

FIRST DRAFT

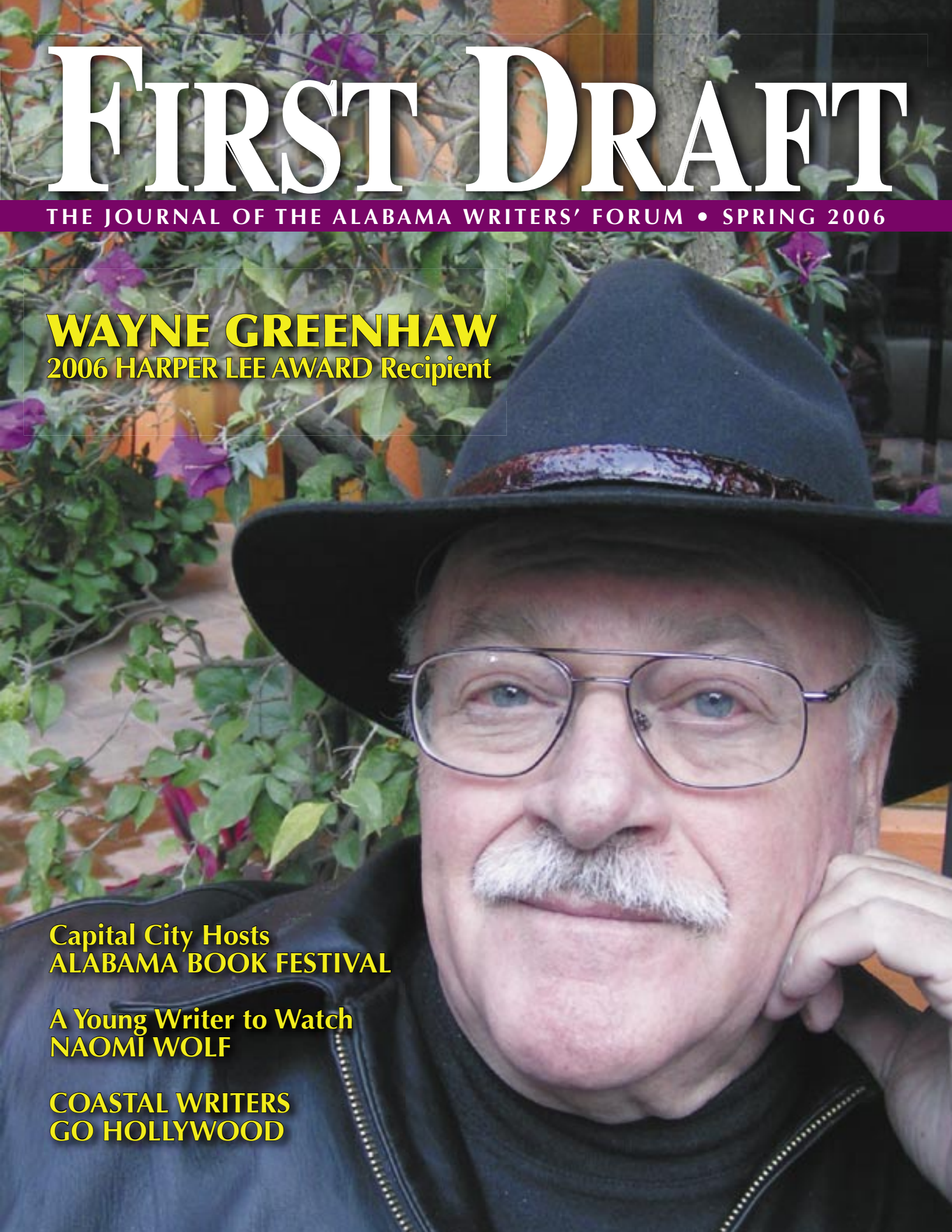
THE JOURNAL OF THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM • SPRING 2006

WAYNE GREENHAW
2006 HARPER LEE AWARD Recipient

Capital City Hosts
ALABAMA BOOK FESTIVAL

A Young Writer to Watch
NAOMI WOLF

**COASTAL WRITERS
GO HOLLYWOOD**



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

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BOARD MEMBER PAGE

Words have been my life. While other ten-year-olds were swimming in the heat of summer, I was reading *Gone with the Wind* on my screened-in porch. While my friends were giggling over Elvis, I was practicing the piano and memorizing Italian musical terms and the bios of each composer. I visited the local library every week and brought home armloads of books. From English major in college to high school English teacher in my early twenties, I struggled to teach the words of Shakespeare and Chaucer to inner-city kids who couldn't read. They learned to experience the word, even though they couldn't read it.

Abruptly moving from English teacher to a business career in broadcast television sales, I thought perhaps my focus would be diffused and words would lose their significance. Surprisingly, another world of words appeared called *journalism*: responsibly chosen words which affected the lives of thousands of viewers. As the eventual CEO of that same television station, I discovered the precious gift of being able to craft a good memo, a stirring presentation, or a precise report. I watched in horror as others had no command of the language, and I saw what a handicap and deterrent it was to career development. Once again, it all revolved around words!

Words inspire, devastate, commemorate, celebrate, criticize; words are the heart of each of us, no matter our daily menu of activities. When all else abandons us, words will be the mainstay of our hearts, our passions, our legacies. In retirement now as a writer and public speaker, I still embrace words as my very best friends.

I am proud to serve with the Alabama Writers' Forum because it represents the best of who I've always tried to be and what I've always loved. I find in my local community that people of words are appreciated, employed, and celebrated. They still hold the power to influence, to change, to make a difference. In a world where minds are mesmerized via Game Boys, computer screens, and yes, television screens, we must work harder than ever to keep the word alive. It must survive. As a writer, I find that if I can "live inside the lines" I can survive.

The Alabama Writers' Forum is one of our best hopes to keep the word alive, whether we are writers, readers, or listeners. Here's to the magical power of words and to the Forum for its continued emphasis on preserving our Alabama heritage to write, to read, to feel, to be!

Linda Spalla



*Linda Spalla serves as Writers' Representative on the AWF Executive Committee. She is the author of *Leading Ladies* and a frequent public speaker.*

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 Center for the Book / Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities, the Alabama Department of Youth Services, and Alabama Southern Community College. 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. (See thank-you page on 14.) 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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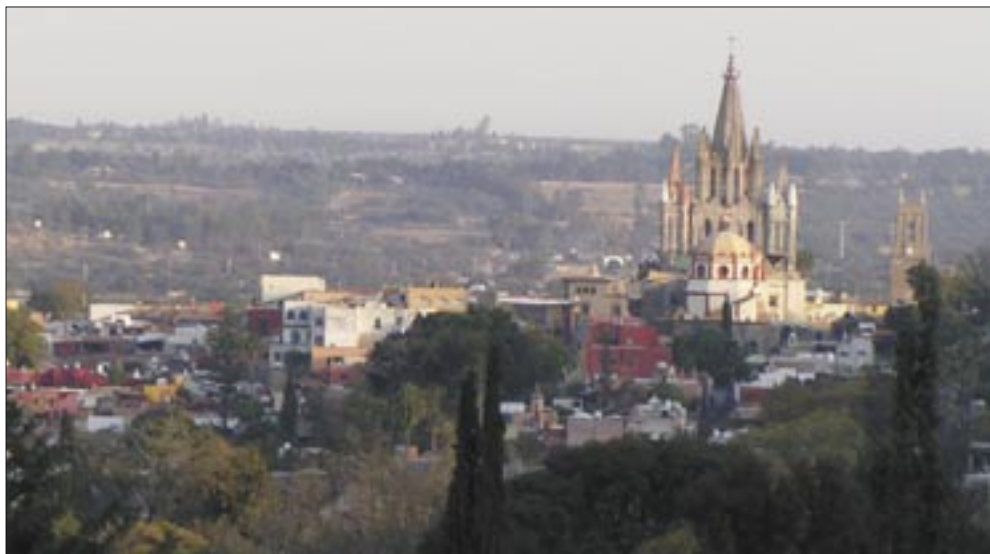
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Naomi Wolf

A YOUNG WRITER TO WATCH

by Elizabeth Via Brown

Naomi Wolf

Before she learned to put words on paper, Naomi Wolf began writing stories “in her head.” She grew up in near solitude on the J. Nicholene Bishop Biological Station/Tanglewood Estate, where she, her younger brother and their mother are the caretakers. Wolf’s keen observation of the details of her surroundings developed into a vivid imagination that spilled over into the colorful stories she told herself.

Located in rural Hale County within 30 miles of Tuscaloosa, the 480-acre plant and wildlife preserve is maintained by the University of Alabama as an inland biological station for faculty and graduate research. Wolf has lived there most of her life and still commutes back and forth to the University, where she is enrolled as a freshman in the Blount Liberal Arts program, tentatively majoring in English and creative writing.

While attending the public schools in nearby Moundville, Wolf said she related to books better than she did to the other students. She was more interested in intellectual pursuits, such as reading the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling, the adventure stories in the Redwall series by Brian Jacques and Grimm’s Fairy Tales. Using a loose-leaf binder,

she composed her own book of fantasy, which she painstakingly wrote by hand.

As expected of a junior high student, the book is amateurish, but it serves as the basis on which Wolf bases her long-term goal. “I like re-reading it now,” she said, “just to see how far I’ve come.”

To fill what she thinks is a current void, she is most interested in publishing novel-length literature for young adults that features settings of alternative reality. She shies away from what she calls “chick lit” that many of her contemporaries prefer.

After attending a writing camp, she applied and was accepted into the tenth grade at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, but she was not prepared for the closeness and buoyancy of dormitory life.

“It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done,” said Wolf, who was homesick. She tried, though futilely, to persuade the administration to allow her to commute. A public and tuition-free school, ASFA offers instruction for grades 7-12 in dance, visual arts and music; math and science; and theater arts. The school is designed as a residential campus.

By writing daily, Wolf relieved the angst of living within a crowd and the

distress of not being able to go home every day. “Being lonely in a crowd is worse than being alone,” she said, but the regimen of high school, which included two writing periods a day, helped to develop her writing skills beyond the grade school level.

When Wolf met Bryding Adams, a member of the ASFA board, she found more than a surrogate mother. Wolf also found a friend who encouraged her to take advantage of the opportunity to develop her writing skills.

“Naomi is probably the most visually perceptive and observant person I have ever known,” said Adams, “and she can put her perceptions and observations eloquently and descriptively into words and into poetry and stories.”

So perceptive is Wolf’s knack for observation, said Adams, the young writer inspired her husband, Bob Adams, to collect his memoirs about growing up in California in the 1960s.

During Wolf’s three-year stay at the school, she had dinner with Adams and her husband at least once a week. During her senior year, she often spent the night in the couple’s home. It became a family affair when Wolf’s mother, Denise Wolf, and her brother, Logan, plus their three

dogs, bunked in safety at the Adams' home during the threat of two hurricanes.

Despite their difference in age, Wolf and Adams consider each other good friends and continue to communicate by e-mail and telephone.

Instead of journaling formally, Wolf makes notes about her observations of the small details and images of life and records anecdotes so she won't forget them later. "It's sort of a time travel," she said of her daily writing. "I address my future self with notes on what I think I'm going to be like. My imagination is what I like best about myself."

While fantasy is her favorite form of reading, Wolf is also enamored with the classics and the Victorian period. After reading a book, she often reads it again to better determine the style and to understand the crucial methods of setting up plots. "I struggle to develop plots," she said. Wolf added that she uses her experience in visual arts to work out scenes.

Fiction may be her forte, but poetry has become another favorite form of expression. It wasn't until she entered ASFA that she was introduced to writing poetry. The school's curriculum demanded creative writing students to study various writing techniques. Wolf said her teacher, Stuart Flynn, introduced her to poetry.

"He is so energetic and has such fun teaching," she said. "He made me want to write poetry."

Flynn required his students to turn in a poem every other week. Wolf said she still walks around with a rough outline in her head and lets her daily observations influence the outcome of a poem.

In her senior year at ASFA, Wolf served as co-editor of *Cadence*, a publication of the creative writing department that features poems and short stories submitted by the creative writing students.

Of his former student, Flynn said she was a bit shy, but acquired a fan club of sorts. Wolf was writing at graduate school level when she entered ASFA and spent the next three years perfecting her work to the point of being recognized locally, regionally, and nationally.

For the past two years, Wolf has been "chugging" away at a novel. "I'm pretty dedicated to it," she said, but she added that it's slow going because she must fit it in around her class assignments.

"It was difficult for Naomi to be cooped up in a dormitory in an urban setting when she grew up free as a bird to observe and appreciate her rural home," Flynn said. "But she persevered and stayed at ASFA all three years. We miss her. We know one thing for sure, though, Naomi will always write. Watch for her work. She will be famous one day."

Elizabeth Via Brown is a freelance writer in Montgomery. From time to time First Draft will profile up and coming young Alabama writers.

