

# FIRST DRAFT

THE JOURNAL OF THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM • FALL 2010

**OLD IS NEW AGAIN**  
**Sean Hill On Broadsided**

**SWEET 16**  
**Alabama High School**  
**Literary Arts Awards**

**MOCKINGBIRD TURNS 50**  
**A Look Back**



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Marianne Moates Weber is a freelance writer and author of *Truman Capote's Southern Years*. She recently rotated off the AWF board of directors. The Forum thanks her for her service.

## The Alabama Writers' Forum

### Writers Find a Home

"How can I find you?" a friend asked before I moved to a rural town few people, including me, had ever heard of—and I grew up in Andalusia. "My new town of Monroeville just made the news," I said. "Ever heard of *To Kill a Mockingbird*?" Within a few months, everybody and his brother had heard of Monroeville's *Mockingbird*. When I moved there in 1961, I fell into a swirl of media frenzy and town gossip. Gregory Peck was meeting with Harper Lee to explore his role as Atticus Finch. Truman Capote, who'd grown up next door to Harper Lee, was on his way home to visit kin. Capote's aunt, Mary Ida Carter, was planning a garden party for the authors to celebrate their successes. We gathered on her farm one Sunday afternoon when her orange and yellow daylilies were in bloom. Capote's contribution

to his aunt's soiree was a case of smuggled-in Jack Daniels bourbon which we enjoyed into the late hours.

During those days in Monroeville, I pushed my infant son in his stroller from my house on South Mount Pleasant Avenue to the court house, then back around the block past the elementary school, oak trees, and large clapboard homes. (Surely *that* one was where Boo Radley lived.) We passed a small pasture where Miss Sook and Buddy took little Queenie for romps, and Capote found inspiration for *The Grass Harp*. I developed a kinship with folks who saw themselves or a friend in those books. That's when I decided to become a writer. I figured if Lee and Capote could do it, then surely I could. Looking back, I chuckle at my naïveté, but marvel at my determination. I dug out the manual typewriter and taught myself to do more than hunt and peck. Reality soon met ambition, though, and I was very much alone with my thoughts and a sheet of paper. There was no one to talk to about writing. The only writers I knew were Capote and Lee, who were in Kansas chasing a murder story. I yearned for support, nurturing, mentoring. The more I wrote, the more I was driven to write. I had chained myself to Capote's "merciless master" down in the dungeons of burgeoning creativity.

Eventually the *Montgomery Advertiser* hired me as a stringer reporter. Mostly I reported on wrecks and other gory happenings like the death of a neighbor boy in Vietnam. I started a newsletter for the church, wrote articles, entered writing contests, and hoped and prayed for a breakthrough. A move to Birmingham in the 1970s opened a larger world of networking, and writers in various stages of birthing their careers nosed forward. We literary orphans glommed onto each other to celebrate our successes and mourn our rejections. It would be nearly two decades before we had a place to call home, and this would come with the Alabama Writers' Forum. Anything that's "writer oriented," you'll find the Forum's hand in it.

Now it's time to rotate off my AWF board of directors "home" after my three-year tenure. Still, when anybody asks today, "Where can I find you?" I don't worry too much about business cards or hastily scribbled phone numbers. "Check out the Alabama Writers' Forum Web site," I say. And I smile when I think how far we Alabama writers have come to find a home.

Marianne Moates Weber

*First Draft* is a journal for writers, readers, editors, publishers, and those who support and work in the literary arts.

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Founded in 1992, the Alabama Writers' Forum is a not-for-profit, statewide literary arts service organization whose mission is to advance the art of writing by promoting writers, educating young writers, and cultivating Alabama's literary arts. The Forum partners with other not-for-profit arts organizations, schools, libraries, and like-minded entities across the state in a range of public programs and educational endeavors. Some of its partners include the Alabama Alliance for Arts Education, the Alabama Department of Youth Services, Alabama Southern Community College, Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities, Auburn University College of Liberal Arts, and Old Alabama Town/The Landmarks Foundation. In addition, the Forum works in communities to promote local literary arts programming and to support teachers of creative writing.

Sustaining funding for the Alabama Writers' Forum comes from our major partner, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, with additional funds from our extensive membership base, education contracts, individual contributions, and corporate commitments. Additional funds for special projects have come from the Alabama Children's Trust Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Southern Arts Federation, and the "Support the Arts" Car Tag Fund.



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# MOCKINGBIRD AT FIFTY

## A Sacred Text Revisited

by Don Noble

As the entire nation and especially Alabamians know, this is the fiftieth year since the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel came out in 1960, was soon a best seller, won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and the movie, starring Gregory Peck as Atticus and Mary Badham as Scout, with a shadowy Robert Duvall as Boo Radley, was a huge hit. It was nominated for eight and won three Academy Awards.

In the years since publication, as many journalists have noted, the novel sold upwards of thirty million copies by the year 2000 and probably ten million more since then, has been translated into forty-plus languages, and is admired, even revered, the world over. As Nancy Anderson has reminded us in her *Encyclopedia of Alabama* entry, *Mockingbird* has been selected more than any other novel in America for projects often called “one city, one book” or “The Big Read.”

The book is perhaps the most widely assigned book

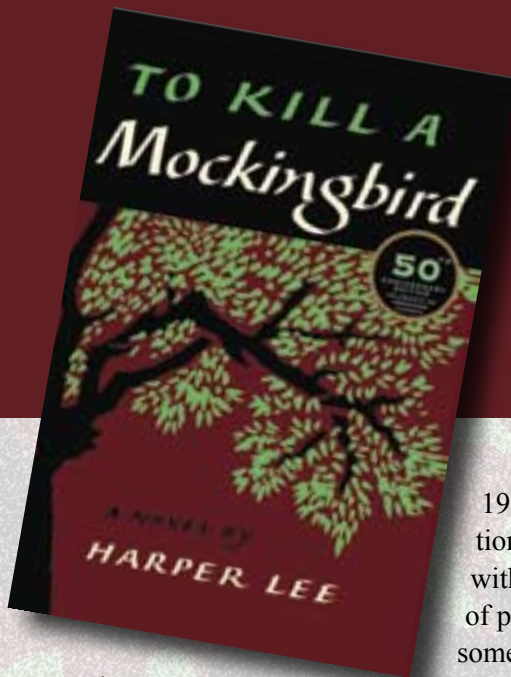
in America, and in a 1991 survey conducted by The Library of Congress *Mockingbird* was rated second only to the Bible as the book that made a “difference” in people’s lives.

