

The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum

VOL. 7, NO. 3

FALL 2000

FIRST DRAFT



FIRST LADY LORI ALLEN SIEGELMAN—
PASSIONATE ABOUT CHILDREN'S BOOKS

THE RICH LEGACY AND BRIGHT FUTURE OF WRITING FOR CHILDREN

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As school children across Alabama are readying themselves for the coming school year—buying new clothes, spiffing up back-packs, and dreaming of the perfect teacher and new friends—we decided to present the world of children's writing in Alabama. What are our children—those future readers, writers, and book-buying public—reading today? Who are our children's writers and how does this market intersect with the authors who write for primarily adult audiences?

We offer you perspectives on being a children's writer from popular young adult writer Aileen Henderson and on being part of a professional organization for children's writers/illustrators from Joan Broerman. Retired educator and children's literature expert Joan Nist recaps who Alabama's children's writers are. And Eleanor Lucas of Capitol Book & News in Montgomery, well-known for her astute observation of this line of publishing, gives her view on the genre in general.

Rounding out the issue is a feature about the Alabama Humanities Foundation's Motherhead program which helps parents help their children and themselves. And



Jeanie Thompson

because we knew that Alabama's First Lady Lori Allen Siegelman has a very tender spot in her heart for children's books, we asked her to comment on her personal experience with children's writers. We think you will be touched by Mrs. Siegelman's story of a love of reading and the world of literature for children.

With this issue we introduce a new column to *First Draft*, "Voices from 'Writing Our Stories'." Our inaugural contributor is Marlin Barton, the "Writing Our Stories" teaching writer who, in October 2000, begins his fourth year at Mt. Meigs. Barton will also serve in an administrative capacity this year, organizing visiting writers at all three DYS "Writing Our Stories" sites and coordinating teacher training and anthology production. Later this year, Frederick C. Beil Publishers will publish Barton's short story collection, *The Dry Well*. In future columns we will hear from other teaching writers, visiting writers, and Department of Youth Services faculty and staff.

Jeanie Thompson is Executive Director of The Alabama Writers' Forum.

On the cover: Alabama's First Lady, Lori Allen Siegelman, with daughter Dana.

Cover photo: Jay Sailors is a professional photographer in Montgomery who has worked for the Montgomery Advertiser, the Associated Press, ad agencies, corporations and other businesses across the Southeast.

First Draft is a quarterly journal for communication among writers and those interested in literature/publishing in Alabama and elsewhere. We encourage publication news, events information, and story suggestions. *First Draft* will grow as the needs of writers in Alabama are identified.

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Children’s books find a niche at Capitol Book & News (page 2).



Jay Sailors

Lori and Dana Siegelman share a love of reading that began before Dana’s birth (page 5).



Playwrite Laura Maria Censabela speaks with Patrick White at the Sewanee Writers Conference this summer. (page 25).

The Ups & Downs of Children's Literature

BY ELEANOR LUCAS

Why on earth would anyone want to write books for children? Kids are the most demanding, fickle, unpredictable audience there is. To further complicate matters, they're often in the presence of meddling parents who tend to have a great deal of say in what they're going to get to read. Add to those two problems nasty things called "required reading lists" which tend to suck all the pleasure out of reading at the most crucial time in a child's life, the relative obscurity in which the vast majority of writers for children's books operate, and the constant threat of censorship challenges, and one would have to be out of their mind to carry on with the craft. Fortunately, most Alabama writers have grown up with the odd bit of Southern knowledge that a touch of eccentricity (known as "insanity" outside the region) is an invitation either to write or hold public office, and therefore they are holding their own in the field.

I have been selling books for just over a decade, and early in my career I was given the rather overblown title of "Children's Literature Specialist." What this means, essentially, is that I was (and still am) the only staff member to have ever actually given birth. Other than that, thankfully, the qualifications are totally lacking in substance. My job does provide me, though, with the opportunity to look at children's literature through several different filters, which may be helpful to those "eccentric" enough to try the waters.

I would never presume to give writers advice on their craft. I count myself among the legion of booksellers who do what we do because selling someone else's book is as close as we're likely to come to writing our own. Perhaps, however, I can give some notice on the challenges one is likely to face after the pen has been capped.

The whole notion of children's literature is relatively recent. Until 1918, there was no special attention given to books for young readers as a viable market. In that year, however, Macmillan Publishing Company opened a department given over to nothing but books for children. Other publishers quickly followed suit. Two of

the major reasons for this rather late start were reflections of changes in society: early literacy rates for children were increasing, and new ideas about the education and psychology of children were taking hold (i.e., they were no longer considered merely short adults).

For the longest time, much of what was being written for this market were cautionary tales, full of references both veiled and overt to the horrible fates awaiting those children brash enough to, say, neglect washing their hands before dining. More recently, children's literature has attempted to hold a highly polished mirror up to society itself and as a result has more frequently come under fire from all who believe they have the best interest of children at heart. Cynically put, if Dick and Jane were still hanging around they would likely be confronted by the horrors of the puppy mill industry into which Spot may have been born, in an effort to open young children's eyes to the evils of the corporate world.

So there's a tightrope out there for those who would write for tender readers. Children are exposed via television and the Internet to every curve life is likely to throw them or someone they love. Shockingly high numbers of them come from single parent homes, or homes in which both parents work and are therefore absent from many of the moments of their lives. They know that life means loss. They understand that they are expected to excel at everything even when they believe they aren't good at anything. Their lives have become pressure-cooked, and there is less time in their day for anything remotely resembling what we used to call "goofing off." All these things dramatically affect what they are looking for when they look for a book.

It has been my experience that left to their own devices, children generally gravitate to the good stuff on the shelves eventually, but there is also a need for what has been ungraciously called "sub-lit." It is very telling that when I have asked authors who or what they read as children, the most frequent responses are *Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, and comic books. The very act of read-



Jay Sailors

ing—picking a book from a shelf, cracking its spine to make it easier to hold when one is also perhaps eating potato chips—is important, even when the subject matter may leave something to be desired. It will do no one any good to ignore the stiff competition books have from all manner of electronic gee-gaws, and I have long ago ceased to turn my nose up at pure escapist reading. I am always amazed when parents insist that little Johnny **MUST** pick a dry old standard to read even while they are grabbing the newest bodice ripper or white-knuckle suspense thriller for themselves, with the refrain, “I just want to be entertained.”

There comes that moment, though, when a young reader chooses a book with the potential to transform him or her in a

fundamental way. These are the books that open hearts and minds to the lives of folks they thought were different, or the story in which the problem or fear they believed they alone were experiencing is faced with courage and humor by an empathy-inducing character. This is what the very best books do, this is the power they possess. All literature reflects society, and to do that honestly and fearlessly for children involves risk.

Authors who write for children face the very real threat of attempts to ban their books from shelves in libraries and reading lists. Perhaps no other body of literature is more frequently embroiled in challenges based on suitability for the reader. Because adults run the world, we sometimes get a little nervous about letting kids in on the secrets. Some are so frightened by words on a page they can scarcely contain their enthusiasm for censorship. The good news is that most challenges are not ultimately upheld, and frankly, do a world of good for sales.

Ironically, the biggest problem facing those brave enough to continue to sail these waters may actually be the boom in children's book publishing. Every movie which appeals to children comes complete with brilliant marketing plans which include what we like to call “book as product.” Books that enjoy sales success trigger an onslaught of knockoffs. Writers for the adult market and celebrities from every entertainment corner are trying their hand at kid lit (with little success) with the encouragement of publishers hoping that a recognizable name will translate into sales. These same publishers have little tolerance for slow starters, and thus drop books from their backlist quicker than one can say “remainder.” It's a brutal world out there.

But for those tenacious few among the Alabama writing community who have enjoyed some measure of success and recognition in the field—Charles Ghigna, Mark Childress, Han Nolan, Aileen Kilgore Henderson, and Faye Gibbons, among others—the rewards are unlike those in any other genre. They know what it feels like to be the lightbulb that goes off in a child's mind and heart at the moment they learn to love to read. These writers, and those who aspire to take a place among them, offer entertainment, enlightenment, and epiphany to the most demanding and distracted readership in the literary world. These tasks may be infinitely harder to accomplish when writing for children, but they are the exacting and satisfying standards of the art.



Eleanor Lucas is the Children's Literature Specialist and Book Buyer for Capitol Book & News in Montgomery. She has written one book for children, which is currently in print only in her filing cabinet.

A First Lady's Love of Children's Books

BY JEANIE THOMPSON

First Lady Lori Allen Siegelman is known as a strong advocate of arts education in Alabama and a lover of books for readers of all ages. As part of her Children's Arts Festival in spring 2000 she included written expression by giving each student who participated in the festival a specially designed journal to take home. As each child left the festival on the Governor's Mansion grounds in Montgomery, he or she was given the journal, which was designed by Mrs. Siegelman to encourage responses with lots of room to write. Also included was an envelope addressed to Mrs. Siegelman. The first lady received more than 400 letters, and many of those youngsters remarked that receiving the journal was their favorite part of the festival. This year's festival, slated for April 17-19, 2001, on the Mansion grounds, will again feature a journal.

Children's books are a passion for Alabama First Lady Lori Allen Siegelman. Having wanted a child for many years, Mrs. Siegelman began collecting children's books during her first pregnancy. She laughs as she remembers that rather than encourage gifts of clothes or toys for the new baby girl, she asked for books.

"While I was pregnant, I discovered the poems of Eugene Field and read these to Dana before she was born. I discovered that when I read, the baby responded—she was calm." Later, Mrs. Siegelman found an original 1904 edition of Field's *Poems of Childhood* on the bookshelf of Lois Craig's home in Middlebury, Vermont. Craig, who also owned a bookshop, learned of Mrs. Siegelman's attachment to the book, and she insisted on giving it to then Secretary of State Don Siegelman for an anniversary present for his wife.

Collecting children's books has led Mrs. Siegelman to discover many favorites, including *The Yearling* by



Mrs. Siegelman's well-read copy of *Poems of Childhood*.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings; *The Education of Little Tree* by Forrest Carter; *Barn Dance!* by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault; *A Song for Lily* by Gail Lamar; and *Rechenka's Eggs* by Patricia Polacco.

As well as being an advocate for buying books, the First Lady is a passionate spokesperson for the importance of reading. When asked what she would like to tell all parents in Alabama about the value of reading to their children and making books available in their family, she said,

"Once a child learns to read, a whole world opens up to them. If you present reading as something wonderful, like eating cake, it can be the greatest gift a person will ever have besides their health."

Mrs. Siegelman remembers the excitement she experienced when daughter Dana was ready to read. Her favorite book at age two had been *Annie and the Wild Animals* by Jan Brett, Mrs. Siegelman remembers. "When Dana was ready to read it was so exciting to watch this little child sit at her little lavender desk absorbed in the books in front of her."

For younger brother Joseph learning to read happened naturally. Mrs. Siegelman recalls Joseph coming to her with a treasured book, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things*

Are, and asking that she read it for him because, he said, "I can't read, Mommie." So Mrs. Siegelman took him in her lap and read the first page for him.

"He read the next page, and the next and the next!" she said, beaming at the memory of an eager child walking through the open door of a book and welcoming a source of new life.

The First Lady's enthusiasm for her personal children's book collection should be a point of encouragement for all readers—and writers—of children's literature in Alabama.



