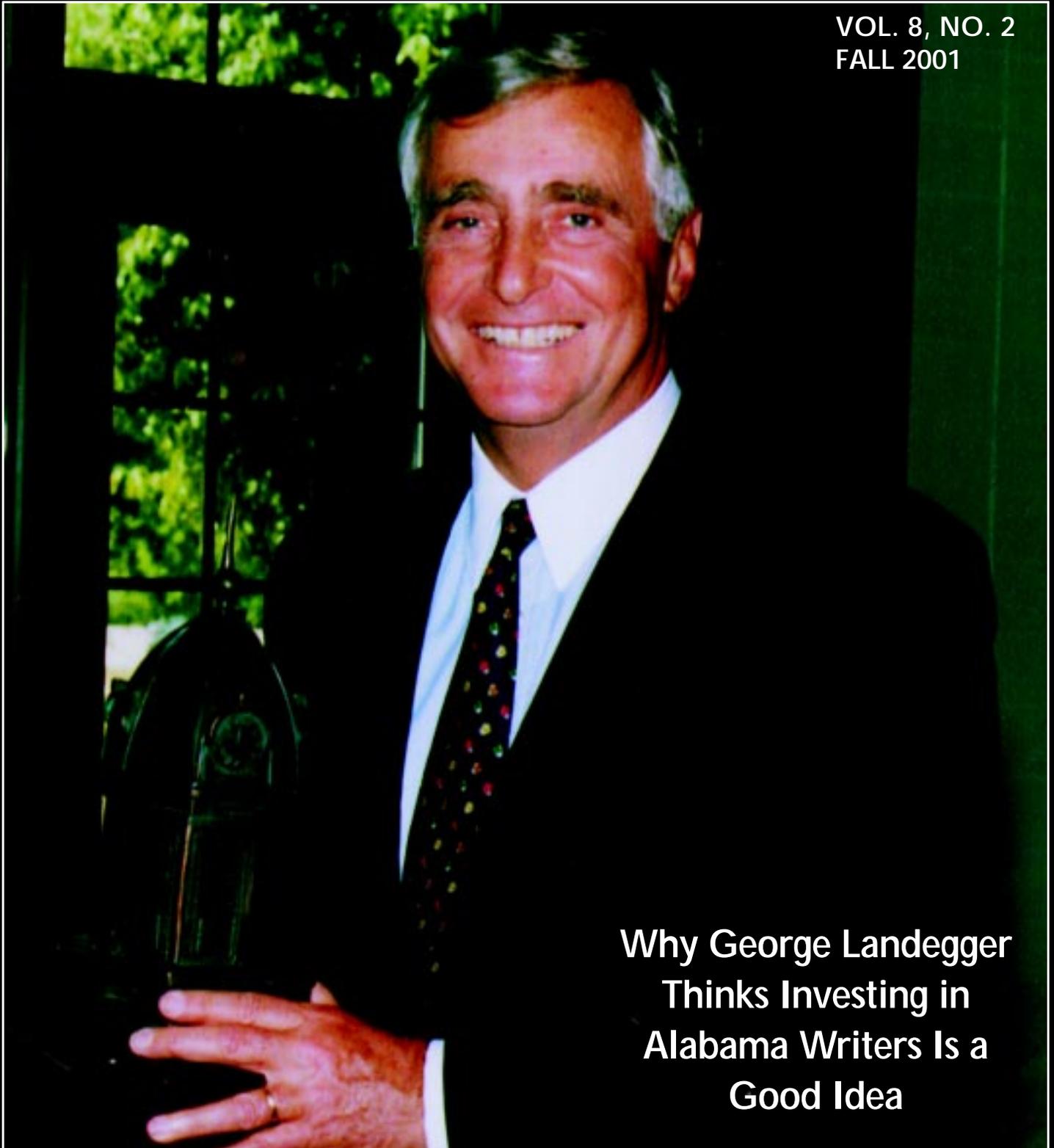


The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum

FIRST DRAFT

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FALL 2001



Why George Landegger
Thinks Investing in
Alabama Writers Is a
Good Idea

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From the Executive Director



Jeanie Thompson

We are happy to be back with you! It was a hard decision not to publish *First Draft* this summer, but it was a wise and frugal one. Thank you for your patience with us. Now we're here again, brimming with news and features about the vital Alabama literary family.

With the passing of our Southern literary mother, Eudora Welty, this summer, we all had a chance to think about the South's literary tradition, influences, and the passing of writers we've read and grown to love. In this issue, we pay tribute to four of our writers who have left us in recent months: novelist and poet Anne Carroll George (Birmingham), memoirist E.B. Sledge (Montevallo and Mobile), poet and fiction writer James Still (born in LaFayette), and theater critic Allen Swafford (Montgomery).

Our young writer focus takes us to a creative writing workshop in Florence, and we introduce a series of columns by Alabama School of Fine Arts creative writing chair Denise Wadsworth Trimm on teaching writing. Also in this issue we profile the most recent Artist Fellowship Recipients in Literature from the Alabama State Council on the Arts: fiction writer Wendy Reed Bruce (Tuscaloosa) and poet Lynne Burris Butler (Florence).

Other important news includes Alabama's designation by the Library of Congress as the 42nd Center for the Book. A coalition of entities will play a part, with administration at the AU Center for the Arts and Humanities. Watch for more on the Center's organization and activities in future issues of *First Draft*.

Another new column is Ed George's "A Writer's Rights." If you aren't up to date on copyright issues and want to refresh yourself without having to admit your ignorance, here's your chance! Ed will devote a series of columns to legal issues of interest to writers.

Finally, you'll notice new names on the FY 02 Board of Directors masthead. We welcome our new board members and will profile them in our winter issue.

We've done our best to round out all things literary in Alabama with a rich selection of book reviews and a thoughtful Back Page account of publishing by Ben Erickson. We invite you to sit back and enjoy *First Draft*.

Jeanie Thompson

Jeanie Thompson
Executive Director

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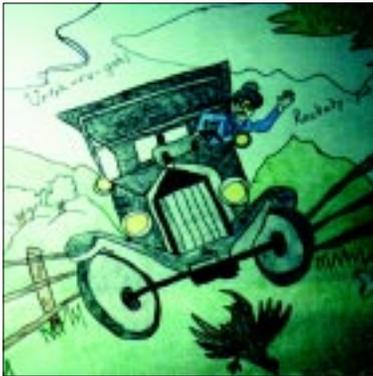
Bethany Giles visits a young writers' class in Florence and explains workshop mechanics. Opportunities for young writers abound in Alabama.



ALABAMA SOUTHERN COLLEGE

Frank Fleming's bronze of the Monroeville Clock Tower.

FAYE KIRKLAND



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BETHANY GILES

Honoree Jeffers and students.

Why George Landegger Thinks Investing in Alabama Writers Is A Good Idea

When John Johnson, president of Alabama Southern Community College, began dreaming about a literary center on his campus in Monroeville, he knew that he wanted to include a major award that recognized Alabama writers.

“I thought it appropriate that we recognize the very best of Alabama’s writers with an award of merit that carried a cash prize, as well as a commemorative work of art,” Johnson said.

Through contact with novelist Harper Lee’s family in Monroeville, he obtained permission to name an annual writing award recognizing Alabama’s Distinguished Writer of the Year after the world-famous author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Johnson asked the Alabama Writers’ Forum to select the writer to receive what would become the state’s premier recognition for literary arts.

In tandem with this award, Johnson conceived of a literary scholar’s award and asked the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama (ACETA) to serve as the selection committee and to name the award. Thus the Eugene Current-Garcia Award was born, honoring one of the most distinguished and admired members of Auburn University’s English department faculty.

With the awards established and the judges in place, Johnson faced the challenge of funding the awards and paying for the cast bronze clock tower that he planned to commission from renowned Alabama sculptor Frank Fleming.

“My first thought was to offer George Landegger, chairman of Parsons & Whittemore, which owns the locally based Alabama River Pulp companies, the chance to be the award’s corporate sponsor. I was well acquainted with the Landegger family’s philanthropic efforts and of Mr. Landegger’s community leadership in this regard. So it seemed natural to offer him the opportunity to support the Harper Lee Award.”

Johnson said that the industrialist’s immediate response was “Yes!” to



ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*George Landegger with
Harper Lee Award recipient
Sena Jeter Naslund and
president of Alabama Southern
College Dr. John Johnson.*

ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Jeanie Thompson, executive director of the Alabama Writers' Forum, congratulates Sena Jeter Naslund.

ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



George Landegger with the Frank Fleming-designed Monroe County Courthouse clock tower sculpture given to the Harper Lee and Current-Garcia award winners.

ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Eva Landegger with granddaughter Helena and Sena Jeter Naslund.

ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Current-Garcia Award winner Bert Hitchcock with Janice Lassiter of the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama and Anne Boozier of the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

sponsoring the Harper Lee Award for 1998, adding that he was grateful for the opportunity to honor Harper Lee and the best writers in the state. Thus Johnson found it less difficult to persuade other entities to pitch in and fund the Eugene Current-Garcia Award, which was supported the first year by Barnes and Noble, and in the subsequent two years by Alabama Power Foundation.

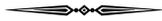
In 1998 the inaugural Harper Lee Award for the Distinguished Alabama Writer was given to fiction writer and jazz historian Albert Murray. The second and third years saw novelist Madison Jones and fiction writer/poet Helen Norris honored. Literary scholars recognized in the first three years included American literature specialist Claudia Durst Johnson, Alabama

literature scholar Philip K. Beidler, and modern American fiction expert Donald R. Noble.

When the fourth year rolled around, Johnson again found himself looking for a corporate sponsor for the literary scholar award. But he didn't have to look far. At the fourth Alabama Writers Symposium, held this past May in Monroeville, Johnson announced George and Eva Landegger's commitment to funding the pair of awards for the next five years. During the awards luncheon presentation of the Harper Lee Award to Sena Jeter Naslund, author of the internationally acclaimed *Ahab's Wife, or the Star Gazer*, Alabama Writers' Forum executive director Jeanie Thompson presented Eva Landegger with a signed first edition of *Ahab's Wife*.

Parsons & Whittemore

George Landegger is chairman of Parsons & Whittemore, one of the world's largest producers of market pulp, the raw material used in paper-making. Parsons & Whittemore has two pulp mills in Alabama and one in Canada. Chairman George Landegger and his family own the company. Landegger's father, Karl, came to the United States from Austria in 1938 and bought Parsons & Whittemore, then a small pulp-trading firm founded in 1909. Parsons & Whittemore also produces newsprint through its Alabama River Newsprint joint venture with Canada's Abitibi-Consolidated, the world's largest newsprint maker.



Alabama River Pulp and Alabama Pine Pulp Companies, Claiborne, Alabama

Alabama River Pulp and Alabama Pine Pulp companies are wholly owned subsidiaries of the Parsons & Whittemore Organization, and are known worldwide as producers of quality softwood and hardwood market pulps. The Claiborne Mill Complex (in Monroe County) is recognized as the largest pulping operation in North America and as one of the world's largest single pulp and papermaking sites. The manufacturing facilities are noted for their efficient application of the industry's most advanced engineering and environmental technology.

The two pulp mills and its woodlands division employ some 600 people with an annual payroll of about \$50 million. Combined, the mills produce over 800,000 tons per year. The pulps are used by papermakers across the globe for numerous products, including fine writing papers, copy paper, towels, tissues, coffee filters and a variety of other products.

In addition to supporting the Harper Lee and Eugene Current-Garcia Awards, the Alabama River Companies also show support for a variety of community programs, including the following:

- sponsoring the Monroe County Adult Literacy Council and providing a facility in Monroeville for its use;
- purchasing IBM's Writing to Read computer labs for kindergarten students in public and private schools in Monroe, Conecuh, and Clarke counties;
- donating \$500,000 to Reading Alabama's successful campaign to raise \$5 million to purchase the Writing to Read computer labs for kindergartners in public schools through Alabama. P&W Chairman George Landegger organized this effort and serves as President of Reading Alabama, Inc.;
- contributing to the Monroe County Library and remaining a longtime supporter of *To Kill A Mockingbird* Teachers Literary Workshops and Young Writers Series sponsored by the Monroe County Heritage Museum;
- initiating the start up of Our Place Teen Center to help teens in rural counties have a safe place to gather by donating \$350,000 for building the facility and by serving serves as the project's major sponsor.

"For your support of this award, we would like to present your family with signed copies of books by all of the Harper Lee Award Recipients to show our deep appreciation for your recognition of Alabama writers," Thompson announced at the ceremony. Eva Landegger then spoke briefly, underscoring her love of writing and her family's commitment to the literary arts in Alabama.

Parsons & Whittemore Chairman George Landegger has actively supported literacy throughout the state and has enlisted strong cooperation from influential business leaders like Alabama Power Company's Elmer Harris and Retirement Systems of Alabama's David Bronner. But both Landegger and his wife, Eva, know from personal experience that once children learn to read, the key to continued success lies in their developing a love for reading. This is why the Landeggers place such high value on writers.

"We recognize that parents and teachers play the key role of equipping a child with the basic reading skills," says Eva Landegger. Yet Mrs. Landegger maintains that once children learn to read, they must be continually exposed to stimulating reading material. "That is why writers are so important. Whether it's a classic novel like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or a biography of a favorite sports hero, as children experience an assortment of literature at progressive reading levels they discover their particular interests and expand their knowledge. This sparks a passion for reading and instills an appreciation for education that continues into adulthood and can last a lifetime," she believes.

“My husband and I support these literary awards because we wish to acknowledge the writers. From experience with our own children and now our grandchildren, we know it is the writers’ creativity that provides the true incentive to read,” Mrs. Landegger explains. “With the popularity of television and computer, it is even more important that writers create good books for the enjoyment of all ages on a broad spectrum of subjects and reading levels.”

Landegger agrees. “Every state should follow Alabama’s example and recognize their outstanding authors. Educational programs to boost literacy and to encourage reading certainly have their place and I fully support these initiatives,” he states. “But we should not overlook an important connection. An effort to recognize writers is also worthy.”

And what does the Harper Lee Award, including the \$5,000 cash award and work of art, mean to the writer? For Sena Jeter Naslund, who grew up in Birmingham, where she attended public schools and often took the bus across town to explore the rich resources of the Birmingham Public Library, the recognition from her home state is particularly sweet. “I am so happy with the embrace from Alabama, especially the Harper Lee Award.”

And for Bert Hitchcock, named the Eugene Current Garcia Award winner for 2001, the recognition means “varying epitomes of individual and collective personal/professional friendship. I can’t begin, in any amount of time or words, to express my gratitude.... Its meaning

is especially, affectingly deep both because of the name it bears and because it comes from and through the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama and the Alabama Humanities Foundation.”

“It was our vision to recognize the best in Alabama literary arts and literary scholarship through these awards, given as the center pieces

of the Alabama Writers Symposium annually,” said Johnson. “With partners like George and Eva Landegger supporting these awards, Alabama puts itself forward as the best of the best with corporate/community partnerships honoring the arts and scholarship. I feel proud to be from Alabama when I look at our investment in the literary arts.”

Alabama Voices This Year and Last

Alabama Voices kicks off its seventh year this fall in schools, public libraries, and communities all over the state.

Among the writers confirmed this year are nationally acclaimed writers **Kelly Cherry** and **Sena Jeter Naslund**. Also participating are the 2000 and 2001 Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowship Award winners: **Jim Hilgartner**, **Carol Pierman**, **Lynne Burris Butler**, and **Wendy Reed Bruce**. Writer/teacher **Rick Shelton** and children’s author **Faye Gibbons**, who will lead workshops and give readings at several schools, are also on the slate.

This year’s Alabama Voices will also continue offering readings by writers in the Tutwiler Prison for Women and at several Alabama youth detention centers. These programs support the Aid to Inmate Mothers creative writing program at Tutwiler and the Alabama Writers’ Forum “Writing Our Stories” antiviolenace creative writing program.

Alabama Voices 2001-2002 will kick off with a visit by Faye Gibbons to Sylacauga on October 10th. For a full schedule of readings and locations, call the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities at 334-844-4946 or check the Center’s website at www.auburn.edu/pebblehill.

PHOTO CREDITS: FAYE KIRKLAND



“In my twenty-two years as a teacher, I don’t think we have ever had an author visit our school, “ wrote Donna Plunkett, third-grade teacher at Carbon Hill Elementary School, after a visit by Faye Gibbons (upper left) last spring. Other writers visiting Carbon Hill and West Jasper Elementary School included Aileen Henderson and Charles and Debra Ghinga.

Nurturing What Can Grow

Young Writers Workshop

Article and photos by Bethany A. Giles

Artistic sensibility starts at a very young age,” said poet Honorée Jeffers at a recent young writers poetry workshop she presented in Florence in connection with the W.C. Handy Music Festival. “We don’t spring fully grown geniuses as adults. You nurture what can grow later on.”