AWARDS AND HONORS

- Presidential Scholar in the Arts, Semifinalist, 2005
- The National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts: Arts, Recognition, and Talent Search (ARTS), Level I Scholarship Award for Poetry; Honorable Mention for Fiction, 2005
- Alabama School of Fine Arts Senior Award in Creative Writing, 2005
- Howard Nemerov Creative Writing Award, Washington University, Poetry Division, 2005
- Friends of the Emmet O'Neal Library Literary Award, First Place in Senior High Poetry, 2005
- Manningham Trust Student Poetry Awards, National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Third Prize, 2005
- Alabama State Poetry Society, Senior Poetry Honorable Mention, 2005
- High School Literary Arts Awards, Alabama Writers' Forum, Poetry Judge's Special Recognition, 2005
Third Place in Poetry, 2004
Third Place in Poetry, 2003
- State University of New York at Buffalo Poetry Contest, Fourth Place, 2005
Honorable Mention, 2004
- Who's Who Among American High School Students, 2005 and 2004
- Co-editor-in-Chief, *Cadence*, the literary journal of the Alabama School of Fine Arts, 2004-2005
- Scholastic Gold Key Arts and Writing Award, 2004
- Nancy Thorpe Hollins Poetry Contest, Hollins University, Honorable Mention, 2004

PUBLICATIONS

Hanging Loose, Fall 2005

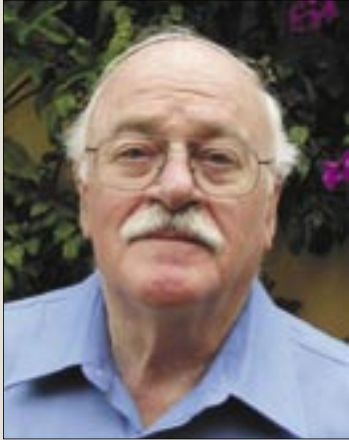
The Lilliput Review, Summer 2005

The Mad Hatter, Spring 2005

Cadence, Spring 2005, Spring 2004, and Spring 2003

A Celebration of Young Poets, Fall 2002

Wolf currently works as an editorial assistant at *Alabama Heritage* magazine while attending the University of Alabama.



THE MONTGOMERY-SAN MIGUEL EXPRESS

Wayne Greenhaw Wins 2006 Harper Lee Award

by Danny Gamble

Wayne Greenhaw received the news of his nomination for this year's Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer at his second home in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico.

"I was sitting in my tiny *oficina* high above San Miguel," he said from his home there. "I was working, writing a treatment for a film of *The Thunder of Angels*, when I retrieved an e-mail from Jeanie Thompson."

Thompson, Executive Director of the Alabama Writers' Forum, had e-mailed Greenhaw to inform him of his award. Greenhaw returned Thompson's e-mail and then immediately phoned Harper Lee, an old friend.

"At first she kidded, asking if I would truly accept an award with her name on it," said Greenhaw. "When I told Nelle I would cherish the award, I could hear her smiling on the other end.

"Nelle then said, 'Hey, kid, I've always loved what you have done with your work.'"

The Harper Lee Award is an annual award, established in 1998, that recognizes the lifetime achievement of a writer who was born in Alabama or who spent his or her formative years living and writing in the state. The award is named for Harper Lee, whose novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* has sold more than thirty million copies. It is funded by George Landegger through a generous gift to Alabama Southern Community College.

In his letter of nomination, Don Noble, University of Alabama Professor Emeritus of English and host of the Alabama Public Television literary talk show *Bookmark*, wrote, "We have a writer here with very good work and lots of it. Wayne Greenhaw has spent his life studying and writing first-class fiction and nonfiction about the state of Alabama. There is no one in the state who deserves this award more."

Greenhaw has published eighteen books, several short stories, numerous journalistic pieces, and two plays. He has also written for film and television.

Born in Sheffield in 1940, Greenhaw grew up in Trussville and Tuscaloosa, where he attended the University of Alabama. There he studied with noted creative writing teacher Hudson Strode. Greenhaw began his writing career early.

"Since I was a teenager I have awakened around 5:30 or 6:00 and started writing," he said. "I actually wrote a first novel before I finished high school. Thank goodness that manuscript has been lost and hopelessly destroyed."

Greenhaw's latest book, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow*, has won critical accolades. Greenhaw wrote the book in collaboration with Donnie Williams, a Montgomery grocer who had never attempted a book-length work.

"The publisher wanted me to collaborate with someone from the North," said Williams, "but I insisted that I needed someone from the South that would understand me and my work. Wayne was recommended



by a friend of mine.

“Once I contacted Wayne, he said all that was written about the boycott was already written, but I convinced him to look at my documents. I’m happy for Wayne winning the Harper Lee Award. He has worked very hard, and he knows how to make words come together like no other author I have ever read.”

The annual Harper Lee Award for Alabama’s Distinguished Writer recognizes work in fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry. In addition to his work in most of these genres, Greenhaw also spent a career as a journalist and editor.

“I am so glad to be able to write — period,” he said. “I love to jump from genre to genre, keeping my interest at a high pitch. I love to research, interview, find new and interesting facts and points-of-view, as well as people and places.

“With fiction you use an entirely different mindset. With nonfiction I work hard trying to make the real even more real and to highlight the drama of real events.”

Having spent a lifetime living and working in Alabama, Greenhaw and his wife Sally, a retired circuit court judge, now divide their time between their homes in the Old Cloverdale neighborhood in Montgomery and their home in San Miguel.

“I first came here by train when I was eighteen, right out of high

school, to attend the creative writing center at the Instituto Alende, which was at that time a very well-regarded school,” he said. “I came back for three summers, had some marvelous adventures here, fell in love, enjoyed the old frontier atmosphere of that time nearly fifty years ago.

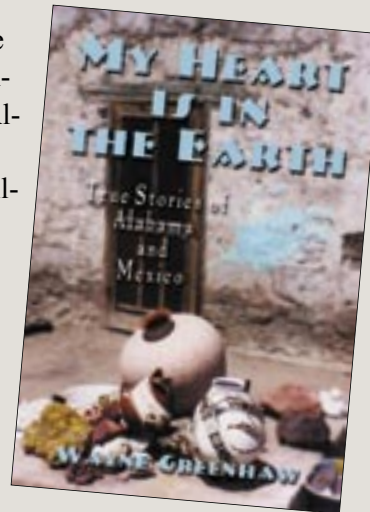
“After Sally retired four years ago, we rented a house in San Miguel for a month. We both fell in love with San Miguel and a few months later came back and bought a house here.”

Greenhaw spends about six months of the year working in San Miguel. He described an idyllic life there.

“I have a little cubicle where I keep my laptop, some books, and other research work,” he said. “My window looks out over the beautiful old Spanish colonial town.

“You should see the town right now from the window of my *oficina*. It’s bathed in the last light of day — a golden yellow. Absolutely gorgeous. The mountains far to the west turn a hazy purple at sundown. It really is beautiful.”

Despite this setting in the high-



lands of central Mexico, Greenhaw is not ready to accept the label of expatriate.

“Alabama is home,” he said. “I feel a strong kinship to Mexico, but Alabama is where I feel a very strong sense of being myself.”

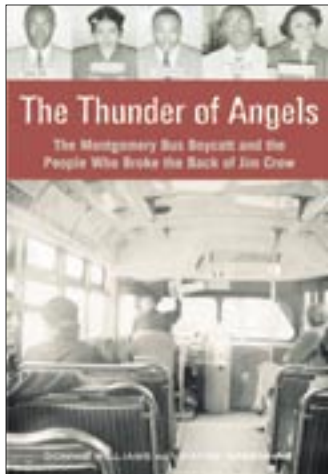
At sixty-six, Greenhaw said that age has moderated his work schedule a bit, but that he has no plans to retire from his laptop.

“I’ve written the Mexico memoir,” he said. “I’m sure it will need at least one more rewrite. Then Donnie and I will talk about doing a sequel to *Thunder*, which has already sold through two printings. I still love the act of writing and rewriting and re-writing again.”

Wayne Greenhaw will receive the 2006 Harper Lee Award for Alabama’s Distinguished Writer at the ninth annual Alabama Writers Symposium, May 4-6, at Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville. On the web: www.ascc.edu

Danny Gamble is a teaching writer for “Writing Our Stories: An Anti-violence Creative Writing Program,” a collaborative project of the Alabama Writers’ Forum and the Alabama Department of Youth Services.





The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow

by Donnie Williams with Wayne Greenhaw

Lawrence Hill Books, 2005

\$24.95, Hardcover

reviewed by Don Noble

Donnie Williams of Montgomery, Alabama, inherited from his father-in-law the bus on which Rosa Parks made history. On the evening of December 1, 1955, Mrs. Parks got off work at Montgomery Fair department store, where she was a seamstress, and, just plain tired out, took her seat on bus number 2857. When a white passenger

boarded, Mrs. Parks was ordered to give up her seat, refused, and was arrested.

In this volume, however, the boycott story is fully fleshed out, using the extensive research conducted by Donnie Williams over a period of many years, dozens of interviews, and a thorough sifting of the Alabama newspapers of the era. Williams, a Montgomery grocer, not a writer, enlisted the help of Wayne Greenhaw, a veteran journalist, the winner of the Clarence Cason Award for Distinguished Non-Fiction, and author of a history of Montgomery, to help him, I believe extensively, with the writing.

This book, *The Thunder of Angels*, covers in detail the boycott that lasted for 381 days, from December 5, 1955 until February of 1957. This is one of the many recent books, including Diane McWhorter's treatment of Birmingham in *Carry Me Home*, that fills in another piece of the historical puzzle. Williams and Greenhaw tell a good story; some parts of it will be familiar to the reader, some not.

To begin with, the Jim Crow practice of segregating bus riders was not only humiliating, insulting, and dehumanizing. It was sometimes murderous. Early in this book we are told of Thomas Edward Brooks, an Army enlisted man in uniform, who boarded a Montgomery city bus, paid his dime, and was walking down the empty aisle to the colored section. That was not enough for the driver. He insisted that Brooks follow the rules to the letter, which meant leaving the bus by the front door, walking to the rear door, and re-entering the bus. When Brooks refused, the driver summoned a policeman who clubbed Brooks, then, when Brooks attempted to flee, shot him in the back, killing him instantly. The killing was officially declared "unavoidable." As grotesque as this story is, it is not singular. Two more black men were killed in similar circumstances over the next three years. Nothing was done about any of the killings. Williams and Greenhaw make clear that, in defense of segregation, the bus drivers and police were more than rude: they were homicidal.

History has recorded that the young Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was elected President of the Montgomery Improvement Association, and King indeed deserves full credit for his eloquence, his organizational skills, and his courage. From Montgomery, he quite rightly became the leader of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Others have also received a fair amount of credit. In this volume, however, the spotlight justly lingers on E. D. Nixon, a Pullman Porter, an older man, born in 1899, who, in fact, "organized the NAACP in Alabama when Martin Luther King, Jr., was still a child." Nixon was uneducated and rough in his speech, but he learned from A. Philip Randolph and other labor leaders how to organize and bring pressure to bear. Like many others in the Movement, he was courageous enough to endure having his home bombed and his life threatened and just keep moving on.

The Montgomery bus boycott was nonviolent and effective. Although the KKK threw dynamite and city officials seethed and brought spurious lawsuits, they could not force people onto the buses. The boycotters, having been treated abominably, cursed at, and shot, stayed with the boycott until they did, in fact, overcome.

Don Noble is a University of Alabama Professor Emeritus of English and host of the Alabama Public Television literary talk show Bookmark.

WAYNE GREENHAW

BOOKS

The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow with Donnie Williams, Lawrence Hill Books, 2005

The Spider's Web, River City Publishing, 2003

Montgomery: The River City, Elliott & Clark Publishing, 2002

The Long Journey, River City Publishing, 2002

My Heart Is In the Earth: True Stories of Alabama and Mexico, River City Publishing, 2001

Beyond the Night, Black Belt Press, 1999

Alabama: Portrait of a State, with photographs by Dan Brothers, Black Belt Press, 1998

King of Country, Black Belt Press, 1994

Montgomery: The Biography of a City, Advertiser Company, 1993

Tombigbee and Other Stories, Sycamore Press, 1991

Alabama On My Mind, Sycamore Press, 1987

Flying High: Inside Big-Time Drug Smuggling, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1984

Elephants In the Cottonfields: Ronald Reagan and the New Republican South, Macmillan, 1982

Watch Out for George Wallace, Prentice-Hall, 1976

The Making of a Hero: The Story of Lieutenant William Calley, Jr., Touchstone Publishers, 1971

The Golfer, J.B. Lippincott, 1968

PLAYS

The Spirit Tree, 1997

Rose: A Southern Lady, 1992

AWARDS AND HONORS

Clarence Cason Award for Nonfiction, the University of Alabama College of Communication, 2005

University of Alabama Office of Student Media Hall of Fame, 2000

Travel Writer of the Year, Southeast Tourism Society, 1995

The Hector Award, Troy University Hall School of Journalism, 1984

Nieman Fellowship, Harvard University, 1972-73

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COASTAL WRITERS GO HOLLYWOOD

by Lovelace Cook

INT. HOTEL ROOM, DREAM - DAY
A man's naked chest moves softly as he sleeps. Outside, there is the SOUND of tires on running and laughing.
He is MARK BARRETT (mid 30s). A handsome man, Mark knows how to present himself to the world, but under his considerate exterior there is something uneasy and vulnerable.
DIXON SINCLAIR touches his chest.
DIXON
Her long, dark hair is spread across his face. She kisses the hollow of his sternum. He looks to be in his mid-twenties.
The clock beside the bed reads 11:43.