Mrs. Siegelman and Dana.

“Henry Bobbity Is Missing *takes sibling squabbling from the ordinary into a Seussian-Sendakian world and back.*”

Alabama's Children's Writers Offer Something for All Ages

BY JOAN NIST

Harry Potter is indeed a wizard—for he has proved to a wide audience, young and adult, that children's books are good “reads.” Among the authors who are writing literature for youthful readers are a number of Alabamians; their work is receiving recognition not only through awards but also by inclusion in school English courses.

For example, an Alabamian won one of the four 1997 National Book Awards: Han Nolan, recipient of the Award for Young People's Literature, for her *Dancing on the Edge*. Nolan wrote this young adult novel, and three others, because of her interest in “young people coming into their own and finding themselves.” Another writer of works with teen protagonists is Dennis Covington. He has spoken of the challenge he faced when asked to create a play from his novel *Lizard*. The dramatic work was featured both at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and later at the Atlanta Olympics.

The works of many Alabama writers appeal to a range of audiences, preschool to adult. Mark Childress, known for his novels of magic realism, has used this technique in picture books as well: his versified *Henry Bobbity Is Missing* takes sibling squabbling from the ordinary into a Seussian-Sendakian world and back, Alabama-born James Haskins is probably the most prolific state writer of nonfiction for young people: from his *Count Your Way* picture book series to biographies, many about African-American figures. Kathryn Tucker Windham's ghost story collections, inspired by her resident Jeffrey, are enjoyed by all ages and provide special



Dennis Covington

folkloric and regional interest for schoolagers.

Two authors have written about Alabama's earliest people. Margaret Searcy has been honored for her “Factual-Fiction Archaeological Series” about prehistoric Indians; one of her adaptations of native tales, *Tiny Bat and the Ball Game*, received the first juvenile award of the Alabama Library Association. A few years earlier, Virginia Pounds Brown had been given the ALA fiction award for *The Gold Disc of Coosa*; more recently she has written *Cochula's Journey*. Both are historical novels with teenage heroes caught in the cultural clash caused by DeSoto's expedition.

On the poetic side, Alabama's youngest readers/listeners have their own “Father Goose,” a.k.a. Charles Ghigna, author of serious poetry and popular rhymes, Ghigna is the lighthearted and versatile versifier of rollicking *Riddle Rhymes* and most recently *Christmas Is Coming!* (with Debra Ghigna). Artistic books for the preschooler and beginning reader include those by Cindy Wheeler, who received her education at Auburn University. In addition to her Marmalade cat series, she has created books introducing sign language for children.



Charles Ghigna

The Coretta Scott King Award is given for “educational and inspirational” works by African-American authors. James Haskins has received the honor and Tuskegee-born Angela Johnson has been recognized twice: for *Toning the Sweep* (which draws on her Alabama family background) and *Heaven*. She is also author of picture books for younger children, as is Faye Gibbons. Gibbons has written novels for preteens, like *King Shoes and Clown*

Pockets (a title inspired by one of her sons), set in Alabama, and recently has introduced the large Searcy-Long family who have hilariously homely picture-book adventures, as in *Mama and Me and the Model T*.

Aileen Kilgore Henderson, though a lifelong writer, has called herself a “late bloomer” because her first book, *The Summer of the Bonepile Monster*, which has elements from her own Alabama childhood,



Aileen Henderson

was not published until she was in her seventies. Two other novels soon followed and more are planned for the future. Like others among this sampling of writers with an Alabama heritage, she contributes not only as an author, but also as a speaker at schools and libraries and as a supporter of others who are creating works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and picture books to enrich the world of young readers.



Joan Nist is professor emerita of children's literature at Auburn University.

How Do They Do It?

Alabama's Own Give Their Ideas About Writing for Children

“Write about what you know” is sage advice, says Debra Ghigna. “When I became a mother a few years back, my writing naturally took a turn toward the juvenile. It was a happy transition. Following my young son around and recording his exploits in verse was a joy. His childhood (as well as that of some of his friends) is captured in my poems. This ‘literary scrapbook’ documents everything from youthful sleepovers to scary visits to the mall, all seen through the eyes of a child. Perhaps, as writers, there is some redemption in living vicariously through our children after all!”

SLEEP OVER

by Debra Ghigna

(First appeared in *Jack and Jill* magazine.)

Last night all the lightning
and thunder was frightening.
And so I crawled under
your bed for a while,
beneath a big pile
of clothing and toys
(because of the noise).

So next time it's stormy
and you're looking for me,
don't worry or wonder;
if I'm sleeping over,
and it starts to thunder --
I'm sleeping under.

Rick Shelton, author of *Hoggle's Christmas*, insists, “I don't sit down to write for kids. I sit down to write a really good story. I learned that it is okay to move from strictly literary writing—to writing quality things for kids. There is some masterful writing out there for kids. And my work in schools with kids had made more difference than anything in my writing. That and having kids myself.”

Teacher and writer, Ruth Beaumont Cook, says, “Whenever I think back to my own childhood, I realize that the books I read and the ones read to me are an integral part of my memories. Experts insist that no matter how extensively technology evolves, the portable, imaginative turn-the-page world of reading and writing is here to stay. We must make sure to make time for reading to and with children so that the wonder of books will help shape their memories too.”

Gail Lamar, author of *A Song for Lily*, says, “I don't know where we would be if we hadn't had all those beautiful, magical stories told and read to us as children.” *How does she choose her subjects?* “It depends on what you really love.”

Charles Ghigna, known as “Pa Goose” to his legions of young fans, says, “Get yourself a notebook and write in it every night for two weeks. Then stop—if you can. If you can't, you're a writer. And no one, no matter how hard they may try, will ever be able to stop you from following your writing dreams. Enjoy those dreams. Follow them. Make new ones. Share them. Write of your passions, your loves, your fears, your joys. Find your writer's voice by listening deep inside. It's that little voice that says in a low, soft whisper, ‘Listen to this...’”

“We looked for years for a program that would touch the lives of a significant part of the population....”

MOTHEREAD: Alabama Humanities Foundation Helps Parents Help Children and Themselves

BY JAY LAMAR

In Alabama today more than 250,000 citizens can't read. Approximately 25 percent of the adult population is functionally illiterate. In some counties the percentage is even higher. Being unable to read keeps individuals from participating fully in their society and government, of course, but illiteracy is also linked to unemployment, poverty, and crime, and it feeds the cycle of these circumstances.

The Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF) is offering a program that directly and effectively addresses the issue of illiteracy. In December 1998, AHF became an affiliate of the Motherread program, an award-winning national literacy program started thirteen years ago in North Carolina by Nancye Gaj. Ms. Gaj, who received a 1998 National Endowment for the Humanities Medal and the Parenting Pioneers designation from *Parenting Magazine* in 2000, designed the program on a simple and obvious premise—parents will often do for their children what they will not do for themselves. Motherread is offered in schools, prisons, libraries, and other community centers across the country, often in collaboration with state humanities councils.

Motherread, which is the only statewide family literacy program in Alabama today, uses nationally recognized children's books to target parents who want to help their children learn to read and who want to improve their parenting skills and their relationships with their children. By focusing on the parents' desires for their children, and by recognizing and using the parents' own strengths, Motherread mitigates the stigma of illiteracy for the

parents, many of whom it reaches through agencies such as Even Start, Head Start, Aid to Inmate Mothers, libraries, and schools. The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, Hugh Kaul Foundation, Robert Meyer

Foundation, Susan Mott Webb Charitable Trust, Bankhead Foundation, Alabama Power Foundation, SouthTrust, Protective Life, Southern Progress, and the State of Alabama have all provided funding for Motherread.

Motherread was the answer to a long search, says AHF Associate Director Marion Carter. “We looked for years for a program that would touch the lives of a significant part of the population we don't reach with the Foundation's other



programming. Let's face it, 25 percent of the population is a significant number.

“This program goes to the heart of the hard choices and difficult circumstances of many Alabama families. As a humanities program, Motherread uses literature as a means for encouraging critical and analytical thinking—but in a family setting rather than an institutional one.”

Since 1998, AHF has hosted five Motherread training sessions across the state that have included more than 90 literacy providers. The program's three-year goal was to train program instructors in 22 counties (or one-third of the state). After only a year and a half Motherread is already in 18 counties.

According to Tara Holman, AHF's Motherread coordinator, the keys to success are offering something parents need and want, being flexible, and collaborating with existing agencies that already



“Parents will often do for their children what they will not do for themselves.”

deliver services to parents and children. The instruction and curriculum are widely adaptable and can be offered in a great range of settings. “One of my favorite things about Motherread,” says Holman, who is based at Troy State University Dothan, “is that it can be modified to meet the needs of the parent participants.”

Motherread’s reading list includes Caldecott winners, bilingual titles, and classics such as *Ferdinand the Bull* in its whole-language approach. Through the exploration of themes, discussion of ideas, and even the interpretation of art, the curriculum develops listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills equally. According to Holman, “It also helps parents with their parenting skills. To read to a child you have to bring him physically close and show patience. Thus it helps with parent-child bonding.”

Holman describes a basic premise of Motherread as “the everyday usefulness of stories.” “Parents who develop their abilities to read and think critically can apply these skills to their lives. They can develop a capacity to question their own expectations about the way things have to be.”

In its role as the state affiliate, AHF recruits and sponsors training for instructors, assists with implementation, distributes a directory of instructors, evaluates classes, and publishes a newsletter to disseminate information and keep instructors and agencies in touch with each other. Once their staff has successfully completed the training, host agencies cover the cost of the parent classes, including books (and often food) for the participating parents and children. Through a partnership between AHF and Books-a-Million, books for the curriculum are available at a significant discount.

A recent partnership with the Alabama Public Library Service (APLS) is helping Motherread reach libraries all over the state. So far, twelve libraries have Motherread-trained staff, and according to Maureen Womack, APLS Youth Services Coordinator and liaison for

Motherread, the program answers many needs: “As the role of libraries in communities changes from information centers to community centers, librarians are looking for opportunities to expand programming and services through partnering with other community organizations. Motherread is a prime example of a program that can benefit the family, and, in turn, the community. Partnerships with daycare centers, schools, churches, and job-training programs provide a base and the community decides how to implement the program based on its needs and resources. This makes it a potentially valuable program to all libraries.

“Of course,” Womack adds, “the best part is that parents and kids communicate and spend enjoyable time together building relationships. Stronger families make stronger communities.”

Literacy programs help thousands of new readers every year. They mostly begin with the basics: street signs, job ads, warning labels.

Motherread’s philosophy acknowledges that the skills gained through reading and discussing books and stories are important in the rest of life as well. That philosophy also recognizes that sharing books with a child can make a dramatic difference in his or her life. It can be a reward in itself.

For information about Motherread and to find out about future training programs, contact Tara Holman in Dothan at 334-712-0010 or tholman@ahf.net.



The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators —*Alabama-style*

BY JOAN BROERMAN

Alabama authors and illustrators who create quality children's literature thrive in the climate created by the Southern Breeze region of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Founded in 1992 as part of the international SCBWI organization, Southern Breeze is composed of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. Volunteer energy drives this active region, which puts on two conferences every year and offers working retreats geared to the professional writer or artist intent upon publishing in the children's field.

