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COOSA NEIGHBOR

Poet comes home to Coosa

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It took leaving Coosa County for Rodney Leonard to learn to appreciate it.

"It wasn't the ideal place for me to get my first taste of life," said the Rockford native and 1989 graduate of Central High School. "But now, I've been so many places that are 'stuffed.' It is nice to come back to the serenity of this place. I love the serenity that I find here."

Here is his mother's home, where he has returned to mourn the death of his maternal grandmother, Mary Edna Edwards. Those two women, more than any, he said, have influenced his life.

"I've always tried to be a listener of the people," said the young man who, after a four-year stint in the Air Force, is embarking on a career as a poet and lecturer. Recalling the times he sat on the front porch and listened to his grandmother and her contemporaries, Leonard said, "The adages she shared on her front porch are my lessons for living today. A lot of my writing stems from that."

Leonard, who now uses the name N'Terich Ziyadh, said that he has always been "expressive." He called his beginnings humble ones, but said that his mother, Ruby Leonard, always taught him to "focus on fashioning your life with dignity and grace."

"That's what I built my life on as I stepped out into the world," he said.

That stepping out has taken him a number of places. All of his experience has become fodder for his work.

"My poetry always examines the Rodney T. Leonard experience because that is what I know," he said. "I write about life as it has been for me in Coosa County, in Paris,

Grace

Within your reach
lies yourself
expecting
and waiting
To be discovered
and accepted
— N'Terich Ziyadh



in London ..."

The poet said he was recently notified that his work will be included in an upcoming National Library of Poetry anthology, "Tears of Fire." He is working out the details of signing with an agent who will arrange lectures and speaking engagements, and plans to continue the education he began in two-year schools while in the service.

"My ultimate goal is to earn a Ph.D., teach a class on the college level, sing my song of life," he said.

For now, he is "doing some serious writing," and looking for opportunities to talk about the things important to him — education, spirituality, the war against AIDS and against drugs and the fact that people can make something of themselves no matter what their beginnings.

"You can create your life, you can create yourself," he said. "All roads lead somewhere, but first they must be traveled. Life is an energy constantly moving, constantly inviting us to take on that challenge, constantly discour-