At least that was her reason for working with children and teens in the area of creative writing.

“You nurture a seed in workshops,” she said. “Teens do have deep thoughts and wonder about life, God, and sexuality; it’s important to feel understood.”

As a nervous teen who read her own poem before Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks, Jeffers said she reveled in the experience. “When Brooks came at me, it was not as a peer,” tearing her work apart for its faults, she said. “But knowing I needed to be nurtured, she told me my poem was wonderful. It was not really wonderful, but as a young writer, I needed that encouragement.”

She also talked to her workshop participants about the power or empowerment of the written word.

“Many (children) experience things they have no control over. But when you tell them they have power over the written word, that’s survival. That’s how I survived,” she said, alluding to a variety of childhood experiences she’s only now beginning to write about in her third book, as yet untitled. Her first book, *The Gospel of Barbecue*, won the Stan and Tom Wick Prize from Kent State and soon will be followed by a second book.

Even outside of creative writing, Jeffers said, “journaling is very important to getting experiences out, being at the cusp of a life change. I remember when I was 15, 16, and 17 and I think of all the things racing through me at the time. It

was a way to get that stuff out and connect with the world.” But to write, it is said, one must read.

“I was always a serious reader, even when I was not getting great grades,” Jeffers said. “Being an avid reader sustained me.”



AWF board member Daryl Brown, a published author and an instructor in the English faculty at the University of North Alabama, taught a short story workshop in connection with the Handy Festival. He mentioned how easy it is to work with writers who have read extensively.

“I saw a lot of encouraging things in this group,” Brown said of his workshop participants. “I’m seeing some well-read students. And to see someone in this age group one who’s read *Finnegan’s Wake*? Yes, it’s surprising.”

“They’re enthusiastic,” he added. “They do everything they are asked to do and they’re curious—that’s always good.”

Brown, whose first published short story was selected by Algonquin Books for inclusion in an anthology of the best Southern short stories of 2000, said the group worked on trusting their instincts. They used their imaginations. And they read. Flannery O’Connor and James Alan McPherson were on the reading list, as were J.D. Salinger and Samuel Clemmons. “They read a couple of stories every night,” he said.

His participants wrote three short stories during the week, each about two pages long. They also performed writing exercises, and they sought help with characterization, description, terminology, and diction.

Brown said that one exercise, “Be a Good Liar,” helped reveal a natural storyteller in the group. “A story goes around the table, and each person adds to it... a couple of them just

ran with it but with good storytelling and slipping in of good details.”

One participant, a Muscle Shoals High School tenth-grader named Michael Campbell, also participated in the poetry workshop with Jeffers.

After three years of primarily writing poetry, Campbell said this workshop was something new for him. “I never really worked in short stories, but this made me interested in them.”

And he said this practice will help him for years to come. “Next year, I hope to take a creative writing class, and it’ll help when I write short stories for contests.” But he said he’d definitely “love to publish some poetry...and I’d love to write a novel some day.”

His influence? Edgar Allen Poe and some influential family members.

“My grandmother, Laura Campbell, was a librarian and school teacher and did some writing in college. I let her read my poetry,” Campbell said, adding that she does offer constructive criticism and not just a grandmotherly hug and “nice work.”

“She has the largest vocabulary of anyone I know. If I have a weak adjective, she offers something helpful. My mother also worked with a newspaper for a few years, so she has experience writing, too.”

This second year of the young writers’ conference in Florence offered Brown some opportunities to dig deeper and explore some more mature subjects, he said, since only upper-level high school students participated. “With that comes

more knowledge of reading and literature and grasping concepts in writing...they’re picking up on things quicker,” he said, than would a group of younger students.

Still, a workshop such as this is no easy task for the instructor, Brown said. “Just a week is hard. I try to tell them everything I know in a span of eight hours in the course of a week and try to bring up points again and again to reinforce ... using the same terminology: character, conflict, drama.

“I try to give them a finished product by the end of the week—a bound volume of work from this class. And I give them a variety of stories and, hopefully, they read them when they get a chance,” Brown added.

But even more than for a finished product, some attend for the atmosphere and the tools. Deanetta Goodloe, a Shoals native who attends the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, plans to use her skills for herself and her future work in public relations.

“I liked the different exercises (Jeffers) gave us, especially as a returning student. It was a creative stimulus; that’s why I went,” she said. “I like workshops because you can get your creative juices flowing.”

That’s exactly the kind of influence Lindsey Stricklin had in mind when he envisioned young writers workshops in the Shoals area, which includes Florence, Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, and Tuscumbia. The departing Shoals representative on the Alabama Writers’ Forum board had heard about programs in other parts of the state, including “Writing Our Stories” at several Alabama youth detention centers and liked



“Teens do have deep thoughts and wonder about life...[writing] is a way to get that stuff out and connect with the world,” notes Honorée Jeffers, who worked with young writers in the Florence workshop.

MECHANICS OF A WORKSHOP

by Bethany Giles

All heads nod affirmatively as poet Honorée Jeffers describes the three groups of poetry—dramatic, the rhythmic form written in dialogue; lyric, generally meant to be sung; and narrative, which tells stories. Then, since the workshop included such a broad range of ages, Honorée led the group in writing exercises based on common things. She had them empty their pockets.

Keys, lip balm, a coin, and breath mints were set out. “It’s hard to write about lip stuff,” one 12-year-old said. “But this is what we do,” Honorée said.

All pens hit the paper at “Go.” Keys jingled, the lip balm container was opened, sniffed, and turned over. A candy wrapper was crinkled. One participant studied closely what was inscribed on a coin. One counted the number of buttons on a calculator.

As each participant listed or described the first things that came to mind about each item, Honorée led a discussion about writer’s block: “I thought after I began writing and was published, I would never stop writing. Buzz, wrong answer,” she said.

“Then I went to a family reunion and it was awful. You know, there are certain poems you show your family and some you hide from your family. At that reunion, it was like I was a child again and it was like all the things that I didn’t want to write about, because it was about my family, just started bubbling out – nine, 10, 11, 12, 13 poems in a row. So, now I’m working on a third book.”

When the thoughts are coming, write every good thought down, she encouraged. “Sometimes, you write something really beautiful, but it just doesn’t fit. I have

a big banker’s box full of these things that I carry city to city. Some slips of paper in the box are 10 years old. It’s like being a creative pack rat. Some stuff will be usable someday,” she said.

Topics of all descriptions were brought up, including lactose intolerance, being Southern, stereotypes, the male/female dynamic and poetry, understanding the other gender, racism, understanding cultures worldwide.

Then the homework assignment was given: Choose one of these, Jeffers said, or come up with something else, along with a good reason for not using one of her ideas:

1. Draw a picture of your mother’s kitchen and write a poem about it. It must include an oven, something green, something dead, and a female relation coming into the scene.
2. Write a six-line autobiography that includes name of your mother, name of your father, city of birth, year of birth, and favorite flower.
3. Write a dramatic monologue poem in the voice of a person other than yourself.
4. Make up a secret about yourself or tell one that’s real.
5. Create a BOP—first stanza is six lines, one line alone that’s a quote from a song, second stanza is eight lines, one line alone to repeat previous solo line, third stanza is six lines long.

What makes a good workshop? “Nothing is forbidden to talk about in workshop—particularly with adolescents,” Jeffers said. “If you have a place to talk with no holds barred, without shame, creative writing is a healing practice.”

the idea of a summer workshop for students since “it’s away from the academic atmosphere of the school year.

“I think that’s helpful in that students are not writing for an assignment but are just being encouraged to be creative. They have the benefit of a professional writer who can encourage them, and a lot of them don’t have such benefits during the school year, as I see it, to engage in this kind of writing. As a consequence, many get through school without the experience of putting their thoughts on paper and hearing how they sound when they are read,” he said.

“We have potential and the students and people trained in

teaching who are themselves writers, so it seemed natural,” he said.

Stricklin said future plans include more workshops for young writers, in more age divisions and genres. “When we get in the new library, we will have a better facility. Now, we’re crowded for space, so we’ve limited the size. It would be great if we could have sessions that included even the very youngest students,” he said.

Regardless of age, reading, writing, and workshops can provide important basics. Anita Garner, an assistant professor in English at UNA and founding member of the Alabama

Writers' Forum, has worked with young writers for more than 25 years. Her teen-aged son, Ted, and one of his friends participated in the short story workshop.

"There was a lot of discussion all day about it...so I think it probably opened up areas for them," Garner said.

"A one-week workshop can touch on a lot of basics that some students would understand from just reading things. Other students need to be reminded that those things are important," she added.

When talking about her son, "the baseball player," Garner admitted that one never can predict who your writer would be. "Just because they have great grammar skills does not mean they'll be a writer... sometimes your electrical engineers—or even lawyers, these days—become noted writers."

But for novices and pros alike, there are many advantages to being in workshop. "If you have a decent body of work and a decent portfolio of published work, the workshop leader might be in a position to recommend your work to other people, such as agents and publishers. But on the beginning level, the kinds of things you do with junior and senior high school, it's more that the participants need to be excited by the genre," Garner said.

Stricklin notes that even very young children can benefit from workshops. "I have had very young children tell me a story while I wrote it down. They would see me put these strange things down on paper, and I would read it back them. A light would come in their eyes and it was kind of a miracle going on there," he said.

As it should in any good workshop.

Bethany A. Giles is a writer and photographer in Florence, Alabama.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Workshops are only one option for young writers. From school projects to regional competitions, young writers are creating plays, poems, and even novels. Here are some of the offerings and accomplishments around the state and beyond.

Last year fifth graders at **Oneonta Elementary School** wanted to "improve our writing. With a school-wide nautical theme, we chose to dive deeper by going beyond everyday words and phrases in our writing." The result: a novel called *Bridges Through Time*, a work of historical fiction that draws on characters and stories from the area. The novel sold out its 500 copy print run in short order.

Schoolchildren in Hoover have published almost twenty novels in the last eight years. This year, eight students in **Hoover High School's** International Baccalaureate program wrote a novel in Spanish. *Dos Patrias* is about two Cuban-American doctors who meet by chance in New York. Writers drew on interviews with Cuban-American residents of Hoover for details and stories.

Benjamin Russell High School in Alexander City hosts an annual young writers' conference, and young writers there are working on a new novel, entitled *Bridges*, about building links beyond the classroom to understanding our culture and traditions.

Numerous contests highlight the work of young writers. Besides the Alabama Writers' Forum's Literary Arts Awards for ninth through twelfth grade students, a short list includes the **Huntsville Literary Association's** annual Young Writers Contest and the **Alabama Penman Contest** sponsored by the Alabama State Department of Education. Open to young writers in Madison County, the HLA contest offers cash awards, honors, and public recognition. For information contact HLA at 1808 Covewood Drive, Huntsville, AL 35801. The Penman Contest targets young writers in seventh through ninth and tenth through twelfth grades. The contest is open to all schools in the state, and submission guidelines and criteria can be found on the ALSDE website at www.alsde.edu.

Since 1995, *Southern Voices*, sponsored by Cedar Creek School in Ruston, Louisiana, has provided a venue for the best creative writing of high school students across the South. The 2001 issue of the journal includes work by students from 10 southern states, including Alabama. For information check the *Southern Voices* website at www.southernvoices.org.

The **Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Young Playwrights Competition** solicits dramatic works by Alabama high school age writers that address the subject of being a Southerner in some way through plot, character, setting, or theme. A cash award and apprenticeship opportunities are among the prizes. More information can be found at www.asf.net.

A new contest this year is the **University of Alabama University Honors Program** essay competition. Announced at the induction of Harper Lee into the Alabama Academy of Honor this fall, the contest seeks 300-400 word essays from high school juniors on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The theme should address how life has changed in the South from the time of Scout and Atticus to the present. For information contact Dr. Martha Anandakrishnan at The University Honors Program, Box 870169, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.

In memorium

The last few months have seen the passing of several literary figures whose accomplishments, contributions, and friendship we honor.

Anne George

Anne George was one of those remarkable people who charmed everyone she met. I was charmed by her at her very first Southern Sisters book signing in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1996, and then again at each successive book signing over the next few years. In 1996, I was working at what was then the Highland Booksmith bookstore. My best friend, Carla Engbretson, got Anne to sign a copy of *Murder on a Girl's Night Out* for her, and a second copy for her mother, Gwen Engbretson, who lived in Wetumpka. That action was repeated for Anne's second book, *Murder on a Bad Hair Day*, the following year. By the time the third book was published, Anne's popularity brought her, among other places, to Montgomery's Capitol Book & News to sign *Murder Runs in the Family*. Since Wetumpka is such a short distance from Montgomery, Gwen told Carla she would get her own copy inscribed this time, so she could finally meet Anne. The signing day arrived and Gwen anxiously waited in the long line that had become customary at all of Anne's signings. When it was finally her turn, she remarked, "Hello, Anne. You know my daughter who works at the Highland Booksmith." Anne smiled broadly and without hesitation said, "You must be Gwen." That remarkable ability of Anne's to make everyone feel

as though they knew her, but more important, that she somehow knew them, was one of her many special qualities.

In 2000, I was privileged to be involved with the publication of her latest book of poetry. Anne had to fill out a form which provided background information for submission to the Library of Congress. Anne returned the completed form with one blank space remaining, her birth date. When contacted about the missing information, she replied, "They ask for that, but they don't need it, and I'm not going to give it!" *The Map That Lies Between Us* was indeed published without her age being disclosed. The book's title refers to her beloved husband Earl's hand. When they would be traveling, she would look at the veins showing on the back of his hand and be reminded of a road map, a

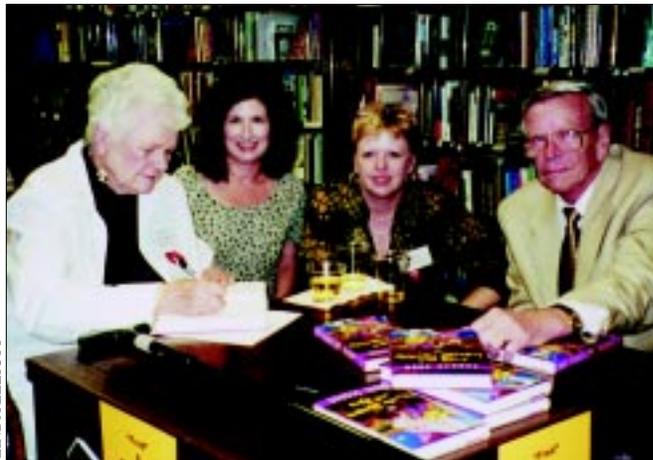
map of their lives and their many mutual destinations.

In speaking with Anne at an event last fall, I asked candidly what, if anything, of hers she might have a burning desire to see published. She replied, "My life story. I had a really unusual childhood and I think people would find it interesting." She didn't want a contract for it, however. "Then I'd be under pressure to write it! Let me get it written, and then we'll talk about it." Sadly, that interesting volume will never be written, but Anne has left a great legacy to her family and her fans with her writings, and in the way she charmed us all.

Tina Tatum

Eugene B. Sledge

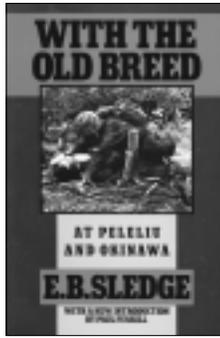
Japan's surrender in 1945 saved a good many lives, including that of Eugene B. Sledge of Mobile, a mortarman in the First Marine Division who had already survived two of the most ferocious battles of the Pacific war. The young Marine did well with the years he was given; he died on March 3, 2002, a beloved husband and father, a



LINDA ELLIOTT

Family and friends attended an Alabama Booksmith celebration of the publication of Anne George's last mystery, Murder Boogies With Elvis, including Anne's cousin, Mary Elizabeth Reeves (far left), friend Linda Elliott, daughter Alice, and husband, Earl.

distinguished professor emeritus at Montevallo, and a fine gentleman. Moreover, Dr. Sledge left us what Paul Fussell called “one of the finest mem-



oirs to emerge from any war.” *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa* (1981) is a work from which no one can come away unaffected. Its images of violence, brutality, deep sorrow, and personal redemption remain in the reader’s mind; indeed Dr. Sledge’s account has become part of our collective consciousness whenever the Second World War is evoked.

We would be mistaken to suppose that the war was the defining element of E. B. Sledge as a person. His honorable life, his humor, his gentleness—all these qualities leave a void in the universe that cannot be filled, and all should merit his remembrance. At the same time, we cannot separate him from the events through which he passed. They never left him; they troubled him in dreams to the end, as they should trouble us all. His voice, rising so unassumingly from the page, urges us to remember, remember. His message is not “Greatest Generation” nostalgia, but a timeless warning we would do well to heed, but probably won’t. We never have before.