There have been, over the years, innumerable testimonials to the ethical/moral power of this book, but one of the most recent is by 2009 Harper Lee Award winner Rick Bragg. In an article titled “The Book That Changed My Life” in the May 2010 *Reader’s Digest*, Bragg writes of his first reading the novel in the mid-seventies.

He reveals how “the ragged 50-cent paperback shook my conscience, broke my heart, and took me into its landscape forever.” Alabama was still in the turmoil of the civil rights revolution, but *Mockingbird* helped this one boy understand “right and wrong, kindness and meanness.” Bragg has a lot to say about the effect of the novel on him, but he perhaps summarizes that effect for himself and many others by saying,







“There was more to me after reading that book than before.”

The nearly incredible affection for this book is well-deserved. Few novels hold up for even a few months, never mind half a century, and *Mockingbird* seems as fresh today as ever. The voice of Scout is appealing and in no way dated. The minor characters like the unforgettable Dill, Aunt Alexandra, Calpurnia, Mrs. Dubose, Sheriff Heck Tate, and others are finely drawn and memorable, the plot is straightforward, and the plot endings—Tom Robinson’s fate, the children’s nearly fatal encounter with Bob Ewell, and the heroic emergence of Boo Radley—are not predictable. Most important of all, in my opinion, the language itself holds up.

There is no more stringent test of style than being read aloud, and in Monroeville on July 15, 2010, I heard large swaths of *Mockingbird* read aloud.

It was amazing. Read aloud and slowly, the narrative voice is convincing, the dialogue is sound, and the humor comes through even better than on the printed page. It was not surprising that the chapter read by Mary Badham was smooth, authentic, and convincing. After all, she played Scout in the movie. But as one reader after another, Southerners and visitors, took their turns, the language itself held up. One reader, a visitor from San Diego, was thrilled to stand in on short notice for a missing reader, and his rendition was entirely satisfactory. It seems there’s just no ruining the prose of *Mockingbird*.

To test the truth of this assertion about out-loud reading being an acid test, try it for yourself.

*Mockingbird* has now achieved nearly universal acclaim, but it was not always so. Right at publication in

1960, there were reviewers who had reservations. Reviewers found fault, justified or not, with the too-sophisticated voice of Scout, the pair of plots that are united only at the end, and what some saw as the stereotyped characters of poor whites, black maid, etc.

Most of these quibbles seem irrelevant now.

There were few articles, and those mostly about Atticus as lawyer, let alone books about *Mockingbird* for a rather long time. Claudia Johnson published *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries* in 1994, thirty-four years after the publication of the novel. There is another collection now, Alice Hall Petry’s *On Harper Lee*, a collection of essays in 2007, from the University of Tennessee Press.

Part of the reason for this dearth of criticism may be that *Mockingbird* seemed self-explanatory to most readers. Ms. Lee herself underlines this sentiment in the front matter to the thirty-fifth anniversary edition. She refuses to write an Introduction, instead writing a short Foreword: “*Mockingbird* still says what it has to say; it has managed to survive the years without preamble.”

Indeed, *Mockingbird* was for decades considered merely popular fiction, not sophisticated “literary” fiction and so, unlike *Ulysses* or *The Sound and the Fury* or *Gravity’s Rainbow*, needed no explicating or “unpacking,” as the phrase was then.

In the early 1980s when lists of works by Southern authors were being compiled for inclusion in the authoritative *The History of Southern Literature*, edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., et al., *Mockingbird* did not make the cut. The twenty-five or so foremost scholars of Southern literature did not feel that *Mockingbird* was literary fiction. In that volume, Harper Lee is mentioned only very briefly in the essay on Truman Capote, and then *Mockingbird* is summarized in one



paragraph in the essay “The Recent South: 1951-1982.”

This may seem ridiculous now, but it was the case. I was involved in the planning and list making and contributed a chapter on “The Future of Southern Writing.” It may be of interest to know that the books of William Bradford Huie were excluded on the same grounds: popular fiction.

So the absolute reverence for *Mockingbird*, and the attention being paid to it is, broadly speaking, fairly new.

But revered indeed, it is now. In fact it has achieved the status of literary sacred text.

This is often triggered by the fiftieth anniversary. *The Sun Also Rises* was fifty in 1976, *The Great Gatsby* in 1972. At the meeting of the James Joyce Society at the MLA in 1972, Professor Weldon Thornton presented a paper for *Ulysses* at fifty on “*Ulysses* as Sacred Text.”

What happens when a work of art becomes a sacred text? Well, some fans are likely to insist that it is perfect, although thinkers since Plato have understood that this is by definition impossible.

Devotees of the sacred text declare it to be self-explanatory as well as perfect, which is more sensible with *Mockingbird* than with *Ulysses*, since *Mockingbird* is in fact readily understood. In any case, when the sacred text is declared to be an icon, this brings out, as you might guess, the iconoclasts, those critics, sincere and ingenuous, trained and untrained, professional and amateur, who will throw rocks and declare the work of art to be deeply flawed, not perfect at all. (The two easiest roads to attention-getting as a critic are to discover something relatively

The two easiest roads to attention-getting as a critic are to discover something relatively unknown and declare it to be wonderful and, even quicker and surer, to declare a beloved art object to be wildly overvalued.

unknown and declare it to be wonderful and, even quicker and surer, to declare a beloved art object to be wildly overvalued, in fact, trash: “You admire the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? I find it vulgar!”)

We have in the past few months seen a good deal of this. From the more or less reasonable to the absurd.

Although many Alabamians found it objectionable, Allen Barra’s recent piece in the *Wall Street Journal* is not outrageous. In criticizing *Mockingbird*, he asserts, “In all great novels there is some quality of moral ambiguity, some potentially controversial element that keeps the book from being easily grasped or explained.” He recalls to our minds

the complex relationship between white Huck and black Jim, or the symbolic nature of the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock.

Malcolm Gladwell in the *New Yorker* last summer published a highly irritating and essentially ill-founded piece about *Mockingbird*. Gladwell complains that Atticus is not upset enough at the guilty verdict. One wonders how he intuitively the inner feelings of a fictional character. Gladwell also feels, as Barra does, that Atticus is a little dreamy about the viciousness and anti-Semitism of the KKK and how Sam Levy had so easily turned them away “with only a good scolding,” and that Atticus is guilty of gross prejudice against the white lower classes, such as the Ewells. When we evaluate Atticus’s behavior, however, it might be good to remember what many mothers have told their children over the years: What if everyone did that? What if everyone behaved that way? Well, just imagine if everyone did behave like Atticus Finch in Alabama in 1936. It would be a better world, I think.

