

# The Start of a Poet

Before famed poet Langston Hughes received national recognition, he worked at the fashionable Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C., bussing tables at the restaurant. The pay wasn't much, but it provided his meals and he didn't care about the rest.

What did matter was that one day he learned one of the leading poets, Vachel Lindsay, was staying at the hotel. Hughes had read Lindsay's poems and admired him. Lindsay was both a minstrel and a missionary, a people's poet like Carl Sandburg.

Hughes worked up the courage to drop three of his poems at Lindsay's dinner plate, unable to say more than that he liked Lindsay's poems and that these were his own poems. Then he fled toward the kitchen.

Lindsay gave a public reading that night in the hotel theater. Hughes couldn't go to the reading because the management wouldn't allow black people to attend. When Hughes showed up for work the next morning, reporters were waiting for him. They told him that Lindsay had read his poems aloud and praised them to the large audience.

The press interviewed Hughes and took his picture. Although he had had some poems published, he was relatively unknown. His name soon spread to the whole country.

At the hotel desk, Hughes found that Lindsay, too shy himself to try to see Hughes, had left for him a beautiful set of Amy Lowell's biography of poet John Keats. On the first blank page, Lindsay had written a long letter filled with encouragement.

Hughes never forgot Lindsay's kindness and encouragement. It helped him overcome many obstacles in his career.

Encouragement is a gift to be shared – in any walk of life, but especially for those of us who work in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home.

Reach down and lift others up. It's the best exercise you can get.

– Beecher Hunter