

The Frank Muller Benefit

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Over 750 people turned out to see Stephen King, John Grisham, Peter Straub and Pat Conroy at a benefit performance for audiobook narrator Frank Muller in New York City last Saturday evening. Muller, who has narrated dozens of books by these authors and others, was injured in a motorcycle accident in November. Due to the severity of his injuries, which include neurological damage, it is unclear if he will ever work again.

Unlike authors, audiobook narrators do not get royalties from their performances. While Muller has health insurance, Stephen King said it is inadequate for his current situation and his family is now without income.

Hosted by George Guidall, who has narrated over five hundred unabridged audiobooks, the event featured readings or talks by the

four authors, each prefaced by a snippet of Muller's recording of that author's work. John Grisham started the evening joking about King's rumored retirement and fears of repeating himself. "What's wrong with that?" Grisham said. "I ran out of new ideas after my fourth book and I'm still writing!" He also joked about walking into the bookstore every few months after King's accident to find a new book by King. His publisher suggested Grisham start taking long walks on remote, rural roads to increase his productivity. Grisham then read from his new legal thriller, *The Summons*, published on February 5th.

Peter Straub, before reading a passage from *Black House*, commented about reading at the same event as two Southerners, saying no one had ever complimented a Milwaukee accent.

King was also scheduled to read

from *Black House*, but read "The Revenge of Lardass Hogan" from "The Body" instead. *Different Seasons* was the first of King's works read by Muller, who had to do several takes to get this passage on tape without laughing. At the part of the story where characters realize an upset in the pie-eating contest may be in the works, King looked up and said, "Go, Patriots! ... I don't know where that came from ... it just popped out."

Pat Conroy said that living in the South did not make him immune to the influences of New York. His next book, he said tongue-in-cheek, would be called *The Erections*, detailing the romantic misadventures of Jonathan Franzen and Oprah Winfrey.

The evening closed with a brief thank you from Muller's wife, Erika, carrying their young daughter.

Touched by the outpouring of sup-
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port for her husband, she said she'd spoken to him by phone earlier that day and he was able to say he loved her. She also introduced the doctor who had treated Muller after his accident.

Simon and Schuster recorded the benefit for audio release. King said they hadn't yet secured the

rights from NAL to include "The Body" excerpt but hoped to do so. Otherwise, the audio release might have something else from King on it.

At the end of the evening, the four authors signed books for people who had contributed extra for that privilege. Wavedancer Foun-

dation, named for Muller's home recording studio, has been established to support disabled performers, writers, and members of the production community.

For more information see www.bitchen.com/muller.