Gladwell knows that *Mockingbird* is set in the mid-thirties, but the spinal column of his argument is a lengthy comparison of Atticus and Big Jim Folsom. Folsom, a fifties Governor, is, one should remember, a real person; Atticus is a character.

One way you can tell a text has become sacred is that it has attracted iconoclasts. Another way is certainly to observe the response of the acolytes to any attack. Gladwell’s and Barra’s remarks, while negative, cannot do serious harm to a monument like *Mockingbird*. They are

# Literary Gumbo



Songs, stories and characters  
that flavor Alabama literature

Mark your calendars now for the 14th Annual Alabama Writers Symposium, **May 5-7, 2011, Monroeville, Alabama.** We're cooking up a great weekend in Alabama's Literary Capital for writers, scholars, songwriters, musicians and, of course, people who love to read. We'll be exploring the rich variety of songs, stories and characters that flavor Alabama literature.

#### Our list of writers (so far):

- Mark Childress
- Sena Jeter Naslund
- Frye Gaillard
- Kathryn Scheldt
- Wayne Greenhaw
- Watt Key
- Joshilyn Jackson
- Karren Pell, Tom House, Tommy Goldsmith of the Reckon Crew



visit [www.writerssymposium.org](http://www.writerssymposium.org)  
for updates and details

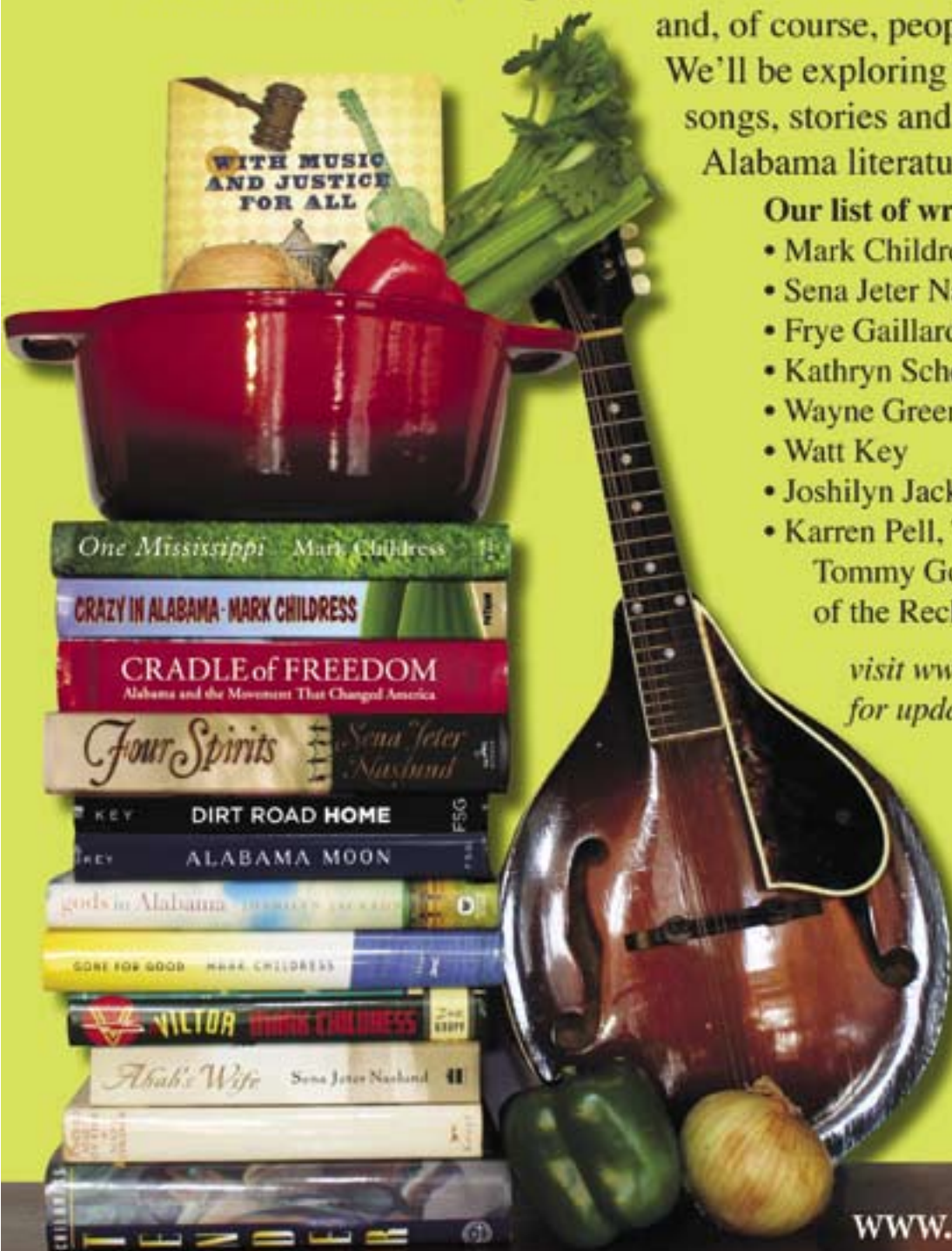
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# SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW

## Broadsided Reinvents the Form

by Sean Hill

I was invited to the Alabama Book Festival this past April to talk about history-based poetry and read some of my poems in the Poetry Tent. As a coeditor of Broadsided Press, I also planned to talk about broadsides. The broadside has a long history. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first recorded use of the term to refer to “a sheet of paper printed on one side only, forming one large page” occurred in 1575. Broadsides were used to announce events and circulate such things as song lyrics, political statements, and poems.

In 2005 poet Elizabeth Bradfield decided to carry on the tradition by founding Broadsided Press. It’s a virtual broadside press with the slogan “Putting literature and art on the streets.” Each month, Broadsided publishes an original literary-artistic collaboration that visitors to the site can download, contemplate, print out, and share.

When my poem “Insurance Man 1946” was accepted by Broadsided in 2006, I found the Broadsiding process exciting. Generally, when you have a poem accepted for publication there aren’t many surprises. You’ll eventually get a proof, and your poem will look how poems look in the pages of literary journals. This time,

### Insurance Man 1946

Silas, you might not be here come April.  
Ain't none of us ever promised tomorrow.  
If you died right sudden, you'd need a will.

That way you control who gets your nickel  
when you gone. Get your ducks in a row,  
Silas. You might not be here come April.

Yeah, your policy's up-to-date and we'll  
pay, say, if you lose an arm at the elbow  
at the mill, but if you die, you'll need a will.

Double pay for accidental deaths? We still  
have you down, your wife won't need to borrow.  
Silas, you might not be here come April.