Dixon makes to go, but Mark's hand quickly, almost violently, reaches out to her and pulls her towards him.
Dixon glances at the clock. It blinks 11:44.

DIXON
No, Mark. I've got to go...
He wraps his arms around her and starts kissing her in her ear.

MARK
Stay with me. I wish you would stay.
His kisses drop lower, to her breast, insistent.
Dixon tries again to go, but she can't. She kisses him with equal passion.
Their bodies intertwine as they begin to make love.
Dixon looks at the clock again, with growing alarm.

DIXON
Mark, stop! Stop! Something's wrong!
MARK
Don't go. You're safe here!
The clock blinks from 11:44 to 11:45.
There is a huge explosion and the hotel room suddenly ablaze.

INT. THE OLD MCVAY HOUSE - NIGHT
Dixon wakes from her dream, gasping for breath. Her thin nightgown stuck to her body with sweat.



Did you see the movies *Adaptation* with Nicholas Cage or *The Player* with Tim Robbins? If so, you probably have a good picture of the convoluted process through which Hollywood turns words into moving pictures. No matter how dysfunctional the process may seem, Hollywood always looks for a good story. So, it's not surprising that moviemakers turned to Alabama Gulf Coast authors Sonny Brewer, Everett Capps, Carolyn Haines, Frank Turner Hollon, among others, for stories to adapt for film. These authors shared their experiences about the bright lights, film options, smoke and mirrors, heartache, headaches, and successes in dealing with Hollywood players.

Fairhope author Sonny Brewer is the recipient of good karma. It's well known that Brewer has been instrumental in helping numbers of talented southern authors find a publisher. So it's good news that Brewer's novel, *The Poet of Tolstoy Park* (Ballantine Books, 2005), captured the imagination of Hollywood. Brewer's novel is a literary, philosophical, and spiritual tribute with a beautifully-crafted character, Fairhope hermit Henry James Stuart. Brewer, who recently returned from a trip to Los Angeles, talked about meetings

and "A-list" screenwriter Tom Epperson, who adapted the novel for film.

Following initial talks with Epperson, Brewer insisted that the screenwriter visit Fairhope, see Tolstoy Park and Henry James Stuart's home, and stay in the Wolff Cottage, home to the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts. He told Epperson, "Come to Fairhope, taste the food, see the sunset," and get a feeling for what Henry Stuart must have experienced in his life on the bluffs above the bay. In a recent trip to LA, Brewer and his film agent, Brian Lipson with Endeavor Talent Agency



Clockwise from left: Frank Turner Hollon, Carolyn Haines, Sonny Brewer, Everett Capps

met with Epperson's agent and manager to plan strategies and talks with major directors, studios, and production companies. Brewer also met with his entertainment attorney, who handled the details of the contract for the adaptation of his novel. Brewer's second novel, *A Sound Like Thunder*, will be published by Random House in August 2006, and Brewer's book agent, Amy Rennert, is shopping his third book, *The Tumble Inn and Sit-down Café*, at Random House.

If you blinked, you might have missed it, and that's a shame. Everett Capps's novel, *Off Magazine Street* (MacAdam/Cage Publishing, 2004), was adapted for the independent film, *A Love Song For Bobby Long*, starring John Travolta and Scarlett Johansen, and released for limited distribution in late 2004. The title song and other music for the film was written by New Orleans musician and Capps's son, Grayson Capps. In the first feature written and directed by New Yorker Shainee Gabel, the adaptation of Capps's novel has a Hollywood ending and is not nearly as gritty or powerfully authentic as Capps's novel, which brings to mind the skid row poet and author Charles Bukowski. In fact, a *Times-Picayune* article referred to Capps as the "Bayou Bukowski." According to Capps, Gabel wanted the movie to be a love story, but Capps says, "It's a story about Taoism and demonstrates that so-called despicable people, or the disenfranchised, are capable of doing good in spite of themselves and are capable of acts of decency for which most people judge them incapable."

Of the authors interviewed, Capps experienced a worst-case scenario in the adaptation and filming of the screenplay based on his novel. A Fairhope writer who also paints

and sculpts in his self-made paradise on the river, Capps had no reason to doubt Gabel's good intentions when he signed the contract to allow her to adapt his novel for film. It came as a shock to Capps and to his publisher, David Poindexter of MacAdam/Cage, when they learned that Gabel had not given Capps credit for his story in the movie. It was only through costly litigation with Sony Pictures, Lions Gate Entertainment, and Gabel that Capps was given the credit "Story By" for his novel just before the movie was released instead of "Inspired By"—the term Gabel used to refer to Capps. If you didn't have an opportunity to see it in a theater, make sure you rent the movie and read *Off Magazine Street* to find out whether you prefer a Hollywood ending to Capps's powerful, thought-provoking story.

Mobile author Carolyn Haines has film options for two of her three novels in the Jexville trilogy. Los Angeles producer Paul Black, who wrote and directed an award-winning independent film called *America Brown*, obtained the rights to Haines's *Touched* (re-released through River City Publishing, 2004) and adapted the novel for film. According to Haines, Black has the script in some "good hands around Hollywood." Haines, who is a multi-genre author with more than fifty published novels, is also working with Ron Daniels, a New York-based opera and film director, who optioned the rights to her novel *Judas Burning* (River City Publishing, 2005). Daniels and Haines co-wrote the screenplay based on her novel, and Daniels is in talks with Paramount.

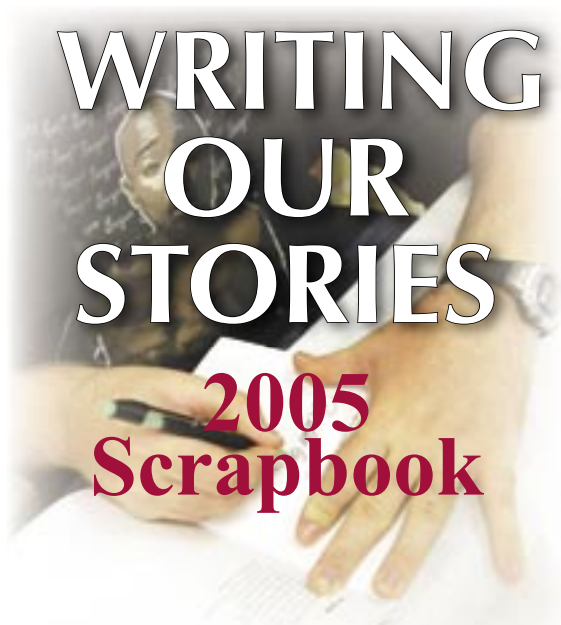
Frank Turner Hollon talked about the adaptation of his novel, *Life is a Strange Place* (MacAdam/Cage Publishing, 2004), and his agent Rich Green with Creative Artists Agency.

The screenplay is called *Barry Munday* after the main character of Hollon's novel, and the film is slated for production in February 2006. CAA is packaging the film with director/screenwriter Chris D'Arienzo who adapted the novel as a straight comedy, and the agency is in talks with actors Luke Wilson and Amy Adams and with Prospect Pictures. Hollon, who is well grounded in his Baldwin County family life, adopts a wait-and-see attitude about it all and admits to being grateful that the experience with Hollywood didn't happen with his first novel.

Hollon is pragmatic. "Hollywood business is like a blowup of the book business. It doesn't have much to do with the hard work of writing," he said. There is no doubt that the solitary pursuit of writing a novel is hard work. However, most screenwriters who make a living from their craft would argue that screenwriting does involve hard work, especially if it's going to sell. Hollon, who recently co-wrote a screenplay with a Hollywood writer, is the author of MacAdam/Cage titles *The God File*, *The Pains of April*, *A Thin Difference*, and *The Point of Fracture*. His children's book, *Glitter Girl and the Crazy Cheese*, is expected in Spring 2006.

Hollon's comment wraps it up for these coastal Alabama writers: "A lot of first-time authors have success with their first novel and they forget what they started with—something important to write. So I told myself, 'Let me just pay attention to what I'm writing right now—just me, the words and the writing.'"

Lovelace Cook is a screenwriter who lives in Fairhope and owns the Lovelace Cook Agency, "where southern writers and movie makers meet."



Photographs by Jamie Martin

This past fall the Alabama Writers' Forum and the Alabama Department of Youth Services hosted three book-signing events for "Writing Our Stories" authors. The three new anthologies published represent the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first editions of work by young authors who study with Alabama authors in this unique partnership between juvenile justice and the arts. Their stories in prose and poetry tell of loneliness, mental and physical abuse, remorse for crimes committed, and the desire for forgiveness.

Each year the Forum invites distinguished guest speakers to address the assemblies at each event. This year our speakers once again stressed to the

young writers that they should continue to work diligently in school, and especially in "Writing Our Stories", so that they will be prepared to re-enter the community as better citizens.

On October 26, Senator Quinton T. Ross, Jr. (D-Montgomery, District 26) spoke to the Lurleen B. Wallace school students on the publication of *Open the Door 8*. Teaching writers Marlin Barton and Danny Gamble work with the young men, who range in age from 12-18, at the Mt. Meigs campus.

On November 16, Jefferson County Commissioner Shelia Smoot was the guest at the Chalkville campus event for the Sequoyah School's book, *New Beginning*. Chalkville is the only girl's

facility of its kind in Alabama. During the reception in the school's library, Commissioner Smoot encouraged the girls to consider how much being published authors can mean. Since 1998, poet and educator Priscilla Hancock Cooper has worked with the young women in Sequoyah School. Says Cooper, "I love working with the young writers at Chalkville. 'Writing Our Stories' has enriched my life. I grow with each group of students."

On November 30, Alabama State Department of Education Assistant Superintendent Dr. Eddie Johnson spoke to the students who published work in the anthology *My World*. The McNeel School students worked for nine months with teaching writer Danny Gamble, who said of this class, "Although small in number, these writers were big on ideas. Their work represents some of the best yet to come from McNeel students."

We include these celebratory photographs in *First Draft* so that all Alabama writers and readers will know of the success of the "Writing Our Stories" students.



Rodney McQueen listens to fellow writers read and waits his turn at McNeel School.

McNeel School writers celebrate the publication of My World. L-R Bradley Coe, Principal Arthur Tigner, Sharron Deet, ASDE Assistant Superintendent Dr. Eddie Johnson, Rodney McQueen, DYS School District Superintendent Dr. John Stewart.





Dr. Eddie Johnson addresses the Vacca campus and McNeel School writers upon the publication of My World on November 30.



Young women, their teachers, and others who make the Chalkville "Writing Our Stories" program a success celebrate at a reception in the school's library following the program on November 16. Standing, l-r: DYS Curriculum and Federal Programs Coordinator Tracy Smitherman, India Rich, Alycia Anne Whittaker, Brandi Crumbley, Brandi Burgess, Katherine Capps, and AWF Executive Director Jeanie Thompson. Seated: Sequoyah School teacher Janet Dixon, teaching writer Priscilla Hancock Cooper, and Jefferson County Commissioner Shelia Smoot. Dixon and Cooper have worked together since 1998 in the "Writing Our Stories" classroom partnership.



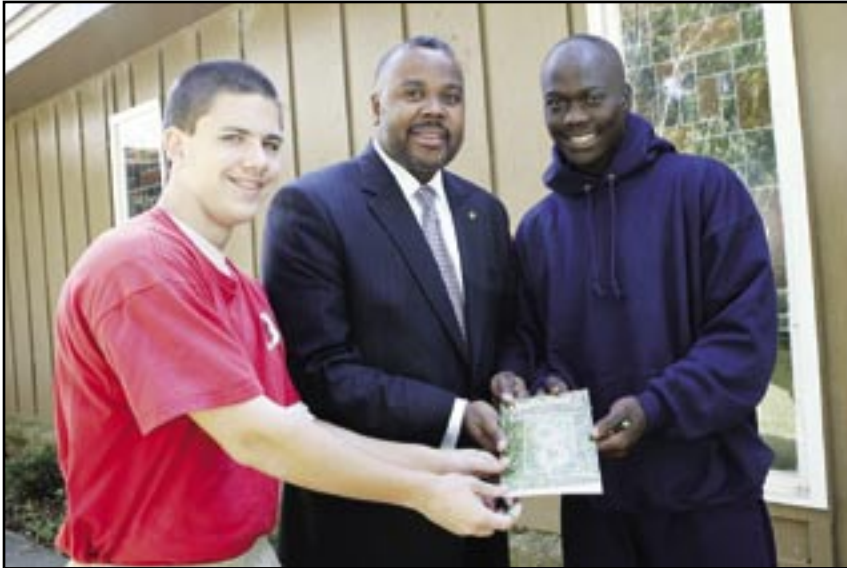
Commissioner Shelia Smoot receives an autographed copy of New Beginning from Alycia Anne Whittaker (left) and Brandi Burgess.



Brandi Burgess returned to the Chalkville campus with her mother, to read her work from New Beginning on November 16.



In the tradition she began to recognize her "Writing Our Stories" participants, Priscilla Hancock Cooper presents a red rose to Alycia Anne Whittaker during the Chalkville Campus reading event.



