Engel did a doubletake. Had the Sherman Alexie, the widely anthologized poet, novelist and screenwriter, submitted poems to Front Porch? How did Alexie even know about Front Porch?

“There were no comments or bio attached, just poems and the author’s name,” said Engel, now a lecturer in the Department of English. The mystery cleared up when Engel mentioned Alexie’s submission to his editorial board and learned that the grapevine was at work: A colleague on Front Porch had a friend who knew Alexie. The friend, also a writer, had told Alexie that he should check out the journal.

“And suddenly his poems appeared,” said Engel, adding that “he was very gracious. He referenced Front Porch in his blog and announced at his appearances that he had work forthcoming in it. He really helped to build our readership.” Alexie’s poems Independence Day, Chicken and I Can’t Get You Out of My Head were published in the journal’s ninth issue.

Front Porch, which debuted in 2006, is published by graduate students in Texas State’s MFA Program in Creative Writing three or four times a year, and it drew attention from first-rank poets and writers of fiction and nonfiction from the beginning. The debut issue featured new work by winners of major literary prizes – Roddy Doyle (Britain’s Booker Prize), Charles Wright (Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize) and Heather McHugh (National Book Award finalist).

Submissions from other award-winning writers followed, including John Wood (Iowa Poetry Prize), Forrest Gander (Whiting Award for Writers), John Evans (Best New Poets 2006), Steven Gillis (six-time Pushcart Prize nominee) and Judy Wilson (Southern Literary Festival Award for Best Short Fiction). After Front
"To publish this rare footage of Ginsberg was like publishing Ginsberg himself."

decades, comprise a who’s who of America’s literati and a treasure trove of historic university events. (See sidebar for a complete list.)

The journal’s online format drew praise recently in a Los Angeles Times blog. “In addition to the expected new fiction and nonfiction and poetry, [Front Porch] makes the most of its multimedia-ness,” the blog’s author wrote, referring to the inclusion of videos. For example, issue No. 7 features video of novelist Mary Gaitskill, reading at the Katherine Anne Porter House in 2008 from a novel in progress. Her evocative description of summer creates the desire to hear more of her work:

“You stand in line at the post office, smelling the other people in line and sensing that the shapes of things are bleeding slightly in the heat.”

Readers were particularly excited when Front Porch featured a previously unpublished video of the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg reading on campus in 1996, in its ninth issue. It was one of Ginsberg’s last readings; he died in 1997. His reading included energetic performances of poems by William Blake, with his long-time guitar accompanist Steven Taylor. He also performed and read from his collections The Fall of America and Kaddish, and the poems “On Neil Cassidy’s Ashes,” “Sunflower Sutra,” “Hum Bom” and “After the Big Parade.”

“...like publishing Ginsberg himself,” Engel said.

“And hearing writers read from their own work or talk about their craft adds to the aesthetics of the Web site,” said Katie Angermeier, current managing editor. “The videos present writing as

Front Porch

Selected videos of writers reading from their work: http://www.frontporchjournal.com/audio.asp

Unless otherwise noted, appearances took place on the Texas State campus or at the Katherine Anne Porter House in Kyle.

- Ai, March 5, 2003
- Charles Baxter, Sept. 28, 2006
- Frank Bidart, Feb. 15, 2000
- Roger Boylan, March 21, 2000
- Ron Carlson, Sept. 15, 2006
- Robert Creeley, Nov. 16, 1999
- John Dufresne, Nov. 12, 2007
- Percival Everett, Feb. 2, 2007
- Mary Gaitskill, April 11, 2008
- Forrest Gander and C.D. Wright (Q&A), Oct. 26, 2006
- Allen Ginsberg, April 4, 1996
- Denis Johnson, Feb. 15, 2007
- Bret Anthony Johnston, Nov. 9, 2007
- Ilya Kaminsky at Lampasas, Sept. 25, 2008
- Li-Young Lee, Nov. 25, 2008
- Yiyun Li, March 1, 2007
- Nathaniel Mackey, Sept. 13, 2007
- Carole Maso, Feb. 23, 2007
- Anne Mellor, Oct. 30, 1997
- Tim O’Brien, Feb. 21, 2007
- Marjorie Perloff (Lecture), April 4, 2006
- Charles Simic, Oct. 4, 2007
- Robert Stone, April 24, 2008
- Alexander Theroux, March 5, 2009
- Helena Viramontes, April 13, 2007
- Rosemarie Waldrop, Sept. 29, 1997
- Eleanor Wilner, Nov. 10, 2006
- James Young, Feb. 26, 2009
Front porch reminiscences

At the end of each poem or work of fiction or nonfiction published in Front Porch, the author reminisces on the theme of front porches. Here are some of their thoughts:

“I have two sisters – one older and one younger, all of us close in age. There is a photograph of us as children, standing on the front porch of our house in Jackson, Miss. . . . I hold a stick by one splintered end. The stick is enormous, a broken pine limb nearly as big as I was. I have no memory of the moment, and every time I see the photo I wonder why I had dragged a dead branch to the porch, and what I was about to do with it next.”

