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Wednesday January 06, 2010

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## Georgina poet barred from entering U.S. for benefit concert

Georgina

January 06, 2010 08:16 AM

### Access denied

Michael Owen

Terrorist treatment isn't stopping a poet's pursuit of cross-border artistic exchanges.

Ken Cowle, poet, author, radio show host and president of Soul Asylum Poetry and Publishing Inc, in Willow Beach, was denied access to the United States Dec. 1, while on his way to the Dreams on Wings Music Benefit for The Hemispherectomy Foundation at the Tin Angel in Philadelphia Pa.

Mr. Cowle was skipped over during a routine passport check, on his train at the Niagara border, so, when the American officers asked if everyone had been checked, Mr. Cowle raised his hand and indicated he had been missed.

"I thought that I had better say something," he said. "I didn't want them to think I was trying to hide something by not speaking up."

An officer then approached him for his passport and declaration card and asked him to state his business in the U.S.

Mr. Cowle informed the officer he was going to the charity event as a volunteer, after which he planned to stay with friends.

"I told them right away about the charity show. I've been going to Philly for three years, probably 10 or 11 times," Mr. Cowle said.

He also informed the officer of his previous trips to The East Coast Recording Studio and The Byrdland Studio, both in Philadelphia, where Mr. Cowle helps promote independent artists.

When the officer asked why a Canadian radio celebrity would travel to the U.S. to perform without pay, "I replied that it was for a charity that helps children who suffer from severe seizures, and that I would never even fathom asking for pay," Mr. Cowle said.

After the exchange, the officer removed Mr. Cowle's two bags from the overhead compartment and began searching them.

Their contents, including a gift pack of several signed copies of books and CDs to be raffled off, were quickly pulled from the bags and left on the floor.

When Mr. Cowle asked for the items to be treated respectfully, he was told to sit down and not speak.

"I was just perturbed by the treatment," he said.

After repacking his items, Mr. Cowle was taken into the customs office where he was photographed, printed and presented with a form stating the reason he was denied access to the U.S.

The form highlights the absence of evidence of employment and a confirmed return date.

Despite Mr. Cowle's suggestion that he simply call Jane Stefanik, northeast regional director of The Hemispherectomy Foundation, for confirmation, he was dropped off on the Canadian side of the border and left to find his way home.

"All I could think about was how sickened I was that I couldn't be at the charity," he said. "I was really floored because, in essence, we're helping (Americans). I do this to help promote independent artists, but we're booking and helping a studio in the U.S."

"I am truly devastated that Ken will not be able to appear at the Benefit," Ms Stefanik said in a letter released after the incident.

Mr. Cowle isn't letting the incident slow him down though.

Through his website, Mr Cowle's radio show audience continues to grow and his publishing company client base is closing in on capacity.

"We have a huge listenership in Philadelphia and I don't have to visit the U.S. to do business in the U.S.," Mr. Cowle said.

Originally started in 2005 on a disability grant, Soul Asylum Publishing has grown to have more than 1,200 registered members and profile more than 300 artists on their website, has published 40 authors (local and international) and have 15 musicians signed to distribution contracts through the new music division, Double K Records.

Many of the works published through the company are available through Turn the Page in Sutton.

Mr. Cowle is also volunteering with the New York Coalition for Healthy Foods to help put together a CD to help raise awareness and money to change the menus in our schools across North America to a healthier choice.

The border incident, "makes me feel (disillusioned), but there's no way I'm going to hurt an artist because of their country. We're helping to bring U.S. independents to Canada and Canadian independents to the U.S.," Mr. Cowle said.

He still has a few questions though.

"Who could have got in who was really a person of contempt while they were going through my stuff? If you think putting up walls will solve our problems and elongate our lives — that's a misconception," Mr. Cowle said.

He's not sure if he'll attempt to go for another show as he would like to, but he is sure, if he finds himself in the same situation again, he'd still do the honest thing.



Michael Owen

Ken Cowle was barred from entering the United States for a charity concert last year.

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"If they put me through the ringer for being honest, what would they do if I tried to pull a fast one," Mr. Cowle said.

For more information on Soul Asylum Poetry and Publishing Inc. or to listen to Mr. Cowle's radio show, visit [www.soulasylumpoetry.com](http://www.soulasylumpoetry.com).

For more information on The Hemispherectomy Foundation, visit [www.hemifundatioq.org](http://www.hemifundatioq.org).

For more information on the New York Coalition for Healthy Foods , visit [www.healthylunches.org](http://www.healthylunches.org).

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