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POETRY



John Stennes, staff photographer

Rodney Leonard, stationed at Grand Forks Air Force Base, has been writing poetry seriously for two years.

'Speakin' the truth Easin' your pain'

- Air base poet uses poor background as a rich source for writing

By **Gail Stewart Hand**
Herald Staff Writer

He's making up for time lost as a teen-ager, when working for a hairdresser filled his only spare hours.

Rodney Leonard has learned to love to read and write poetry.

Leonard, 22, is a native of Alabama stationed at Grand Forks Air Force Base.

He's been writing seriously for two years, inspired by

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Maya Angelou, a writer recently thrust into the national consciousness by her recitation of her poem for the occasion "On the Pulse of Morning" at President Clinton's Inauguration. Angelou is a humanities scholar who has made the story of her amazing life — just one of her pursuits in literature. Besides poetry and autobiography, she is active in music, in dance and various languages.

Leonard says he uses her as a model, and is trying to incorporate his appreciation for all aspects of the arts, from hairdressing and fashion, to poetry and autobiography, into his efforts, "for liberation and education have delivered my daybreak."

He likes to use elaborate expressions, expansive gestures. "I do not wish to dwell on the melancholy," he says, with a grand sweep of his arm. He grew up poor in a sometimes harsh environment, which he's tried to forget. Now he finds this background a rich source for writing. For him, writing is "both a vehicle for expression and my healing process."

Two years ago, he was stationed one hour away from London, and found it an invigorating and inspiring experience. And, the excitement of being in a foreign culture made him more aware of things going on around him. He saw with new eyes, and came to recognize that he likes, and needs, to use his senses. "It was there that I really began to listen to people," he recounted.

His writing allows him to express his spiritual and sensual side, he said. He turns to the wisdom of his 96-year old grandmother for inspiration.

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WHAT UP

"What up man,
Say,
Where you from?"
I'm from Portland
Or-e-gon
but I'm not a What's Up man.
"Say then,
What's your game?"
Kickin' the knowledge
Caimin' the fame
Speakin' the truth
Easin' your pain.
"What you do?"
I write books
and poetry
about men just like you.
"Poetry,"
Talkin' 'bout
Poetry.
Wrap your head.
Slip on the bellbottoms and tank.
Fasten your choker
Strap the sandals.
Wear your bangles.
Meet me for happy hour.
"So, who are you?"
I am the you
You want to be.
I am man,
Redefined.