Being alive is enough to get you killed.  
Did you hear about them folks up in Monroe?  
If they hang you from a tree, you'll need a will.

Your folks won't have to worry about a meal  
with this insurance when that day of sorrow  
comes. Silas, you might not be here come April.  
If you died right sudden, you'd need a will.



Note: On the afternoon of July 25, 1946, two young married African American couples were lynched at the same time in Monroe, Georgia. They were beaten and their bodies were riddled with bullets by a mob of white men who were also from Monroe. One of the women was seven months pregnant.

A native of Milledgeville, Georgia, poet **Sean Hill** is a Cave Canem Fellow. His poems have been published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. "Insurance Man 1946" originally appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*. Artist **Jim Benning** is a photographer and graphic artist living in Anchorage, AK awaiting open travel to Cuba.

9/1/06

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however, the publication turned out to be a powerful conversation between my poem and the art that added up to a broadside greater than its parts.

Broadsiding works like this: Poems and very short prose pieces are chosen from submissions e-mailed to Broadsided. Broadsided artists are sent the selected piece and have a few days to decide whether it speaks to them; the first artist to come forward has dibs on producing the broadside for that piece. Next, the artist creates a broadside with visual art that responds to the writing. In some cases, the dialogue is created by visual art that sits beside the writing; in others it incorporates the writing. For example, in artist Jim Benning's broadside of Kathleen Lynch's poem "Canned Food Drive," the poem is printed as the lid of a sardine can. An 8 1/2" by 11" PDF of the broadside is posted on the site. Anyone with Internet access can download it for free and print it. We hope that people will post the broadsides on community notice boards, office doors, bathroom stalls, etc. We call these people "vectors," and we invite them to let us know that they're out "vectorizing" their area, so we can add them to our "vector map."

I was particularly interested in spreading the word while in Montgomery because at the time Broadsided had vectors posting in almost every U.S. state, in Europe, Chile, Japan, the Philippines, and in Canada but none in Alabama. This is why *First Draft* editors Jeanie Thompson and Danny Gamble encouraged me to talk about Broadsided.

One of the founding principles of the project, the accessibility of the broadsides, was appealing to me first as a writer and now as an editor. Broadsided is the perfect example of how technology and the Internet democratize the production and distribution of literature and give it a global reach.

As of this writing, Broadsided Press has published sixty-four broadsides. Twice a year in November and April, we publish a "Switcheroo." We post an image by one of the Broadsided artists and ask writers to respond, and a broadside is created from the selected piece of writing. Elizabeth, co-editor Alexandra Teague, consulting editor Mark Temelko, and I are planning additional collaborative projects for Broadsided Press which we will be announcing on our Web site; our Twitter feed, maintained by Gabrielle Calvocoressi; and our Facebook page in the coming months. With your help we will continue putting literature and art on the streets.

Visit Broadsided at  
[www.broadsidedpress.org](http://www.broadsidedpress.org).

*Sean Hill lives in Bemidji, Minn., and is the author of the poetry collection Blood Ties & Brown Liquor, published by the University of Georgia Press. [www.seanhill.org](http://www.seanhill.org)*



BART NAGEL

*ForeWord Reviews*  
 Historical Fiction  
**BOOK OF THE YEAR**

**Noah's  
 Wife**  
 5500 BCE

a novel by  
 T.K. Thorne

nominated for  
 Alabama Library Association's  
**Author Awards**

*"...awed at Thorne's ability  
 to work magic with words.  
 Her mastery...kept me  
 awake many nights."*  
 -Anniston Star

*"...a novel of epic sweep,  
 emotional power, and  
 considerable beauty."*  
 -The Blount Countian

**A unique perspective of  
 the flood story.**

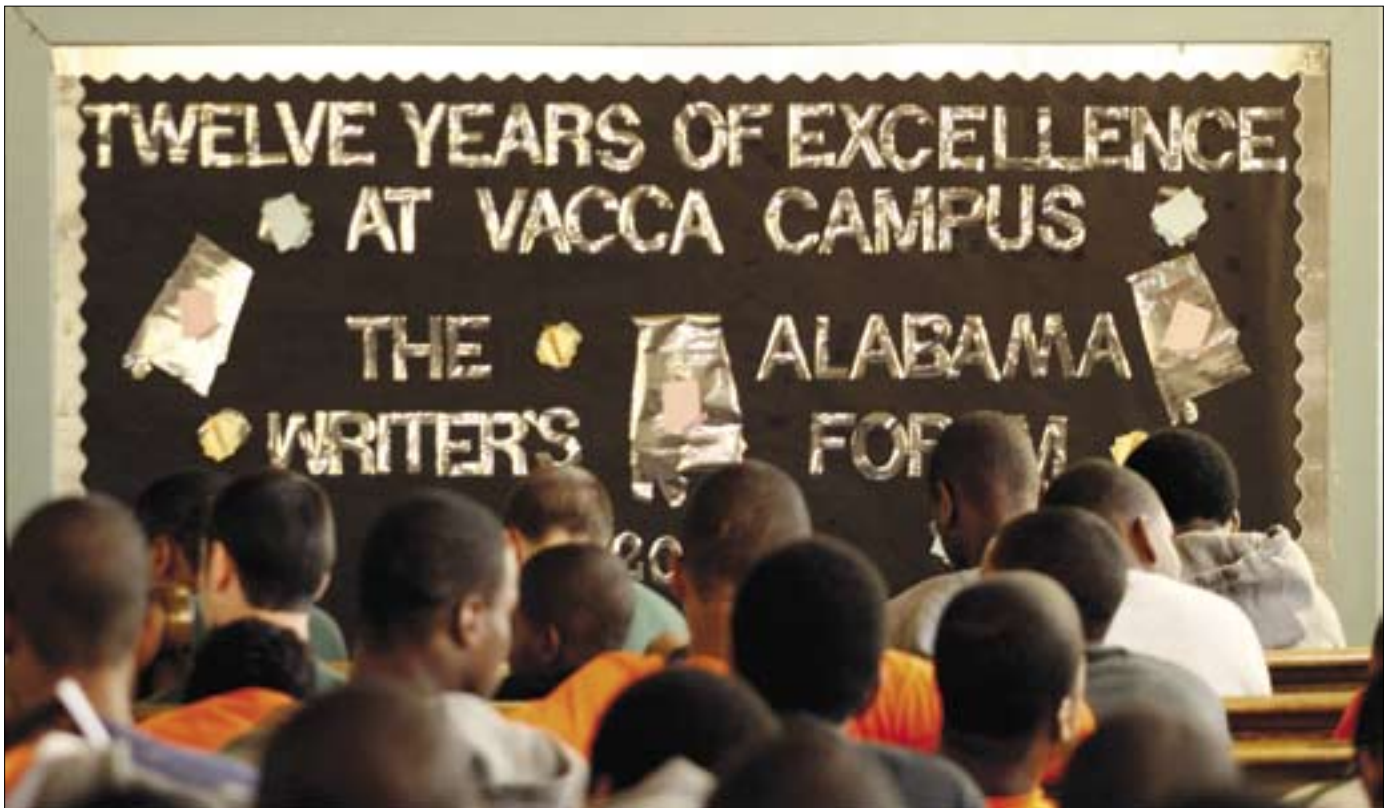
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COURAGE  
HONESTY  
HOPE

