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One Year Ago this Week, Steve Sanfield Passed Away

In memory of Sanfield, August House will feature *Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry* and *The Adventures of High John the Conqueror* in its February Newsletter.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Atlanta, Georgia (January 28, 2016) This upcoming February marks the one-year anniversary of beloved author, poet, folklorist, and professional storyteller Steve Sanfield's death. In memory of Sanfield's work and in the spirit of African-American History Month, August House will feature two of Sanfield's children's books of African-American stories in the February August House Newsletter: *Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry* and *The Adventures of High John the Conqueror*. Steve Sanfield, who published children's books *John Henry* and *High John* with August House and more than 30 additional titles, died at home on January 28, 2015 at the age of 77.

At the age of 22, Sanfield volunteered as a Freedom Rider, joining other mixed racial groups who challenged segregation in public lunch counters in the South. In Houston, Sanfield's group was arrested for disturbing the peace after integrating a lunch counter at Union Station. Although he had been beaten while in jail, Sanfield reflected recently that, "It was just the right thing to do, and I'm still grateful to this day for the opportunity to do it." In *Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry* and *The Adventures of High John the Conqueror*, Sanfield continued to fight for African-American's equal representation, this time on the literary front. In 2014, a survey conducted by the Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education at University of Wisconsin-Madison found that only 5% of children's books were about Africans or African-Americans.

Both *John Henry* and *High John* offer enduring stories with intelligent and strong black protagonists. Sanfield's rendition of *John Henry* has received praise for bringing greater life and motivation to John Henry's character. Jane Yolen, from the New York Times Book Review, explains how Sanfield "has filled in the story in places where balladry drops transitions and folk tales skim over motivations. In other words, this is a standout retelling." *High John* recounts a series of African-American stories about a slave trickster, High John, who excelled at outwitting

his oppressors. Tales of High John flourished during slavery, but after emancipation they fell out of circulation and his antics were all but forgotten. As a result, these stories play a unique role recounting lessons of perseverance and courage in the face of overwhelming injustice.

By featuring *Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry* and *The Adventures of High John the Conqueror* in its February newsletter, August House hopes to continue to give voice to African-American stories, which so rarely receive the exposure and recognition that Sanfield worked hard to represent. For additional African-American stories and book titles, and for books written and illustrated by African-American authors, check out August House's African-American History Month Reading List (<http://www.augusthouse.com/#!african-american-history-month-reading-l/c1qxj>), which features talented writers and artists such as Rob Cleveland, Bobby Norfolk, Don Tate, and Pat Cummings.

August House is a highly acclaimed and award-winning multimedia publisher of children's picture books, folktale anthologies, and resource books. Located in Atlanta, GA, August House has developed one of the most highly respected collections of folktales from the world's great oral traditions.

You can find more information about August House at AugustHouse.com.

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