His book offers a tremendous message of hope. "The reason we are here is to save one another" says Milligan. His book was read and praised by Oprah Winfrey and he appeared as a guest on her

Today, Milligan is the director of engineering for a major hospital. He graduated from Siena Heights University with a bachelor's degree in business and he continued his studies at Wayne State University earning a master's degree in computer engineering.

He lives with his wife Sarah, just outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan. They are the proud parents of an adult son who recently graduated summa cum laude from Siena Heights University and works as a computer programmer and web designer.

His parting thought as we concluded this interview was, "It doesn't matter if you are rich, poor, black, white or whatever your circumstances are, your education is something that you own and can take with you wherever you go."

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