A  
SENSE  
of  
COMMUNITY

*by Tony Crunk*





**W**hen asked about my experience as a teaching writer in the Writing Our Stories program, I typically respond with any number of adjectives that describe the students themselves—they are eager, open, energetic, imaginative, honest, courageous, reflective. One could ask, or hope, for no better qualities in a group of students.

But, while each of these characterizations may apply to any number of individual students, their most striking collective feature is the community of writing they have fashioned for themselves. Equally eager to share their own work and to read and respond to their fellow writers' work, they enact the understanding that investing themselves in the care for others, for their struggles and their growth, is the most profound way for them to grow in their own talents, sensitivities, and personhood. They know instinctively that to serve and nurture others *is* to nurture the best in themselves.

This sense of community is no accident. It is the guiding principle of the many diverse and dedicated individuals who make WOS possible. A highlight of the school year occurs in the fall, when each campus releases its annual anthology of students' work from the previous year. Publication of each anthology is celebrated on its respective campus with a reception for students, which includes the ultimate highlight of the program, a public reading by the students of their own work. Last year's reception at the Adele Goodwyn McNeel School epitomized the expansive community effort that *is* WOS.

The event featured remarks by Alabama state representative the Hon. James Fields, Jr. (D-District 12, Cullman); Walter Wood, executive director of the Alabama Department of Youth Services, a WOS partner; and Arthur Tigner, principal of McNeel School. The reception included a full, formal luncheon prepared and hosted by members of the McNeel School faculty and staff, led by Mrs. Robin Harrell and Mrs. Marion Sneed, with a video presentation by WOS cooperating teacher Harold Abram. Other guests included administrators and representatives of the Alabama Writers' Forum and of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Without each of these organizations, and without the dedicated, sustained commitment

of these and many other individuals, WOS would not exist, nor could it be the exemplary program it is today.

Over the program's fourteen-year history, the Forum has published thirty-three student anthologies. Even casual readers of these collections will be immediately struck by the sophistication, imagination, and expressiveness of the students' writing. It is as good as any work being done anywhere by writers of their age group. In fact, WOS students have perennially placed very highly in the annual, statewide High School Literary Arts competition. Most striking about their work, though, is the absolute honesty with which these young writers face the truths of their lives and with which they articulate those truths.

The most powerful testament to WOS' success is the students' written work, and their reflections on what this work has meant to them.

In commenting on his experience, one of my students from last year wrote, "Writing Our Stories meant: experiencing something new; letting all the anger go; taking my mind off of stress; respecting myself while I'm writing; looking forward to something; showing how changers can come; having a choice; putting my thoughts on paper; getting through the struggle; learning what I want to do for myself; being who I am." Another wrote, "Writing Our Stories has given me the chance to explain my life. It's been like a guardian to me—guiding me in the right path to doing good things that I need to do."

In my two short years with the program, I have witnessed in Writing Our Stories what writing *can* be at its best for anyone. Quite simply, it can transform lives. As a member of the Forum and as a citizen of the state, I am deeply proud of this program and its history of accomplishment. As a teacher, I am deeply grateful to all the many people who make such a rewarding experience possible. But I am, above all, grateful to

my students, who teach me new lessons daily about honesty, courage, sensitivity, perseverance, hope.

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*Tony Crunk is the teaching writer in the Writing Our Stories program at the Adele Goodwyn McNeel School on the Alabama Department of Youth Services Vacca Campus in Birmingham.*

Even casual readers will be immediately struck by the sophistication, imagination, and expressiveness of the students' writing.



JAMIE MARTIN



# Celebrating the Spirit of Youth

## The Sixteenth Annual Alabama High School Literary Arts Awards

*by Danny Gamble*

*Photos by Jamie Martin*

The Alabama Writers' Forum hosted its sixteenth annual Alabama High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition ceremony on March 10 at the Alabama State Capitol Auditorium. A diverse group of students from the Alabama School of Fine Arts (ASFA), Booker T. Washington Magnet High School (BTW), Briarwood Christian School (BCS), Mountain Brook High School (MBHS), and Pelham High School (PHS) attended the event to receive awards for drama, fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. The audience also included teachers, parents, guests, and AWF Board members.



Sen. J.T. “Jabo” Waggoner (R-District 16, Jefferson, Shelby) (right) congratulates ASFA teacher Stuart Flynn (left) and students. Sen. Waggoner introduced the enabling legislation that led to the formation of the school in 1971 when he served in the Alabama House of Representatives.





(l-r) Sena Jeter Naslund chats with ASFA fiction writers Lin Wang, Abby Melton, and Emma Roberts.



"I'm always thrilled to learn that some of the Writing Our Stories students have placed well in the High School Literary Arts Awards," said teaching writer **Marlin Barton**. "It means so much to them, and it's an honor for our program." **Sen. Priscilla Dunn** (D-District 19, Jefferson) (center), a Department of Youth Services board member, lends support to WOS team members **Barton**, **Priscilla Hancock Cooper**, and **Tracy Smitherman**, DYS Curriculum and Federal Programs Coordinator.

"We have one of those things when writers gather—a lot of energy in the atmosphere," said Alabama Writers' Forum Executive Director Jeanie Thompson, introducing keynote speaker Sena Jeter Naslund, a best-selling novelist, Harper Lee Award recipient, and program director of the Low-Residency MFA in Writing at Spalding University in Louisville, Ky.

"I'm a writer because I love to read," said Naslund. "Let me give you two words of advice: Take some of your free time to read books that I'll call the classics. Second, respond to your writing assignments with all of your heart and

all of your imagination. Let your imagination take fire from the stimulation of your teachers."

In conjunction with the awards ceremony, Gov. Bob Riley proclaimed March 10 as Young Alabama Writers' Day. Alabama State Council on the Arts Executive Director Al Head presented the governor's proclamation to the audience.