SCBWI membership worldwide has topped 12,000. The largest writer's organization in this country, and the only one focused specifically on those who create works for children, SCBWI began in 1971 when Stephen Mooser and Lin Oliver put a notice in a California paper seeking others who wanted to talk about writing for children. Sue Alexander responded. Today Mooser is president, Oliver is executive director, and Alexander chairs the board of directors, which includes Judy Blume, Eve Bunting, Paula Danziger, Tomie de Paola, Sid Fleischman, and Jane Yolen. Members are automatically part of the regions where they live, and 70 regional advisors, all volunteers, oversee regional activities.

Southern Breeze boasts many published authors and illustrators who attend conferences to network and share their experiences. Active Alabama Southern Breeze members include beloved children's authors Aileen Kilgore Henderson, Faye Gibbons, Brenda Moore, Jo S. Kittinger, and until recently, when her husband took a job in Boston, Han Nolan, a National Book Award winner.

Writing is a discipline that requires training and practice. Writing to publish demands professionalism and business savvy. Those who plan to build a successful career in writing for

children must hone their craft and study the market yet keep the joy of writing alive in their hearts. Children's writers are especially supportive of each other. When a member of Southern Breeze signs a publishing contract, the entire region celebrates. A column in the regional newsletter is devoted to recounting members' success stories.

New York editors not only speak at Southern Breeze events but make it known that this group is a source of talent to fuel their future publishing lists. Established, reputable agents have found clients at Southern Breeze conferences.

The one-day fall conference and three-day spring conference have distinct differences. "Writing and Illustrating for Kids" is held in October in Birmingham and offers more than 30 workshops from entry level to professional track, as well as numerous talks on craft from early picture books through young adult novels. This year, on October 21, editors Fiona Simpson from Random House and John Allen of *Cicada* magazine will be joined by Elizabeth Harding, a literary agent from Curtis Brown, Ltd., and other publishing professionals.

For More Information

Resources for writers, readers, and teachers of works for children abound. Besides the SCBWI in Alabama, the Tuscaloosa-based Guild of Professional Writers for Children is a regional organization dedicated to providing support and exchange of information for its members about writing for children. Membership is \$15 annually, and meetings are held the second Saturday of every month except August. For information and membership, contact Aileen K. Henderson at 205-556-0861, 10924 Big Hurricane Spur, Brookwood, AL 35444.

“Writers who plan a successful career in writing for children must hone their craft and study the market yet keep the joy of writing alive. . . .”

Springmingle is held by turn in each of the three member states. Springmingle '02! is scheduled for February 2002 in Gulf Shores. This three-day conference emphasizes professionalism and a high percentage of spring conference registrants are published. At Springmingle 2000, held in Atlanta, the topic was “Promotion with Pizzazz” and participants created press kits and showcased their school presentations at a public program. The Southern Breeze newsletter (send \$5 to Southern Breeze, P.O. Box 26282, Birmingham, AL 35260 for 2 issues per year),

and web site, <http://members.home.net/southernbreeze/>, also offer resources to writers.

The ranks of Southern Breeze grow at the rate of several new members each week. Look for books by Alabama children's authors and expect to be delighted.



*Joan Broerman is Regional Advisor of Southern Breeze.
Her book, Weekend Getaways in Alabama,
was published this fall by Pelican.*

Web Resources for Children's and Young Adult's Writers

- * The Children's Literature Web Guide is a thorough review of writers, books, and websites developed and maintained by David K. Brown, librarian and children's literature specialist at the Doucette Library of Teaching Resources at the University of Calgary in Canada. The Children's Literature Web Guide “gathers and categorizes the growing number of Internet resources related to books for children and young adults.” This may not speak directly to writers about writing but it is a source of important information: commentaries on books, websites of individual writers, lists of awards and their winners, and other resources. Brown's “secret subversive purpose” is to tempt us “away from the Internet, and back to the books themselves!” (<http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/>)
- * Inkpot is an award-winning resource and community for writers of all ages and levels of skill and interest. It offers networking through polls, chats, and discussion forums; feature articles and regular columns on the craft and business of writing; genre writing resources; and the basics of writing from grammar to copyright. Margaret Shauers' column on marketing children's literature is a regular feature. She offers publishing news—what specific publishing houses are seeking, who pays what, which magazines are

combining editorial offices, which are out of business—and tips on how to get your work read. Shauers' last newsletter (to subscribe check Inkspot website) included detailed information about Teachnow.com, a new e-book for education publishers, how to access Writers Market Online, as well as news that *Teen Live* is ceasing publication and that *Cricket and Cobblestone* are combining editorial offices. (<http://www.inkspot.com>)

- * “The Purple Crayon: A Children's Book Editor's Site” is the website of Harold Underdown, editor at Charlesbridge Publishers. Underdown draws on his years as a freelance editor and as an editor at Charlesbridge (publisher of Charles and Debra Ghigna's *Christmas Is Coming!*) for tips on making contacts, finding editors, and attracting the attention of publishers. The Purple Crayon also features an index of articles addressing specific topics: “Getting Sorted: Really Basic Information for Children's Writers and Illustrators,” “Getting Out of the Slush Pile,” “Writing Multicultural Children's Books,” and “Trends in Children's Books: The Business Side.” Guest writers include Joan Broerman of Southern Breeze, Debbie Ridpath Ohi of Inkspot, and Ana Olswanger, whose many pieces include interviews with Barry Moser, Arthur Levine, and literary agent Anne Tobias. Underdown's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Children's Books*, published by Macmillan, with Lynn Rominger, is due out in 2001. (<http://www.underdown.org/articles.htm>)

The Three "Ps" of Writing for Children

BY AILEEN HENDERSON

Writing for children is hard work. It takes an extra measure of the proverbial "three P's" for writers: patience, persistence, and postage stamps. Not only must a book appeal to young readers but also, as one writer reminds us, it must please the adults in the children's lives, too. In addition, numerous groups and individuals carefully screen children's literature and hold it to a high standard. Then, of course, the editor has guidelines the story must follow.

For those who don't give up, writing for children is worth the effort. It is an adventure that can take you anywhere, whether in the pages of a manuscript or in real life. You can be anybody, and you can take your young readers with you. The result is excitement: fan letters from children who confide their satisfactions, sorrows, or problems; who ask for more information about your characters because you made them alive; who object to your story ending and offer their own. Phone calls from adults inviting your participation in writing conferences for young authors, school visits, book signings where you meet other authors as well as your readers, awards, book tours, complimentary reviews in national publications, lunching with your editor, and of course, the royalty checks twice a year. All these are incentives for writing children's books.

One of the most necessary and pleasurable requirements for the job is reading what other children's authors are writing. It is a guilt-free indulgence that includes reading as many of the award-winning books and all others as you can manage, keeping in mind that not all of the excellent books win awards. Note who publishes books similar to ones you want to write; they will be good prospects for you. Who is willing to accept stories told in present tenses or from the first-person point of view? When I began writing, both of these were no-nos. Today it is different. Many books told in first person or present tense are not only popular, but are award winners. Even multiple POV (points of view), against the rules not too long ago, again are being used with intriguing results.

We are no longer limited to a word list or to the vocabulary the child already has at his command. The freedom is ours to challenge our readers with a wide-ranging and imaginative use of words. That is also true of the subject matter we write about. Almost any subject affecting children can be dealt with in our stories. And nowadays secular publishers are more open to references to God, and to characters who attend church, who pray, who observe notable religious days.

Until recently, adult characters could have little or no part in children's books, certainly not to aid or have an effect on the outcome of the story. But I have noted several recent books where adults take their rightful place in fictional children's lives, much as they do in the real world. As before, the adults do not solve the problems or the mystery,

neither do they do what the child characters need to do for themselves. They function more as sources of family lore, encouragement, and information. When children are convinced by the books they read that adults have nothing to offer them, that only their peers are important, they may overlook cultivating enriching relationships with older adults. Characters in books can help a child learn how to relate more successfully to older adults, which would be a plus for all ages. And I strongly believe that what we write does influence children, and that is another impelling reason for writing for the young. Mollie Hunter, the Scottish writer for children, expressed it this way: "The first light of literature on a young mind does more than illumine. A touch of glory descends, and that mind can never be truly dark again."

"I strongly believe that what we write does influence children...."

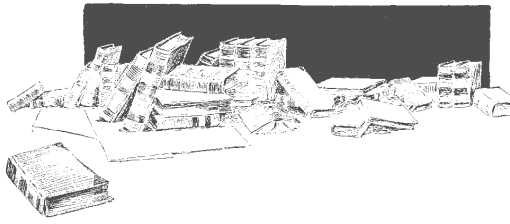


Aileen Henderson

Perhaps the most immediate reason for those of us living in Alabama to write for children is demographics. Tracy Dils writes, in *You Can Write Children's Books*, that the boom in population will peak in the year 2006, with most of the growth taking place in the Southeast. These folks will want to read books set in the South, about characters who live in the South, books that will help them understand their social and natural environment, and give them new insight to their problems. Who is in the best position to write such books? Writers who live in the heart of the South as we do.

For all these reasons, I feel hopeful about the future of children's books. But I also feel there are things we writers should be doing to make the outlook even rosier. Volunteer to tutor children in reading; bring a weekly story hour to a shelter for homeless or abused children; serve on library boards; visit schools to talk about books and writing. Any way that we can encourage youngsters to read, let's be Johnny-on-the-spot to do it. Not only will we help bring a lasting joy to them, but we will—I must whisper—also ensure that there will always be readers for the books we write.

Aileen Henderson is author of three novels for young readers, The Summer of the Bonepile Monster, The Monkey Thief, and Treasure of Panther Creek. She was awarded the Milkweed Prize for Children's Literature in 1995 and the 1998 Best Books for the Teenage from the New York Public Library. In spring 2001, the University of South Carolina Press will publish Henderson's Stateside Soldier: Life in the Women's Army Corps, 1944-1945.



R E V I E W S

JAY LAMAR, *Editor*

Farewell, My Lovelies

By Diann Blakely

March 2000

73 pp. Paper, \$12.95

There must be very few poets who would consider writing a poem that compares the relationship of T.S. Eliot and his first wife, Vivien, with that of punk rock icons Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungeon. There must be fewer yet who would take such subject matter and frame it in a variant double sestina that incorporates a mere five end-words (with occasional minor variation) over its 65 lines. But when we encounter a poet capable of molding such material with such artistry into a poem that speaks to the very depths of our humanity, we have made a rare find indeed. But that is the fortunate discovery in “Bodies” and in virtually all of the pomes included in *Farewell, My Lovelies*, the second book of poems by Diann Blakely, a Birmingham native, who published her first book, *Hurricane Walk*, in 1992 as Diann Blakely Shoaf. This remarkable collection is full of intelligent, carefully crafted, and moving poems, poems that speak as much to the heart as to the mind without invoking the first charge of sentimentality.

In some ways this is a book of marriages. Many of the poems deal with the disappointment of failed or failing domestic unions in a tone that is equally stoic and elegiac. But the poems also frequently marry two worlds of reference, the worlds of high and popular culture. In “Bodies,” the stately Modernist poet meets the archetypal punk rocker; in “The Homeless in America,” photographs of the displaced poor evoke images of grand marble statues of mythic figures, through both literal proximity and imaginative leap; and in “All Those Pretty Ones,” a chilling reference to a song from Nirvana’s *Nevermind* rubs shoulders with an extended allusion to Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan.” In all these poems, Blakely demonstrates an impressive knowledge of both artistic spheres. And in weaving together the worlds of high and popular culture so beautifully and intelligently, she reveals the futility of such distinctions, illuminating what is most human in all art, whether high or low.