He is at rest now. His heart, his good mind, are stilled at last, and with them the dreams. Only the voice remains—a voice curiously young, as if it were the boy himself speaking, and not an old man remembering. I once asked a college freshman class who our enemies were in World War Two. “Europe” was

the consensus. For these young people, the combat in “Saving Private Ryan” is no more real than that of “Star Wars.” The Japanese Zeros of last summer’s “Pearl Harbor” might as well be Klingon cruisers. Peleliu and Okinawa? Um, like, coconut drinks, maybe? Dr. Sledge would have smiled at such innocence, no doubt, knowing as he did that it is the innocent who must fight and die.

Farewell, sir. May St. Michael and all angels bear you to a peaceful rest.

The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

Howard Bahr

James Still



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

“Appalachian writer” and “beloved Kentucky author.” These clearly he was, having resided in that state for almost seventy years, but as he himself would wish to be acknowledged, he was also an “Alabama writer,” a native who passed all the formative years of childhood and youth here.

Ardently revered and believed by some to be “the most influential Kentucky writer of the last fifty years,” Still was, according to scholar Jeffrey J. Folks, “a highly original writer who has left an important record of American rural life.” His work, says Folks, is an

“enduring portrait of ordinary mountain people struggling for existence” that “chronicles the integral folk culture of Appalachia, with its emphasis on the oral tale, riddles and games, and traditional music.” “The absolute integrity” of his literary record, Folks goes on, is “almost unique in its avoidance of regional stereotypes and excessive use of dialectical language.”

Still’s remarkable first novel, *River of Earth* (1940), is considered to be his most enduring prose work, while the best of his poetry appeared in the collections *Hounds on the Mountain* (1937) and *The Wolfpen Poems* (1986). Other of his books—fiction and nonfiction—include *On Troublesome Creek* (1941), *Pattern of a Man* (1976), *Sporty Creek* (1977), *Jack and the Wonder Beans* (1977), *The Run for the Elbertas* (1980), *The Man in the Bushes: The Notebooks of James Still, 1935-1987* (1988), and *Rusties, Riddles, and Gee-Haw Whimmy-Diddles* (1989). The University Press of Kentucky is issuing *From the Mountain, From the Valley: New and Collected Poems* this year. His stories and poems appeared in the *Atlantic*, *Yale Review*, *Saturday Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Esquire*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. He received a special award from the Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Marjorie Peabody Waite Award, two Guggenheim Fellowships, and selection of stories for both *The Best American Short Stories* and the *O. Henry Memorial Prize Stories* volumes. He was the recipient of honorary doctorates from Berea College, Lincoln Memorial University, Transylvania University, Morehead State University, and the University of Kentucky.



The Master of Fine Arts in the Book Arts Program at The University of Alabama is now in its sixteenth year. We accept up to eight new students per year for the sixty credit hour program which emphasizes the art and craft of making books by hand: bookbinding, letterpress printing, hand papermaking, and history of the book. Our students are highly motivated and come from various undergraduate backgrounds and work experiences. We have four graduate assistantships available on a competitive basis. To find out more about the Book Arts program contact Steve Miller, Program Coordinator at 205.348.1525, stevemiller@bookarts.ua.edu, or write us at The University of Alabama/SLIS, Box 870252, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0252. www.bookarts.ua.edu

Born July 16, 1906 at Double Branch Farm near Lafayette in Chambers County, Alabama, Still lived in or around Lafayette until completing the fifth grade, when his family moved to Shawmut (where he completed the eighth grade) and then on to Jarrett Station, near Fairfax, where he graduated from the Fairfax High School (all in Chambers County). He worked his way through Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee, and went on to earn another bachelor's degree in library science from the University of Illinois as well as an M.A. in English at Vanderbilt University. In the early 1930s he began a lifelong association with the Hindman Settlement School in Hindman, Kentucky. Eastern Kentucky became his adopted home, and for years he lived in a log cabin in Knott County. He served in Africa and the Middle East with the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, and later regularly traveled to Europe and spent part of many winters in Mexico and Central America pursuing a special interest in Mayan culture.

He also regularly traveled back to Alabama—"at least twice a year to review and renew the scenes of my childhood," he reported at age seventy-seven. One of his earliest memories was his consciousness of running about in an Alabama cotton field with a little sack of his own and picking a cotton boll here and there. "I wouldn't have missed an Alabama boyhood," he wrote. "Or a Kentucky manhood. On being asked once what I thought was the most beautiful word in the language I didn't hesitate. It's 'Alabama,' said I."

Bert Hitchcock

Allan Swafford



For more than 15 years, Allan Swafford covered the theater for the *Montgomery Advertiser*. He died on July 13, 2001, at age 64. An actor and a critic, Swafford covered not only Alabama Shakespeare Festival plays but also a wide range of community and university productions.

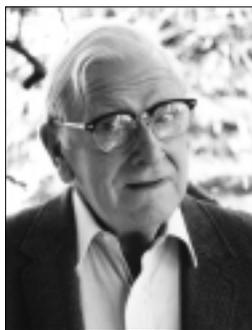
Allan Swafford loved theater. He loved plays like most of us love our children; in those that were good, he found wonder—in those that were bad, he often found the good or the potential to be good that so many of us overlook.

I edited Allan's reviews and copy for many years at the *Montgomery Advertiser*. He was a joy to work with and I will miss him, but not nearly as much as will this area's theater scene. If area theater was Allan's life, he also pumped life into the area theater scene, and will do so for decades to come, thanks to his loving nurturing of both local theater and those who aspired to become a part of it.

Rick Harmon

SATIRIST

Eugene Walter



When writer, actor, gourmet, good friend, and true original Eugene Walter departed this world in March 1988, he left behind not only whole cities, indeed practically whole countries full of friends but also a yawning gap in our collective sense of possibility. For possibility was what Eugene spent much of his time exploring. With deep learning and wild imagination, as well as an unconquerable sense of play, he wrote, cooked, talked, and sang through his days and ours.

It seems that Eugene can't get far from us, however, and the ongoing celebration of his life includes the recent publication of two books that bring him forth again and again in all his glory. Katherine Clark's *Milking the Moon: A Southerner's Story of Life on This Planet* (Crown, 2001), to be reviewed by Don Noble in our winter issue, lets Walter tell his own stories. An oral biography, it follows the fortunes of this "Southern boy let loose in the big world."

In Rebecca Barrett and Carolyn Haines' *Moments with Eugene: A Collection of Memories* (Kalioka Press, 2000) remembrances of Eugene by friends, acquaintances, and colleagues recall the man the editors describe as "a novelist, poet, essayist, humorist, artist, stage designer, lyricist, actor, master of the culinary arts, botanist, philosopher, sociologist, radio personality, Mobile, Alabama native, resident of Rome and Paris, and most importantly a friend and inspiration to fellow artists and writers."

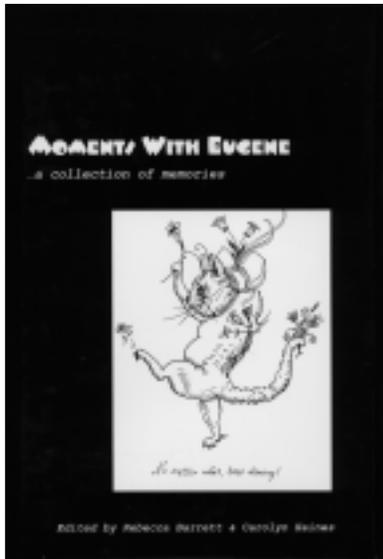
The following essay by John Hafner, professor of English at Spring Hill College in Mobile and new AWF board member, was intended to be included in *Moments With Eugene*, missing the stack through the sort of serendipity that Eugene would have laughed about. Originally given as a talk at Spring Hill, the essay offers a glimpse of the man you'll love to remember—or relish meeting for the first time—in *Moments With Eugene* and *Milking the Moon*.



Eugene Walter has been an activist on the national and international literary scene for over thirty years. His work—including two novels, two collections of short stories, several volumes of poetry, cook books, drawings, paintings, essays and reviews—has been well received in Europe and the United States. One of the remarkable attributes of that work, remarkable in light of its volume and diversity, is Walter's amazing consistency of vision. No matter what medium he is working in, Walter conveys an exhilarating delight and joy in living life along with a satiric mockery of those unable to do so. This comic spirit is most often expressed through his witty use of language, through his ability to present vividly the silly, the outrageous, the foolish, the

idiosyncratic, the—well—funny behavior of individuals and groups. But his sense of humor and his display of wit are frequently tinged with mockery, with satire. Walter's satire is not Juvenilia, not contemptuous, not cruel or harsh; it is, a gentle poking fun, a sly smile in the Horatian mode, at man's folly. This isn't to say that he isn't serious in calling man's attention to his faults, only that his method for doing so is more subtle than harsh, more kindly than mean.

Walter's satirical targets include the minor vices, foibles, idiosyncrasies of individuals and social groups. In *The Untidy Pilgrim*, his 1954 prize-winning novel, he describes one of his characters as "a creature too apt, too clever, and too handsome to be any good at all in the workaday world."

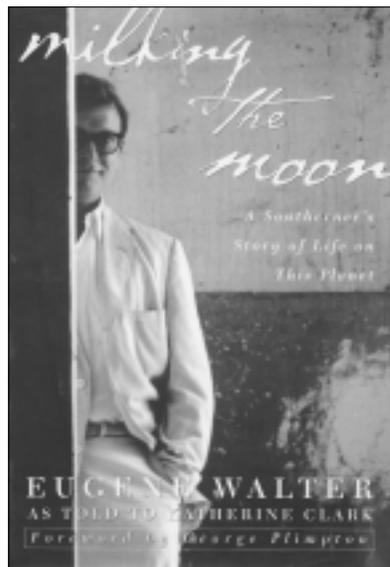


This useless boy's sister had earlier displayed her sense of what's important in life when she was given "a pair of fine jet eardrops. So she ran squealing to the mirror and treated us to a Cecil B. DeMille production called *Putting on the Earrings*. All it lacked was fireworks." But these vain characters should perhaps be excused their

vanity because they live on the Alabama Gulf Coast, where "you are sure enough in the kingdom of monkeys, ...the Island of Monkeys, and have got to learn Monkey Talk." And learning monkey talk seems to mean learning how to get along with the natives, learning how to feel at home while dreaming of being someplace else.

The factor that can make the above examples of vanity undesirable rather than merely harmless is that they are so often accompanied by ignorance. The young lady with the jet earrings—her name is Laura but she's called Lola—later tries to enter a conversation about books. "...Lola had launched on a description of a murder mystery she'd read, so as to prove to all present that she, too, cracked a book now and again. Every word was *clever*, 'cause Lola always had a word of the week and you might as well stand back, boys and let her kick it to death." Lola's impulse to show off is the same as that which causes the owners of the house in the short story "Palladian Style" to name their home "Fontanelle."

But it isn't only individuals at whom Walter points his mocking finger. In an age in which materialism dominates all other value systems, in which progress means destroying much that is valuable from the past and beautiful in the present, then insensitivity, greed, bad manners, Puritanism are attributes of groups of people as well.



In *Jennie: The Watercress Girl*, a 1946 story whose heroine dies of heartbreak when she returns home to discover that the city officials have cut down all the oaks on Government Street and used the wood to make benches to sit on and enjoy the view, and that Bienville Square has been paved to form a parking lot containing gasoline pumps in the images of the city commissioners.

Lack of imagination is another frequent target of Walter's satire. In his cookbook of 1982, *Delectable Dishes from Termite Hall*, he pokes fun at those who are slaves to conformity. With turkey dinner, he asks, "why always cranberry? Why always mashed potatoes?" and then he recommends hominy with celery and quince preserves. And another bit of food advice: "Never use the dead dust sold as ready-ground pepper.... If, like me, you love that bit of pepper on your steak or your salad, either take your own pepper mill with you or smash an ashtray when the waiter says they don't have one."

Other examples, other targets: To poke fun at the desire of both natives and tourists for a glimpse into the good, old days of the ante-bellum South, there's the black lady in the short story "Natural Habitat" who wears a Dixieland outfit and speaks in an exaggerated accent while she writes a dissertation for her Ph. D. degree; to both illustrate and mock social pretension, there are the delightful ladies in the story "Byzantine Riddle" and their discussion of the blue cupcakes served at the Modern Idea Club meeting; to put self-righteous do-gooders in their places, there is the wonderful woman in *Love You Good, See You Later* who wishes she "might learn to relish misery. But I'm a gin-soaked Southern girl," she says, "and I honestly believe every problem on

earth can be solved by either giving a party or taking a trip"; and there is *Singerie Songerie*, which Walter describes as "a Masque, or perhaps more correctly a ballet-play, all about Miss Verdine (who represents the Lyric Spirit) and her attendant Monkeys and Sprites (who represent the Comic Spirit) and how they survive when the professors, critics, comma-counters, and fuddy-duddies have all argued and bored each other to death."

That is Eugene Walter's last word on literary criticism and I hereby adopt it and make it mine.

John Hafner

Writing Their Way Through

Wendy Reed Bruce and Lynne Burris Butler

The 2001 Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellows in Literature

By Kelly Gerald

This year's winners of the Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowships in Literature share a common perspective on writing, using it to channel and process memory and relationships and experiences of all calibers from the mundane to the remarkable. As Lynne Burris Butler expresses it: "I have written myself through traumatic loss. I write myself through seemingly empty days. Some days I just write about the weather report. The trick is to keep writing." The recent tragedy Wendy Reed Bruce faced and now copes with on a daily basis, a near-fatal automobile accident involving her children and their father, suddenly places the need to write and the purpose of writing into perspective for her.

The winners offered the following statements about their lives and writing.

WENDY REED BRUCE

In recent years, Wendy Reed Bruce has received numerous awards for her fiction, including the Barksdale-Maynard Prize for Short Fiction and the Hackney Short Story Award. Her work has also won her recognition from *New Letters*, *Birmingham Magazine*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Currently she produces and directs for The Center for Public Television's series *The Alabama Experience* and serves as assistant editor for *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Bruce earned both B.A. and M.A. degrees at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. Her work has appeared in *Aura*,

G.S. HAGLER



Kalliope, and *Southern Breeze*, among others, and has also been anthologized.

About herself, she writes: "I'm the blue collar/industrial-first-generation-to-go-to-college cliché. I married at 17 and became a mom at 19. I am now a divorced mother of three trying to make sense of this new life and also trying to make fewer mistakes."

"I don't know if UAB's creative writing program saved me or nearly killed me. Either way, I'm glad to have been with such fine writers and researchers there. There, for the first time, I didn't feel like such an odd bird. Wait. No. That's not right. I didn't feel like the LONE odd bird."

"I've never considered myself a writer. I still don't. I think certain people are called to it, like say the priesthood or ministry. But I'm not in that elite group. Maybe I write

things to satisfy my masochistic side. Is there any worse way to punish yourself than to spend a lot of time and effort on something only to have it rejected?"

"I've always loved stories; they are ever so much more interesting than facts. Somehow, growing up, I wound up with teachers who loved language arts. I've always been a bit of a nerd. I loved the Bookmobile. I asked to be taken to the local library. One teacher introduced me to Dickinson and Shakespeare before I was twelve, though I tended toward Poe—anything macabre—in my formative reading."

Wendy Reed Bruce and Tia.

“I would love to edit an anthology of writings by Southern women on the topic of spirituality, something Queen [Flannery] O’Connor herself might sit up and praise from her grave. I love when the flesh and the spirit collide. Talk about tension! I hate the way religion often limits the spirit and I’m fascinated by how religion as an institution maintained and even required patriarchal domination. I’m working on an essay where I say I want a scrotumless savior.”

On July 24, 2001, Bruce wrote to me about the devastating automobile accident involving her children and ex-husband: “Seventeen days ago my children and their father, Scott, were in a serious automobile accident. Brianne, 13, suffered the ‘Christopher Reeve’ injury but without the paralysis. Her broken neck will heal thanks to the ‘halo’ she will wear for a few months.

“Reed, 8, almost lost his left leg below the knee and lost half of his right ankle, but fortunately all the king’s horses and men re-assembled him, somewhat. He will be in a wheelchair for a while before he can graduate to crutches, and his recovery is that damn one-day-at-a-time cliché that people lacking patience like me have difficulty with. About 80 percent of the muscle and tissue was lost, but for some time now—I think since I went back to grad school in ’96—my mantra has been normal is way overrated anyway.

In the days following the accident, Bruce reflected on the impact it has had on her work. “Writing is the last thing I’m able to do—but it’s the thing I want to do so badly it hurts. Reconciling those two creates a tension almost maddening.”

“Because of the car accident, I’m not sure what I will be able to work on. Taking time to write often seems a selfish thing, and now more than ever, time is a precious commodity not to be wasted. Pin sites have to be cleaned three times a day. My daughter’s hair has to be hand-washed. My son has to be carried to the commode. Yet, though it doesn’t make sense to most people, I will have to find some time to sit at a keyboard and try to make sense of this chaos or I won’t make it. Like any working parent, I wallow in guilt, guilt, guilt.”