Nathaniel Holmes and his mother traveled from their home in Georgia to so that Holmes could participate in the October 26 Mt. Meigs event for Open the Door 8.

Alabama State Senator Quinton T. Ross, Jr. (D-Montgomery, District 26) spoke to the Open the Door 8 writers and their guests at Mt. Meigs on October 26. Senator Ross received a signed copy from Jonathan Steele (left) and Lutrix McGlown.



Charles Smith has grown both as a writer and a person while participating in "Writing Our Stories" at Mt. Meigs. His work has appeared in two anthologies and two chapbooks. On October 26, he read from his poems in Open the Door 8.

At the Mt. Meigs campus event to celebrate Open the Door 8, DYS Executive Director J. Walter Wood, Jr. told the assembly that he believes in the effectiveness of "Writing Our Stories" as part of the educational curriculum for adjudicated youth in Alabama.



For more information about "Writing Our Stories," visit www.writersforum.org/programs/writing. A limited number of current and previous anthologies from the program are available to teachers and juvenile justice professionals upon request. Contact writersforum@bellsouth.net, Subject: DYS programs, or phone 334-265-7728.

"Writing Our Stories" is funded by the Alabama Department of Youth Services, with additional funding from the Alabama Writers' Forum and the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Additional funding has been provided for special projects by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alabama Children's Trust Fund.

The Alabama Writers' Forum,
a statewide literary organization promoting
writers and writing, wishes to thank its
generous partners and friends.

Partnership Support, 1993-2006

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The Alabama Department of Youth Services

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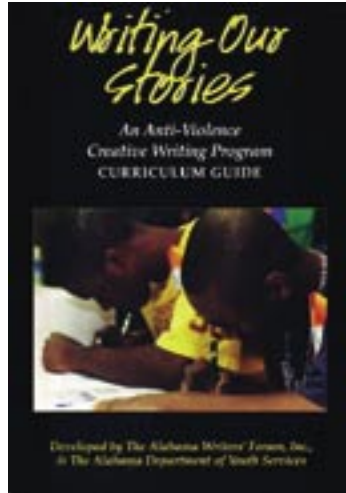
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Comes a Time For Leaping



by Ron Ellis

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE I GREW UP, there was this one old man, a known lover of fishes and far away waters, who fished everywhere, even taking trips into Canada. He was the world traveler of our block and he brought back wonderful tales from his many journeys, which he told with great joy to his dedicated fans, primarily a group of enthusiastic kids who would abandon a game of basketball upon catching sight of his truck and gather in his driveway to hear about his latest adventure.

As we sat quietly before him on the warm blacktop and listened to his stories, each of us yearning to be his fishing partner in pursuit of some monster bass or musky, he nurtured in us the desire to cast our own baits into some distant water and to haul out a few dreams of our own.

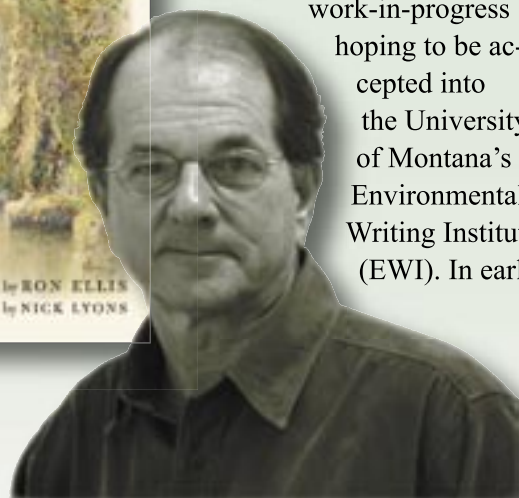
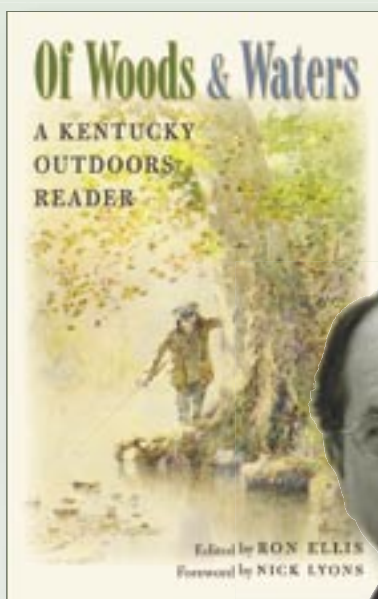
At the time, my dream included thoughts of becoming a writer, specifically an outdoor writer, and so the old man's stories fanned this flame, as did the stories I read in my father's monthly issues of *Field & Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, *Sports Afield*, and *Kentucky's Happy Hunting Ground*. During that time fishing and writing were becoming entwined and braided together so tightly I could no longer think of one without the other.

By the time I had the money to fund a dream fishing trip, I encountered life and some of its unexpected but pleasant distractions, like discovering THE girl, while working several jobs, including playing drums in a rock and roll band on the weekends, working a day job for the Federal government in nearby Cincinnati, selling clothes at a local men's store, and attending college full time in the evenings. This was the late 1960s and so the Vietnam War was always on my mind as well.

In the end, I served three years in the army in West Berlin and ended up marrying THE girl in that divided city. After being discharged, I returned home to finish college as a journalism major and an English minor at a brand new four-year college where, in January 1974 during my senior year, I was hired as a student writer by the public relations department and then asked to stay on full-time after graduation. This was during the "energy crisis," at a time when there seemed to be absolutely no jobs, except for petroleum engineers, and so in February 1975 I began an unexpected career in university relations. Without getting into a lengthy expose of my early academic life, suffice it to say that for those who knew me, such a career decision was highly unlikely, even "startling," to use the words of a former high school teacher.

True, the writing dream was on hold, but still, I never abandoned it.

It was in the winter of 1998 that I finally formalized that dream when I submitted the first twenty-five pages of a work-in-progress hoping to be accepted into the University of Montana's Environmental Writing Institute (EWI). In early



Ron Ellis

April 1998, I was notified in a letter from Hank Harrington, a professor in Montana's Environmental Studies program and the director of the EWI, that I was one of fourteen writers selected to study that May with my literary hero, the critically acclaimed writer Rick Bass.

In February 2001, my first book, *Cogan's Woods*, a slim volume of fictionalized memoir based on those early pages I submitted to the EWI, was published by Pruett Publishing, with a foreword by Rick Bass.

A few months later, as I was trying to decide whether to take early retirement and finally pursue my dream, a friend asked if I was afraid to leave my job, to leave the place where, in his words, "you are somebody." He also asked, "What if you've just written your only book and there are no more? What then?" I had not really considered that possibility, since all along I had only been thinking about how much I enjoyed writing and the thought of living this long overdue dream, and, truly, I felt I could write more books. At this critical time, I was re-reading most of the work of another major literary hero, the celebrated Alabama writer Harry Middleton whose work I so admired. While reading *On the Spine of Time*, his classic tale of journeying and fly-fishing through the Smoky Mountains, for which I had the honor to write the foreword for the Pruett Publishing edition, Middleton suggests that "sooner or later you've got to let loose of certainty's hand and leap. Jump. Believe in something. . ."

Indeed, I thought, it was time for me to believe in something new and grand.

And so, armed with the security of a monthly retirement check (it truly does lessen the guilt I feel at not going off to work each morning, while my wife continues to do so), I walked away in August of 2001 from my university career as the Assistant Vice President for Advancement. I made this chancy disconnect from the only long-term professional world I had ever known, a world where I was comfortable, and fully embraced the writing life, a life more quiet and solitary than any I have ever known, especially after a career driven by schedules and deadlines and a dizzying sense that comes from a life lived in perpetual motion.

And now, as I discuss and read from *Cogan's Woods*, or the new anthology I recently edited for the University Press of Kentucky, *Of Woods & Waters (A Kentucky Outdoors Reader)*, I am often reminded of Professor Harrington's prophetic words in the closing line of his acceptance letter: "You're in for a rare experience," he

wrote, "which, I honestly believe, will change your life (or you weren't paying attention)."

I like to think that I was "paying attention" in Montana that spring, because certainly my life has changed since then—quite wonderfully, in fact—a river of change that has carried me to destinations I only once dreamed about experiencing.

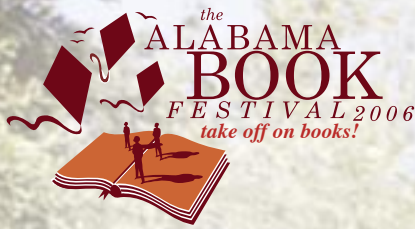
As I think back on that great "leap" I took, it is not lost on me that the ancient mapmakers often cautioned sailors when entering such uncharted waters to "BEWARE—BEYOND HERE THERE BE DRAGONS."

Still, as Harry Middleton suggested, there comes a time for leaping.



Line art by Rick Hill, courtesy of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

HARRY MIDDLETON (1948-1993) lived in Birmingham, Alabama, with his wife and two sons, while serving as a senior editor for *Southern Living* where he wrote the monthly "Outdoors South" column and numerous features from 1984 to 1990. Throughout his career, he contributed hundreds of stories, essays, and book reviews to the most respected periodicals, such as the *New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *Field & Stream*, *Country Journal*, *Smithsonian*, and *Sierra*, among others. Sadly, Harry Middleton died far too young, but not before he could leave an impressive body of work rich in the wild trout, cold mountain streams, and wonderful characters he discovered while frequenting these beloved wild places. He is best remembered for his classic books *The Earth Is Enough* (1989), *On the Spine of Time* (1991), and *The Bright Country* (1993)—all about Harry's journeys through good mountains with a fly-rod in hand and wild trout on his mind—which are still available in paper from Pruett Publishing Company (www.pruettpublishing.com) of Boulder, Colorado, or through your favorite bookstore. Two first-edition hardback volumes, Pruett Publishing's *Rivers of Memory* (1993) and Meadow Run Press's limited-edition *The Starlight Creek Angling Society* (1992), are only available through collectors and the used market.



"I grew up in a state that has produced the best storytellers on this planet. Some of them have reached literary fame, and some of them will go to work tomorrow laying shingles or raising babies. Some of them read from lecterns at universities, and others speak from rockers and stoops and back porches... I don't know where you could find a building or a tent big enough to throw over all the writing talent this red dirt and black bottomland has grown."

—Rick Bragg

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RICK BRAGG is the best-selling author of *All Over But the Shoutin'*, *Somebody Told Me*, *Ava's Man*, and *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*. Formerly a national correspondent for *The New York Times*, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 1996. Bragg lives in Tuscaloosa where he is on appointment to the University of Alabama, where he teaches writing in the Journalism Department.

SONNY BREWER's first novel is *The Poet of Tolstoy Park*. A second novel, *A Sound Like Thunder*, is forthcoming, and he is working on the third novel in his Fairhope trilogy, *The Tumble Inn and Sit Down Café*. He has edited several anthologies in the Blue Moon Café series, the most recent is *Stories from the Blue Moon Café IV*.

WAYNE FLYNT is the author of eleven books, including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*. His most recent book, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, was awarded the 2004 Anne B. and James B. McMillan Prize. His other awards include the Lillian Smith Award for Non-Fiction, the Alabama Library Association Award for Non-Fiction, Outstanding Academic Book from the American Library Association, and the James F. Sulzby, Jr. Book Award. He is co-author of *Alabama: A History of a Deep South State*, which was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

FAYE GIBBONS is the author of several books, including the Mountain Wedding series, *Night in the Barn*, and *Hook Moon Night*. Born in the mountains of northern Georgia where storytelling plays a large role in everyday living, Gibbons now lives in Deatsville, Alabama, with her husband and two dogs, who have inspired many of her story ideas.

JULIANA GRAY's debut collection of poems, *The Man Under My Skin*, is the fifth in the River City Poetry Series, edited by Andrew Hudgins. Her chapbook, *History in Bones*, won the 2001 Wick Prize. Her poems have been published in a variety of literary journals and anthologies, including *Yalobusha Review*, *Sundog*, *Poetry East*, the *Formalist*, the *Louisville Review*, *Stories From the Blue Moon Café Volume III*, and *The Alumni Grill 2*.

WAYNE GREENHAW has published fifteen books of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow* (with Donnie Williams), *The Spider's Web*, and *The Golfer*. His plays include *The Spirit Tree* and *Rose: A Southern Lady*. He is the recipient of the Clarence Cason Award for Nonfiction, The Hector Award, and a Nieman Fellowship. Greenhaw is this year's recipient of The Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year.