These poems also display the impressive craft of the poet. Blakely is in complete control of form here, executing difficult villanelles and sestinas with grace and building careful free verse lines into short poems of grand impact. Mark Doty has called Blakely “a poet of dark and bracing powers.” I would concur and add that



those powers are deeply empathetic, beautiful, and human. This is a brilliant book by a masterful poet.

Dan Albergotti is currently at work on an MFA at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

First Books: The Printed Word and Cultural Formation in Early Alabama

by Philip D. Beidler

University of Alabama Press,
1999

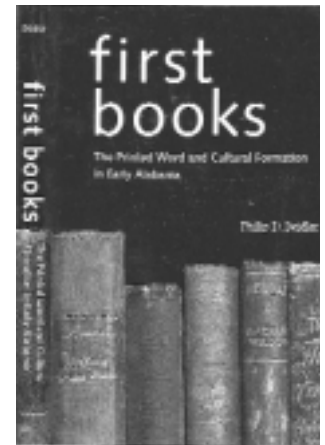
216 pp. Cloth, \$34.95

Epic poetry. Rowdy humor. Romantic history. Practical law. Apologies for Southern slavery. Such were the “first books” that Alabamians wrote. But do these generally inferior products of amateur literati warrant a serious study by one of the South’s foremost scholars and cultural journalists?

The answer is a surprising and resounding yes. Surprising because Phil Beidler has discovered a heretofore unrecognized unity among these disparate works. Resounding because in his hands we glimpse a new way of seeing how individuals once struggled to create themselves.

Beidler’s introduction is essential for understanding what he is doing. Here he portrays frontier Alabama as a society divided by gender, class, and especially race. These divisions account for the wide variety of Alabama’s first books, which he examines in the nine succeeding chapters. Judge Henry Hitchcock’s *The Alabama Justice of the Peace* (1822), for example, supplied the no-nonsense legal advice that was essential to organizing the state’s “astonishingly heterogeneous constituency.” An historical novel, *The Lost Virgin of the South* (1832), portrayed the clash of early multinational settlers with the equally diverse indigenous tribes, and in so doing raised the prospects of a multicultural—perhaps even multiracial—society in the Old Southwest.

The romantic sketches Albert J. Pickett included in his *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi* (1851) continued these themes, seeking thereby to establish a common past from which Alabamians could find common purposes. The common purpose that came to override all others—defending slavery—was the theme of Caroline Lee Hentz’s *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854). Intemperate tales published by the nationally renowned humorists J. J. Hooper (my personal favorite)



and Joseph G. Baldwin announced that Alabamians were not above self-deprecation either. Through Beidler's discussions of these books and others, we understand how the literary elite were using print to create a culture.

But Alabamians were creating even more. The differences in race and gender that Beidler describes in broad strokes are easy enough to see in Alabama—antebellum or otherwise. Differences in class may seem obvious, too, especially when examining literature written by a few gifted with the pen. But I wonder if, ironically, these writers were struck more by the lack of class division in frontier Alabama than by its presence. Hooper may have written his satires, for example, to raise alarms at the prospects of the individual man, shorn of responsibilities and ties, living for himself alone. Alabama's first books, on this reading, were less expressions of class and education than attempts to overcome an atomism that threatened society, rendering personal relationships tentative and putting institutions at the mercy of luck or personalities. These acts of self-creation thus extended beyond establishing a literary and political culture to establishing society itself—an urge to find bedrock.

This is not to suggest that Beidler is mistaken—quite the opposite. His insightful analysis of this largely ignored material brims with suggestions that we look beyond mere words and rethink our romantic myths of antebellum Alabamians. There was a frontier of possibilities where individuals were challenged to build their own world, and these first books were one important result.

G. Ward Hubbs has published widely on nineteenth-century Alabama. His most recent work studies the role of the Civil War in developing the uniquely Southern character and community. An assistant professor at Birmingham-Southern College, Hubbs lives in Tuscaloosa.

Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter

by Barbara Robinette Moss

Scribner, 2000

319 pp. Hardcover, \$24

It seems impossible that children who spent their days memorizing poetry and reading books on classical art also lived with poverty, violence, malnutrition, and humiliation. Such is the childhood of Barbara Robinette Moss and her seven siblings as told in her memoir, *Change Me Into Zeus's Daughter*.

Set during the late 1950s and



'60s in Eastaboga, Anniston, Birmingham, and Kimberly, the book tells why Moss sought a life of art and beauty.

Her father was an alcoholic, too proud to accept charity, too violent to stay out of trouble, and too charming not to control his children's hearts. Ironically, it was he who told his children one night about Venus, the daughter of Zeus. Pointing to the star, he told them she was cherished and beautiful. Venus was "a star that encompassed everything I had been praying for. I closed my eyes and made a wish: Change me into Zeus's daughter."

The author's mother provided an escape from the ugliness of their lives. She focused her children's attention on the liberal arts, since she was an educated woman whose only fault was submissive compliance.

Many chapters delightfully tell of the antics of Moss's siblings. The tales are strictly Southern with vivid descriptions of bright lilies, blue foothills, and red clay. Describing a field of gladiolas, she says "...the slender stalks had soaked up energy from the sun all day, we could hear them grow, jubilantly crackling as they pushed toward the stars. Solar furnaces. Cosmic rockets."

When she's older, Moss suffers from perceived ugliness due to several moles and a severe overbite. Ridiculed by classmates, she saves money to have the moles removed. She also works to pay for braces on her teeth and facial surgery at the University of Alabama Hospital at Birmingham. She finishes college, raises a son and is now an accomplished artist of oil painting and multi-media art.

The book's dust jacket reflects the sharply dichotomous story. On the front is a photo of the children and their mother sitting on the steps of a ramshackle house. On the back is a painting of a pretty, delicate face—Moss's self-portrait in yellows and reds. She is most like Venus in the transforming power of her starry goddess.

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

Thanh Ho Delivers

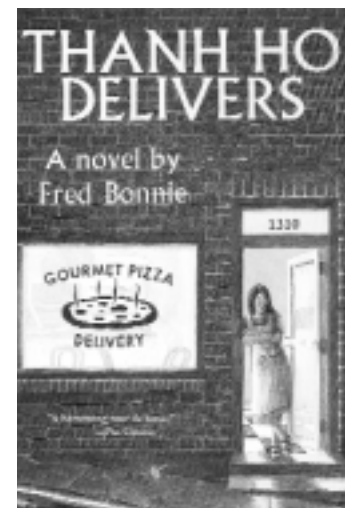
By Fred Bonnie

Black Belt Press, 2000

350 pp. Hardback, \$24.95

The late Fred Bonnie, who was primarily a writer of short stories, outdid himself in his first novel, *Thanh Ho Delivers*. It is his masterpiece, a legacy that will generate a readership for years to come.

Bonnie weaves a suspense-



ful tale about Thanh Ho, a Vietnamese girl who starts Birmingham's first pizza delivery shop. His knack for double meanings is evident in his title: Thanh delivers in more ways than one.

If you've ever been interested in Vietnam or the outcome of the war for the South Vietnamese, you'll relish this story. Even if you're not interested in Vietnam, this story will grip your heart and haunt your senses. It's a story of an innocent young girl whose tenacity for survival forces her to commit deeds that surprise the reader and even Thanh herself.

Thanh's life, altered irrevocably after her father puts her on a boat for America, becomes a symbol for Vietnam itself. She is the embodiment of Vietnamese suffering, enduring unspeakable torture and anguish both on the boat and at stops along the way to America. Even America, expected to be a haven and land of opportunity, does not offer her the respite she desperately needs. Despite her hardships, she becomes a savvy entrepreneur who seeks to support herself and her family but who must endure misguided love, deceit, and betrayal to survive both economically and spiritually.

Bonnie adds to the body of American literature a multicultural novel that is a testimonial to the human being faced with war, exile, torture, and death who prevails by drawing upon strength of character, ingenuity, and ultimately love. Alternating chapters between the present and the past, Bonnie weaves a plot that is intricate and captivating. He has created a literary character who not only typifies the struggles of her people but also stands for the resiliency of the human spirit. His novel, which gives voice to the Vietnamese people and chronicles their tribulations, forces American society to reflect upon itself in its treatment of the refugee immigrant.

Bonnie's death last May startled and saddened all those who knew him. His fans will be thankful for this last creative endeavor from a man whose sharp intellect, fun-loving spirit, and big heart will be sorely missed.

Nabella Shunnarah is a Birmingham free-lance writer and English instructor.

Plastic Soup

By Charles Ghigna

Black Belt Press, 1999

76 pp. Hardcover \$14.95

As the author of eight books of poetry, serious and sacred, as well as of excellent children's books, Charles Ghigna has taken yet another direction in his ninth book of poems. In *Plastic Soup* these are talking, or speaking, poems in which the voice is everything, even unto their dreaming author. Oscillating between "I" and "we" and an occasional third person, the speaker (not the author) adopts one role after another, from bull rider to divorcé to Thanksgiving

Day Parade balloon and a well-used bureau up attic. Things as well as people here come under the claims of the surrealists (Duchamp, Breton, 1924, Warhol, 1960) anticipated by Coleridge (1795). Written in three-line stanzas so sparsely, the poems seem deceptively simple, yet they are not. Once we enter the unconscious in the title poem "Plastic Soup," the poems are all of a piece and must be read as a book, not merely as individual poems. A key to much of the book's meaning is the speaker's assertion in "Alley Cat": "Change is my only dream."

Ghigna's central epigraph from Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" speaks of "all of animated nature" (including humans) as "organic harps" that "tremble into thought" when worked upon by the "plastic" and "intellectual" power that is both "the soul of each" and "God." Coleridge also uses the term "esemplastic," "to shape into one"; and the imagination of the poet, having this shaping power as well as "Soul," can make his words participate in the Divine by the creative response of his own imagination. For Ghigna succeeding here is a lot harder than it looks, for the poem may or may not reveal the divine quality the poet's imagination attempts to tremble into being.

But between pun and persona Ghigna accomplishes much to reward a reader. "Comic Stripped" employs a pun (we are both in the comic strip and "stripped"), and the shape this pun takes when the author reveals us cleverly searching for words "to fill the hot air balloons/ that hover above our heads" humorously places the author's own position with respect to the meaning of the epigraph. The poet will be shaping into one, and his readers will be searching as much as he does. Ghigna does this quite handily in several of the poems that employ the "I" where the "I" is persona in the dreamlike revealing of the unconscious ("The Electrocutation Complex," "Plastic Soup," "No Hunting Signs," "Night Mare").