When asked about which stories or essays are her favorites, Bruce responds with predictable modesty and humor that she “can’t find anything that I’d want anyone I know very well to know that I wrote. Ha! My mother will die. My kids will die. The PTA will be aghast. I have no idea if they’re any good at all. I would love to write lovely, kind, good stuff. But something’s wrong with my muse. When I send it out hunting, hoping for pheasant or some such appropriate game, it brings back headless Barbies instead.”

The two stories submitted by Bruce to the Alabama State Council on the Arts were “Gnawing through the Mask” and “Sweet, Sweet Tea.” “Gnawing through the Mask,” previously published in *New Letters*, partakes of memoir, philosophical essay, and satire in equal parts and weighs, among its other tasks, feminine volition against the evolution of the human brain.

From GNAWING THROUGH THE MASK

My own mother attempted suicide in her thirties. A few years later, I watched her, the most vanilla person I knew who didn’t yell and barely walked faster than a crawl, jump off our porch onto my aunt and promptly try to beat the hell out of her with an Avon bag. This was before Prozac and molecular biology. This was when such events were explained as dark rivers that sprang from even darker urges in the maternal line. The women, then, did what they could. They repressed. They denied. They fried a lot of chicken. In short, they coped.

– by Wendy Reed Bruce

“Sweet, Sweet Tea,” a short story that appeared in *Kalliope*, offers readers a ringside seat for the meeting of the wife and the other woman that confirms some expectations and upsets others. Should the wife be more attractive and together than her husband’s mistress? That’s the question foremost on the mind of the narrator-other-woman whose confusion and consternation the reader is allowed to witness.

From “SWEET, SWEET TEA”

Oh, listen.” She strains her long earlobe toward the charcoal sketch of the pig where one of the speakers is covered. “It’s his favorite song.” For a moment I can’t think who “he” is. She has thrown the pronoun out like bait and watches to see the effect. I concentrate, turning my right ear to the wall. Then I get up and adjust the volume knob. I’ve never heard the song before, and I hate it immediately because it’s country. I consider telling her that when he was with me, he liked music with real rhythm. I tap my fingernails on the magazine cover in front of me, though, as if I know the whining by heart. And smile as though in joint recognition. Her smile reaches out to me in a strange welcoming way.

She is not having a problem with me like I thought betrayed wives were supposed to have. The magazine I’m tapping my unpainted, uneven fingernails on is a big damn freelance deal, not only with her article in it, but with a list

of ten suggestions for extending orgasms, an interview with Cameron Diaz reporting what she finds sexy, and bust tips for the bosom challenged.

—by Wendy Reed Bruce

How does Bruce feel about being selected as one of the Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellows? “I want to say how lucky I feel to be the recipient. I walked around for days in a fog. I still can’t believe it. I alternate between whooping and crying. Above all, I’m really, really grateful.”

LYNNE BURRIS BUTLER

In addition to four books of poetry, Lynne Burris Butler is the author of a book of creative nonfiction. She received an M.A. in English from Wichita State University and an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Arkansas. She teaches at the University of North Alabama where she is currently the Laura Harrison Professor of English.

About her own work, Butler contends, “I knew I wanted to be a writer when I started teaching in a composition/introduction to literature class at Wichita State. I knew I wanted to understand how literature was made, not necessarily what it meant. When I left Wichita I entered the M.F.A. program at Arkansas where I studied primarily with Miller Williams.”

“My current project is the same project I’ve had for 25 years—keep writing every day. As far as structured projects go, I’m working on a new book of poetry, which I hope to have finished in the next year and I’m also working on a text for writing creative nonfiction.”

“Sunday Afternoons” is the title poem for Butler’s Blue Lynx prizewinning collection. She asserts that she likes it “because it starts with the mundane. I think we all start there and begin to see something more in it. I also like it because it has layers—Florence, Alabama, becomes Russia, the unhappy woman up the block becomes Tolstoy’s tragic heroine. I think it says something about how even the most common sorrows can be overwhelming.”



SHANNON WELLS

SUNDAY AFTERNOONS WITH TOLSTOY

For S.

*Nothing much happens here
on Sunday. No mail, no visitors
arrive from the capital.*

*There are closets that should be cleaned,
shoes and boots grim as a coal scuttle
to be polished, a history*

*of skirts and blouses to unravel.
There are windows that could be washed,
surfaces where your mother’s face*

*is as persistent as the robin
that flies and flies
into the glass of the storm door.*

*But perhaps there will be a distraction,
a sudden squall, a branch crashing
onto the porch. Or maybe*

*a phone call from my house
to yours to interrupt the afternoon,
the kind of afternoon*

*when Anna makes perfect sense,
when page after page, the story
doesn’t get any better, just longer.*

—Lynne Burris Butler

Butler says that “Rainbow Girls” is not necessarily her favorite poem, but has been greatly appreciated by others. “I think its appeal is in the way it touches on that moment of coming into womanhood. Who are we? Who are these men we trust our bodies and our lives to? I hope that it also captures the glory of that threshold where girls step into being women. I also think it is a sort of funny poem.”

What is next? “I think my work is taking new directions. I’m trying new forms. I’m a lot more political than I used to be. Art is always political in that it asks you to see the world, or to see yourself in the world, in a new way. I’m trying to do that.”

Lynne Burris Butler.

RAINBOW GIRLS

*The second Thursday
of every month we dressed
in tulle, nylons, garter belts,
fake pearls, maybe gloves
and went downtown upstairs over
Duckwalls 5 & 10 to the mysteries
of the Masonic Temple, the sacred
East, for rituals mostly involving
square corners and speeches
aimed at turning us
into fine young women.*

*When I tell you this,
I want you to see how afterwards
we rushed down the wide staircase
to our boyfriends who kept
the motors running. I want
you to hear the net skirts,
a sound like wind ruffling
a wheat field and to feel
how smooth the wide silver
banister was beneath our hands.*

*Oh, there were rules:
No blacks, no Catholics, no girls
whose fathers owned liquor stores,
no smoking and come straight
home on school nights
but as we swept into the night
our words were the sudden
chatter of goldfinches flushed
from a meadow, our laughter
jangled the stars though
in the cars we sat close to the boys
docile as bowls of milk.*

*And if the dresses were second-hand
or homemade, still
we were elegant, almost
women, armor hard bras
carrying our breasts like bijouterie,
little jewels his fingers
crawled toward until I wanted
to grab his hands and say Here.
Here. Here. But this was not
the way out for a rainbow girl
who had her eye on the east,
maybe Wichita or even Kansas City.*

—Lynne Burris Butler

Kelly Gerald teaches at AU.

A Writer's Rights

by Edward M. George



Ed George

This article on the basics of copyrights is the first of a series to be published in *First Draft* on the business of being a writer. Future articles will include such topics as the agent-writer relationship, publishing contracts, movie/television rights, permissions, and commercial rights.

What Is a Copyright?

The concept of a “copyright” being held by the creator of an artistic work has been around for a lot longer than most people realize. In the United States, the first law on copyright was included in the Constitution drafted by our founding fathers, who gave Congress the power to “promote the Progress of Sciences and useful Arts, by securing for limited times to Authors...the exclusive Right to their...writings.”

The current federal copyright law, the 1976 Copyright Act, is designed to protect authors of “original works of authorship” including literary, dramatic, musical, artistic, and certain other intellectual works, both published and unpublished. In particular, the Act gives the owner of a copyright the exclusive right to do, and authorize others to do, the following: to reproduce the work; to prepare derivative works; to distribute copies; to perform the work publicly; to display the work publicly; and in the case of sound recordings of music or literature, to perform the work publicly by means of audio transmissions.

What Can Be Copyrighted?

Under U. S. law, copyrightable works include literary works; musical works, including any accompanying words; dramatic works, including any accompanying music; pantomimes and choreographic works; pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works; motion pictures and other audiovisual works; sound recordings; and architectural works.

How Does a Writer Secure a Copyright?

It does not take either publication or registration with the Copyright Office to create a copyright. The copyright is secured by the author automatically when the work is fixed in a copy for the first time, even in draft form. If a literary work is written over an extended period of time, the author automatically secures a copyright in each part of the work as it is completed.

Why Register a Copyright?

Even though it is not technically necessary to register a copyright with the Copyright Office in order to obtain copyright protection, it is almost always a good idea to do so. Some of the benefits of copyright registration are that registration establishes a public record of the copyright; registration is necessary before an infringement suit may be filed in court; the registration form will establish *prima facie* evidence of who created a work and when it was created; an author may not be awarded statutory damages or attorney fees by a court unless the copyright was

registered within three months after publication of the work; and registration can be used to have the U.S. Customs Service block the entry into the U.S. of unauthorized copies printed in another country.

Who Other Than the Author May Hold a Copyright?

In the case of a “work for hire,” which is defined as a work created on behalf of another person or entity, the person or entity for whom the work was created will be considered the “author” for copyright purposes. A good example is a screenwriter who is hired by a movie company to write a screenplay for the company.

Other situations in which someone other than the creator of a work will hold copyright interest occur when the author has transferred that interest. The author of a work may transfer any or all of his or her copyright claim. Examples of when less than a complete copyright is assigned would be where an author has assigned someone else the right to write a sequel or a screenplay of a book, or where the author has granted someone else the right to hold the copyright for a given period of time.

How Is Registration Accomplished?

To register a literary work, the author (or other copyright claimant) is required to 1) submit an application form provided by the Copyright Office; 2) pay an application fee of \$30; and 3) include with the application either one copy of the work, if unpublished, or two copies of the work, if already published. The effective date of the copyright registration will be the date on which the Copyright Office received all the required items, even though it generally takes three to four months for the claimant to receive the actual registration document.

How Long Does a Copyright Last?

Copyright protection begins at the moment the work is created and generally lasts for the lifetime of the author plus 50 years. If the work is created by more than one author, the copyright lasts until 50 years after the death of the surviving co-author. In the case of work for hire, the duration of the copyright is 75 years from publication or 100 years from creation, whichever is shorter.

How Can an Author Contact the Copyright Office?

The mailing address for the Copyright Office is
Library of Congress, Copyright Office
Register of Copyrights
101 Independence Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20559-6000
Its phone number is 202-707-3000.
The website is www.loc.gov/copyright.

Ed George is a member of the Alabama Writers' Forum Board of Directors and an attorney who practices in Montgomery.



Denise Wadsworth Trimm

Charting the Course

One Writing Teacher's Voyage

by Denise Wadsworth
Trimm

This summer while my mother suffered through knee replacement surgery, I channel surfed for something to watch on daytime television while making sure she received her ice chips and morphine. Most of the time, I found my choices so intolerable that I considered sneaking a pill or two from my mother's cache and lying down beside her.

I can't truly say it was a fruitless week, though. I did learn the importance of documentation in Judge Judy's court as well as the history of how my sheltie came to be bred on the Shetland Islands. Nevertheless, you can imagine my delight one midafternoon when I found a rerun of Pat Conroy's movie "Conrack," based on his novel *The Water Is Wide*.

And while my heart leapt with joy for a moment, it was soon replaced with sadness as the plot thickened and I was reminded of the gaping chasm that exists between educators on all levels—each believing they are doing what is in the “best interest” of the children they serve.

Long after Conroy's movie ends, that poignant final scene lingers. The children stand on the shore, playing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as their well-meaning, idealistic teacher drifts away from them. Also lingering is the sadness from knowing that their best chance of ever crossing that water is gone, having been fired for not playing educational politics wisely—for doing what he believed was right over what was in the best interest of keeping his job.

Today I drove to Montgomery to meet with representatives from all over the state who believe in the value of teaching writing in our schools. State Department of Education leaders, teachers of writing, college educators, and members of the Alabama Writers' Forum sat down with pens and blank legal pads and asked, “What are we doing to promote writing in this state?”

And we are all doing something...each taking wobbly boats into the water with as many young people as our vessels can hold. Each has a chartered course, guided by the stars of optimism but propelled with prorated fuel and

second-hand motors—these motors maintained by mechanics who reluctantly agree to do the work for free.

It wasn't until the end of the meeting, after the sandwiches had been devoured and several people hurried across town to that next appointment that the stragglers got the courage to ask the really pointed questions at the core of why these boats are sinking just feet off the shore. The questions fired like missing pistons.

"Why a reading initiative but no writing initiative?" "Why are so many of the in-service education offerings such a joke?" "Why do teachers continually say they don't receive the information we send them?" "Why do we test kids for writing without teaching them how to write?" "Why are teachers not being trained to teach writing?" "Why is creative writing not considered a fine art?" "Who makes curriculum decisions that affect all these kids?" "Why are the very people who could help the most in making these curriculum decisions never consulted?" "How can educated people categorize writing as a frivolous activity that is separate from literature...separate from life?"

Engines sputtered. Blue smoke circled us. We scratched our heads, then agreed to continue the dialogue later. After

all, what can one do when the shipyard is sending us defective boats?

This sailor does not have the answers. I can only keep a log of my own voyage and hope to learn from it. In the next few issues of *First Draft*, I will chronicle this voyage in an attempt to show other wayfarers out there how I came to navigate this course, for better or for worse.

I have played many of the roles in this metaphor. I have been the non-swimming passenger who has fallen overboard from several defective boats only to climb back onto them—sometimes with the help of a teacher who reached out for me. Other times I hung on with my big toe, treading water and praying for someone to spot me before the sharks smelled my fear. Later, I became a totally inept captain who meant well but who meandered all over the ocean without paddle or course but who encouraged the shivering kids aboard to put their trust in me, while I figured out how to get them there...one way or another.

Then came swimming lessons, where I learned how to swim for myself but with no real instruction on how to teach others to swim. Then there was the self-education of learning how to craft a sturdy boat that would support those who could not swim long enough until they could learn. Then the leap of faith, when I jumped in and encouraged others to jump with me, promising them that they would, indeed, rise to the top if they kept their heads up and filled their lungs filled with air.

Lately, I am a reluctant admiral, aware of the numerous weak ports, the ever-ebbing funds, the rising tide of complacency, and the bewildered captains who are expected to navigate test scores in shallow water while encouraging their passengers to use their imagination to create images from the constellations overhead.

It is my hope that in the months ahead we can all get our sea legs beneath us and chart a course for the success of our precious passengers who entrust with us their lives, their futures. I welcome your inquiries and input, and I hope that when I approach you—fishing for entries from your log—you will open up your nets and allow me to pick around in them. For the water is wide, and our passengers are waiting on the shore, hands shielding eyes that search for better lands.

Please address all mail to trimmteach@aol.com or send to Denise Trimm, Chairperson, Department of Creative Writing, Alabama School of Fine Arts, 1800 8th Avenue North, Birmingham, AL 35203.

Denise Wadsworth Trimm teaches creative writing at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, where she has chaired the department for the past eight years. Prior to teaching at ASFA, she taught English at Jess Lanier High and Hillcrest High. She is a graduate of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Alabama. She and her husband, David, live in Birmingham.

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Reviews

The Dry Well

by Marlin Barton

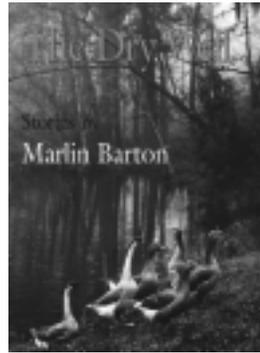
Frederic C. Beil, Publisher, Inc. 2000
219 pp. Cloth, \$24.95

Marlin Barton has a keen and precise ear, aimed, like Conrad's, "to make you hear, to make you feel...., to make you see." The twelve stories in *The Dry Well* are character studies of people pressed to face moral dilemmas. Each, like Barton's Jeremiah, is "lost out in those woods," morally ambiguous woods where each must choose a way. Memory pursues until one must pursue it, confront it in order to live. These are ordinary people, often heavy with guilt not without humor, valiant in their confrontations with the past. The author lets the characters reveal themselves. Chameleon-like, he takes on their skins, language, thoughts—whether man, woman; black, white; young, old—in a prose that seems effortless.

Jeremiah "remembers other music when he was a boy. A man sitting out on some porch with a guitar. Whose porch, though? His own? The man makes the sound come out of that wooden box with the blade of a pocketknife. The music is painful-like, as if he uses that knife to cut the sounds loose from those shining metal strings. The man plays so slow it seems as if the whole world is still. The wind doesn't even blow. When he puts his guitar down Jeremiah begs for more until his father tells him to hush."

The stories are seamless, most constructed in scenes alternating past and present, scenes built with a casual tone but with a relentless tension which evokes deep emotion. Barton has mastered the art of letting suggestion and silences speak in his fiction.