Sonny Brewer



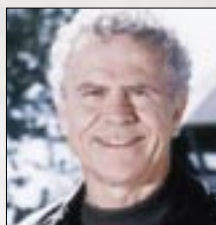
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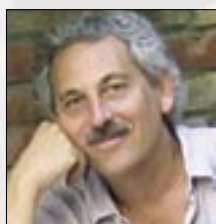
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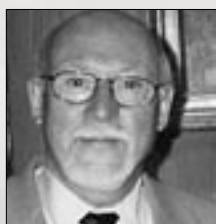
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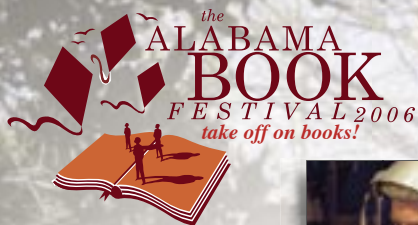
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Storytelling

A "Writing Our Stories" showcase



CAROLYN HAINES is the author of the new novel *Penumbra*; *Judas Burning*, third in a trilogy; the *Bones* series of mysteries, set in the Mississippi Delta; and other works of fiction. She is the recipient of an Alabama State Council on the Arts Literature Fellowship. A native of Lucedale, Mississippi, she currently resides in Semmes, Alabama, where she teaches fiction writing at the University of South Alabama. Haines is one of two teaching writers for the Grand Bay area “Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Initiative.”

JAMES HANSEN’s new book is *First Man: A Life of Neil A. Armstrong*. He is a scholar of the history of science and technology and author of more than a half dozen books. Hansen is a professor of history at Auburn University.

PAUL HEMPHILL is the author of four novels and eleven works of non-fiction, including *Lonesome Blues: The Life of Hank Williams*, *The Ballad of Little River*, *Nobody’s Hero*, *King of the Road*, *Lost in the Lights*, and *Leaving Birmingham*. Born and raised in Birmingham, he lives in Atlanta.

HOMER HICKAM is a *New York Times* best-selling author with eight books, including *Rocket Boys*, which was made into the movie *October Sky*. His other titles include *The Keeper’s Son* and *The Ambassador’s Son*. He is a Vietnam veteran, a SCUBA instructor, a retired rocket scientist, and an amateur paleontologist. He lives in Huntsville.

ROY HOFFMAN’s novel *Chicken Dreaming Corn*, was a BookSense Pick and *Southern Living* Select. Other books include *Almost Home*, winner of the Lillian Smith Award, and *Back Home: Journeys Through Mobile*, a collection of narrative nonfiction, profiles, and essays from the *Mobile Register*, *New York Times*, *Preservation*, and other publications. A staff writer for the *Mobile Register*, Hoffman also teaches in the Brief Residency MFA in Writing Program at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. He is one of two Eastern Shore teaching writers for “Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project.”

SUZANNE HUDSON is an award-winning fiction writer, whose works include *Opposable Thumbs*, *In a Temple of Trees*, and *In the Dark of the Moon*. She won the Playboy Fiction Contest while a student at Birmingham-Southern College. She presently works as a counselor and creative writing teacher at Fairhope Middle School. Hudson is one of two Eastern Shore teaching writers for “Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project.”

DOLORES HYDOCK’s four CDs of original stories have won Resource Awards from *Storytelling World Magazine*. An actress and story performer whose work has been featured at a variety of concerts, festivals, and special events throughout the Southeast, Hydock is a touring artist for the Alabama State Council on the Arts, a speaker with the Alabama Humanities Foundation, and a member of the Southern Order of Storytellers. She is the recipient of an Alabama State Council on the Arts Artist Fellowship.

DON NOBLE is the editor of *Climbing Mt. Cheaha: Emerging Alabama Writers* and host of *Bookmark* on Alabama Public Television. Noble is professor emeritus at the University of Alabama Department of English and teaches in UA’s Department of Communications. His specialties include Southern and American literature.

GREG PAPE’s eight books of poetry include *Little America*; *Black Branches*; *Storm Pattern*; *Sunflower Facing the Sun: Poems*, winner of the Edwin Ford Piper Poetry Award; *Small Pleasures*; and *American Flamingo*, winner of the *Crab Orchard Review* 2004 Open Competition Award in Poetry. He teaches at the University of Montana and in the Spalding University Brief Residency Writing Program. He has received two NEA fellowships, the YMHA/The Nation Discovery Award, and other awards.

DORI SANDERS’s first novel, *Clover*, won the Lillian Smith Award. She is the author of two novels, a cookbook, and a family memoir. She can be found most days at her family’s peach stand in Filbert, South Carolina, selling peaches and autographing her books.

AMY STOLLS’ debut novel for young adults is *Palms to the Ground*. She holds an MFA in creative writing from American University and works as a literature specialist for the National Endowment for the Arts. She lives in Washington, D.C.

JOHN TAYMAN’s new book, the *New York Times* bestseller *The Colony: The Harrowing True Story of the Exiles of Molokai*, has been featured on *Morning Edition* and Terri Gross’s *Fresh Air*. He is the former deputy editor of *Outside* magazine. He has been editor-at-large for *Men’s Journal*, executive editor of *New England Monthly*, and contributing editor to *Life*, *GQ*, *People*, *Men’s Health*, and *Business 2.0*.

FRANK X WALKER is the author of three poetry collections, *Black Box*; *Buffalo Dance: the Journey of York*, winner of the Lillian Smith Award; and *Affrilachia*, a Kentucky Public Librarians' Choice Award nominee. He recently was awarded the prestigious Lannan Literary Fellowship as a writer who demonstrates potential for continued outstanding literary work. A founding member of the Affrilachian Poets, he is editor of *Eclipsing a Nappy New Millennium*. Walker's poems have been widely anthologized and adapted for the stage by the University of Kentucky Theatre Department.

BILLIE JEAN YOUNG, an actor, activist, poet, and educator, has written several works, including *My Name Is Black* and *The Child of Too*. Her book of poetry and drama, *Fear Not the Fall*, is based on the life of Fannie Lou Hamer. A MacArthur Fellow, Young has performed her play, *Fannie Lou Hamer: The Little Light*, internationally.

...and also appearing



Marlin Barton



William Cobb



Abe Fawal



Philip Beidler



Tony Crunk



Joe Formichella



Clyde Bolton



Kirk Curnutt



Danny Gamble



Aleta Boudreaux



Pat C. Devoto



Peter Golenbock



Loretta Cobb



Priscilla Hancock Cooper



Russell Helms

MARLIN BARTON's work includes *Dancing by the River*, a collection of short stories, and *A Broken Thing*, a novel. His collection, *The Dry Well*, received the *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook Award*. He received the Andrew Lytle Prize from *The Sewanee Review* and his fiction has also appeared in the anthologies *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards* and *Stories from the Blue Moon Café*. Barton has taught in the "Writing Our Stories" program from its beginning in 1997.

PHILIP BEIDLER's books include *Late Thoughts on an Old War: The Legacy of Vietnam* and *The Good War's Greatest Hits: The World War II Classic and American Remembering*. He has published numerous books on Alabama literature. In 1999 he received the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Alabama's Distinguished Scholar. Beidler is a professor of English at the University of Alabama.

CLYDE BOLTON is the author of numerous books, most recently the novel *Turn Left on Green* and the memoir *Stop the Presses (So I Can Get Off): Tales from 40 Years of Sports Writing*. An award-winning journalist and three-time Alabama Sports Columnist of the Year, Bolton retired from Auburn University. Boudreaux is one of two teaching writers for the Alabama Sports Writers Hall of Fame. He lives in Trussville, Alabama.

ALETA BOUDREAUX wrote her first novel, *Song of the White Swan*, while conducting research into healing, New Age and Native American philosophy, and comparative religions. She holds a degree in Fine Arts from Auburn University. Boudreaux is one of two teaching writers for the Grand Bay location of "Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane Project."

LORETTA COBB's debut short story collection is *The Ocean Was Salt*. She has also published poetry and numerous short stories. Cobb is director emerita of the Harbert Writing Center at the University of Montevallo.

WILLIAM COBB has published six books of fiction, including *Wings of Morning* and *A Walk Through Fire*, and numerous short stories and essays. He has also had three plays produced off-off Broadway in New York. A native of Demopolis, Alabama, Cobb served for many years as writer-in-residence at the University of Montevallo.

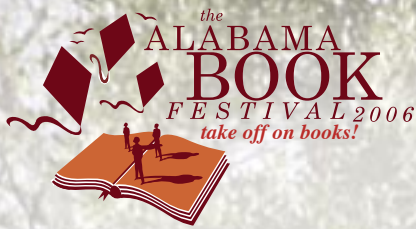
PRISCILLA HANCOCK COOPER is a multi-media artist who has toured the stage adaptation of her book, *Call Me Black Woman*, around the country. Her work has appeared in the anthologies *The Dark Woods I Cross*, *Black Alabama*, and *The Storytellers*, and in the textbook *Teaching Zora Neal Hurston*. She is the recipient of the Individual Artist Fellowship in Literature from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and a Regional Artist Project grant funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. She coordinates the Birmingham Cultural Alliance Partnership at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. She has been a teaching writer in the "Writing Our Stories" program since 1998.

TONY CRUNK is the author of three children's books, the latest *Railroad John and the Red Rock Run*. His collection of poetry, *Living in the Resurrection*, was the 1994 selection in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. He currently teaches creative writing at the University of Alabama Birmingham.

KIRK CURNUTT is the author of *Baby, Let's Make a Baby Plus Ten Other Stories*. He is chair of the English Department at Troy University, Montgomery Campus.

PAT CUNNINGHAM DEVOTO is the author of three novels, including *My Last Days as Roy Rogers* and *The Summer We Got Saved*. She taught high school for many years before turning to writing. Born and raised in Florence, Alabama, she currently lives in Atlanta.

ABE FAWAL's novel, *On the Hills of God*, received the 1998 PEN Oakland Award for Excellence in Literature. A writer and filmmaker, he taught film and literature at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Birmingham-Southern College.



JOE FORMICHELLA is the author of *The Wreck of the Twilight Limited* and *Here's to You Jackie Robinson: The Legend of the Prichard Mohawks*. He lives on the Gulf Coast.

DANNY GAMBLE is the author of *Letters from Suburbia*, a chapbook of poems, and *Exit: Brautigan*, a one-man play on the life and work of poet/novelist Richard Brautigan. He has been a teaching writer with "Writing Our Stories" since 1999. Gamble is copy editor for *First Draft*, the journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum.

PETER GOLENBOCK's twenty-five sports biographies and histories include *Miracle: Bobby Allison and the Saga of the Alabama Gang*. One of the nation's best-known sports authors and oral historians, he is a five-time *New York Times* best-selling author. Golenbock lives in St. Petersburg, Florida.

RUSSELL HELMS is the author of *60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Birmingham*. His latest book, *GPS Outdoors: A Practical Guide for Outdoor Enthusiasts*, will publish in July. His lifelong interest in the outdoors and hiking has carried him along a variety of paths, from sections of the nearby Appalachian Trail of North Georgia all the way to the remote highlands of Ethiopia. Currently, Helms is an editor with Menasha Ridge Press of Birmingham.

HARVEY H. JACKSON III is the author of *Rivers of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama* and *Inside Alabama: A Personal History of My State*, among other books. He is Professor of History at Jacksonville State University.

WANDA JOHNSON is a storyteller, motivational speaker, and educational consultant. She is the recipient of an award from *Storytelling World Magazine*. A native of Prichard, she works as a Library Associate for the Mobile Public Library.

APRIL MOON currently entertains children at the Emmet O'Neal Library in Mountain Brook. She has been an artist-in-residence for the Pulaski School District, featured entertainer at the Blue Bell Festival, yearly presenter at the UAB Young Authors Conference, and a much sought-after children's entertainer throughout Alabama.

BILLY MOORE's most recent book is *Little Brother Real Snake*. He teaches history at South Walton High School and Okaloosa Walton Community College. He is a graduate of Mississippi State University and Rice University, where he studied novel writing and served as assistant football coach. A native of Florida, he spent much of his youth on his grandparents' farm near Opp. He and his wife Dee live in DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

MARY ANN NEELEY has written and edited numerous articles and books documenting the history and culture of central Alabama, including *The Writings of M. P. Blue: Montgomery's First Historian*. Montgomery's leading local historian and the former director of the Landmarks Foundation, she is a preservationist and former educator.

CAROL PADGETT's fascination with how folks live has resulted in a series of collections of folk wisdom, remedies, and recipes, including *Keeping Hearth and Home in Old Alabama*. She is a researcher and writer living in Birmingham.

ROBERT PARSONS has worked in puppet theater for eighteen years through children's television and international touring. He began his work with puppets in Tasmania, Australia, before attending the School of Puppetry at the Academy of Musical Arts in Prague. Since coming to the United States, he has worked with the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago, the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and the Auburn University Theatre Department.

KARREN PELL is the author of *Alabama Troubadour* (with photography by Tim Henderson). Her work ranges from commercial songs, published and recorded nationally and internationally, to musical theater produced by Opera Memphis and Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Pell has served three residences for the Alabama State Council on the Arts. She teaches at Auburn University Montgomery while writing and performing original musical literary adaptations across the Southeast.

JOHN HAYES PRITCHARD, JR. is the author of *Junior Ray*. Three songs he co-wrote were recorded by major artists, and his poetry has been published in minor journals. Born in the Mississippi Delta, Pritchard currently lives in Memphis, where he has taught college English for most of the last thirty-two years.

CARROLL DALE SHORT's new book, *Turbo's Very Life and Other Stories*, was recently published by NewSouth. His work has appeared in *Redbook*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Oxford American*, and *USA Today*. He received *Redbook* magazine's Outstanding Young Writer in America Award in 1977. Short was born in Shangi, Alabama, wrote for *The Jasper Eagle*, and now lives in Birmingham.