The puns in these poems may be a critical point, as the reader may not take them seriously, or seriously enough. Perhaps the author should be aware of letting so many puns (at least sixteen) loose in one book. But Ghigna comes out in the open often enough to gain more than our assent, and other poems—"Dreamscape," "Angel Dream," and "Field Trip"—will gain our attention for other reasons, of love and trust, which is he master at describing. While the shocking conclusion of "Dream Death" will ask whether we are waking or sleeping, the journey these poems invite readers to begin is well



Picture This

Tiffany Silver Flatware 1845-1905: When Dining Was an Art

William P. Hood, Jr., with Roslyn Berlin and Edward Wawrynek, Photographs by Larry Stanley

Antique Collector's Club, 2000

350 pages with 250 color, 150 b/w illustrations. Cloth, \$95

Retired Alabama cardiologist William P. Hood, Jr., of Dothan, an avid antique silver collector for many years, offers a book rich in historical details on the art of fine dining and silver flatware produced or sold under the Tiffany name. Useful for the collector, certainly, the book is also a mouthwatering writer's reference.



See designers Edward C. Moore and E. Antoine Heller's Olympian pattern, introduced at the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1878, which offers new takes on old stories: seventeen mythological motifs ranging from "Venus born of the sea" to "Satyrs receiving instruction." Moore's "Vine" sports delicate daisy, gourd, grapevine, iris, pomegranate, raspberry, wild rose, pansy, peapod, squash, tomato vine, and wheat designs. Let the book fall open to the alluringly thin "Richelieu" marrow scoop or a nautical-theme punch ladle. Or a salad serving set in Gorham's "Naragansett," each piece with "multiple marine elements modeled from real life"—shells, fish, tiny

crabs trundling off the back of the spoon. Studying the way Moore and others designed Tiffany silver can make better writers of us all.

The Crimson Tide: An Illustrated History of Football at the University of Alabama

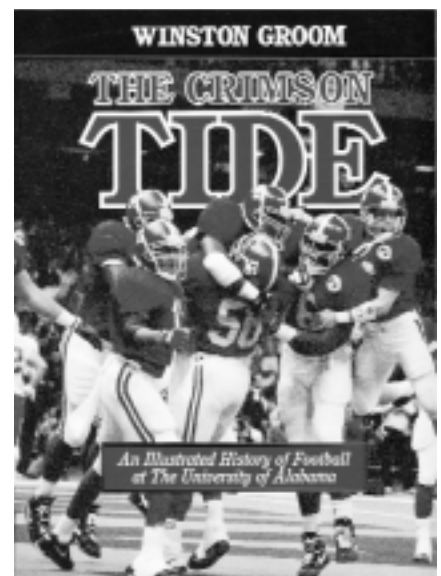
Winston Groom

University of Alabama Press, 2000

288 pp. \$39.95 cloth

Writing about the role of football in *Alabama: A History of a Deep South State*, Wayne Flynt says, "If all this attention makes Alabama football seem like a religion, it is!" Winston Groom's prodigious history of UA football is the apotheosis of our attention to this sport. The book boasts not only Groom's own narrative and nearly 300 photographs—including coaches, players, cheerleaders, and artifacts—but also essays by such contributors as actress and one-time UA cheerleader Sela Ward, former UA quarterback Scott Hunter, and writers Gay Talese and Willie Morris, among others.

Counting from 1892, when the game was introduced, to the new millennium, the book covers literally more than a century of wins, losses, and larger-than-life personalities. It is a fascinating account, and, odds are, one that will find an eager audience.



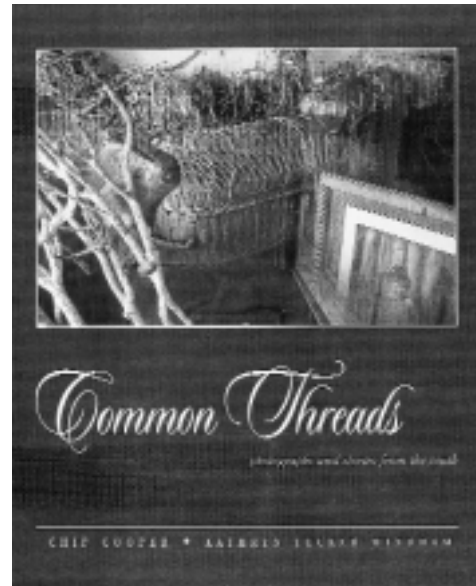
Alabama Art**Nall****Black Belt Publishers, 2000****127 pp. Cloth, \$49.50**

Trying to describe *Alabama Art* is like trying to get your arms around those 'possums in a croaker sack. It just won't hold still. Imagine instead a parade, a moving spectacle, in the medieval tradition, of characters lofty and mysterious, yet familiar. Nall, a visual artist originally from Alabama and now resident of Vence, France, is internationally connected—H.S.H. Crown Prince Albert of Monaco contributes a welcome to the book—but still

bound to his home state. His portraits of thirteen Alabama artists include Kathryn Tucker Windham, Chip Cooper, Flemming Tyler Wilson, Bill Nance, William Christenberry, Jimmy Lee Suddeth, Charlie Lucas, Yvonne Wells, Mose Tolliver, Clifton



Pearson, the late Steve Skidmore, Frank Fleming, and Nall himself. Nall senses in the work of each of these artists “the tragedy and grandeur of great art,” and he is attuned to the quality of their “technique and symbols, their intense work ethic, and their raw sincerity of human sentiments: a fresh expansion of courage, humanity, and suffering.” The spectacle is perhaps finally a morality play. Its lesson? “Alabama art is something that hits in the guts!”

***Common Threads*****Chip Cooper and Kathryn Tucker Windham****Introduction by John Shelton Reed****CKM Press, 2000****152 pages, indexed. Cloth \$45**

Fans of Alabama writer Kathryn Tucker Windham and photographer Chip Cooper are in for a big treat when they open *Common Threads*, a coffee-table book of “photographs and stories of the South.” Fifteen of Windham’s favorite stories—featuring Thurza the cook, memorable family members, and her native Alabama landscape—are lavishly presented with “photographic chapters” of Cooper’s painterly work, all introduced with an evocative essay by John Shelton Reed. The organizing principles are narrative line and color palette—with Windham’s texts framed by Cooper’s southern images from dogwoods abloom in Tuscaloosa to a sunset of rusted antique cars in Uriah, Alabama. While you’re alone, feast on the textures and mood of Cooper’s photographs, but when family or friends gather, feed them Windham’s stories out loud—with expression!

worthwhile to complete, and together the poems constitute not a diminution of language (as the puns might suggest), but an elevation of consciousness and a new spin on the meaning of awareness.

Theodore Haddin lives in Birmingham.

Goya, Are You With Me Now?

by H. E. Francis

Frederic C. Beil, Savannah

1999 163 pp.

Hardbound, \$24.95

After making his reputation with a long career of writing almost exclusively critically acclaimed short stories, especially his first volume, *The Itinerary of Beggars*, which won the Iowa Prize, H. E. Francis has published a novel. Originally from Rhode Island, Francis, retired from the English Department of UNA, now dividing his time between Huntsville, Alabama, and Madrid, Spain. The protagonist of this novel, a professional art critic, grew up in Rhode Island, has deep connections in Huntsville, and resides in Madrid. These are the places that mean a lot to Francis, and his immersion in them enhances the novel.

Goya is, in a sense, a mystery novel. The protagonist, Ferris, receives a phone call in Madrid. His best, lifelong friend, Paul Brand, is dead, and "by his own hand." Ferris is summoned back to America to serve as executor of Brand's estate, to comfort his family, and, as it turns out, to search for the reason for Brand's suicide.

No man's suicide is easily explained, and Ferris's search moves in a number of directions. Brand is divorced from a woman he cared for deeply. He had two sons, but one was killed by friendly fire in the Gulf War. He was disowned by his father, a German rocket engineer from the Peenemunde laboratories who was brought to America at the end of World War II. But these are not his reasons.

Brand, who like Ferris graduated from high school in 1963, is a world-famous photographer. He covered the war in Vietnam, the anti-war movement at home, and the civil rights movement. Like the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who was married to the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, Brand's wife, Esther, is a successful painter. Unlike Stieglitz, Brand can't stand it.

Francis has written here that vanishing subgenre, the novel of ideas. Brand and Ferris have long discussions on the nature of cre-



ativity, the limitations of photography, no matter how well it is done. Brand can capture the moment, but "he could not shape." "As an art, photography is still limited." Ferris, speaking after Brand's death with Brand's ex-wife Esther, realizes what drove Brand mad, and why his marriage to the famous painter failed. "The two arts are different, but he had a gnawing desire to go beyond the photo because his vision went beyond it, but his hand couldn't capture it. Yours probes. He wanted to do in his way what you do in yours. He couldn't survive living so near the flame he desired but was denied him."

Also mysterious is why Brand should have been so obsessed with what he thought of as a goal he should reach: to create, to shape. The answer here is his father. Not only is Heinrich Brand a German, but Francis depicts him as a raging anti-Semite, a man who literally hates Jews, hates his grandchildren when he realizes his daughter-in-law is part Jewish, and disowns the lot of them because in America he would not be allowed to do something worse. Natives of Huntsville may be displeased and surprised to read in Francis that there was in that city a corps of unreconstructed Nazis. Brand rejects utterly his father's prejudices. He has, however, absorbed the driven, absolute, uncompromising nature of his father. He wishes to be a perfectionist in the Platonic sense, to create perfect beauty.

Goya is an attempt, not entirely successful, at a Jamesian novel. Some "conversations" go on for hundreds of uninterrupted words on a side, and the style can be convoluted, even idiosyncratic. There are lectures on Joy, Art, Horror, Guilt. Not for everyone, *Goya* is paced, not slow, but for readers who enjoy James' *The Ambassadors* or Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. For them *Goya* will be a rewarding experience. A warning to photographers: it was the Goyas in the Prado in Madrid that overwhelmed Brand, that triggered his envy and frustration and made him aware of the power of the painter and the limitations of photography.

Don Noble is host of APT's BookMark.

Unsung Valor: A GI's Story of World War II

By A. Cleveland Harrison

University Press of Mississippi, 2000

355 pp. Hardcover, \$28

In his preface to *Unsung Valor*, Cleveland Harrison, now professor emeritus of Auburn University (Department of Theater), asks this questions: "Why bother to record the military experience of an undistinguished GI more than a half century later?" He answers his question in this way: "Chiefly, to help balance in some small way the weightier achievement of statesmen, generals, diplomats, and heroes by describing the ordinary work, rest, and combat of a naïve soldier boy."

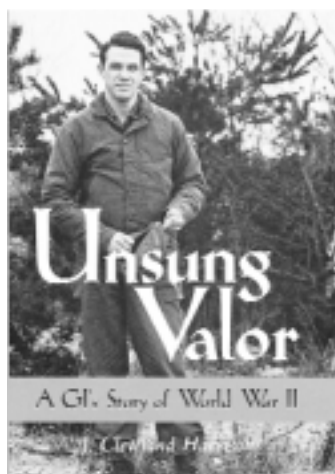
“Maybe,” he continues, “the small and fearful events I underwent as a teenage boy who didn’t shave, drink, smoke, swear, or drive a car when sworn into the Army can convey once again for a new generation war’s boredom, misery, fright, pain, and waste.”

This Arkansas boy’s attitude toward war had been shaped by ineradicable images from the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which he saw when he was ten years old, “sitting between buddies in a theater in Little Rock trying to hide the tears I shed for the lost lives of the young boys on the screen and filled with hate for war.” Personal stories of three neighborhood veterans of WWI impressed even more terrifying images on the boy.