A Civil War soldier is impelled to return to the home he ran away from after nearly killing his cousin. During the war he has killed, and on the way back he needlessly kills a Yankee soldier. Reliving that attack on his cousin, he reaps the knowledge of an indescribable and irremediable aspect of his nature: "Something inside him had sent him after Ben that day and had then forced him to have to hide in the old well. And that same something still remained, it seemed, had perhaps grown into some terrible shape within him." A woman and her crippled brother, because of their piety, hatred, and



the town's judgments, reject their brother on his release from prison, though he is innocent. A young black girl living with her grandmother and an uncle, who sexually abuses her, burns them out of one trailer, then another. She escapes him but not the memories: "Some things maybe you just can't burn. They scorch and turn black, but don't burn. Never."

The author's most profound probing of the wilderness of human nature occurs in "The Minister" and "The Cemetery." A minister sees in his congregation "the face that he had been looking for" and challenges himself to convert this suggestive embodiment of evil. With dubious charity—dubious because pride governs his desire to be Aiken's "exclusive" savior—the minister serves Aiken. In a brilliantly depicted dream, with empathy the minister "becomes" Aiken. Later, when the minister's car hits a lamb and Aiken dies in the burning car, the minister sees "the sky as bruised" and remembers Aiken's words, "Maybe you're not so different from me after all." A parallel empathy occurs in "The Cemetery" between Lydia, whose baby is dead, and a woman and baby entombed in 1919, whose history she pursues. In a supreme fictional moment, she lies on the dead woman's grave and envisions the other woman and her child. When Lydia reaches for the child, the woman "took it into herself, then turned slightly and faded." At that moment Lydia, who has rejected the words *is dead*, "took the words into herself... till they were no longer just words but something solid and whole that found its own place inside her." Such profound insights startle, illuminate, and delight.

Through finely observed details, gradually the town of Riverfield itself takes on the stature of a character, one which, in part, has formed these people. These stories present us with a reflection of the complex wholeness of human nature, the inseparability of experience, good and evil, form the moment one is living, from the cumulative self. The past can be a cruel—indeed, uncompromising—teacher; but it can bring knowledge, cost what it may, and sometimes joy, and sometimes grace. The author takes an unflinching gaze at life, makes no compromises, gives no easy solutions. He emerges as a writer of great sensibility and understanding, willing to let the fictional life stand without commentary. A fictional world has a life of its own. These stories vibrate with that life. Barton stakes out a strong first claim for a place in American literature.

H.E. Francis' latest works are The Sudden Trees (Stories) and the novel Goya, Are You With Me Now?

The Iron City

by John Bensko

University of Illinois Press, 2000
Paper, \$14.95

One looking for Birmingham in John Bensko's *The Iron City* would be justified. Bensko is a son of the Magic City, the only native Alabamian to win the prestigious Yale Series of Younger Poets Award (1980), and so a shape for anyone's hope for a poetry of Alabama.

But one is apt to be disappointed after opening *The Iron City* with such a mind. There is a Birmingham here, but it appears to be a city of childhood and memory rather than a city of iron. The title poem returns Bensko first to "the big house on Graymont Avenue" full of "the damp coal's smell," his father's signature, and his father reading from the bible, from which Birmingham may at last proceed:

*Down Graymont and then Third Avenue
to downtown Birmingham,
that was where I'd ride with my mother...*

...

*I asked my mother why the best seats
were theirs, and she hushed me
with a soft pat on my mouth.*

Bensko remembers, but the clearest events like the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing are in "the scattering fragments / from the church windows, and the spray / of firehoses on the downtown streets."

Bensko feels (and perhaps here is the mark of the Alabamian) that "the past is ours / to tell again and again / until it changes as we want it to." But, again, it appears the past with which Bensko is most concerned is the history of his family and himself. This will come as no surprise to anyone who's read Bensko's first volume, *Green Soldiers*, a collection heavily inflected with images suggestive of dream and unconscious, with the mechanics of memory and thought. His Birmingham will be a memory of digging coal from the backyard, scenes from his father's mine, or his amputee grandfather. Except in the hardening into "Predictability" of the city's life, and a poem about an ornamental works, coal is as close as we get to iron. Bensko's Birmingham is a city of family, with more in common with the smoldering heat of coal than any metal.

But Birmingham is not the only city in this volume. Bensko focuses as well on Memphis, his current home. One of the best poems here is "West Memphis, Southland Track" which displays a well-developed imagination of the city as a whole, in its place and every detail. Here Bensko takes us "a mile inside the levee...to the Southland lot," a dog track that becomes, for Bensko's placement, an emblem of the city in which, to get to the track, you have already placed your bets.

And there is a third city: The City, the subject of one of the strongest poems, "Another Set of Existential Metaphors About the City," wherein "Its fragments of experience / catch up with him in the strangest places...." A good many of the volume's poems occur in a place unspecified, just somewhere in America, in The City. This can be somewhat disconcerting if you're looking for the iron city, but this city is the key to the entire book. Its poems are fragments of experience catching up with Bensko at different rates.

It is clear, in poems like "Mail Bomb," that it's the fabric of Alabama history that makes the psychological field that will respond to the city this way, that will remark "how quickly we are unwrapped, / the small things we are / exploded." The dissociation is so terrific that Bensko is amazed: "Someone is dead, / and it's not even me."

The plan of *The Iron City* is difficult to discern at times, its marriages as difficult as learning how to find Dreamland Barbecue or remembering on occasional trips how 8th and Cleremont are at some point joined. It is, at best, a testament of an Alabamian, living with what the state has given him; things are dark and incendiary as coal, or bright as fire, but hard as steel only at times, hard enough at times to make you wish for more.

Poet Jake Adams York teaches at the University of Colorado-Denver.

Terminal Bend

by Patricia Meyer

Livingston Press, 2000
256 pp. Paper, \$14

Reminiscent of Hawthorne's voice in the "Introductory" to *The Scarlet Letter*—recognizing that one's ancestors' earthly substance mingles with the soil in such a manner that the connection of family with one spot creates a kinship between the human being and locality—Patricia Mayer lays down the strata of the folk who become the southern Alabama railroad town of Terminal Bend. The collective personality of those familiar eccentrics who make up Miz Melba's family—bonded by both blood and spirit—gives insight into who we of the Deep South are and from where we've come.

Mayer shows her readers that although the children of railroad towns are seduced by the lure of the tracks to their individual somewhere else, there are always those for whom the pull of tradition and the sense of place are more compelling. These people maintain, carrying forth those things begun generations before—laying down their own layer, becoming guardians of the community's shared past. They understand that all tracks eventually come full circle, and those riding them long enough eventually return home.

For the wanderers, these guardians hold the spot to which they can return when their somewhere else fails them.

Told from the memory of seventy-two-year resident of Terminal Bend Miz Melba, as she narrates her story structured around months of her life, the front-porch tales both amuse and instruct. From the history of the Japanese-American gardener, Tekoyote (T-Coyote) who sets roots around the hearts of the 1932 townspeople, comes an understanding of the power of unfounded prejudice. Another parable on the forces of prejudice surrounds the story of racial hatred of Mr. Bloom for the harmless Buddha—hatred that boomerangs as the reader comes to understand in the denouement of the novel.

Elements as varied as influences on Southern history make their marks on the façade of *Terminal Bend*. From the young girl giving up more than something-to-remember-her-by for her handsome neighbor departing for war to those drunks seeking increased courage and decreased memory, the black cook, Tillie, suffering from voodoo conjure to the three-nippled Willard Bradshaw who preaches over the not-yet-departed Brother Earl, these characters created in the image of truth are stranger than any created solely from imagination

In a story as wise as that of Nell Lee and as entertaining as those of Clyde Edgerton, Patricia Mayer—in showing who we are and from where we’ve come—gives us insight into what we should become and where we’re headed. Her Southern voice resonates with authenticity and strength.

Charlotte J. Cabaniss is director of library services at the Bay Minette Public Library and founder of Alabama Athenaeum.

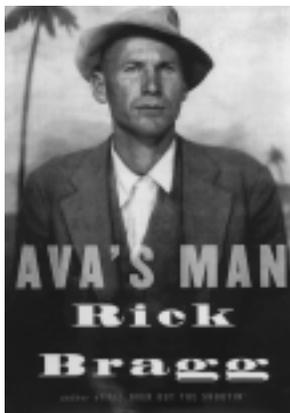
Ava's Man

by Rick Bragg

Knopf, 2001
304 pp. Cloth, \$25

In his new book, *Ava's Man*, Rick Bragg tells us his granddaddy, Charlie Bundrum, is, among other things, a top-rate whiskey man who snuck off into the woods now and again and brewed up the best white lightning the hills had to offer.

Bragg inherited something from that granddaddy. But where Charlie's greatest talent lay in crafting a wondrous libation, his grandson, who lives in a forest of asphalt, glass and steel, crafts an elixir of a different sort, a tonic to soothe readers weary of uninspired formulaic tales.



Bragg, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the *New York Times*, peels back the layers of many of our nation's most important contemporary events and escorts his readers into the lives of those most touched by those moments.

With his memoir, *All Over But the Shoutin'*, he found more heady material within his own bloodlines. He introduced us to his mother, Margaret, and showed us the sort of tough sinew she's made of.

Ava's Man can be considered a sort of prequel: Margaret's grit came natural, from her daddy, Charlie, who chewed nails, fought without fear at a moment's notice, sheltered simpletons and cuddled babies, and from her mama, Ava, driven by a fire of her own.

Bragg has learned to weave a consummate Southern story, though he doesn't write the way people talk down here—not exactly. Folks in the South are known for their storytelling, and even the best of them simply pepper their tales with the deft turn of phrase.

Bragg approaches his craft like Charlie approached moonshining. He throws in a little corn—not too much—and a little sugar and distills the mix to a fine, potent brew. Just a sip of his literary white lightning will set the imagination aflame, as does his opening line: “She was old all my life...”

One can almost see this country boy sitting back and collecting the sweet memories of his family's womenfolk, plotting to capture Bundrum lore onto the page.

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Readers of *All Over But the Shoutin'* know Bragg comes from sturdy stock. Raised at his momma's knee, his no-account daddy always off God knows where doing God knows what, Bragg and his brothers knew a hard life where a living was scratched out of crusty Alabama land with bare hands. Bragg takes those lessons to heart. He, too, eeks out a living with his hands, but where his mother's scraped and blistered fingers scrubbed other people's clothes and snatched other people's cotton bolls from rough plants in hot fields, Bragg's own soft digits mash buttons with letters on them, and from a cushioned chair in an air-conditioned room he tells other people's stories in a manner that does his own people proud. Some of those stories earned him the Pulitzer Prize. More important, they earned him the freedom to write his own history from the stories of those who formed the rigid and bent branches of his knotty family tree.

What makes *Ava's Man* compelling is not so much Bragg's elegant and chewy prose, but the sense that the writer himself is not so much relating a story as discovering it. He tells of growing up with little knowledge of Charlie Bundrum, the grandfather who died the year before he was born, a man he knew only through anecdotes — “flashes of light beneath a closed door” — he heard from his mother and

her sisters as he grew up. More than 40 years after his grandfather “was preached up into the sky,” Bragg asked the elder women of his clan to tell him about this larger-than-life patriarch, and the sisters grew quiet. “After daddy died, there was nothing,” said his mama, Margaret.

From the woman whose spirit of steel was chronicled in *Shoutin'*, that was something. Something, indeed.

Bill Perkins is editorial page editor of The Dothan Eagle.

Stateside Soldier

Life in the Women's Army Corps 1944-1945

by Aileen Kilgore Henderson

University of South Carolina Press, 2001

252 pp. Cloth. \$24.95

“I don't know anybody who has ever done such a daring thing as I have done,”

wrote Aileen Kilgore

Henderson in her diary in

January 1944. The 22-year-

old Henderson, fresh off the

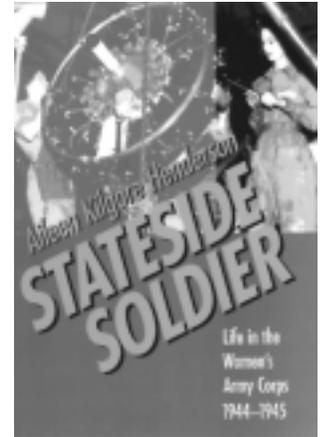
farm, had just enlisted in the Women's Army Corps. It was a daring move. Growing up in Brookwood, Alabama, she'd worked hard on the farm, been active in church life, and had robustly sung patriotic songs in school. After graduation, she worked at Kress and witnessed a new phenomena happening all around her. Youthful, exuberant young British cadets were training in Tuscaloosa, people were talking, and newspapers and radio programs focused on one subject: World War II.

Henderson desperately wanted to be a part of it all. But how? Then she learned about the newly formed WACs. She quickly made up her mind to join. Not without fears, however, for in February 1944 she penned an entry in her diary, “What have I got myself into?”

The diaries and letters exchanged between friends and family during her days in the WACs stayed tucked away among mementos. Henderson went on to distinguish herself as a teacher, photographer, and author. Over the years she thought of the scraps of paper she had saved and finally decided to piece them together.

A treasure trove of cultural information emerged on every subject imaginable: the war as seen through feminine eyes, foods, barracks survival with women from various cultures and backgrounds, training, and her very special love, “a B-25—the most beautiful ship that flies.”

Writing a spellbinding tale, Henderson crafts her work as though it were a fine novel. By giving historical events an intimacy she has the reader's attention immediately with her



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worries over enlistment and her last night in Alabama. She describes dinner at the Dixie Carlton Hotel as “delicious.” She recorded that she ate ham, mashed potatoes, pineapple sherbet. Then she boarded the train to take her to basic training in Georgia.

Once in a barracks, she took cold showers in the latrine, marched until she nearly dropped, and made friends with WACs from all over the country. The women soon segregated themselves into Yankees and Rebels. She writes home of her duties scrubbing floors, polishing shoes, pulling KP duty. She describes her uniforms—fatigue dresses with voluminous bloomers to match. She writes to thank her mother for the scuppernong jelly: “Everybody tasted it with spoons and thought it so good they got bread and butter to go with it. Then brought out the baked ham.”

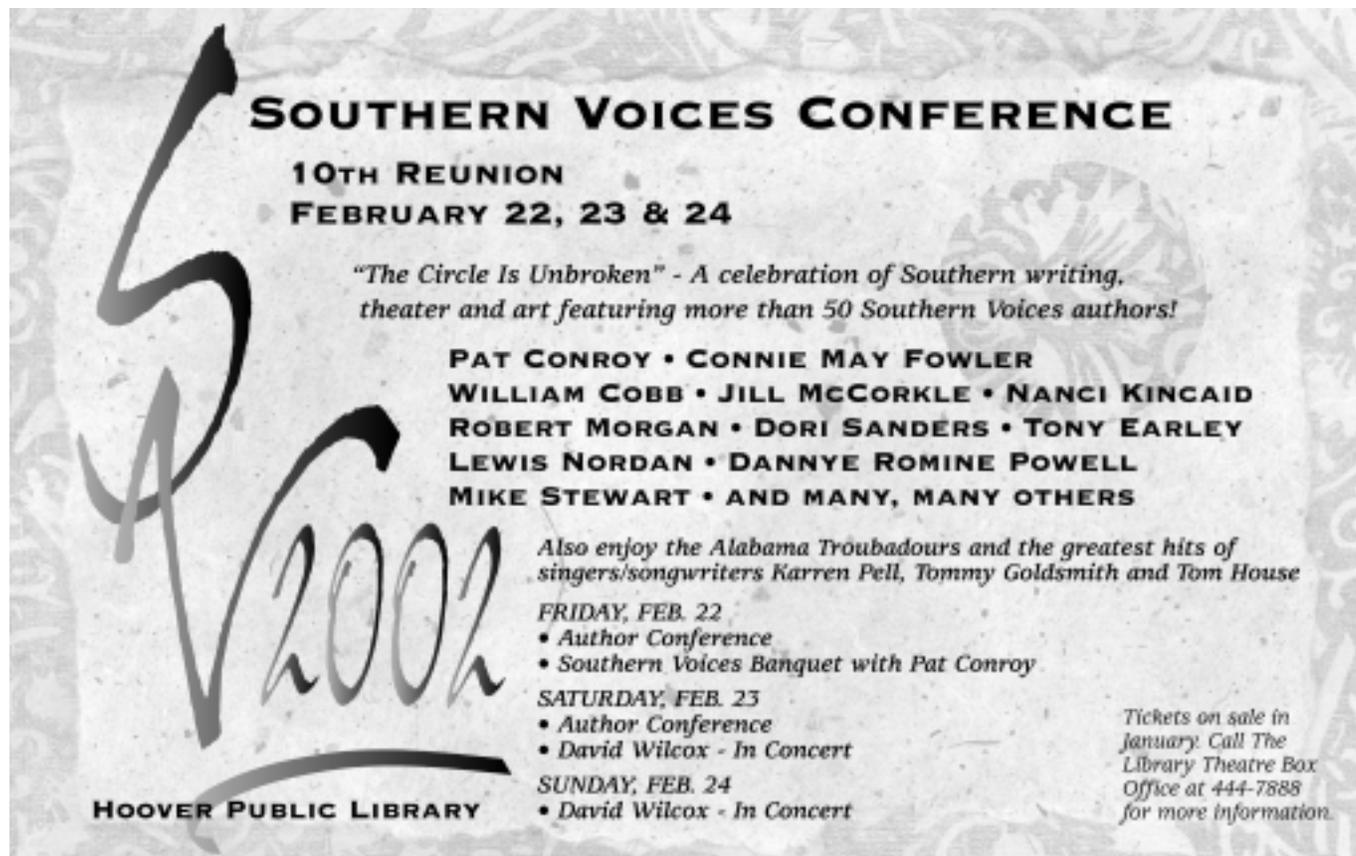
Ever a patriot, Henderson tells her mother not to believe a rumor spread by a sergeant who came home to Alabama with tales of 500 pregnant WACs. His rumors are tantamount to “committing as grave an act of sabotage as if he sank a ship. I heard that same rumor, and with his 500 and my 500 that makes one thousand. The U.S. can’t have many more than a thousand WACs overseas. So tell the Dim-wit he can kiss my foot.”