Katherine Conner, Issue No. 11

“On lazy afternoons my grandparents would sit on their front porch in rural Tennessee and watch. They watched cars and trucks whine past as Duke, their mutt dog, chased them over the hill. They watched my brother and me wade through the creek that snaked along the foothills in front of their house. From their front porch they watched the sky reddish in the west and listened to whippoorwill calls in the distance. They waved at every vehicle that passed. Some honked. Most everyone waved. Their front porch was where they watched and told stories, usually about when they were young, about my ancestors, about how they spent their summers working in the fields. My grandfather was a farmer before he became a mechanic and built a workshop out of barn tin near his house. During the summer when my brother and I stayed with them, he'd work until the shop became like an oven in the afternoons, then he'd retire to the front porch to watch and tell us stories. He's been dead a few years now, but that front porch remains like a shrine inside my mind. In some way, every story I tell is rooted there.”

Robert Lavender, Issue No. 10

“In late, thick August, on the wide porch of our old brick house in a tiny town in Indiana, my sister and I would sit with a bushel of fresh corn, shucking and peeling and picking. The porch was cool, shaded all day, and we could sit against the nearly chilly brick wall. Over our heads, a beveled bull’s-eye, lead-paned window caught bits of light and sent prisms across the porch floor, our corn-sticky hands, our bug-bitten legs. Doing this simple, old work, we were quiet, which was truly unusual. Strands of cornsilk floated down the steps and across the yard and parched immediately in the scorching heat, but we were cool and very young and quiet and together.”

Rachel Contreni Flynn, Issue No. 11

“I remember the front porch of my parents’ house in East Texas at dusk: full of fireflies, green hills and crickets.”

Eleanor Tipton, Issue No. 11

“They said there'd been a well once under my father's father's porch, though it'd been filled in, covered over. Someone had fallen in at some point and drowned. After that there was no water. Sometimes standing out there with my Thanksgiving plate, I could hear teeth and tongues and blubber in my shoe soles. I always seemed to get a nosebleed. Sometimes I swear the porch wood bowed.”

Blake Butler, Issue No. 5

“My front porch, which curves around our house, overlooks the Saxtons River, which can always be heard rushing and roaring down below us, except in winter when it's frozen over. . . Other than in the winter, I'm on that porch every afternoon and many evenings. It may be the title of an old song, but 'moonlight in Vermont' is not like any other light I've ever seen.”

John Wood, Issue No. 6
something that uses many senses. As writers, we're passionate about that.”

_Front Porch_, which doesn’t publish current Texas State students or faculty (Angermeier says that would be a conflict of interest), receives hundreds of submissions from writers around the country, of all talent levels. Student readers review each work and pass acceptable pieces to editors, who make final decisions on which ones to publish. They also work with the authors to polish their pieces before publication.

“Front Porch operates on a tiny budget; other than the fee for Web hosting, little money is spent. The student editors receive class credit rather than salaries, and the published authors agree to donate their previously unpublished work.

“Writers don’t publish in journals to make money; they publish to have an audience,” Angermeier asserted. Engel added, “It’s that you share a sense of dialogue with all the authors published in a particular journal. Each journal has its own life; the poems and stories speak to each other. It’s the closest thing to being able to sit together in a room with other writers and share your words.”

“Students tend to think of established writers as rock stars,” Angermeier continued. “We think of them as far away when, in actuality, it appears they aren’t. The more you work with authors, the closer they seem.”

Publishing _Front Porch_ for free makes it free to readers, Angermeier added. Anyone with an internet connection can read it.

The online format also presents endless possibilities for integrating technology with writing at no cost. Photojournals, graphic novels, comics, video footage of singer-songwriters, and poetry that experiments visually on the page are all possible in an online format, Angermeier said, and are under consideration for inclusion in _Front Porch_.

“The established writers seem to appreciate the feedback we give them, because it’s more feedback than they usually get from better-known journals,” she continued. “And the newly discovered writers are exciting to work with because they are so grateful to get their work out there.

“Our editors have built some close relationships with authors,” she continued. “We are a student-run journal, and we get excited about words. Authors get excited when an editor gets excited about their work.”

More and more, literary journals are moving from print to online publication to save money, and _Front Porch_ is leading the pack in online publication. Angermeier and Engel attended the recent national meeting of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), where they represented _Front Porch_, one of the only online journals in attendance.

“We had a lot of editors who were concerned about their budgets ask us how to make the transition from print to online,” said Engel. “It was interesting to see that _Front Porch_ is at the forefront of this transition.”

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“The founding editors of _Front Porch_ took a risk in 2006, she continued, embarking on a venture that would require a lot of unpaid work and that had a chance of failing. “We already had the print journal _Persona_ for the undergraduate writing program, and there was skepticism that an online journal would benefit Texas State.

“But they launched it anyway and, successively, students have taken up the mantle and carried the journal forward, even as they’ve balanced teaching and their own coursework. There’s a lot of interest in the journal,” she said. “Everybody realizes that _Front Porch_ is published only because we care about giving writers an audience. That makes me proud.”

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