Harvey Jackson



Wanda Johnson



April Moon



Billy Moore



Carol Padgett



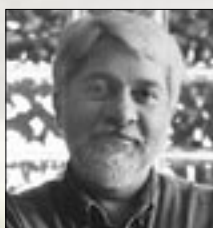
Robert Parsons



Karren Pell



John Hayes Pritchard, Jr.



Carroll Dale Short



Carl T. Smith



Mary Stanton



Sidney Thompson



Sue Brannan Walker

CARL T. SMITH is the author of two novels, *Nothin' Left To Lose* and *Lowcountry Boil*. His careers have included professional acting, singing, songwriting, platform speaking, and teaching at the secondary and college levels. He lives on Fripp Island, the last in a chain of barrier islands off the coast of South Carolina.

MARY STANTON is the author of *Freedom Walk: Mississippi or Bust* and *From Selma to Sorrow: The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo*. Her work has appeared in *Southern Exposure* and *Gulf South Historical Review*. A public administrator with the Town of Mamaroneck, New York, Stanton has also taught at the College of St. Elizabeth and Rutgers University.

SIDNEY THOMPSON's debut short fiction collection is *Sideshow* and his stories have been published in the *Southern Review*, the *Carolina Quarterly*, *Louisiana Literature*, and *New Delta Review* and anthologized in *The Alumni Grill*, *Climbing Mt. Cheaha: Emerging Alabama Authors*, and two volumes of *Stories from the Blue Moon Café*. He has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He lives in Point Clear, Alabama.

SUE BRANNAN WALKER, Alabama's Poet Laureate, has published several books, including *It's Good Weather for Fudge: Conversing with Carson McCullers* (with Virginia Spencer Carr), *In the Realm of Rivers: Alabama's Mobile-Tensaw Delta*, *Blood Will Bear Your Name*, and *The Appearance of Green*. She is the founder and publisher of Negative Capability Press. Walker presently serves as the chair of the University of South Alabama Department of English.

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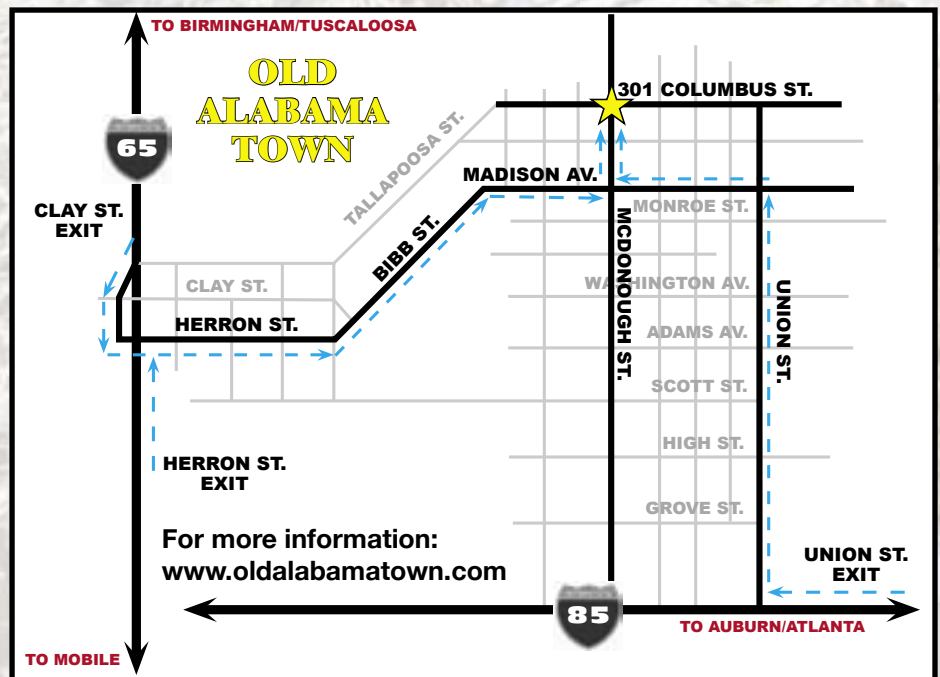
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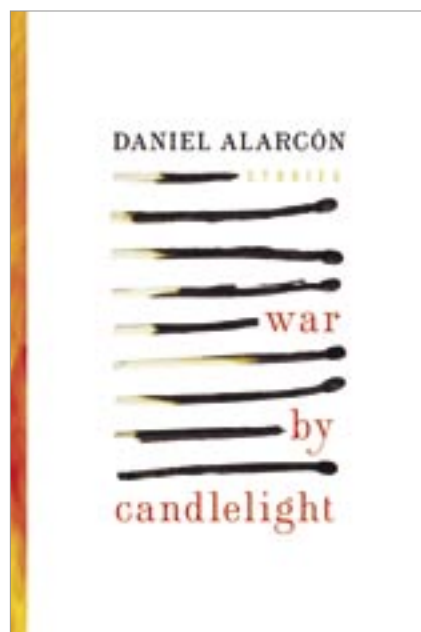
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War by Candlelight

by Daniel Alarcón

HarperCollins Publishers

\$23.95, Hardcover

reviewed by Julia Oliver

Peruvian-born Daniel Alarcón spent his formative years in Birmingham, but there is no allusion to that connection in these taut, viscerally eloquent stories of revolution, gang warfare, poverty, and natural disasters in the author's native country.

In "City of Clowns" (which appeared in *The New Yorker*), the viewpoint character asks, "What does a volcano do to a man but impress upon him the need to dream on a grand scale?" "Absence" reflects an artist's sense of alienation and loss after he moves from Lima to New York.

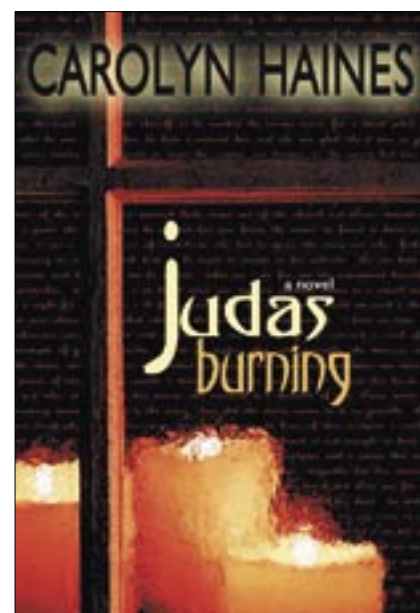
The startlingly disturbing "Lima, Peru, July 28, 1979" describes a wanton holiday killing of all the black street dogs in the vicinity: "Decent people slept, but we made war, fashioned it with our hands, our knives, and our sweat. Everything was going well until we ran out of black dogs...By two o'clock, we were slopping black paint on beige, brown, and white mutts, all squirming away the last of their breaths, fur tinged with red." Although he has moments of unease during this matter-of-fact recollection of violence, the narrator's conscience remains clear: "You should know the homeless dogs of Lima inhabit a higher plane of ruthlessness. They own the alleys, they are thieves of the colonial city, undressing trash heaps, urinating in

cobblestone corners...They hustle through the streets with self-assurance, with a confidence that comes from knowing they don't have to eat every day to live...It angered me to know that a dog might outdo me, and so I resolved that it would not."

In the final story, "A Strong Dead Man," sixteen-year-old Rafael learns, while watching his father die of a series of strokes, "that life makes us older frantically, that time does not always pass in an even cadence, but sometimes all at once: that we can age—month, years, decades—in a single day, even a single hour."

Daniel Alarcón is currently the writer-in-residence at a college in Oakland, California. Perhaps a future work will be nuanced by his Alabama upbringing—or not. We can still stake a claim to this rising star.

Julia Oliver's third novel will be published by the University of Georgia Press.



Judas Burning

by Carolyn Haines

River City Publishing, 2005

\$26.95, Hardcover

reviewed by Ruth Ott

Carolyn Haines, famous for her *Bones* series of mysteries set in imaginary Zinnia, Mississippi, has for her newest mystery returned to Jexville, site of her novel *Touched*. However,

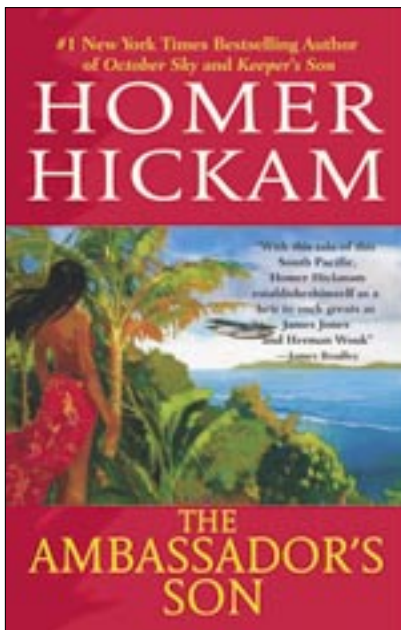
in *Judas Burning* Haines changes to multiple points of view, which allow the characters to retain different perspectives on the action, according to whom they believe is guilty of the small town's current crime wave.

Thirty-something Dixon Sinclair, a reforming alcoholic, returns to her mother's hometown, chiefly because Dixon owns the family home in which she can reside. Daughter of a Jackson, Mississippi, newspaperman killed in an explosion some years back, Dixon is the child determined to walk in his footsteps. She uses all her savings to buy the local weekly and try to begin her life anew. Meanwhile, she is haunted by doubt about the black man convicted of her father's murder and who faces imminent execution at the state prison.

The action begins with a decapitated statue of the Virgin Mary, splashed with blood, and moves into gathering violence as two teenage girls disappear from a riverbank. Apparently, someone who hates the mother of Jesus, and may hate all women, is loose in the usually quiet, dusty town, and two girls are missing. The newspaper owner and the local sheriff form an uneasy partnership to unravel the mystery. Their work is complicated by the addition of a nationally prominent publication's man who has also arrived on the scene.

Carolyn Haines, a native Mississippian who lives in Mobile, fleshes out her story with a wide cast of tightly-drawn characters and interweaving threads. With succinct, well-chosen words and phrases, she quickly sets each scene and defines every player in the game. The author's delight in spinning a good story and keeping the reader guessing is obvious. An engrossing read—not one to lay aside once you begin.

Ruth Mitchell Ott is a board member of the Alabama Writers' Forum and a columnist for The Montgomery Independent.



The Ambassador's Son

by Homer Hickam

Thomas Dunne Books, 2005

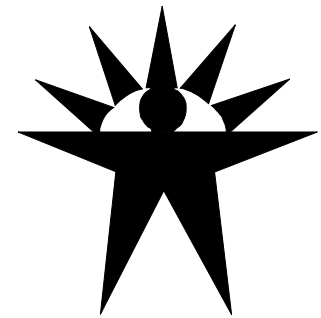
\$24, Hardcover

reviewed by Jim Buford

Homer Hickam's novel follows the adventures of Coast Guard Commander Josh Thurlow and the crew of the *Darlin' Dosie*, a seaplane named for Josh's soon to be ex-girlfriend, in the Solomon Islands during World War II. Why they are in the South Pacific when they should be looking after the coast of North Carolina is apparently due to a fairly serious navigation error; however, higher-ups decide it would be better to find them something to do rather than send them back. So Josh and his boys occupy their time by engaging Japanese soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, irritating higher-ranking officers, checking up

on sons of the rich and famous, and running errands in the *Darlin' Dosie*. The plane is piloted by Ensign Eureka Phimble, who skipped flight school in order to be the first African-American to experience aerial combat.

Josh senses that the easy part of his mission is over when he arrives on Megali Island, which has recently been captured by the Fifth Marine Raiders under the command of Colonel Montague Burr. Burr longs for Felicity, a comely Englishwoman whom the Japanese had inconvenienced by killing her husband and chasing her off their plantation. Felicity, however, longs to get back to her plantation, near where



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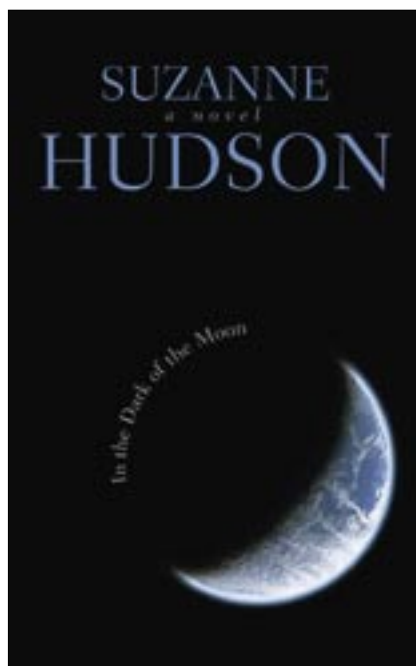
Todd Whitman, a shady character, was surrounded by Japanese until Lt. David Armistead arrived and killed all of them, but then ran off with Whitman's native wife.

When Felicity learns that Burr is sending Josh to sort it all out, she asks to come along. Josh refuses, although the reader suspects that too much has already been made about Felicity to suggest that she will waste much more time on Megali or to leave any doubt where she will show up next.