For a time she was assigned as a technician in the photo department. She wrote her mother that she wasn’t allowed to work on some pictures. “For your own good,” her boss explained. She had to pull KP duty on Thanksgiving, 1944. And she didn’t get to go home for Christmas: “I’m dreading Christmas—the first one I ever spent away from home.”

Her months away from home were filled with war news, exciting duties as an airplane mechanic at Ellington Air Force Base, and various social events like dances, church attendance, and evenings on the town. Some days could be described in three words: “A grueling day.” At times the war news was confusing. She’d heard that the British had captured 10,000 Russians in France fighting with the Germans. Stalin had ordered their return to Russia. “What is the meaning of this?” Henderson mused.

By August 1945, she writes in her diary, “Looks like the beginning of the end for Ellington. All day enlisted men have passed the barracks on their way to headquarters with those tell-tale folders in their hands.” Later she processes some “gruesome pictures...a soldier who committed suicide right after his discharge.”

Henderson was discharged on Pearl Harbor Day, 1945. It was a confusing time as she wondered what life back in



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Alabama would hold for her: "I'll buy a piano and take lessons. I'll buy paintings for the house and go to concerts and ballet. All we talked about (during the war) was the Utopia awaiting us in civilian life." She says life was no Utopia before, but she hopes "With all my heart to make it better at least."

Marianne Moates is a writer and reviewer who lives in Sylacauga.

The Ship and the Storm

Hurricane Mitch and the Loss of the *Fantome*

by Jim Carrier

International Marine/McGraw-Hill, 2001
264 pp. Cloth, \$24.95.

Jim Carrier's *The Ship and the Storm* reconstructs the tragic and terrifying story of the sinking of the schooner *Fantome* with the loss of all hands in Hurricane Mitch off the coast of Honduras in October 1998. Carrier's lifelong fascination with sailing and his knowledge of the sea—its beauty as well as its perils—enabled him to write skillfully and convincingly about this modern maritime tragedy. This book joins Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* and Sebastian Junger's *Perfect Storm* as modern accounts of epic human struggles against powerful, destructive forces of nature. It is a story that would have filled a Winslow Homer canvas or inspired a Melville novel in an earlier century.

The elements of this drama are the beautiful, pedigreed sailing vessel; its carefree, but able and experienced officers and crew; the transformation of a typical tropical depression into one of the most unpredictable and savage hurricanes in modern times; and the swashbuckling cruise line willing to risk human life for the sake of profits.

Fantome, a 228-foot schooner whose four masts towered nearly 12 stories above the sea, had been built to the highest seafaring standards in 1927 for the Duke of Westminster. In the next decade the vessel came into the possession of Arthur Ernest Guinness, of stout fame and fortune. Subsequently, the schooner passed into the hands of Aristotle Onassis who flirted with the idea of giving it to Prince Rainier and Princess Grace as a wedding present. Instead, the ship rusted away in the Kiel Canal until 1969 when Mike Burke, the son of a kosher butcher, purchased it for his fledgling Windjammer Barefoot Cruises operation.

Fantome became the ultimate "love boat" in the Windjammer fleet. The crew and officers were young and affable, virtues in an organization that encouraged fraternization between crew and passengers that sometimes led to romantic interludes. Although only 32 when given command of *Fantome* in 1997, Guyan March, a level-headed Englishman, had ten years experience as a Windjammer

officer and, within the company at least, his seafaring skills were legendary.

In that same year, the company transferred *Fantome's* base of operations to the less-crowded Gulf of Honduras. Windjammer passengers, many of whom were repeat customers, scorned the "foo foo" cruises that embarked at Fort Lauderdale or Miami. Windjammer "groupies," who often bragged to friends about racing from squalls or running aground, welcomed the adventure of sailing from Omoa, Honduras. Other cruise lines avoided the Gulf of Honduras for good reason. In the event of tropical storms, especially hurricanes, the lee shore of the Gulf of Honduras offered little shelter.

Carrier's description of Hurricane Mitch's evolution from tropical wave 46 off Africa's west coast into a Category 5 hurricane, packing winds in excess of 150 miles per hour and generating waves more than five stories tall, is a lesson in the improved, but still inexact, science of meteorology and storm prediction.

To the company's credit, passengers on *Fantome* were safely put ashore in Belize as the tropical storm, gathering momentum, headed into the Caribbean Sea. In hindsight, the decision to sail *Fantome* back to the Gulf of Honduras where another group of cruise passengers was arriving in Omoa proved to be a fatal blunder. Carrier's *The Ship and the Storm* convincingly recreates the last terrifying hours aboard *Fantome* as it vainly sought shelter in the Bay Islands and foundered. Apart from a few pieces of flotsam that washed ashore, *Fantome* simply vanished. Although there was no single cause for this tragedy, Carrier concludes that the cruise line's deeply imbedded culture of risk, as well as a touch of hubris, impaired the judgment of the owners and the ship's officers, leading them to minimize the destructiveness and unpredictability of Hurricane Mitch and resulting in the loss of *Fantome*.

Allen Cronenberg is director of the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities.

The High Traverse

A Novel

by Richard Blanchard

Livingston University Press, 2001
184 pp. Paper, \$11

Gordon Lish writes of *The High Traverse*: "Be warned: You will come away from this book haunted by the sensation that what you believed was the very thing of your inalienable separation has been murmured into the world." I must agree that I have rarely encountered a work of such original prose. Blanchard composes exclusively in simple, direct sentences which evoke and extend consciousness as a phenomenal

presence, both familiar and strange, where in the past continually rubs up against the present: “He made it up there first. They call me Dick. I made it, too. My brother got my father’s name. Should I tell her we’re here? His hair parts right. I have one son. My hair goes to the left. We might be next. He has two boys. You should not go alone. He will know just what to say. Does your wife like the pooch? See her bend down for the silver? We climb the ravine. Look, here he comes! Let me make room. You lose your fear of heights. He can order for us. Here she is. Please call me Dick.” *The High Traverse* approaches a fuller exploration of what it means in the moment of passing to say “my life flashed before me.” After a few pages, the reader comes to realize that he is sensing the pulse of something extraordinary. In the montage of thoughts and images that Blanchard provides dwells the human record of love, dignity, and innocence, but above all, a profound reverence for life. Reading *The High Traverse* was a journey I’m grateful not to have missed.

Kelly Gerald, a specialist in Southern literature, teaches English at Auburn University.

The Best of Times

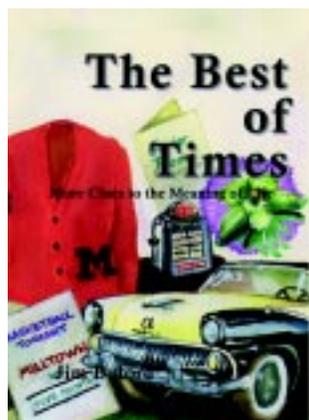
by Jim Buford

River City Publishing, 2001
135 pages, \$18

Subtitled *More Clues to the Meaning of Life*, this slender, hand-sized book is the author’s second published collection of autobiographical prose. In contrast to the current trend of no-holds-barred memoir, Buford writes with well-tempered equanimity about the molding forces of family and community. The disappointments he shares here—such as allusions to an early romance that ended without closure—are outnumbered by happier evocations, among them: becoming a Birmingham Barons baseball fan in the third grade, getting to know a river firsthand, and discovering the Valdosta Public Library, where a young man could spend his spare time reading fiction and poetry.

In “Lunch with Harry,” the poignancy of friendship that should be close, but never gets past the tentative, is plaintively expressed without nostalgia.

“Homecoming” describes a football trip the author made with his father to the college campus the latter hadn’t visited since his graduation there almost sixty years before. (The elder Buford was “a veteran, a teacher, a farmer, a Methodist,



and a Southern Democrat. But most of all he was a Clemson man.”) A real gem, this carefully-wrought essay demonstrates how remarkably durable the father-son bond can be, even when the relationship also harbors “a dimension of combativeness neither of us was ever able to resolve.”

Julia Oliver is a Montgomery writer.

Dreaming Me

An African-American
Woman’s Spiritual Journey
by Jan Willis

Riverhead Books, 2001
336 pp. Cloth, \$23.95

Dreaming Me is storytelling at its best.

Jan Willis was born in the “colored” section of Docena, an Alabama mining camp outside of Birmingham, in the 1950s.

Dorothy, her mother, wanted her to be “saved” and worried about her soul, while Oram, her father, worried about her intellectual growth and education. As a young man, Willis’s father ran away to Talladega College only to be dragged home because his family could not afford to educate him.

Living in the mining camps, the family experienced firsthand the threats, cross burnings, and bombings by the Klan. When Willis, who marched with Dr. King during high school, was offered a scholarship to Cornell in 1965, she left Alabama on her longest journey away from home.

Three years later, she had developed the confidence to travel to Nepal on an exchange program studying Tibetan Buddhism. The violence surrounding her was counter to the Buddhist practice that she had learned. As a young woman, activist, and “thinking Black person in this country,” Willis felt that she had no choice but to join the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s.

After her graduation from Cornell, in a move she describes as “piece or peace,” Willis left the turbulence of America to study the chants and devotional rituals she considered the essence of Tibetan Buddhism. Her spiritual journey would lead the author to Columbia University where she was the first American woman as well as the first African-American to become an Indo-Tibetan scholar.

Dreaming Me started out as a memoir about her family and their life in Alabama and became a narrative of transformation, forgiveness, and acceptance. Calling herself a “Buddhist Baptist,” Willis incorporates the oral traditions of Alex Haley’s *Roots*, the historical perceptions of Diane McWhorter’s *Carry Me Home*, and the good humor of Anne



Lamott's *Traveling Mercies*. She embraces the symmetry of her mother's warning "not to go too far away from home" and her father's belief that she should "think for herself."

While it has become cliché to describe the 1960s as a time of great awakenings, Jan Willis's *Dreaming Me* reminds readers that the dedication to justice and the possibility for change existed for a generation.

Jan Willis has taught and written about Buddhism in America for more than three decades. She's a professor of Religion and Walter A. Crowell professor of Social Sciences at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.

Pam Kingsbury is a writer and speaker based in Florence.

White for Harvest

by Jeanie Thompson

River City Press, 2001
96 pp. Paper, \$20

Robert Frost wrote that the figure a poem makes is "the same as the figure for love," and Richard Hugo warned us against abusing the word. Jeanie Thompson, it seems, learned both lessons well, for no word but love will approach the force that animates her third major collection of poems. No other word can suggest the generosity of its language and the beauty of its gestures. And yet, in all the pages of this book, you will rarely see the word as such.

In her parlance, sculptures do not bear the marks of love; instead, she writes, "they were shaped / by spirit palpable as bronze, / and witnessed their union—/ literal as air." She does not declare love home, nor love, home; instead she explains: "home beckons us to break free, as the blossom's plunder / lures the bee, of a summer morning, / to its blue and fragile shore."

White for Harvest is a bounty of Thompson's gifts, particularly of this ability to phrase the difficult-to-name, to cast the nearly inarticulable in some of the language's most beautiful turns. She writes of a mother's care for her son as "the perfecting / locks of your wish for him," their opening inevitable and necessary "so he can tumble his sure waters, / sluice the gate as free / as the moment you made him." Elsewhere a pair of lovers faces the impossibility of reconciliation, "Knowing / forgiveness of ourselves / as a figure for truth." And in still another poem, she transports us, watching a "pair of hawks" into "this moment / hard with rapture."



The collection draws us again and again to the fragile shores of its flowers. But for all its gathering, *White for Harvest* is just as much about cultivation. As we move from Thompson's recent work to poems from *Witness* and *How to Enter the River*, we move closer and closer to the roots of her capacities. The poems for her son in *Witness* bear some of her most striking emotional knowledge. In "Weekday Blues for My Son," after a troubling imagination of her son's lost biological parents and his future with other women, Thompson admits: "Perhaps I wanted to feel that pain / so that losing you will be familiar, / and, therefore, possible to endure." The earliest poems are just as powerful. The stunningly delicate articulation that marks her work is clearly visible in "Desire" where the speaker declares: "Once in a silence, I wanted to smooth / my hands over your whole body / to make sure you were there, become / what I knew you to be." The poems understand how people learn from, become, and grow through each other, in friendship, blood, and love.

Thompson's grafts of husbandry and bearing—one of this collection's consistent themes—more clearly suggest this point. Wedding the hand's push with the land's grasp, in Thompson's "Earth Hymn," when the lover goes "to the back garden." He returns to hold the speaker and says, "I feel the garden humming." And when the speaker covers her own sowing, she thinks:

*I push the earth down and think I should tamp
it down the way you did walking methodically
down the rows to pack tighter that rich dirt
from which later in the year the hollyhock towered
the moonbeam coreopsis floated in its ferns
and you began the transformation
each morning breathing the day
opening the earth I will think of you*

By seeding, the speaker learns to hold the seed and its growth; she becomes garden as well as gardener. Just as "home beckons us to break free," the release fulfills the conditions of possession, and Thompson's persons are enlarged through their own generosity.

This meditation is so steady that, like any true devotion, *White for Harvest* not only reaps all preparation but primes the field for greater yields. So one of the book's excitements is the constant hint that, even as Thompson's languages of beauty and love have grown to new strength and grace, they have yet to bear their most wonderful fruits.

Both satisfied and anticipant, I marvel at this gratifying hunger, a satiety that feeds its own expansion. As rich a land as it is, Alabama harbors few treasures equal to *White for Harvest*, its abundance of growth, spirit, and love, and its promise and seed for increase, which we need, every one.

Jake Adam York

Carryin' On And Other Strange Things Southerners Do

by R. Scott Brunner

Villard, 2001,
159 pp. Paper, \$19.95

R. Scott Brunner writes essays on Southern humor and culture. His latest collection is *Carryin' On and Other Strange Things Southerners Do*. His previous book, *Due South*, brought him acclaim from the likes of Pat Conroy and Rick Bragg. Selling collections of essays is not an easy task in the publishing world unless the essays are astute and the author is as gifted as this Birmingham native. His writing style is simple and his topics as intriguing as wreaths on the sides of Southern highways, a sight he describes in an essay called "Shrines."

In his essays, themes get described, contrasted, digested, examined, and molded into the art form that, for marketable purposes, should be grouped with "siblings" of equal intelligence and good looks. Brunner's book makes a fine family portrait.

Brunner characterizes us Southerners, celebrates us, and laughs with us about things we know are strange but funny. Why do we encourage the hilarity of adolescent boys in our pulpits? We think it's good for them and for us, too, if later on they should become preachers. Why do we eat greasy collards, slimy okra, and cornbread? These are strange and laughable foods to the rest of the world, but we don't care.

Brunner's works are reflective. The last essay in his book is poignant, written about dust swirling in rays of sunlight. His comments on life's brevity, children's beauty, and mankind's futile endeavors might evoke tears.

His writing preserves aspects of the modern lives of Southerners on many levels: family, community, society, faith, and the details of daily living. What makes Southern culture so popular? Are Southerners more appealing than other regional folks? Perhaps Southern life is exalted because we're nice compared to the rest of the world who seem to be feuding in airports and raging on the roads. We're genuine, too, to a fault except when we're putting on airs, then we're funny. Perhaps Southerners are liked because we're "salt of the earth," "solid as a rock," know the "nitty-gritty" of life. All these traits seem to describe the characters in Brunner's essays and Brunner himself.

The book should be savored. Too much of its rich writing overloads the senses and is best enjoyed two or three chapters at a sitting. Also, the impact of his words should be pondered, a word I rarely use, but "to weigh mentally" fits here. Lest anyone think his essays are difficult to read—not so. The words flow as smoothly as creek water.

Here are synopses of a few essays from this collection:

"Home Place": This essay takes readers to the stately but disintegrating home of a former Delta planting family. The

overgrown driveway is lined with fruit trees that "someone surely used to tend to." A once-white fence "someone used to dump table scraps over...for the guineas, right after breakfast" surrounds the yard.