Gov. Riley's proclamation read in part, "WHEREAS, the state of Alabama is known worldwide as fertile ground for rich literary talent. . . , and. . . WHEREAS, the Alabama Writers' Forum believes that encouragement of young writers, their teachers and

schools is of paramount importance to ensure the continuation of Alabama's outstanding literary tradition. . . : NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bob Riley, Governor of Alabama, do hereby proclaim March 10, 2010, as Young Alabama Writers' Day in the State of Alabama."

Each year the Forum recognizes young writers in grades 9-12, their teachers, and schools for their creative work. Scholarships are awarded to Alabama high school seniors for portfolios based on a literary genre. Noted writers in each field judge the submissions. For a complete list of winners, visit [www.writersforum.org/programs](http://www.writersforum.org/programs).



BTW students Taylor Zimmerman and Amber Rainha with teacher Foster Dickson. Zimmerman won Third Place in Poetry and Rainha Second Place in the Marie Stokes Jemison Creative Nonfiction Awards.



PHS teacher Connie Nola (center) with her students Casey Nichols and Austin Hancock. Nichols received a Poetry Certificate of Recognition and Hancock garnered a Poetry Judge's Special Recognition.



ASFA student Kelsey Greenwood, First Place in Drama, with (l-r) grandmother Susan Tom, Jeanie Thompson, and father Dan Greenwood.



"We gather today in the name of fine writing," said Alabama State Council on the Arts executive director Al Head. "This program is a celebration in many ways." Head and Jeanie Thompson present Gov. Bob Riley's proclamation.



(l-r) BCS teacher Jon Carter with his students Mary Sanders, Audrey Orteza, and Timothy Dunlap. Sanders received a Fiction Judge's Special Recognition and Orteza won the Alabama State Council on the Arts Senior Portfolio Scholarship. Dunlap collected a Poetry Certificate of Recognition.





AI Head congratulates Audrey Orteza, Alabama State Council on the Arts Senior Portfolio Scholarship recipient and a student at BCS.



Clay Greene, Lindsey Stricklin Senior Portfolio Scholarship recipient and ASFA student, with Anita Miller Garner, conference chairperson and cosponsor of the award.



Peter Gray, an ASFA student and recipient of the Mozelle Purvis Shirley Senior Portfolio Scholarship, takes a congratulatory photo with the Shirley family. (l-r) Nan Auston, Virginia Shirley, Gray, Mrs. Shirley, and Philip Shirley, a Forum board member.



"I too was at one time an Alabama high school student who wished to write, and my wish came true with a lot of work and a lot of help," said keynote speaker Sena Jeter Naslund, a Birmingham native. "Winning a contest like this is just a beginning for you."

**Editor's note:** The deadline for the 2011 High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition is January 19. The awards ceremony will take place on March 9 at 1:00 p.m. in the State Capitol Auditorium in Montgomery. Complete guidelines and entry form are available at [www.writersforum.org/programs](http://www.writersforum.org/programs).

# The Invisible Lives of Girls and Women

# PMS Turns Ten

by Kerry Madden

In the Atlanta airport during a layover, my eleven-year-old daughter, Norah, reads while I watch weary travelers sip Seattle's Best Coffee and line up for Checkers and Popeye's Chicken. We are on our way back to Alabama from Washington, D.C., where I spoke to children about being "storycatchers" and capturing the stories in their lives through the five senses.

In the airport chaos, I regard my vision for *PMSpoemmemoirstory*, now in its tenth year, a literary magazine of which I inherited the editorship from Dr. Linda Frost, who created the magazine and garnered numerous awards in her tenure as editor. Her successor, Tina Harris, advised me, and we co-edited *PMS 10* over the past year when I moved from Los Angeles to accept a tenure-track job at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to teach fiction, creative non-fiction, and children's writing, and to become the new *PMS* editor.

The Alabama job meant I had to leave my husband, Kiffen, in Los Angeles where he has his own tenure as an elementary school teacher, but both jobs meant we could try to keep at bay the steady accumulation of college debt for our two older kids. Last year Norah was with Kiffen, and now she is with me as our family "commutes" from the South to the West Coast.

In the airport, my unreliable new droid keeps crashing, so I can't retrieve the letter I wrote last spring to the interim



dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at UAB about why *PMS* deserved to be saved when cuts loomed large, but my letter worked, and we were able to keep the journal afloat for another year.

The reprieve was short-lived, however. This budget year, a crippling amount has been cut from our creative writing venues, including *PMS*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and the UAB Writers Series. We also find ourselves unable to hire a new poet, in spite of the growing enrollment in our creative writing program and the loss of both senior faculty poets in 2010. Associate Professor Robert Collins retired and Associate Professor Daniel Anderson accepted a position at the University of Oregon.

But this article is supposed to be about my vision for *PMS*, so maybe I should leave my worries alone for now and turn to my hopes for the journal.

My strongest vision for *PMS* is to simply sustain the vision and legacy of Linda Frost, which isn't flashy but it's the truth. I will, however, need to think of creative ways to market the magazine if we are to stay alive. But as for the content, Frost created a magazine of simple beauty and published work from women writers all over the world.

To continue the powerful work that Frost established, I contacted Masha Hamilton, founder of the Afghan Women's Writing Project and asked her to write an essay for *PMS 10* on her work with Afghan women. The new issue includes Hamilton's essay along with stories and poetry from the



Afghan women writers themselves. Hamilton traveled to Afghanistan several times to listen to the stories of Afghan women. From these trips and meeting the women of Afghanistan, she came to establish the Project, giving Afghan women a place to tell their stories, publishing only under their first names for reasons of safety. From Seeta's "Under Burqa" to Shogofa's "Kill Silence" to Meena's "My First Namaz," we catch a glimpse of what it means to grow up in a world where women's silence is not only mandatory, it is celebrated. Much like Hamilton, Frost, too, created a haven in PMS for women to share their stories on the page.

Another contributor to *PMS 10* is UAB student Donna Thomas, who worked for thirty years at the phone company in Birmingham before becoming a creative writing masters student. Thomas wrote the essay "Kiddie Land" about when Birmingham's amusement park became desegregated, and she and other African American families were first allowed into the park with white families. From Jeanie Thompson's haunting Helen Keller poems to Cathy Linh Che's "First Day," which paints the portrait of a Vietnamese woman in the garment district of Los Angeles, the secrets and invisible lives of girls and women pulse in the poems and stories of all our contributors.

The cruel layover in Atlanta morphs into mechanical problems that ground the Birmingham aircraft for another couple of hours until a plane from Memphis arrives. I want

to scream, but Norah, who has now finished with her book, wants me to tell her a story, and so enraged at the tyranny of travel and the Atlanta airport, I tell her about *PMS* and the budget slashing. I ask what she would say to the new dean if she could talk to him.