After landing near the designated island Josh tries to engage the services of a PT boat; however, Ivy Leaguers with attitudes are running the war and wouldn't give the time of day to somebody who attended a cow college like Virginia Polytechnic Institute, much less the services of a PT boat. Fortunately, he is able to locate a certain Navy lieutenant from Harvard and the former skipper of PT 109 who is in big trouble for losing his boat and has to go along because a certain poker-playing naval officer who sweats a lot and who could have arranged for a coverup didn't get the word in time. And, of course, Felicity reappears and everyone knows what can happen when a comely Englishwoman meets up with a Navy lieutenant on a tropical island in the middle of a war.

This story, which the author assures us is only slightly fictionalized, is certain to captivate and inspire all who want to know what was really going on when Marines were not landing on beaches and raising flags. Many will be amazed at how the actions of an obscure but intrepid Coast Guard commander played such a pivotal role in making islands in the South Pacific safe for democracy, enchanted evenings, and Broadway musicals. Others will be amazed that we actually managed to win the war.

Essayist Jim Buford lives in Auburn.



In the Dark of the Moon

by Suzanne Hudson

MacAdam/Cage, 2005

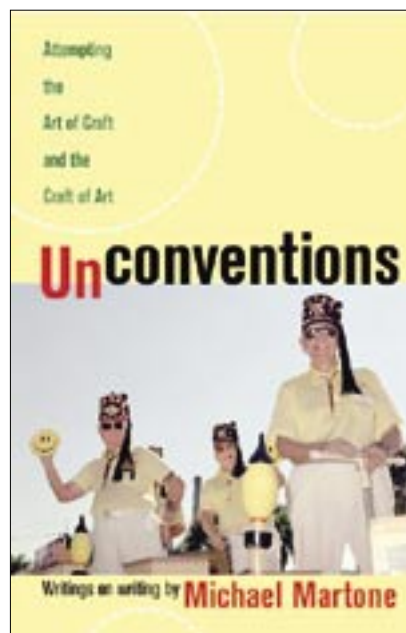
\$23, Hardcover

reviewed by
Anita Miller Garner

In her third book, Alabama author Suzanne Hudson reveals that the small, quaint, peaceful towns that punctuate the rural highways in the South are perhaps not as peaceful as first impressions may lead one to believe. Layering

the novel with mysteries that occur over three generations, Hudson uses textbook-perfect dialogue to introduce us to unforgettable characters in the small town of Sumner, Georgia, set in the Velvet Corridor, an area Hudson described in a recent interview with Luan Gaines as being very similar to Alabama's own Black Belt. Although her use of history and lyrical sentence structure may remind us of Faulkner, Hudson's characters, Elizabeth Frances Lacey and Kansas Lacey, seem more akin to McCullers's Frankie Adams and Mick Kelly. Yet there is more raw sexuality gracefully written in this work than in either of those literary ancestors. Make no mistake, this book—which Hudson explained recently in an interview with John Sledge is an expansion of the title story of her collection *Opposable Thumbs*—is not a cute, first-person piece designed for light reading. *In the Dark of the Moon* is an engaging novel that intricately involves us in the way each life in a small town is connected to all others by tenuous threads, the threads all eventually woven together to create a strong web of a story that will pull us into its depths. Hudson casts a spell you will not want to miss: *In the Dark of the Moon*.

Anita Miller Garner teaches English at the University of North Alabama and received the 2006 Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowship in fiction.



Unconventions

by Michael Martone

The University of Georgia Press, 2005
\$19.95, Paperback

reviewed by
Peter Huggins

Over the years I have read a fair number of books on or about writing. William Stafford's *Writing the Australian Crawl*, Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, and Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town* come to mind. But now comes Michael

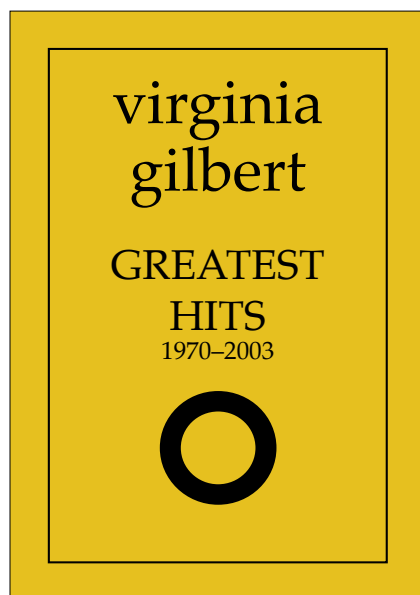
Martone's *Unconventions*, a book of writings on writing that I can only describe as sui generis, both unique and peculiar, which is better than soeey pig or perhaps even chop suey. *Unconventions* is not a how-to book. It does not concern itself with how to make stories better or whether stories are good or bad (although of course it does). The folks at Writer's Digest Books would no doubt flee in horror from this book.

Unconventions asks an often overlooked question: What is the frame or the context or the setting (as in the setting of

a jewel) or the physics of the break not just the balls in the pocket, whichever metaphor seems best, for a writing, any writing? In writing after writing, in lecture, address, article, interview, eulogy, Martone returns to this question, insisting, stating, implying along the way that writers make writing and don't just do it. Hence, writers, and Martone in particular, attempt the art of craft and the craft of art.

Martone provides a formal device to clarify this recurring question of context. Each writing in *Unconventions* is preceded by an authorial note that frames the way the writing is read. For example, in "The History of Corn" Martone writes, "When I give craft lectures like this one, I like to produce handouts. In this case, they were reproductions of the post-office murals I describe. The lecture was first delivered at Warren Wilson." That is the full note, and it lets the reader see the setting as well as the jewel, rather than consider only the jewel, the object, alone. This way of seeing strikes me as generous and inclusive, consistent with the varied and various writings present in this book. Like Hugo's *The Triggering Town*, a book I often return to, I intend to return to Michael Martone's *Unconventions* again and again.

Peter Huggins's picture book, Trosclair and the Alligator, is due in January 2006 from Star Bright Books.



Greatest Hits
1970-2003

by Virginia Gilbert
Pudding House
Publications, 2004
\$8.95, Paperback

reviewed by
Jennifer Horne

Pudding House
Publications of
Columbus, Ohio,
under the direction
of poet/publisher
Jennifer Bosveld,
among its many
projects has un-
dertaken a Poets
Greatest Hits series.

The press's Web site, www.puddinghouse.com, states that over two hundred "greatest hits" chapbooks have been released so far, "archiving the top twelve signature works from poets of reputation" and highlighting "poets of impact, poets whose work changes the way we work, volunteer, love, teach, nurture, see." One such poet is Virginia Gilbert, a professor of English and Creative Writing at Alabama A & M University and the Alabama State Poetry Society's State Poet of the Year for 2001. Other Alabama poets published by Pudding House include Robert Collins, Bonnie Roberts, and Kathleen Thompson.

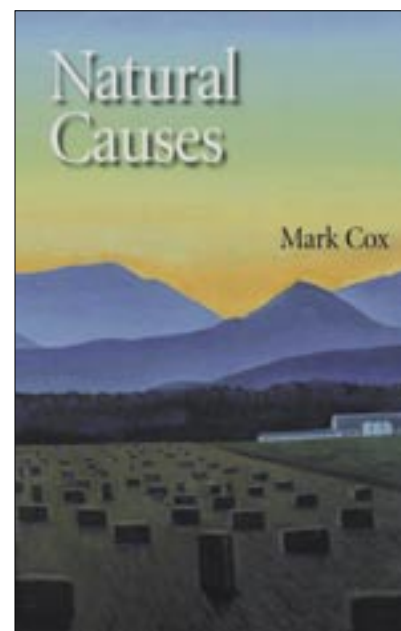
One thing I especially like about this series is each poet's introduction to the poems. Like the poets' statements in the *Best American Poetry* series, these introductions offer insight into each poet's aesthetic, her relevant life experiences, and the circumstances in which individual poems were composed—for instance, a poem that came out of Gilbert's experiences as a Peace Corps worker in South Korea and another that came out of teaching English in Iran.

The twelve poems in this book are geographically scattered but held together by Gilbert's attentiveness to detail and sense of connectedness to the world around her. In her introduction, Gilbert writes, "At a time when so much around us is perplexing and confusing, we need to make an even more concerted effort to see how all the pieces fit together, to try to look at the big picture. Poetry should try to do that."

Gilbert finds the fantastic in the real, and the real in the fantastic: a large fish appearing in the middle of the road sends her off on a meditation about its possible symbolism, purpose, and origin ("Fish"); a black lacquer box becomes an entry into another world ("Outside the Kampongs, At the Market, Waiting"); trying to photograph a ghost town out west brings up questions of representation, of trying to capture, through words and pictures, the transience of human lives ("Photographing Bodie").

Though varied in subject and setting, these twelve poems, chosen by Gilbert as her "greatest hits," cohere in voice, style, and engagement with contemporary issues such as environmental degradation, war, genocide, and consumer culture. These serious concerns, however, are balanced by a solid good humor, a love of beauty, and an openness to the possibilities of any given moment.

Jennifer Horne is the editor of Working the Dirt: An Anthology of Southern Poets.



Natural Causes

by Mark Cox

University of
Pittsburgh Press, Pitt
Poetry Series, 2005
\$12.95, Paperback

reviewed by
William Walsh

Mark Cox's collection of poems, *Natural Causes*, is about a man acknowledging the responsibilities of adulthood, and thus it is not coincidental that the opening poem, "At the Stair," begins, "Adulthood's

frost heaves tamped down / that blank page smoothed”—almost a declaration for Cox. It’s an acknowledgment of his transition from a man who was, perhaps, not serious enough about life, into a man with a sense of his own maturity. The concept of adulthood is of immense significance throughout this book, as though it were very carefully planned out at the kitchen table, from the beginning poem to the end, with “Ashes, Ashes” stating, “No one remembers / all that you remember. / If you don’t carry it, / who will?” Plainly spoken and succinct, like a whack in the head with a ball peen hammer: You have a responsibility. What more could be asked of an adult than to ante up at the table for a little responsibility because “if you don’t carry it, who will?”

The fractured poetic narratives of his past have given way as Cox’s world smoothes out, resulting in an assessment of domestic life in “The Sublime”: “Home is never where or what / you thought it was.” “Better Homes and Gardens” reads like headline news with its sardonic, understated humor that rhythmically catalogs the atrocities of dark middle-class life, ending with an ironic, highly effective reference to the song “These Are a Few of My Favorite Things.”

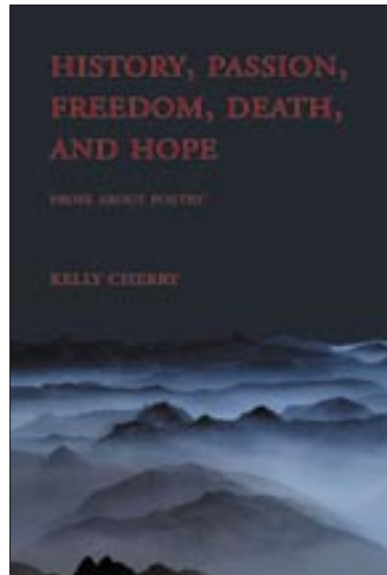
Several poems still display the long, controlled narrative of his earlier books, and bits of humor are woven throughout, but there also are numerous shorter poems unrecognizable as “traditional” Cox poems—small morning meditations from the section called “7:30 Poems” that are worth one’s time.

The title poem is masterful and should be studied for its interdependence of imagery and its ability to move smoothly from one image or thought to another. Cox has a cunning ability to associate images then tie them together via motivation of the action. In this poem, the narrator’s son wants marshmallows because he has seen some round hay bales in shrink-wrap that remind him of marshmallows. The poem takes the narrator on a trip to the convenience store for marshmallows, firewood, and a newspaper, where he discovers the death of Early Softly, a local man. Had one of these matters not occurred, primarily seeing the hay bales, the narrator would not have discovered Softly’s death or been thrown into the thought-provoking conclusion—we do not always understand what we know and how we come to know it, but sometimes things occur naturally for good reason. Death’s bitterness is dissolved when the narrator understands that death is inevitable and that he and his wife have done their part:

Because my wife and I love each other
and wanted something of, and more than, ourselves;
because my little son has imagined heaven in the pasture
land,
even death tastes sweet.

Whatever natural causes there are in this world that create change, Mark Cox has discovered them.

William Walsh is currently editing an anthology of 100+ poets, Under the Rock Umbrella: Contemporary American Poets from 1951-1977.



History, Passion,
Freedom, Death,
and Hope
Prose About Poetry
by Kelly Cherry

The University of
Tampa Press, 2005
\$12, Paperback

reviewed by
Mark Dawson

The broad title of Cherry’s book of engaging essays is fitting since the essays themselves are not an exploration of form or critical schools, but

rather about the experience of poetry—which, Cherry argues, holds the promise of encompassing any aspect of life. She says in “The Blood Jet,” the first essay, “Poetry is the heart. It is where the work begins and where it returns. All other forms are arterial.”

The book is divided into three sections. Twelve of the essays are published for the first time in this volume. It was the music, the experiences, proceeding from her parents’ lives as concert violinists that first gave shape to Cherry’s desire “to create something beautiful.” Those memories are a touchstone in several of the essays throughout the book, which spans writings from 1977 to 2002.