Nevertheless, the 18-year-old freshman at Little Rock Junior College was sworn into the Army on July 21, 1943. This “reluctant draftee” became a competent and courageous soldier in France and Germany. The most memorable narrative in this memoir is a combat episode that adds a horrifying dimension to never-forgotten images. Trying to elude sniper fire in the Forest of Saaburg, Harrison and a fellow soldier dive at the same time for a small depression in the ground. Harrison makes it first: “Looking back over my shoulder as Murray reached me, I saw him straighten up, with a surprised look on his face. Blood spread across his jacket, like the diffusion of a drop of red ink on a blotter, before he crumpled on top of me. Lying beneath him, afraid even my breathing hurt him, I felt his warm blood seep through my uniform and spread across my back.” Murray was dead, and Harrison, extricating himself from the corpse, hears cries of other soldiers who have stepped on mines in the field they were crossing. “Unable to help them, I could still see in my mind’s eye the legless veteran who used to sharpen my father’s butcher-shop tools.” Harrison himself is later wounded by a mine.

This GI’s story ends on February 17, 1946. Thanks to his remarkable memory, his memoir is a notable and detailed record by a member of that wartime generation, in Tom Brokaw’s words, the “greatest” generation whose like, I believe, we will not see again.

Sara Hudson is professor emerita of English at Auburn University.



Partita in Venice: A Novel

by Curt Leviant
Livingston Press, 1999
198 pp. Cloth, \$24.00

It is impossible to describe *Partita in Venice: A Novel* without sounding like Polonius greeting the players in Hamlet. *Partita in Venice* is comical-tragical, tragical-historical, and—oh, why not!—tragical-magical. Curt Leviant intertwines fate with the magical thinking of a middle-aged narcissist, Tommy Manning, who is by turns the novel’s romantic hero and the unwitting victim of the absurdity he spins in the pursuit of past love. Thinking that “if time could be reversed, then past

events could be replayed. If so, he had a second chance,” Tommy returns to Venice to see if he can turn back the hands of time for himself and Zoe, the woman he loved and abandoned in his youth. Leviant gives us a lesson Grimm would be proud of, a narrative version of the platitude “be careful what you wish for, you might get it.” And boy, does Tommy get it. Zoe returns to him in Venice, but not in the way he suspects. Sartre was wrong. Hell is not other people; it is the consequences of our behavior toward others.

Kelly Gerald is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Auburn University specializing in Southern literature.



The Poetry of Jeffrey Goodman

After the War
Jeffrey Goodman
Robert L. Barth, 1988
20 pp. Paper, \$7.50

A Strung Bow
Jeffrey Goodman
Robert L. Barth, 2000
20 pp. Paper, \$7.50

When one is first introduced to Jeffrey Goodman’s poetry, it is immediately obvious that these poems are not for the casual reader, for they demand attentive perusal, as well as indulgence of deeper thought processing, because they are not simple poems. And that, perhaps, is their enduring beauty that lets them linger on and on long after they are read.

The reader soon discerns that these are formal poems, rhymed in the order of classical poetry, with few exceptions, notably “After the War,” a long four-page poem in blank verse.

Subjectively, they cover a wide range of activity, from *After the War's* “Roadside Cemeteries,” “World War II,” “Love’s Journey,” “At the Grave of My Mother,” “African Journey,” and “A Baker’s Dozen” to the newest collection, *A Strung Bow*, containing subjects such as “Modern Epigrams: Journal” (of 12 parts), “A Memory of California,” “African Voices: A Diary” (of four parts), “The Ship of Love,” and “For a Young Writer” among other topics. All of these depicting that Goodman is not a regional writer, his coverage being universal in scope.

How delightful here in this bustling world of new ideas to find a poet still in love with classical poetry, which is all but impossible to get published in nearly all major journals on the market today—free verse hogging the pages!

In an attempt to throw light upon the voice of Goodman, one is reminded of Robert Penn Warren’s unequivocal statement about himself, “My poetry is my autobiography,” for the reader sees much and learns much about the pen and the personal feelings behind these poems, as shown in the opening lines of “Modern Epigrams”: “the feelings I regret / Are mine,” and he goes on in part eight, saying, “I write these epigrams and they are mine./ Yet they are yours to share.”

And share the reader does as Goodman writes advice in “For a Young Writer”:

Leaving their past and present loves behind,
To float it on the rivers of the mind.

And in the same poem, Goodman concludes his own personal calling as a poet:

To forge a home and, later,
work in soil
I’m like an ironsmith who lives with his toil,
Or else I fail to forge art from desire
Though I have had the substance and the fire.

To give only a brief sampling of the sustained beauty of Goodman’s poetical language, the following are but a few of his sparkling gems of worded carats: From “Roadside Cemeteries:” “And resting, moved to meditate on stones—where epitaphs are mute.” And concluding the more than 100-line poem “After the War,” depicting a GI who’d fought Hitler and seen Germany’s horrendous treatment of the Jews that brought headlines to all civilized society, and guilt to the GI himself:

Their tragedy mocked mine like his, Macbeth’s,
My room the jury box, the box a glass
That, when I faced it, framed, revealed the mind
Of German Jews who’d loved their Germany.

And what better affirmation of faith than the last verse of “Corpus Christi Hymn: St. Thomas Aquinas”:

Yea, one and triple Lord on high,
Revile the enemies of peace;
Provide good works and, later, guide
Us to thy home within our reach.

On deeper contemplation of these poems, one cannot help but observe a lengthening influence of the late John Finlay’s sustained body of erudite formalist work permeating the pages of Goodman’s poetry. But what better modern master!

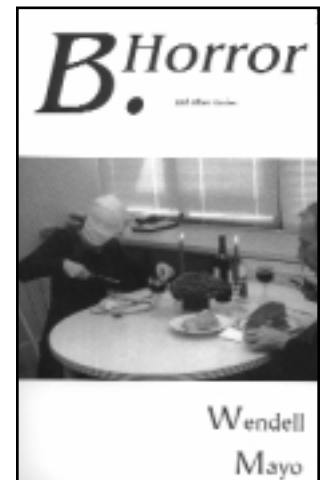
Certainly to read Goodman’s poetry is to read some of the finest crafted poetry of today that will no doubt, endure long after the whims and fads of poetry slams have faded into dust.

Ralph Hammond is former poet laureate of the state of Alabama.

B. Horror and Other Stories

by **Wendell Mayo**
Livingston Press, 1999
128 pp. Cloth, \$23.00

Canny, creepy, and appropriately poignant, Wendell Mayo’s stories in *B. Horror* revisit plots and characters every horror film aficionado will recognize and adore. “Robert’s Bride” tirelessly reinvents her appearance in a series of monstrous beauty school make-overs until what is left of her self is more creation that creature, while “Mary Magdalena Versus Godzilla” maps the tenuous relationship of a brother and sister around the presence of “Old Greenie” in their lives. Yet not all of Mayo’s stories in this volume resound so loudly of horror classics. Stories like “Going Long” makes football an occasion of transubstantiation as “that incredible pigskin ship of holy salvation sail[s] through the sky,” and “Woman Without Arms” approaches with sweetness and true tenderness wanting to know what it is like to



inhabit another's deformity. If you ever stayed up past your bedtime to watch *Dark Shadows*, if you ever suspected that your life was punctuated by the voice of Rod Serling, if you can appreciate what Vincent Price did for Edgar Allan Poe, *B. Horror* is a collection of short stories that belongs on your shelf.

Kelly Gerald is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Auburn University specializing in Southern literature.

***The Map That Lies Between Us:
New and Collected Poems 1980-2000***

by Anne Carroll George
Black Belt Publishing, \$15.95

Reading *The Map That Lies Between Us* is like sitting together on Anne Carroll George's porch, iced tea in hand, telling each other the truth. For twenty years, George has written clear, strong, intelligent poetry. She writes over and over of "the blessing of being human," whether on a riverbank at twilight, in New Orleans in the rain, at a family reunion, or quilting with her cousins.

One of George's many strengths is an economical lyricism. In "Nightrun," she writes of boating on a clear night with simple observations of the wake, the fish. The whole poem contains only seventy-two words, yet she leaves the reader with a profound sense of the vastness of "light years," and "continents shift," and the value of companionship: "But this clear night/you and I are together/and the stars/how lightly they tether us."

George's best poems, and that includes most of those collected here, are about her connections with the people in her life. By the end of the volume, the reader feels part of that intimate circle. As with her novels, George creates a vivid and complex world, full of honesty, grit, and humor. Read "The Grandmother's Story" to find out why, "When he quit pointing, things got better." Learn how "Mr. Philip Conjured Warts." Experience the sad turmoil of "Settling Aunt Annie's Estate." I don't know if George sees reality more clearly than the rest of us, or whether her poems just feel that way. I know I've never gotten quite as much as she does out of "Cleaning Out the Refrigerator."

Pulling apart poems and explaining them never works. I've tried and I apologize to both you and George; you owe it to yourself to buy the book. The volume will become one of those valued works that you read again and again. You will find yourself picking up *The Map That Lies Between Us* when you need to feel connected to someone, when you want a chuckle, when you want to remind yourself how nourishing poetry can be.

Mary Carol Moran teaches the Novel Writers Workshop for the Auburn University Outreach Program and at conferences around the country.

FIRST DRAFT

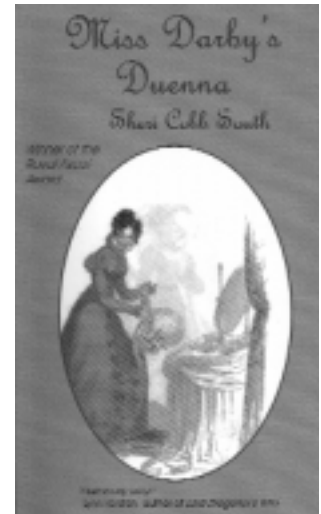
***Miss Darby's Duenna*
by Sheri Cobb South
Prinny World Press, 1999
217 pp. Softcover, \$12.95**

If one's desire is to be transported to Regency London, a time in which the strictures of mannered society gave ample opportunity for scandal and the ruination of reputations, this is the book. It concerns the machinations of one Sir Harry Hawthorne, who, in his twenty-fourth year, asks for the hand in marriage of his childhood chum, Miss Olivia Darby. Livvie, who has been quite in love with Harry all of their young lives, is somewhat disappointed in his matter-of-fact attitude toward their engagement. As she joins London's winter "season," opportunities present themselves for the romance that is missing from Livvie's relationship with her fiancé. Harry, much to his surprise, finds that he must mount a fierce campaign to keep his beloved's attention. He rather outsmarts himself by taking on the persona of his reclusive grandmother, Lady Hawthorne, complete with ballgown and ostrich plumes, to act as Livvie's chaperone, or "duenna."

As the season progresses, Harry must perform quite a juggling act to maintain his dual role of duenna and suitor. Meantime, his arch-rival has spotted the lovely Livvie as a perfect means to revenge himself of a slight suffered at Harry's hand. His pursuit of Miss Darby is met with more success than would have been possible had her fiancé, rather than her duenna, been more in evidence.