She considers this and says, "I'd tell that dean that the arts are very important. I should know because I grew up in a family of the arts, and look how I turned out. Poetry makes you see things from a different perspective. The sky becomes a different shade of blue. What are students supposed to do without somebody to teach them poetry? Where would we be without Emily Dickinson? That is what I would say to the dean."

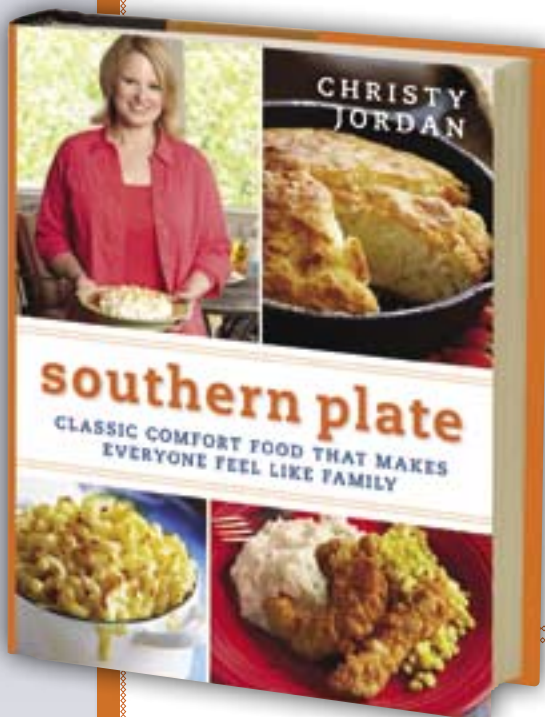
Maybe that's what I'll say to him too—once we get back to Birmingham.

Learn more about *PMSpoemmemoirstory* at [pms-journal.org](http://pms-journal.org).



STEVEN W. WOOD

*Kerry Madden is the author of the books Offsides, Writing Smarts, Gentle's Holler, Louisiana's Song, Jessie's Mountain, and Up Close: Harper Lee. She is currently at work on a novel for children and a picture book, Charlie & Kathryn, about the friendship between Kathryn Tucker Windham and Charlie Lucas.*



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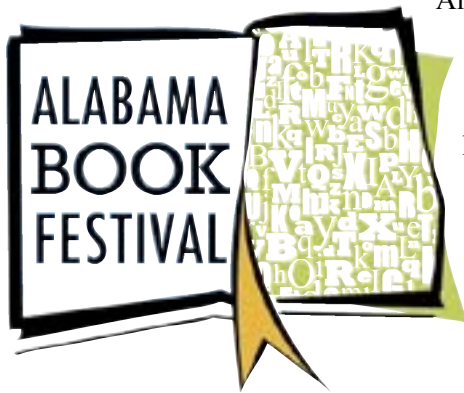
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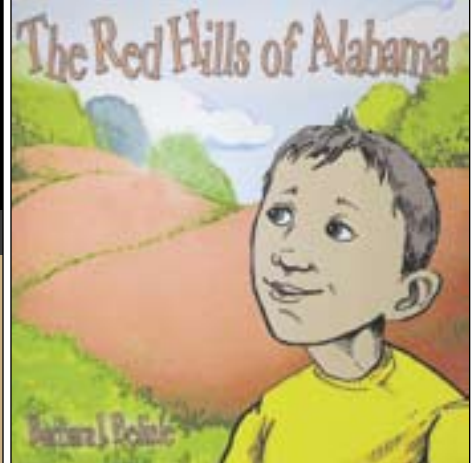
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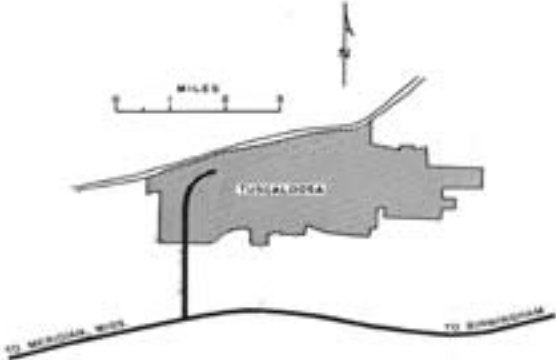
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*And our many individual and student associates. Thank you!*

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If you would like to support the High School Literary Arts Awards or other programs of the Alabama Writers' Forum, or if you would like membership information, please e-mail [writersforum@bellsouth.net](mailto:writersforum@bellsouth.net) or call 334-265-7728. Membership information is also available at [www.writersforum.org](http://www.writersforum.org).



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Continued from page 6

attacking a tank with peashooters. But the defense of *Mockingbird* in Alabama was immediate and ferocious. The state’s best minds, like ants defending the colony, swarmed out and denounced these attacks in letters to the editor, op-eds, and anywhere else there was a forum.

This is understandable, but finally not necessary. *Mockingbird* is really good and can withstand a little criticism. In fact, if defenders of *Mockingbird* read through the essays, pre-selected by the publisher, in *Critical Insights: To Kill a Mockingbird*, which I recently edited for the Salem Press, they would be horrified. Not only are there essays which condemn Atticus for his lukewarm civil rights positions and for taking the case only reluctantly and for not submitting a bill to the Alabama legislature to abolish segregation, there are more. One writer complains that Maycomb’s African-American community is given short shrift; another insists that the females are oppressed and stereotyped. The most absurd writer of all insists that Maycomb should be called “Queertown” because—have you noticed?—there are no happy white married couples, Atticus has not remarried, and all of the women on the street are single. And Scout, with her party frock worn over her bib overalls, is a cross-dresser. What can one say about that? Well, it’s nonsense, provocative nonsense, and the most one can hope for is the instigation of a lively discussion.

The seemingly irresistible attraction of a monument like *Mockingbird* is understandable, however. These are the kinds of articles written about *Hamlet*. Shakespeare’s play can withstand any amount of bizarre commentary and so can Lee’s novel. We can relax, remember Ms.

Lee’s remarks that the book has survived all these years just fine, and remind ourselves that it’s not a sin to criticize a *Mockingbird*.



*Don Noble is host of the Alabama Public Television literary interview show Bookmark. His latest book is A State of Laughter: Comic Fiction from Alabama.*



# Greetings, Salutations, & Goodwill

RAMAN MALIK



Denise Wadsworth Trimm

## MISCELLANY

Dear AWF:

I just wanted to take a moment and thank you from the bottom of my heart for filling my past few weeks with amazing experiences for my students and for me.

