

## Giovanni Speaks At Bridgewater Event

### Began Poetry Career In College

By **JESSICA WETZLER**

*Daily News-Record*

**BRIDGEWATER** — Take every day as it comes.

Those are the words that world-renowned poet, activist and distinguished professor Nikki Giovanni, 75, tells herself daily.

As part of **Bridgewater College**

---

's Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, Giovanni was invited to speak to over 600 attendees, filling the room with laughter and good humor.

Her speech, "An Evening of Poetry, Love and Enlightenment," is about how essentially life is a good

See **GIOVANNI**, Page **A8**

## Giovanni Speaks At Bridgewater Event

### Began Poetry Career In College

**Giovanni** FROM PAGE A1 thing. “This generation needs to learn how to love and how to live,” Giovanni said. “It’s about sharing and giving which is important because there is so much selfishness going around right now.”

Giovanni particularly favored the **Bridgewater College** football team that was present Monday night, addressing the team during the opening remarks.

Born in Knoxville, Tenn., Giovanni began her poetry career when she was in **college**, saying that during that time she began to take writing more seriously.

While attending Fisk University in 1964, she majored in history and took writing workshops with John Oliver Killens. During her time at Fisk, she was a part of the student literary journal called Elan and re-established the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

In 1968, Giovanni published her first volume of poetry, “Black Feeling Black Talk.” The book, published after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., includes her poem “Reflections on April 4, 1968,” the date King was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn.

“I didn’t know Dr. King personally,” Giovanni said. “I was a history major in **college** so we all knew King, but that date was incredibly important.”

Giovanni said that when she was writing that poem, she just sat down and let the words speak from themselves. Not prone to writing multiple drafts of a piece of poetry, the poem she wrote was original and raw. “Either it works or I throw it out,” Giovanni said in regards to her style of not writing multiple drafts. “You have to remind yourself that you are the first reader and a lot of people forget that.” As writers, people tend to think of their readers when writing a piece of work, Giovanni said. “You have to say if it’s working for me then its fine and that’s what I tell to

my students at Tech and I think that I am right.”

Giovanni began teaching English at Virginia Tech in 1989. That same year she received an honorary doctorate from Indiana University and was a featured poet in the Utrecht International Poetry Festival, an annual event held in the Dutch city of Utrecht. One of her writing styles that she adopted after using a typewriter during her early years in poetry was always typing words in the lowercase instead of uppercase. Giovanni said that capitalizing something make it outstanding and therefore uses

it rarely. When she teaches, she tells her students there is always a story to be written and always a narrative to be told.

“I am always trying to tell a story in my work,” Giovanni said. “It is not always about struggle, but I am inspired by the spirituals and African- American writers.” Her most recent book, “A Good Cry,” touches on a more personal side of herself, looking into the history and mysteries of her own heart. Published in 2017, “A Good Cry” dives in on people who have affected her life and those who have influenced her. “There is something to be said about the people who stayed and so I am proud of the people who escaped but I am also proud of the people who stayed and said I am going to build a community.”

If Giovanni could say something to her younger self it would be to stay honest.

“I think I am an honest writer,” she said. “From my first poem to my last, it’s honest.

Contact Jessica Wetzler at 574-6279, @wetzler\_jessica or [jwetzler@dnronline.com](mailto:jwetzler@dnronline.com)

I am always trying to tell a story in my work.

n Nikki Giovanni, professor