"The Last Time I Saw Parrish": The reader seems to ride beside Brunner as he drives into his grandparents' hometown with road signs that read, "Prepare to meet thy God." He describes the influence of the town's former industry, coal. His own "Papa" retired with a "decent pension and a case of the black lung." Parrish is located in Walker County, Ala., and has a graying population, a bleak outlook, and roads so worn that "prepare to meet thy God" could be a travel warning. It has natural beauty, he says, and rare bonds between friends and kin.

"Groupies": In his mid-life Brunner discovers his retired parents have become groupies for the Bill Gaither phenomenon. They buy the CDs, travel to "all-night singin's," and scour the Nashville Network for anyone singing gospel music with a pompadoured hairdo. A funny line: "...Southern Gospel has lately risen from commercial obscurity to warm the cockles of dear old farts—I mean hearts...dear old hearts—like my mom's and dad's."

"Iron Man": Brunner admits to ironing the family laundry and tells how the job fell to him. Comically, he describes how he got a new iron for his wedding anniversary and decided to try it out that very night as his wife sat cross-legged in bed paying bills. "I lugged the ironing board into the bedroom and raised it with a shriek of its collapsible legs." It's a funny way to spend an anniversary.

Sherry Kughn is executive secretary at The Anniston Star and a writer.

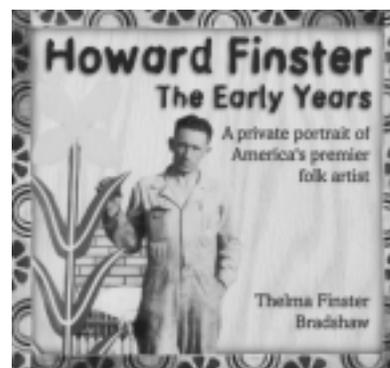
Howard Finster:

The Early Years
by Thelma Finster
Bradshaw

Crane Hill, 2001
151 pp. Paper, \$24.95

The golden thread that runs through Thelma Finster Bradshaw's memoir of the early years with

her father is the presence of the extraordinary in everyday life. As she describes the home in Trion, Georgia, where she grew up, it becomes clear that long before Finster was creating album covers for rock bands and making millions for gallery owners, he was building a piece of heaven on earth for his family. Little did it matter that the children's clothes were made from flour sacks when they could walk down paths that



glittered with broken mirror pieces; when they had a doll house with real glass windows, a front porch, and an octagonal dome; when they had a backyard museum filled with “the inventions of man” that their father had collected. She describes her father, born and raised in Alabama, as a man who could always “build something out of nothing.”

But this daughter’s memoir goes beyond being simply a tribute to an extraordinary man: it is, in many ways, an advisory on living. There are those people who save things and make something better from them, and there are those who destroy. Finster devoted his life to saving things, whether souls searching for salvation, empty coffee cans, broken bicycle parts, or his nephew’s tonsils. Long before the term “found objects” became *en vogue*, Finster was using whatever came his way as a conduit for creating a Paradise Garden and for spreading the word of God. Finster followed what he believed to be God’s plan for him, whether that plan made sense to anyone else or not. He became a preacher when he felt led to preach and he painted sacred art when the Lord told him to. And he gave his family something they could never buy: “I learned from my father,” Thelma tells us, “that having only one destination in mind is a sure way to miss out on the majority of what life tries to reveal to you ... that no matter how old you are, it’s imperative to keep the playground in your mind alive.”

Scripture teaches that old men dream dreams and young men have visions. Thelma Finster Bradshaw has made real for her readers a man who did both. We owe them both a debt of gratitude for the glimpse they have given us into the workings of “the hand of God in ordinary, everyday things.”

Marian Carcache is a writer who lives in Auburn.

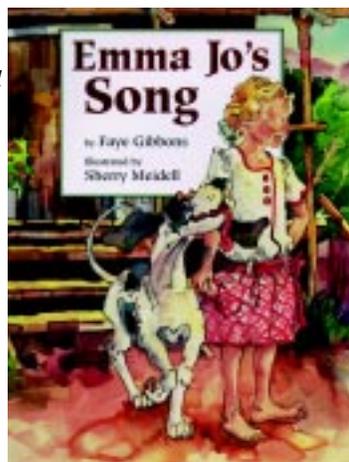
Emma Jo’s Song

by Faye Gibbons
illustrated by Sherry Meidell

Boyd’s Mills Press, 2001
32 pp. Hardcover, \$15.95

Faye Gibbons has given us delightful mini-portraits of her grandparents’ and parents’ times in *Mountain Wedding* (1996) and *Mama and Me and the Model T* (1999). In *Emma Jo’s Song*, her newest picture book, there again is a warm and lively family gathering. The hero is a girl of Gibbons’s own generation, growing up in rural Georgia prior to World War II.

Emma Jo worries that, unlike the rest of the Pucketts, she



isn’t “good at music and singing.” But when her teasing big brother Tom gives her support and their hound dog Rip howls accompaniment, she sings about her “little light of mine,” and Grandpa pronounces the encomium: “That girl’s got a gift. Didn’t I always say so?”

For *Emma Jo’s Song*, illustrator Sherry Meidell has created charmingly rustic watercolor pictures to complement the story, conveying a sense of action from farmyard chores to music making. Faye Gibbons has said, “Stories that endure ... offer visions of hope and joy.” Her tales do present such visions, and in this most recent book, she has also included sounds of happiness, from the family’s songs with guitar, piano, banjo, harmonica, fiddle to Mama’s dulcimer and counterpoint by Rip.

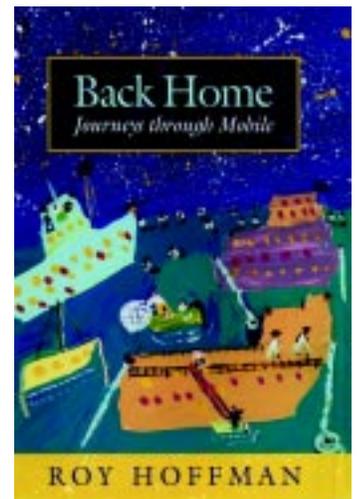
Joan Nist is Professor Emerita in Children’s Literature at Auburn University.

Back Home

Journeys through Mobile
by Roy Hoffman

University of Alabama Press,
2001
380 pp. Cloth, \$29.95

After living for twenty years in New York, Roy Hoffman returned to Mobile with his family to accept the position of “Writer-in-Residence” at the *Mobile Register*. Hoffman, a native of Mobile, is the author of the novel *Almost Family*, winner of the Lillian Smith Award (2000). His work has also appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Fortune*, *Oxford American*, and *Esquire*. Most of the essays in *Back Home: Journeys through Mobile* were originally published in the *Register*, others were published by *Preservation: The Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation*, *Brightleaf: A Southern Review of Books*, *Newsday* and the *New York Times*. *Back Home* is an impressive collection of essays that document with sophistication and honesty the coastal city of Mobile, its diverse communities, histories, traditions, and voices. Like her sister city, New Orleans, Mobile is not a single city, but many cities, and Hoffman brings his readers as close as a non-native can hope to come to an appreciation of the heat, the humor, and the richness of the place. His essays cover a wide range of topics and perspectives while successfully avoiding the sentimental and quaint, qualities which corrupt so many books about the South that deal



with “local color” or attempt to conjure “sense of place.” Among his essays, Hoffman addresses unique sporting events and local phenomena (if you think an anvil shoot involves a gun and “Jubilee!” is a gospel song, you will find an education waiting for you within these pages), famous Mobile citizens such as Albert Murray, Satchel Paige, Henry Aaron, Alexis Herman, among others, industry inland and on the bay, unique holidays and local celebrations, and the tangled skein woven throughout the city by immigration, slavery, and the intermingling of race, history, and local lore. Hoffman’s essays are accompanied by numerous documentary photographs, historical and contemporary.

Kelly Gerald

From Southern Wrongs to Civil Rights

by Sara Mitchell Parsons

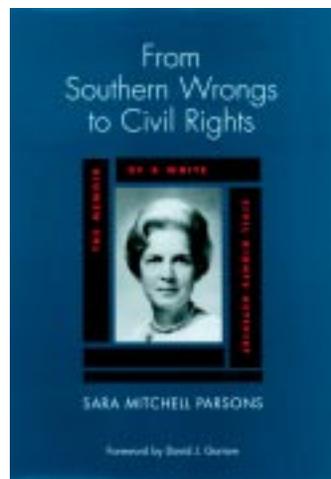
University of Alabama Press,
2,000
208 pp. Cloth, \$24.95

I’m standing in the great hall of one of Birmingham’s largest cathedrals, chatting amiably with two nicely dressed white women in their late 70s—women who are pillars of their church, patrons of their community. I can’t help wondering how it is possible that these two genteel ladies turned out to be so very different from their contemporary, Sara Mitchell Parsons, author of the recently released book *From Southern Wrongs to Civil Rights: Memoir of a White Civil Rights Activist*.

All three women are what is nowadays termed Privileged White Class people. They’ve been educated in the ways of the Old South. In those days, they each employed black maids who were fondly considered to be “part of the family,” as long as said domestic help remained in subservient roles as lower-than-minimum-wage-earners. Each woman has enjoyed a comfortably social existence, membership in all-white country clubs, and freedom from racial persecution of any kind.

What made one of these women reverse direction, give up social standing, and become an Atlanta civil rights activist in a day and time when to do so was actually a life-endangering act?

Parsons says of her Civil War ancestors, “Despite their loyalty to the South and their bravery, they were driven by



misplaced bravado and egotism and at worst by a desire to keep slavery alive.” In her case, she learned to hate the idea and practice of slavery.

Parsons took time in her life to gather additional data about black-white relationships: “Most southerners will say that they seldom heard or even used the word ‘prejudice.’ We lived without thinking, for the most part blindly ignorant of our multiple sins against blacks...it would take a vast library to hold all the examples of white people’s prejudice against blacks before the civil rights movement and afterward.”

From Southern Wrongs to Civil Rights: Memoir of a White Civil Rights Activist is a simple story of a simple woman who became more complicated as she allowed herself to be exposed to racial strife in Atlanta society. The more she learned about racism, the more active she became, the more at odds with her community she became, and with predictable losses: her marriage to a racist husband falters, her country club friends desert her, and she learns how very alone an activist can be when activism goes against the grain of the community.

Parsons learned each of her lessons not from the media, but from dealing directly with individuals she befriended in the black community, a community where one could hope to run successfully for political office only if one’s photograph were never published—in other words, if the voters didn’t know you were black, you stood a better chance of winning election.

From Southern Wrongs to Civil Rights is a simple, straightforward narrative about one woman’s journey from narrow privilege to open acceptance of diversity in a formerly closed society. Though Parsons shed tears when she lost her favorite maid, she also learned to shed tears when she realized how much pain black people of her era experienced, pain that few white people could ever really feel in quite the same way.

Parsons says, “Once Martin Luther King listened while a white woman raved on and on to him about how much she loved Inez, her servant. ‘What is Inez’s last name?’ he asked. The woman did not know even though Inez had been with her family for twenty years.”

Sara Mitchell Parsons lives in a universe parallel to these churchwomen. They are the same age now, but I would imagine they would have very little to talk about were they thrown together socially. I think the value of Parsons’ book is that she admitted her racism early on and tried for the next fifty years to make amends for it. My dream is that somehow all the privileged white men and women who’ve never faced up to their prejudices will be exposed to people like Sara Mitchell Parsons and abandon the ranks of unrepentance and inaction.

Writer, speaker, and bookseller Jim Reed lives in Birmingham.

Music of Falling Water

by Julia Oliver

John F. Blair, Publisher, 2001
302 pp. Cloth. \$21.95

Julia Oliver's third book, set primarily in early twentieth-century Alabama, is part historical novel, part mystery, and part family saga. *Music of Falling Water* (the title refers to a grist mill and water wheel on the family farm) revolves around the lives of the four sisters of the Holloway family: Gertrude, Kathleen, Rhoda, and Lola, the youngest.

Like the turning water wheel, the novel circles around the significant event in the girls' lives: the disappearance, one day, of the teenaged Rhoda and the complete absence of any sign of her since.

From different characters' perspectives, but most frequently Lola's, the reader is returned again and again to the question of how the lively and rebellious Rhoda disappeared, and why. Slowly, over the course of the novel, Oliver provides all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to create a complete picture of Rhoda's last day in Hackberry Hill. Readers, finally, understand what happened, but none of the characters ever do. They go on with their limited visions of the truth, never fully comprehending the effects a single event had on each of their lives.

In the process of the story's telling, some family secrets are revealed, and the three remaining sisters have a kind of reunion and reconciliation (the two older sisters have quarreled over the disposition of property after their mother's death). Oliver effectively brings to life family tensions and conflicts, along with the sense that each family's past is still very much a part of its present.

Perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of this book is the sense of being caught up in the times; Oliver did her research well, and her details, from clothes to cars to the atmosphere of Alabama in World War I, ring true. Lola and her mother sit talking together as Mama sews and Lola "snap[s] beans into a colander"; at a funeral dinner the family eats "plates heaped with ham-filled biscuits, deviled eggs, potato salad, sweet pickles, and thick chunks of pound cake the color of jonquils," washed down with "heavily sweetened" iced tea. The opening scene, with its description of Gertrude, her husband, Jason, and Lola embarking on a road trip, comes alive with Oliver's descriptions of Gertrude's "mauve pongee duster and a high-crowned, bird-winged hat" and Jason's "lawn-party suit and straw boater."

The novel takes place in the town of Felder, based on Montgomery, and the small community of Hackberry Hill, which the author notes is not based on a particular place. As



part of her research, the author consulted the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences, the *Montgomery Advertiser* from 1918, histories of Alabama and of World War I, the *Montgomery County Historical Society Newsletter*, and sources on "Packard autos...names of trains and schedules... laws and amendments...[and] postal history and censorship." Her careful research shows and makes the book a pleasure to read for that reason alone.

For every reader who finds the "Coda" ending—and the solution to the mystery of Rhoda's disappearance—forced, however, there will be another who finds it satisfying and appropriate. Either way, readers who are in the habit of reading the end of the book first should not do so with this book, as it will spoil much of the pleasure and suspense Oliver creates in this intricately plotted tale.

Jennifer Horne is a poet and essayist who lives in Tuscaloosa. Her anthology of Southern farming and gardening poems, tentatively titled Working the Dirt, will be published by NewSouth Books in 2002.

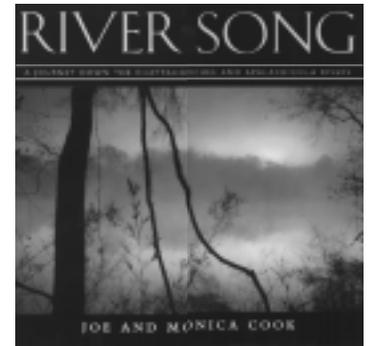
River Song

A Journey down the
Chattahoochee and
Apalachicola Rivers
by Joe and Monica Cook

University of Alabama Press
290 pp. Hardcover, \$39.95

The Chattahoochee River begins as a small spring in northeast Georgia, and when its waters join the Flint River it becomes the Apalachicola River and flows into the Gulf of Mexico at Apalachicola Bay. Two free-lance photographers, Joe and Monica Cook, took one hundred days to paddle the 520 miles from source to mouth in a seventeen-foot canoe. *River Song* is a word and photographic essay of this journey and of the rivers and its people.

The book is a coffee-table size picture book, and the photographs are beautiful, sensitive, artistic, and haunting. The early morning misty scenes and the images of waterfalls, trees, rocks, leaves, sunsets, wild flowers, and still waters that mirror the sky are especially lovely. Because of the fall and winter scenes, it is obvious that not all the photographs were taken on the April-July trip, but some must have been made on various scouting trips the Cooks took before their adventure began. The narrative is generally organized chronologically and geographically from the start of the trip at Chattahoochee Springs to its ending at St. George's Island in the Gulf. The Cooks sometimes went into towns to eat or spend the night, but most often camped along the river banks and sand bars. Although



photographs show their canoe was sparsely packed, it is amazing (as they claimed) that they never swamped it, even when crossing the wide waters of Lake Eufaula, Lake Seminole, and Apalachicola Bay.

As they moved down river, they visited with people whom they met along the way—fishermen, hunters, lock keepers, café owners—and generally those who love and appreciate the river as they do. These vignettes of the river people are mixed with an account of the history of the river from the Indians to the present water wars among Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. Evidences of the river's abuse by man, especially the pollution of nearby towns such as Atlanta, are numerous. The book is a conservation and environmental piece that explains how fragile the river's ecosystem is. The Cooks issue a strong call for the rivers' protection.

Noting how much human beings depend upon water from the rivers, toward the end of the book, Joe Cook (who seems to have done most of the writing) notes that "Rivers and streams, being slow to change, remind us of where we came from and who we are. . . . All along its course, the river flows through the subconscious of its people as its water flows through their veins and fills their cells."