First, my students and

I were happy to submit their poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction works to the High School Literary Arts Awards Competition. By my calculations, this is the fifteenth year I have encouraged my students to enter this wonderful contest. It is so important to me that even in economically challenging times my students are able to participate fully in literary contests so that the process of writing comes to fruition from impetus to publication to submission. I plan my curriculum around your contest every year. Then, when three of my students won this year, we were ecstatic. Thanks also for giving my students such a warm reception at the Literary Arts Awards ceremony at the State Capitol on March 10. We loved hearing Sena Jeter Naslund speak, and I especially appreciated her advice to the students that reverberated all of the qualities I try to instill in my students daily.

Secondly, thank you so much for last Friday's [April 16, 2010] teacher workshop with Sean Hill, DéLana R.A. Dameron, Irene Latham, and Anita Garner in association with the Alabama Book Festival in Montgomery. I have completed hundreds of hours of professional development through the years, but I told my colleagues Monday when I returned to school that I felt like I had received a B-12 injection for my spirit! I couldn't believe that here it was April, and I was looking forward to incorporating what I had learned into next year's curriculum. Equally as important to me, I couldn't wait to sit down and actually write something for myself. The day was so amazing that I couldn't help but come back the next day for the Alabama Book Festival so I could support the writers I had just met and my student Lauren McClusky, who was scheduled to read her poems that had placed in the Literary Arts Awards Competition.

(Unfortunately, my other two students who placed, Jared O'Neal and Raman Malik, were unable to attend the Book Festival.)

The Book Festival did not disappoint. I brought my six-year-old daughter with me, and she got to meet Charles Ghigna, Eric Litwin, and Super Why! She bought a book, got it autographed, made a bookmark, and cheered when Lauren read her poetry in the AWF Poetry Tent. It was an amazing day all the way around. She thought we were celebrities because we got to eat in the "big old house" and wear all access badges. When several people told my daughter that she had a writer for a mother, she was amazed that real writers thought of me as something more than just a teacher and a mommy. Thank you for that.

I hear such horrible stories about states that are disbanding their arts programs and associations to save a dollar here and there. It is a comfort to me that during these times I know people like [AWF Executive Director] Jeanie Thompson and [Alabama State Council on the Arts Executive Director] Al Head are there in Montgomery fighting for us, keeping the boat afloat with what little air they can muster for the tattered sails that keep our hope afloat. And for that and all the Forum does, I am grateful.

Denise Wadsworth Trimm  
Mountain Brook High School  
Mountain Brook, Ala.

## WRITING OUR STORIES

Dear AWF:

I read quite a bit from *A Long Time Coming* (Vacca Campus anthology, 2008) last night and was moved to smiles and tears by the emotion of these young men. I know you must be very proud of them. Thank you so much for sharing a copy with me.

Cynthia McGinnis  
Hastings, East Sussex, U.K.

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# EVOLVING

## writersforum.org



JAMIE MARTIN

Since 1992, the Alabama Writers' Forum has worked to build a cohesive literary arts community, one in which anyone in Alabama who wants to write will feel supported.

Through our networking efforts, public programs, and literary arts education initiatives,

we've helped build this community throughout the state. We developed a Web site in 1999, and since that time have kept it well-stocked with resources for writers, publishers, educators, and readers. Danny Gamble, our communications specialist, is currently making use of social media to support our print and digital communications.

Now we are embarking on a plan to link with others in the digital community in a new way. Over the next couple of months we will rework [writersforum.org](http://writersforum.org), expanding the dimensions of it and creating a truly interactive, digital literary community for Alabama writers and others.

Among other new features, our redesigned site will offer an exclusive portal for members that will link to an expanded and updatable resource directory to which members can upload data. This directory will promote Alabama's many fine writers, publishers, literary programs, and landmarks, and other resources for all who access the Web.

With a grant from the Digital Community Foundation, the Forum will re-launch [writersforum.org](http://writersforum.org) after the New Year. Because we are devoting extensive staff time and

resources to this effort, our next issue of the Forum's journal, *First Draft*, will appear in early Fall 2011.

With our new Web site you will have more news, more often. Readers of *First Draft* will find many wonderful surprises in the new site, including an expanded literary news area, a more dynamic calendar of events, writing and publishing features, expanded book reviews, and guest blogs by some of Alabama's up and coming young writers as well as our most experienced authors.

These components of the site will be updated frequently, so news and features will come your way via the Web in between issues of *First Draft*. We will continue to archive our venerable journal on the Web site, thus providing a valuable resource for students and teachers of American literature and contemporary Southern writing.

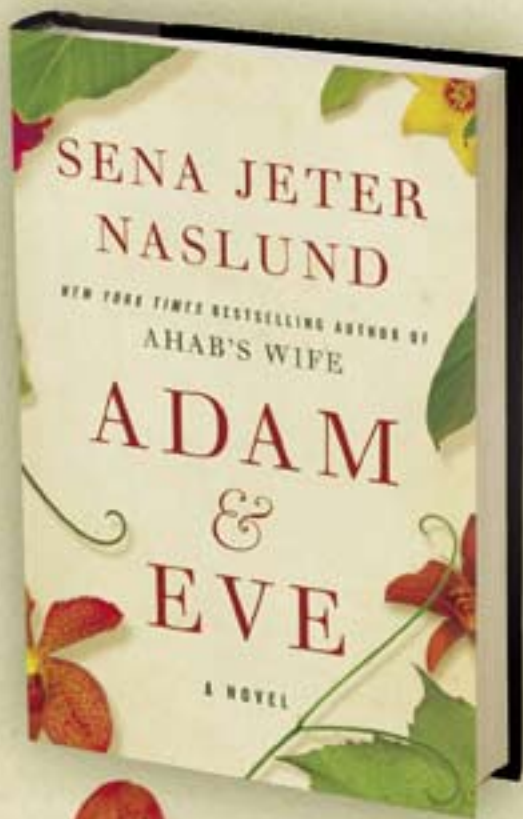
If you are a member of the Forum or receive our *Literary News* via e-mail, we'll keep you informed as we move along. Our goal is to increase the digital footprint of the Forum. By doing this we will enfranchise more sectors of the literary arts community and remain a strong resource for anyone who writes in Alabama, teaches young writers, or simply likes nothing better than to discover another Alabama novel, short story, play, or poem.

Most everyone in our great state knows that Alabama is rich in writers. With the new [writersforum.org](http://writersforum.org), the digital community will know it, too. In the meantime, we hope you'll enjoy the Fall 2010 issue of *First Draft*. We welcome your response.

Happy reading!



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