This fetching comedy of manners has such perfect pitch that it seems more like a diary of 1815 than a current work of fiction. Additionally, the plot moves briskly along, with a villain who is properly dastardly, and with more veiled identities than Sir Harry's. One will enjoy and remember a visit with *Miss Darby's Duenna*, winner of the 1996 Royal Ascot Award.

Mary Elizabeth Johnson (aka Sunshine Huff) has just completed two new books: Quilt Inspirations from Africa will be released in October 2000 by Quilt Digest Press. Mississippi Quilts is to be published by the University Press of Mississippi in March 2001.



When the Lights Came On

James A. Buford, Jr.
Black Belt Press, 1999
112 pp., Hardback, \$23.95

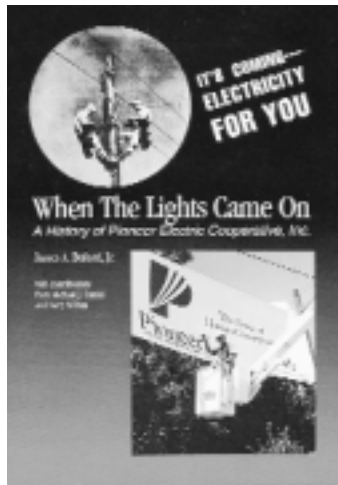
Imagine life without electricity: no television, no air conditioning, and no refrigerator. Today, this is an idea that many cannot fathom. Yet in the 1930s and 40s, there were many people throughout the United States that experienced this as reality. Although it became possible to send electricity to homes as early as 1915, rural Americans were often not included in this technological advance. This was true in Butler County, Alabama.

James A. Buford Jr.'s new book, *When the Lights Came On*, gives an extraordinary account of how the people of Butler County, determined to be treated as first-class citizens, came together to form the Pioneer Electric Cooperative. This cooperative eventually brought electricity to thousands of homes throughout Central Alabama. Realizing that there are few left who can remember the day when the first lights were turned on, Buford combed newspaper articles, scrapbooks, and the personal memories of many Butler County natives to produce this recollection of how determination and perseverance brought a modern luxury—electricity—to rural Alabama.

When the Lights Came On introduces readers to the heart and soul of many Alabamians. In spite of the resistance of the Alabama Power Company and many prominent government leaders, along with the strain of World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, these strong-willed citizens worked to improve the way of life for their neighbors and families.

This account is one that should be read by anyone who appreciates hard work, dedication, and a love for community—as well as those who enjoy Alabama history.

Amber Roberts is a senior in English at Auburn University who is completing her internship with the AU Center for the Arts & Humanities.



***The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama* Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Progress of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Alabama**

With an introduction by Harvey
H. Jackson III
University of Alabama Press,
2000

580 pp. Paper, \$24.95

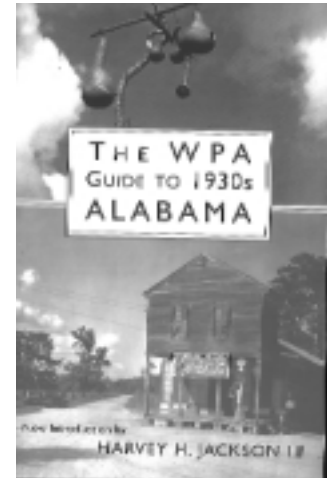
The WPA Guide to 1930s Alabama was originally published in 1941 as *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South*. It was compiled by the Federal Writers' Project as part of the Works Progress Administration under the New Deal, a relief program designed to put people to work while at the same time presenting a modern and progressive Alabama to the rest of the world. Initially used for tourist information about the state, today the *Guide* is an enlightening and educational read for anyone interested in learning about "the Deep South."

What makes this book fascinating is the portrayal of Southerners at a turbulent point in history. The characters of the South represent all walks of life and this guide takes a unique view of a state trying to break the stereotypes of a backward "land of cotton." The book begins by stating this mission: "Alabama is in reality a region where sharply contrasted influences have shaped the manners and customs of the people."

The new introduction by Harvey H. Jackson III provides the background setting of the construction for the *Guide*. He tells the story of the work that went into the book and the people who played instrumental roles in writing, editing, and researching about an Alabama that would be appealing to a changing nation.

The *Guide* includes 120 black-and-white illustrations. The illustrations are especially interesting to anyone from Alabama, providing a glimpse of the past that reminds us of a simpler time. Some images remain the same, such as the sand dunes in Fort Morgan and the blooming azaleas in many small towns. Alabamians will appreciate this book, which as Jackson notes, brings us to a place in history "from whence we came."

Jill Casavant is a senior in Technical Writing at Auburn University.





Voices from “Writing Our Stories”

A NEED FOR STORIES

BY MARLIN BARTON

I will soon begin my fourth year of teaching creative writing to juvenile offenders at the Mt. Meigs facility of the Alabama Department of Youth Services. I've taught literature and writing at a number of universities and to a wide variety of students, but I have to say that teaching at Mt. Meigs has been the single most rewarding teaching experience of my career. Teaching these unique and troubled boys has given me an opportunity like no other to show students the power of language and literature.

I didn't know what to expect the first time I drove past the guard house, through the front gate, and then walked into the classroom at Mt. Meigs. I knew that I had entered a world that was very foreign to me, but I had done some speculating. My instinct told me from the beginning that these boys would have stories to tell, important stories. They did not disappoint. They wrote about the frustration of being locked up, about the pain of separation from friends and loved ones, and they wrote about making poor choices, including the use of drugs and violence. Their stories were sometimes shocking, and I had to learn how to take them in stride. One student wrote about his father beating him regularly; another wrote a poem about hiding beneath the front porch so that he could escape. Still another wrote about his stepfather beating his mother to death on the kitchen floor.

I once asked a student to write about a time when he first learned that adults weren't perfect, when he understood that they had fears and made mistakes. He looked at me blankly, and I knew before he spoke that the assignment wouldn't work. “Mr. Barton,” he said, “you got to understand the kind of family I grew up in. Things weren't too good.” I realized that there had never been a time in his life when, like most children, he'd felt safe because of the simple presence of an adult.

I've had three major goals in teaching these students. Like any writing teacher, I want to improve my students' writing skills. I also want to offer writing to them as a kind of therapy for the problems they face—a way of expressing their anger, fear, frustration, and depression in a positive way. And, once they've begun to write, I want to offer praise and give them something to increase their sense of self-worth. This writing class is craft-based. In other words, the students don't just write their feelings (as important as this is); they learn how to build and shape a poem or story the way a cabinetmaker learns to build a cabinet. And as they come closer and closer, through rewriting, to a finished work, the more praise I can give them and the more sense of accomplishment they can feel. I've seen great pride in the faces of students after finishing a work. And at the end of each year, when we hold a publishing party for *Open the Door*, the anthology of their poetry and fiction, the

students who read to the crowd, which includes members of the media, are bursting with pride.

Other than this growth in my students' level of confidence and pride, I've also seen changes in attitude. One student early on wrote very violent stories. Then one day, and I'm not sure why, he wrote a very sensitive story about a boy making a vase on a pottery wheel in art class. The boy in the story feels good about what he's accomplished, and there is a sense of bonding between the student and the teacher, a sense of trust develops. I told him how good the piece was, and he said, “I don't know why I was writing all that violent stuff.” Because you needed to, I thought, and now maybe you're beginning to move beyond it. Perhaps it was his learning the craft of writing that made him want to write about creating art in the form of a vase.

Another student showed a great deal of anger toward women in his poems and stories. One day I gave the students an assignment to write a story from the point of view of someone very different from them. “For example,” I said, “you might write from the point of view of an old woman. But here is the catch,” I said. “You have to give the character some desire or fear that you have.” I let each of them decide on a character, except for the student who had been writing so negatively about women. I went to him and told him to write from the point of view of a teenage girl. He ended up writing a story about a girl who has to tell her boyfriend that she's pregnant and HIV positive. The story was very sympathetic toward her, and he later wrote other work sympathetic toward women. I'm not a psychologist or counselor, but I can't help but feel that some change in his attitude toward women began to take place, and it came through his use of language.

These kinds of successes don't happen every day, but with this program the students are given an important opportunity to learn and grow in unexpected ways, and they are being told that there are people out in the world who want to hear what they have to say, that their voices matter.

Other than the simple reward of helping these students, which any teacher would feel, I've found that reading their stories and seeing what they can do with language continues to keep me inspired as a writer by reminding me of the basic need we have for telling and hearing stories. Stories, it has often been said, help to tell us who we are, and, hopefully in the case of these boys, maybe who we can become.

Marlin Barton graduated from the University of Alabama and received a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Wichita State University. His collection of short stories, The Dry Well, is forthcoming from Frederic C. Beil, Publishers.



From the Field A VERY USEFUL THING TO DO BY JEANIE THOMPSON

The most useful thing I did this summer was sit in a rocking chair for two and a half hours, talking writing with a fellow poet on the front porch of Stirlings, an on-campus coffeehouse at The University of the South. How did this come to be? Through the generosity of the Sewanee Writers Conference, I attended two weeks of craft lectures, workshops, and readings as a Walter E. Dakin Fellow (funded through the estate of the late Tennessee Williams) along with 104 other poets, fiction writers, and playwrights. Most of the time we were moving through fairly deep waters of contemporary writing.

Poet Wyatt Prunty has directed the Sewanee Writers Conference since 1990, bringing together some of the very best writers in three genres—fiction, playwriting, and poetry—with editors, agents, publishers, and those who are in beginning and intermediate stages of careers.

The Sewanee setting is remote (on the mountain near Monteagle, Tennessee), cool in the dead of summer, and in close proximity to Southern literary heritage. The dorm in which I was housed, with eleven other writers who hailed from California to Canada, was just across the street from the cemetery where Andrew Lytle, Allen Tate, and Peter Taylor are buried. As conference tradition requires, late one night we gathered in the dark cemetery for a graveside reading. With the aid of candles and one flashlight, Prunty read aloud Tate's "The Swimmers" to those assembled around the poet's grave. It was eerie, to say the least, and gave that poem an especially terrifying resonance.

What makes Sewanee unique among most writers conferences is its duration. Not a drive-by sort of conference, the two weeks in residence give a writer time to unburden herself of other considerations and think about writing, pretty much day and night. Not only did I take workshops every other day with poets Dave Smith and Mary Jo Salter, but I also had the opportunity to dine with



Fiction faculty member Barry Hannah and Walter E. Dakin Fellow Thomas Moran in conference on the Sewanee campus.

them, talk informally at various functions, have a conference with Salter, and hear both of them give formal readings, and, in Smith's case, a craft lecture.

I knew that I wanted to concentrate on poetry, but I also wanted to soak up some basics of playwriting. I was not disappointed. The playwriting workshop was lead by master playwright Romulus Linney (whose adaptation of Ernest Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* opened last month in New York) and his colleague Laura Maria Censabella.

Just sitting in one playwriting workshop with Linney and Censabella helped me understand how a play comes into being and how to get the hang of writing an opening (Linney: "Get 40 of the best plays you can find and read the first five pages."). Later, at his craft lecture, Linney took us through Chekhov's process of revision that resulted in *Uncle Vanya*. No one left that lecture with the idea that writing is easy—far from it—but we all left with a key to the process: the absolute necessity to make revision of how one sees one's life key to the writing process.