River Song is a pleasing and poetic book that makes one appreciate the beauties of nature close by.

Leah Rawls Atkins is a historian and co-author of Alabama: History of a Deep South State.

The Cry of an Occasion

Fiction from the Fellowship of Southern Writers
 Edited by Richard Bausch with a
 forward by George Garrett

Louisiana State University Press,
 2001
 Cloth, \$29.95

From a strange and heartening story by Madison Smartt Bell, "The Naked Lady," first published in *Crescent Review*, to the tale of a plantation slave named Knobby Cotton who was "lanky as a child's drawing of a stick person" by Allen Wier, the filling between the crust of *The Cry of an Occasion* is as rich as the finest pecan pie.

Like a good pecan pie, the sticky substance of Michael Knight's "For Alice to the Fourth Floor" and the nutty goodness of Fred Chappell's "The Encyclopedia Daniel" and flavorful resonance of Elizabeth Spencer's "The Everlasting Light" will stick to the roof of your mouth, and the taste will linger.

A good short story is like a good wedge of pie. And Lee



Smith's "Between the Lines," about a small-town columnist, is something to chomp into again and again. It has been reprinted so much its taste resonates like a southern anthem.

Shelby Foote's Faulkneresque Indian legend, set in 1797 Mississippi, is visioned through a slanted glass of official documentation while Louis Nordan's "Tombstone" conjures memories dark and melancholy and shows that support can come from the oddest sources. And Barry Hannah's portrait of a unique barroom character will be remembered on the dimly lighted barstools in joints from Dallas to Charlottesville.

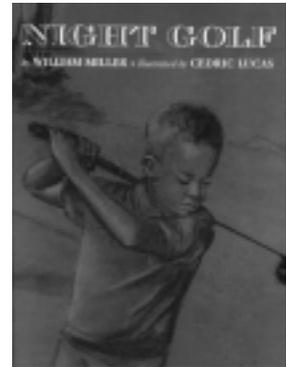
Each of these stories stands alone. Each provides necessary ingredients to fulfill a promise and expand the scope of southern literature, one of the basic reasons behind the Fellowship of Southern Writers, started years ago by Cleanth Brooks, Louis D. Rubin, and others. As editor Richard Bausch writes in his preface, "It is a hell of a collection."

Wayne Greenhaw's latest book, My Heart Is in the Earth: True Stories of Alabama and Mexico, was published this fall by River City Publishing.

Night Golf

by William Miller
 illustrated by Cedric Lucas

Lee and Low Inc., 1999
 32 pp. Hardcover, \$15.95



This is the year of the tiger—golfer Tiger Woods—and William Miller has written *Night Golf*, a picture book, which depicts the barrier African-Americans encountered until recently. Miller, who teaches at York College (PA), has an Alabama background and friends, including poet Charles Ghigna, to whom Miller dedicated his first book, *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* (1994).

That work was followed by *Frederick Douglass, The Last Day of Slavery* (1995) and *Richard Wright and the Library Card* (1997). Miller's first three picture books focus on a historical figure's search for achievement despite obstacles.

For *Night Golf*, the author uses fiction, his brief story telling how young James learns the game. Befriended by Charlie, who has been a caddy for twenty years, James meets the older man after dark on the golf course; a brief appended account chronicles "African-Americans in Golf." As in his nonfiction books, Miller does not stint to show prejudice, but he emphasizes the hope and determination which carry the hero to accomplishment. Soft pastel illustrations by Cedric Lucas support the story and effectively blend dark and light colors.

Joan Nist

PRIZES AND AWARDS

Poet **Rodney Jones** was awarded the Fellowship of Southern Writers Hanes Prize for Poetry in April 2001 at the annual FSW meeting in Chattanooga. Former University of Alabama MFA faculty member Allan Weir was among those named as inductees of the 2003 Conference on Southern Literature.

Alabama native **Janet McAdams** received the 2001 National Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation for *The Island of Lost Luggage*, her collection of poetry published by the University of Arizona Press. The book also won the 1999 First Book Award in Poetry from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas/Wordcraft Circle.



Natasha Trethewey

Poet **Natasha Trethewey**, recipient of the 2000 Alabama State Council on the Arts Artists Fellowship award, has been awarded the 2001 Lillian Smith Award for Poetry for her book *Domestic Work*, published by Graywolf Press in 2000.

Diane McWhorter's *Carry Me Home* (Simon and Schuster) received the Southern Book Critics Award 2001. Tony Early's *Jim the Boy* and William Gay's *Provinces of Night* were named as finalists.

Birmingham poet **Askhari Johnson Hodari** was named the 2001 recipient of the Audre Lorde Fellowship for Women of Color Writers/Activists. The fellowship includes a month-long residency at the Norcroft Writing Retreat for Women and a stipend, provided by the Union Institute, host of the award, through its Center for Women.

Albert Murray was awarded the Clarence Cason Writing Award for 2001 in March in Tuscaloosa. Sponsored by the University of Alabama, the award is given in conjunction with an annual conference on writing.



The Alabama State Council on the Arts Celebration of the Arts recognized **Fannie Flagg** (pictured with Governor Don Siegelman and First Lady Lori Siegelman) with its Distinguished Artist Award for 2001. Given to recognize excellence and achievement, the award is one of four categories of awards to outstanding Alabamians for their Contributions to the Arts and Culture of the state.

READINGS AND PROGRAMS

THE TENNESSEE HUMANITIES COUNCIL'S SOUTHERN FESTIVAL OF BOOKS will take place in Nashville on Oct. 12-14. For a list of participants and travel/lodging information, check www.tn-humanities.org.

HUNTINGDON COLLEGE'S CONTINUING EDUCATION program will host a series of weekend workshops on screenwriting and film/video production. The workshops will be led by **Michael Ritz**, a veteran screenwriter whose credits include *Get Smart*, the *Dean Martin Show*, and *Police Story*, as well as *Funny Girl*, *Easy Rider*, and *Oliver*. The Friday through Sunday workshops begin on October 19th with "The Art of Screenwriting." "The Craft of Screenwriting: An Intermediate Workshop" will begin November 9th, and "The Final Cut—A Master Workshop in Screenwriting" and "The World of Film Production" will be held in the spring. For registration and more information call Huntingdon at 334-833-4451.

THE SCHEDULE FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA-BIRMINGHAM WRITERS' SERIES, 2001-2, is **Judith Ortiz Cofer** (Oct. 24); **Bruce Smith** (Jan. 16); **Honorée Fanonne Jeffers** (Feb. 13); **Judith Kitchen** (Mar. 20); and **Michael Knight** (Apr. 3). All readings will be held at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 1024 South 12th Street, Birmingham, at 7 p.m.

THE FRIENDS OF SPRING HILL COLLEGE will present readings by and interviews of **Melinda Haynes** (Nov. 1; interviewed by Adline Clark, owner of Black Classics Bookstore in Mobile), **Carolyn Haines** (Feb. 21, 2002; interviewed by John Hafner), and **Cynthia Williams** (Apr. 11, 2002; interviewed by Roy Hoffman). Each program will be followed by a dessert reception and book signing. All events will be in Stewartfield on the SHC campus at 7:30 p.m. For more information contact Spring Hill College at 1-800-742-6704.

THE FAIRHOPE CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS presents Southern Writers Reading, Nov. 16-18, featuring **Beth Anne Fennelly**, **Daniel Wallace**, **Doug Kelly**, **Sidney Thompson**, **Barbara Robinette Moss**, **Christopher Rice**, and **Grayson**. Contact Over the Transom Bookstore, Fairhope Center for Writing Arts Inc., at 334-928-0049 for ticket prices and more information.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

STORYSOUTH, a new online literary journal for southern writers edited and published by Jason Sanford and Jake Adam York, will publish fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction by new and established southern writers. Each issue will feature an essay and examination of the work of a writer who has had a large impact on recent southern writing. The first issue includes work by Kelly Cherry, R. T. Smith, Jeanie Thompson, Jim Murphy, and Dan Albergotti. For submission guidelines and subscription information, go to www.storysouth.com.

USADEEPSOUTH is a new southern ezine featuring writers and writing about Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. In addition to covering literature, music, arts, people, and travel, USADeepSouth will include memoirs, humor, and short stories. A section dedicated to poetry is planned. The web address is www.usadeepsouth.com.

The CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD FOUNDATION is awarding \$3,000 grants to fiction writers with at least one book. For more information, go to www.isherwoodfoundation.org or write James White, Box 428, Montrose, AL 36559.

The website AMERICAN CENTER FOR ARTISTS is offering free writing courses designed by the Software Teacher, Inc. These courses have been used in over 500 colleges and secondary schools. The Fiction Writing Program was written by R. V. Cassill (Brown University), Sylvan Karchmer (University of Houston), and James White (University of South Alabama). The programs originally sold for \$349.00 each. Check www.americanartists.org for more information.

ALABAMA CENTER FOR THE BOOK APPROVED



The Library of Congress has approved a proposal from the Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities for the creation of an

Alabama Center for the Book that will be affiliated with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress.

- This new partnership is a welcome development, said Center for the Book Director John Y. Cole. "Alabama is our 42nd state center affiliate in a network that also includes the District of Columbia. The sixth state center located in a humanities organization, it also will be closely allied with the Alabama Public Library Service."

- Lamar Veatch, director of the Alabama Public Library Service, commented: "The state library is proud to be part of this consortium of partners through which many organizations can come together to foster a nurturing, enriching environment for promoting, books, reading, writing, and public programming in every corner of the state."

For information about the Alabama Center for the Book, contact Jay Lamar, coordinator, Alabama Center for the Book, Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities, Pebble Hill, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36843; telephone: (334) 844-4947; fax: (334) 844-4949; e-mail: lamarja@auburn.edu.

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 14-20:

TEEN READ WEEK, *American Library Association*,
www.ala.org/teenreads

NOVEMBER 1:

NATIONAL FAMILY LITERACY DAY, *National Center for Family
Literacy* www.famlit.org

NOVEMBER 7:

NATIONAL YOUNG READER'S DAY, *Pizza Hut's Book It! Program*
412-688-7435

NOVEMBER 11-17:

NATIONAL STORYTELLING WEEK, *National Storytelling Network*
www.tellabration.org/nsw.html

NOVEMBER 12-18:

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK, *Children's Book Council*
www.cbcbooks.org

Birmingham Public Library Seeks Memories

In her autobiography *Change Me Into Zeus' Daughter* Barbara Robinette Moss remembers how she and her siblings would spend hours in the old Birmingham Public Library admiring books of art. Birmingham author Dennis Covington recalls that, after acquiring his driver's license, the first place he drove himself was the downtown Birmingham Public Library.

In April of 2002 the Birmingham Public Library will celebrate the 75th anniversary of its first central library building, now the Linn-Henley Research Library. As part of this celebration the library is collecting reminiscences from those who have used the library over the decades, those who remember the old library as a teacher and a friend.

If you have memories to share or would like more information on this project and the anniversary celebration please e-mail the library at

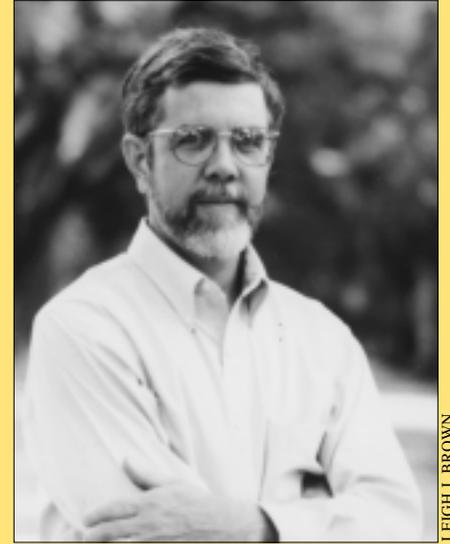
MEMORIES@BHAM.LIB.AL.US, call 205-226-3661 or mail to:
Archives

Birmingham Public Library
2100 Park Place
Birmingham, AL 35203

This information needs to arrive by December 31, 2001.

Please send your calendar items, conference and reading announcements, and award and prize notices to *First Draft*. The address is Alabama Writers' Forum, 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, AL 36130 or awf1@arts.state.al.us.

THE BACK PAGE



LEIGH J. BROWN

Ben Erickson

First Time Out

By Ben Erickson

It has been over five years since I began writing my first novel, *A Parting Gift*, which was published by Warner Books in May 2000. Anyone who has attempted to write a book and have it published knows that it takes a monumental amount of hard work, dedication, innate talent, and just plain luck to finally see your name in print.

I spent a year and a half working on my manuscript for a couple of hours each day before I felt that it was as good as I could make it. The next step was to decide what to do with it now. Since few major publishers today accept unsolicited material, I decided that my best route was to try and find a literary agent to represent me. For an unpublished writer, finding an agent is one of the deepest potholes on the

road to publication. The rejection rate from reputable agents is around 98 percent. If an agent is not reputable or doesn't have a proven track record, he can often do more harm than good, costing the novice author both time and money.

The book that I found most useful in my search for an agent was *Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents* by Jeff Herman. After reading through it, I compiled a list of agents that I thought might be interested in my manuscript, composed a one-page query letter, and began sending it out. After about twenty rejections, an agent called who wanted to represent me. We spent the next few weeks editing my manuscript, cutting out over 10,000 words, before sending it to an editor at Warner Books.

Within a few weeks, Warner had agreed to buy it. After the details of the contract were negotiated, the editor and I spent the next year working on my manuscript. Before I had been just writing for myself, but now I had an editor, publisher, and ultimately an audience to please. There were many sleepless nights when I agonized over proposed changes. Whole chapters that I had worked so hard on were cut, and I wrote half a dozen new ones to take their place. While editing proved to be a long and often taxing process, the marked up pages of my manuscript—filled with my editor's thoughtful comments and suggestions—taught me much about writing. With the editing process complete and the manuscript scheduled for publication, I thought my job was finally finished. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Almost another year would pass before my book was published, but this was by no means an idle time. Jacket copy and artwork for the cover had to be approved, and various other rights to the book were sold. I had to acquire

permission for the half dozen quotes that I had sprinkled throughout my novel. This proved to be no easy task, often requiring detailed permission agreements for each proposed use of the quote as well as paying substantial fees. Six months before the book was to be released, the publisher sent out advance paperback copies to reviewers and bookstores around the country. To augment this, I compiled my own list of local newspapers, magazines, television stations, and bookstores and wrote a personal letter to accompany each one.

Several months before the publication date, the first review arrived. I have read far worse reviews, but before they had always been of another writer's work. Even though I thought I had hardened myself against just this occasion, nothing can really prepare you for an experience that bears a striking similarity to Janet Leigh's shower scene in the movie *Psycho*. My editor was quick to point out that a review is only one person's opinion, and since then I have received many wonderful write-ups, but it is still hard to endure the roller-coaster ride that seems to come with the territory.

I was assigned a publicist at Warner Books, but much of the PR work seems to fall squarely on the author's shoulders. A dozen book signings were set up around Alabama and adjoining states. Warner printed up postcards for the bookstores to distribute before the signings, while I compiled an additional list of names and address. Whenever possible, I scheduled television spots and newspaper articles before each event.

The bookstore that hosts the signing can have a big effect on the success of the event, and size is often unimportant when it comes to choosing a bookstore. Often the smaller independent stores have an edge over the

chains in both their contacts with the local media and loyal customers who show up for every event. Even with good publicity and a helpful bookstore, I don't expect lines around the block when I travel far from home for a signing. Regardless of the turnout, if I have managed to attract some local media coverage for my book, I feel that it has been a success.

Another way I promoted my book was to stop by bookstores and meet the owner or manager personally. I would tell them a little about my book, give them some information on it, and offer to sign any copies they had in stock. If it wasn't a stock item, they would often order it while I was there.

The Internet holds great potential for getting the word out about a new book, but merely being on a Web site does little good if no one goes to it. To attract attention to my page at Warner's Web site—which contains promotional material, reviews, and the first chapter of my book—I set up a contest for a free autographed copy.

Many opportunities to talk and read at clubs, libraries, and writing conferences have presented themselves during my first year as a published author. I find this a more satisfying means of connecting with people about my book than a signing. *The Alabama Literary Resources Directory*, published by the Alabama Writers' Forum, contains the names and addresses of other Alabama authors, bookstores, conferences, libraries, and a wealth of other information that is invaluable in setting up speaking and signing events.

My first year as a published author has now drawn to a close. I've started writing another novel and settled back into my routine of working on it each morning. Maybe one day, if everything goes just right and my muse smiles on me, I might find myself traveling down the long road to publication once again.

*Once we knew the world well
it was so small it could fit in a handshake,
so easy you could describe it with a smile,
it was ordinary as old truths in a prayer*

—Wisława Szymborska

FIRST DRAFT

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