

Poet Nikky Finney to teach at USC in the fall

Written by Staff Writer

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Nikky Finney, winner of the 2011 National Book Award for poetry for her book "Head Off & Split.", is leaving the University of Kentucky to return home to South Carolina.

Finney released a statement on her website, nikkyfinney.net, on Monday saying she was accepting a position in the English department at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

The offer from USC includes the John H. Bennett, Jr. Chair in Creative Writing and Southern Literature.

She said her parents are in increasing need of her presence. The decision to take a job at the University of South Carolina is based on spending more time with her aging parents, including her father Ernest Finney, who was appointed in 1994 as the first African American Chief Justice of South Carolina since Reconstruction.

"My decision to leave UK at this time is a daughter's decision," she wrote on her website Monday.

"My mother and father are 79 and 82 respectively, and in need of more and more of me as time flies ... After thirty-eight years of being away from South Carolina it is time to go home. I feel

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there are projects waiting on me there, books to write on that home soil, and students to nurture and guide. The University of South Carolina, graciously, made me an offer I could not refuse."

"This is a joint appointment in the English Language and Literature department and the African American Studies program," Finney said in the statement. "I will also be teaching in USC's wonderful MFA Creative Writing program."

Finney has taught at UK for 20 years, she said in her statement. In the statement, Finney discussed the opportunity to teach and write that UK gave her.

"That initial invitation, gave me, a 30-year-old poet, with one book of poetry, a chance to do something that I had never had the chance to do before — focus solely on teaching and writing," Finney said in her statement. "I finished my next book. It all worked out beautifully."

She has authored four books of poetry: "Head Off & Split" (2011), for which she won the National Book Award; "The World Is Round" (2003); "Rice" (1995); and "On Wings Made of Gauze" (1985).

Her work is heavily influenced by her childhood in South Carolina, its landscape and her upbringing as the daughter of civil rights activists.

Finney said she will finish out the school year at UK and begin at USC in August.