Other writers on faculty included poets Andrew Hudgins and Mark Strand, fiction writers Erin McGraw, Barry Hannah, Padgett Powell, Alice McDermott, Diane Johnson, Claire Messud, Lily Tuck, and Francine Prose. Throughout the two weeks, editors from *Harper's*, *The New Criterion*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Oxford American*, *The Missouri Review*, and *The Sewanee Review* visited us. Agents Gail Hochman and Georges Borchardt talked business, as did publisher Peter Mayer from The Overlook Press, which publishes the Sewanee Writers' Series. And a formal poetry panel heated things up a bit when Robert Richman and British poets Jon Stallworthy and Dick Davis discussed "The State of Poetry."

I would so like to introduce to Alabama many of the fine poets, novelists and playwrights I heard read from their work during the fellows and scholars readings.



Playwrighting faculty member Laura Maria Censabella meets with Sewanee Scholar Patrick White.

During these morning readings, we heard from many outstanding writers who had one or two books to their credit. They ranged from all over the U.S. and Canada, and the Forum will definitely keep track of their Southern book tours so that if it is possible to bring them to Alabama events, we will do so. Several of the writers living in contiguous states have said they would be interested in visiting the DYS “Writing Our Stories” sites.

And what of the Alabama Writers’ Forum at the Sewanee Writers Conference? Although this was a personal time for me, I found a most interesting phenomenon developing that I wanted to share in *First Draft*. It went like this. Someone would approach me at a party or waiting for a reading to begin, “Were you the founding editor of *Black Warrior Review*?” I would say, “Well, yes, my classmates and I did that at UA many years ago.” Then the inquirer would get a look of incredulity and say, “Well, how do you get into that magazine?” I would admit that I don’t really know, and that while I’ve appeared in *BWR*’s pages, I’ve also been rejected more than once.

But how gratifying to be recognized in this way. In the finely

honed literary world where serious writers gather, Alabama’s *BWR* is something to which writers aspire. I was proud to be able to claim kin.

Sewanee was a battery-recharging experience, and one most welcomed by this poet, who has spent most of the last eight years concentrating on focusing the Alabama literary community’s sense of self. Everyone needs a retreat, and I highly recommend the Sewanee Writers Conference (which AWF Board Members Peter Huggins and Ruth Beaumont Cook have also attended in previous years).

I want to close by saying that what makes this conference run seamlessly is the fine staff that Prunty has assembled. Conference Coordinator Cheri Bedell Peters is a wonder of organization and cool management; the eleven other staff members keep things moving—from hospitality to vans to hanging the 102 photographs of writers who have served as faculty in the previous years. (Among those staffers are Alabamians Brad and Juliana Gray Vice, University of Alabama graduates who now live in Cincinnati, Ohio.)

To add your name to the Sewanee mailing list and receive next year’s four-color booklet about the conference, email cpeters@sewanee.edu.



Fiction faculty members Claire Messud (left) and Diane Johnson are flanked by fiction writers Audrey Petty and Ken Foster during a Sewanee fiction workshop.

L I T E R A R Y N E W S

AHF HONORS

The Alabama Humanities Foundation will hold its annual Humanities Awards Luncheon on October 20 at noon at the Wynfrey Hotel in Birmingham. Now in its eleventh year, the Awards Luncheon honors individuals and corporations who have made exemplary contributions to the public understanding and appreciation of the humanities.

This year, the Humanities Awards honor Kathryn Tucker Windham and Dr. James D. Yarbrough.

Storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham is, according to AHF Director Robert Stewart, a "humanitarian in the truest sense of the word" as she has dedicated herself to the "preservation of Alabama ways of life through her writings and photographs, her collection of stories from our state's forgotten areas, and her reflections on Alabama on public radio programs."



Kathryn Tucker Windham

Since November 1989, Jim Yarbrough has served as dean of the University of Alabama's College of Arts and Sciences. Architect of the newly minted Blount Undergraduate Initiative—a program offering the advantages of a small liberal arts college within a large state university—Yarbrough believes strongly in the value of interdisciplinary learning.



Dr. James Yarbrough

"Knowledge doesn't have neat compartments," he insists. Yarbrough served two terms as board chairman for the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

Keynote speaker of the awards luncheon is Douglas Brinkley, director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies and a Distinguished Professor of History at the University of New Orleans. He is author of *Rosa Parks* (part of the Penguin Lives series), *American Heritage History of the United States* (Viking Press, 1998), and *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House*, which was named Notable Book of the Year by *The New York Times*. In addition to serving as an historical consultant and commentator for numerous television documentaries and National Public Radio's Weekend Edition, Brinkley is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and serves on the Board of the National Faculty.

Katherine "Kakki" Brooks, AHF board member and Huntsville civic leader, serves as chairwoman of the 2000 Awards Luncheon Committee. Tickets for the October 20 event are \$35 and \$100;

tables are available. To order tickets or for more information, contact the Alabama Humanities Foundation at 205/558-3980 or visit their website at www.ahf.net.

NEW PUBLISHING HOUSE OPENS

A new independent general trade publisher, NewSouth Books, has opened in Montgomery. NewSouth will publish regional books of national interest under the imprints of NewSouth Books, primarily non-fiction, literary fiction, poetry, folklore, and folk art titles exploring the history and culture of the South; Junebug Books, which will specialize in children's chapter books, including African American and Native American subjects; and Court Street Press, which will provide custom, short-run, on-demand, and subsidy publishing services on any subject.

The partners of the new company are Randall Williams and Suzanne La Rosa, both formerly with Black Belt Publishing, also of Montgomery. NewSouth, Inc., is located in the Moore Building, Suite 309, 217 South Court Street, Montgomery, AL 36104. Phone: 334-834-3556. Fax 334-834-3557.

ALABAMA VOICES

Alabama Voices V winds up this fall with programs in Selma and Jasper. Charles and Debra Ghigna will be speaking at several schools on October 10-11 in Selma hosted by Selma-Dallas County Public Library. The Ghignas are celebrating publication of their new book, *Christmas Is Coming!* a collaborative work, featuring holiday poems illustrated by Mary O'Keefe Young.

Writer/teacher Rick Shelton will spend October 17-18 at the West Jasper Elementary School in Jasper. Shelton, author of *Hogge's Christmas*, will work directly with students to model writing. Aileen Henderson will visit the school for two days during National Children's Book Week. Henderson is a frequent reader at schools.

Other Alabama Voices VI will kick off in January 2001. Authors include Honoré Jeffers, Tom Franklin, his wife, poet Beth Ann Fennelly, and Patricia Foster. Other programs and specific dates for the Alabama Voices VI series, jointly sponsored by the Alabama Writers' Forum and the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities, will be announced this fall. To be put on the mailing list and for more information call the AU Center for the Arts & Humanities at 334-844-4946.



The Alabama Writers' Forum gratefully acknowledges those who make possible literary arts programming in Alabama.

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THE BACK PAGE

BY KENNETTE HARRISON

You are a writer. Your pen travels the empty page alone. Your hand seals and stamps the envelope. You read rejection letters with resignation or acceptances with joy—alone. But you are connected, and you are indebted. You know that for a certainty when the day comes that you publish a book.

A publisher has faith in a collected body of your work. You are astonished when that work garners honor in three states. You alone receive exciting letters of recognition. You are invited to book signings, awards dinners, parties honoring you. You are asked to judge contests, write articles, speak at public functions. But you know in your heart that you are not alone. So how do you say thank you?

I believe the first way to really acknowledge contributions of others to our writing is to recognize on a deep level our connectedness. To writers, who frequently experience feelings of being both apart and part, this should not be a difficult task. To pay personal acknowledgment in our lives, we can plunge into the pool of our past and present. We can transcend the strictures of solitude and actively search our memories and our hearts for those who have been the underpinning of our writing efforts.

I have found ways beyond words to thank my parents, both of

whom wrote for the fun of it and whose example made writing seem to me as natural as breathing. I have expressed my gratitude to my children, teachers, and friends with words or flowers or an occasional poem dedicated to them. Among my hidden helpers have been my neighbor, my taxi driver, my mail carrier, my angel, and close women friends who are my sisterhood. But what about my writer colleagues and friends?


I believe my first responsibility to them is to be the best writer I can be—to do that very writerly thing of retreating into my deepest self that private sanctuary where I am apart and see everything differently. There are writers who are entirely reclusive, but I revel in being able to emerge from the wonder-filled creative epiphanies and rejoin my fellow writers.

My publisher, John Chambers, recently received a certificate from the 2000 Oklahoma Book Awards for my book, *Dowsing for Light*. That is a small thing to give John, who saw my manuscript in a contest his magazine, *Elk River Review*, sponsored and told me he wanted to publish a book for me. It is certainly not sufficient reward for a man who has suffered the frustrations of all small press publishers. I work hard to publicize my own book because small presses do not have resources to do this on a large scale.

Close friends who are poets are easier to say thank you to. I have edited several manuscripts for them. I buy their books when possible. I listen to new poems.

Reading professional literature and paying attention to newly published works of my more distant poet colleagues have been ways of supporting them. Buying books and reviewing them is another way to appreciate the person and the writing. I try to be a small voice in publicizing works of far-flung writers who have contributed to my growth and success as a writer.

Lastly, the arts structure on a statewide or national scale needs my support. Joining, volunteering, and working professionally in arts-related organizations are ways of being grateful for their help. Being a “joiner” is not always consistent with my solitary nature as a poet; however, these organizations make possible more communication between writers, a collective voice in lobbying for funds for the arts, the creation of scholarships for emerging artists, artists in the schools, and arts fellowships in many fields. I join.

For most of us, especially writers who experience not only solitude but isolation, there is the tiny but persistent voice which repeats, “I am more. I am more.” We are more, as humans and as writers. Being respectful and grateful for each other is part of what builds a web of connectedness in which we are embraced by each other and not only hear that voice, but experience the expansive self which allows us to write about what we have not personally experienced, but what we as members of life’s community know in our bones. Thank you, dear writers. Thank you. 

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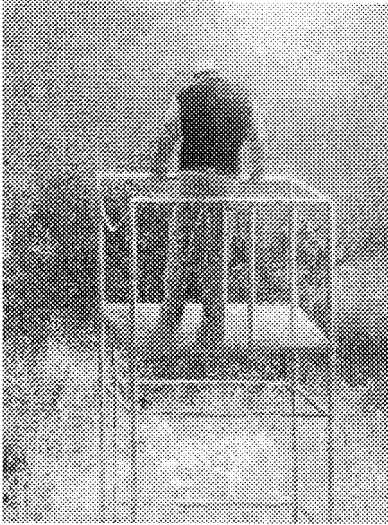
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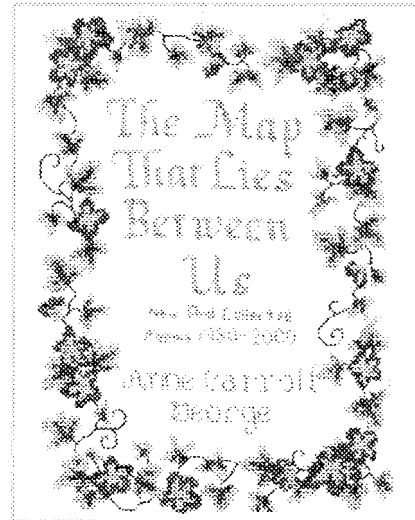
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