The first section progresses from definition to advice (“Letter to a Young Poet”) to experience. In “On the Isle of Bards,” Cherry recounts a weekend visit to Bardsey Island, Wales, with her lover, his teenage daughter, and a teenage friend of the daughter. The weather is damp and chilly, a metaphor for the faltering relationship. The writing here is tight, without melodrama, and thus all the more poignant. Poetry is not only the result of this experience, but part of the experience itself, as all four persons engage in poetry writing and the sharing of those poems.

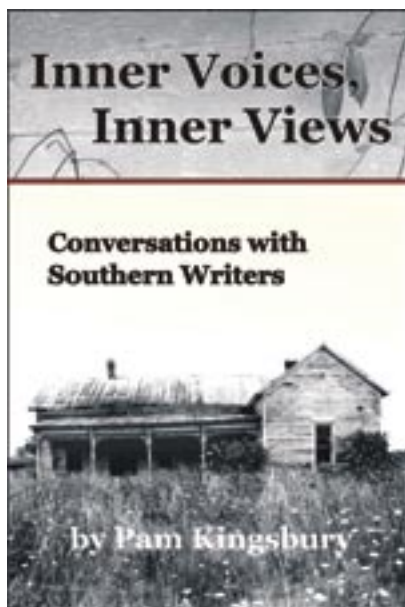
The first section concludes with three essays, which stem from Cherry’s memories of the early Cold War period and of her relationship with Latvian composer Imants Ziedonis. How history shapes us is a theme, and if it can’t ever quite be quantified and measured, it can certainly be recorded, in both music and in poetry. As Cherry says, they are “art that routs meaninglessness by creating meaning. And the material with which meaning is created is feeling.”

Poets reviewed in the eight essays of Section II include Betjeman, Chappell, Voight, and Adrienne Rich. The opening essay on Betjeman introduces readers to two additional British poets, R.S. Thomas and Alasdair Maclean. The third section is comprised of shorter-length reviews of books by twenty-five poets and of three books by other authors on the poets William Carlos Williams, Dylan Thomas, and Delmore Schwartz.

My few quibbles have to do with format. Footnotes to help identify writers and composers would help the general reader. Regarding printing, –ct and –st ligatures (originally part of the Caslon typeface) are used, meaning that there is a line that joins every instance of when these two letters appear side by side. It is distracting, but, like actor Dennis Quaid’s peculiar rendering of the New Orleans accent in the movie “The Big Easy,” one gets used to it. Finally, the essays in section two are in chronological order. Given the importance to Cherry of culture and experience, I would argue for the same arrangement of section three, and some dates (rather than an alphabetical arrangement).

Those quibbles aside, the book itself is well made and should be of particular interest to poets who teach. And any poet who has been a bit lazy about reading the work of other poets might close this book feeling a bit like the speaker in Rilke’s poem “The Archaic Torso of Apollo”: “You must change your life.”

Mark Dawson, a former editor of Black Warrior Review, has poems in The Antioch Review, North American Review, Colorado Review, Willow Springs, and others.



Inner Voices,
Inner Views
Conversations with
Southern Writers
by Pam Kingsbury
The Enolam Group,
Inc.
\$25.00, Paperback

reviewed by
Marc Mitchell

Writers are a funny lot. Like characters in a novel, each one has a distinct personality, a distinct voice, a thematic arc, and a back-story. Each author offers

something different, whether in nuance or tone, in style or in substance.

The twenty-six authors of Pam Kingsbury’s *Inner Voices, Inner Views: Conversations with Southern Writers*, while sharing the distinction of being contributors to that wildly diverse grouping known as “Southern literature,” open themselves up to Kingsbury’s careful questioning, thus giving readers a sense of just how varied and diverse Southern writers are. Included in this collection of short interviews is Larry Brown, a former firefighter; Rick Bragg, a former Pulitzer Prize winner and chronicler of blue collar life; and Jeanne Ray, who graduated from nursing school. Some write romances, some comedy.

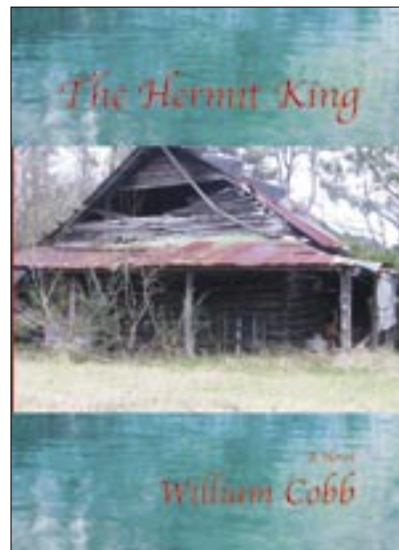
Some specialize in nonfiction, while others offer meditations on religion and existence. No one author approaches his or her work the same way, and yet all share the same Southern roots that make for distinctly American works.

Kingsbury does well in her questioning, feeling out each writer’s interests and giving each interviewee room to explore those interests. She comes to each writer with an understanding that writers “write what they know,” and she is clearly willing to learn whatever knowledge these writers wish to impart. Unlike some questioners (one is hesitant to call Kingsbury an “interviewer”, her inquiries seem to be borne of a genuine thirst to know rather than a passive need to accumulate facts). Kingsbury allows her subjects to shape the narrative of their own story. There are very few angles and a great many insightful questions that allow each writer to speak honestly, simply, and fully.

As each writer speaks of influences and inspirations, a loose theme develops: Southern writers have a keen eye for character. They understand, perhaps more than any other writer from any other region, what makes an individual tick. Jeff Sharlet, co-editor of the wonderful *Killing the Buddha: A Heretic’s Bible*, suggests that this is because of compassion (“not sympathy,” he stresses). The history of the South is, indeed, a process of acquiring compassion for one another, of taking the time to learn—sometimes over decades and sometimes over hours—what the person standing next to you is all about.

Kingsbury’s collection demonstrates that there are many voices in the South, all striving to make the label “Southern writer” as broad and as compelling as possible. Kingsbury, herself, through her patient and engaging questioning, shows that there are those who appreciate this variety.

Marc Mitchell is an assistant at W.W. Norton and Co.



The Hermit King
by William Cobb

Livingston Press,
2005
\$15.95, Paperback

reviewed by
John H. Hafner

Bert Hitchcock mentions in his introduction that *The Hermit King* was published some twenty years ago. Although Livingston Press states, “This is a re-issue, with authorial changes,” it appears

that this book is more a revision than a re-issue, since the additional five short stories were not printed with the original publication of the novel by Portals Press in 1987.

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The Hermit King is a charming fable, a summer of 1944 retelling of the story of "Hansel and Gretel." Billy Malone and Hallie Fisque are driven from home by grandmothers, mothers and great aunts; experience scary and challenging happenings in the woods where eating is a crucial event; and return home more knowledgeable about the world, wiser about themselves.

The additional five stories offer provocative insights into adult relationships, especially the destructive nature of hypocrisy in "Brother Bobby's Eye," but it is Billy and Hallie and their encounter in the woods that reverberate as legend.

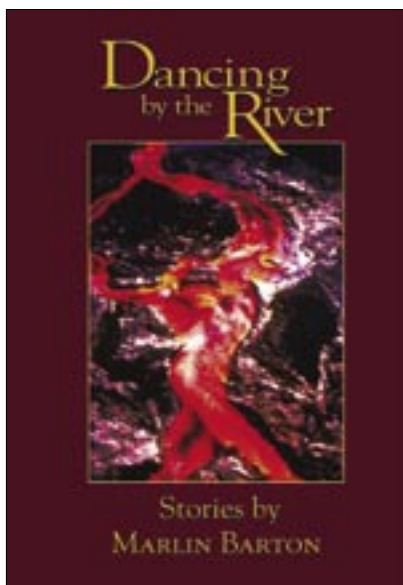
Billy and Hallie are twelve going on thirteen and, as Billy's grandmother's cook puts it, "He feelin a stirring in his britches." When the two are caught and punished for a thieving scam, they run away with a change of clothes in a straw suitcase and a supply of cold biscuits and cigarettes. After spending a stormy night in a cabin in the woods, they encounter the hermit, a Negro named Armstead King but better known as Joe Bynymo, who, after frightening them, cooks for them and talks to them about his life and their future. Joe believes that his God-given mission is to take care of the woods and the swamp, but the children, after their return home, are more conscious of the smoke from a lumber mill and an approaching storm.

The natural beauty of the wilderness setting is described from Billy's perspective: "*The woods were still and gray and there was a fog-like mist around the roots of the trees. While he stood there, a soft breeze stirred, and a long stream of the mist, like the train of a wedding gown, drifted slowly across the high grass and ground vines of the clearing.*"

And later, from Hallie's: "*The high trees formed a wall all around them, their branches extending out over the pool, reflecting there, and the sunlight streamed through the opening, like a skylight, directly over the center of the smooth water. The little clearing was quiet, and they stood, hearing only the trickling, lapping water as it seeped down the rocks... 'It's like an enchanted forest,' the girl said.*"

This description of the beauty of God's creation, the obligation that Joe believes he has to preserve it, and the threat by the lumber mill and the guns of the men who search for the two runaways are reminiscent of Faulkner's similar concern in "The Bear" and others of his stories. And that puts William Cobb in pretty good company.

John H. Hafner is a Professor of English at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama.



Dancing by the River

by Marlin Barton

Frederic C. Beil, Publishers, 2005
\$24.95, Hardcover

reviewed by John H. Hafner

Dancing by the River is described on the book cover as "a companion volume to *The Dry Well*." Both collections contain stories that are interconnected with the same characters and settings recurring throughout the two collections. The result is a series of independent stories that, together, give the reader an in-depth view of a small town in the rural South in the latter years of the twentieth century. Barton is especially good at exploring the complexities of family interrelationships.

In "Domestic Relations," a young boy reports on the various conflicts among his mother, father, grandmother, and great-grandfather by repeating what he overhears, describing what he observes, but not

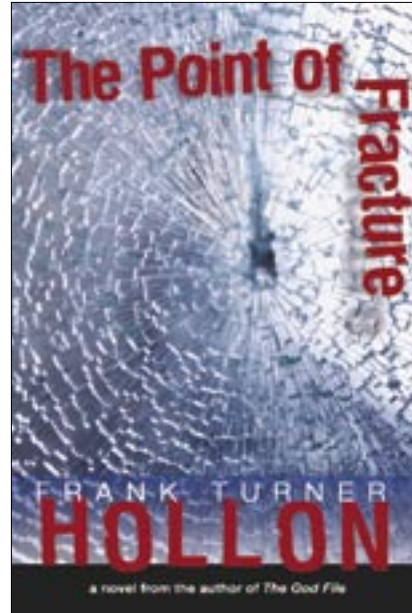
necessarily understanding the adults, though he does seem, almost instinctively, to take the caring side in family arguments.

A strip joint figures prominently in several stories and Barton uses the entertainment there to expose motives for the behavior of the customers. The narrator of "Meaning Business" heads for the strip joint after arguing with his wife, and when the strippers remind him of his wife, he realizes how much he loves her. In "Dancing by the River," the seventeen-year-old Seth can finally express his feelings for Susan when he sees how badly his friend Russell behaves toward the dancing strippers.

"Beneath a Dark Window" is a moving story about reconciliation between a black man and a white man who grew up together but who were driven apart by the civil rights movement. Many of the characters are heavy drinkers, but as "Slow Waltz" tells us, "it wasn't just the whiskey" that causes all the trouble. "At the Wall in Gaillon" very matter-of-factly informs us that "distance happens in a marriage. A sad thing."

The narrators of the stories are sometimes male, sometimes female. The settings can be France or during the American Civil War. The protagonist can be very young or on his deathbed. And through this wonderful variety of time and place and age and gender and race, Barton creates a complex and fascinating world.

John H. Hafner is a Professor of English at Spring Hill College in Mobile.



The Point of Fracture

by Frank Turner Hollon

MacAdam/Cage, 2005

\$24.00, Hardcover

reviewed by Kirk Curmutt

The fifth novel since 1999 by Baldwin County barrister Frank Turner Hollon is a crisp, compelling page-turner that plays interesting tricks with the conventional structure of the crime thriller. Readers may initially wonder why the back-cover blurb gives away so much information in describing the consequences of the crumbling marriage of Michael and Suzanne Brace: "In a tangled desire for revenge against her father, her husband, his family, and everything she cannot reconcile, Suzanne sets in motion a

structure of the crime thriller. Readers may initially wonder why the back-cover blurb gives away so much information in describing the consequences of the crumbling marriage of Michael and Suzanne Brace: "In a tangled desire for revenge against her father, her husband, his family, and everything she cannot reconcile, Suzanne sets in motion a

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complicated plan of deception, sacrifice, and death.” Thanks to that summary, the plot thus unfolds less as a whodunit or even a why-she-dun-it, but a how-it’s-bein’-dun.

Alternating with chapters documenting the uninspired ennui of the spoiled (though not unsympathetic) Michael, Suzanne’s intrigue is revealed one deliberate piece at a time. At least, that is, until the novel’s midpoint (page 120, to be exact), when the nature of her frame-up is revealed in a surprising act of violence that Hollon narrates with hardboiled understatement. From that point on, *The Point of Fracture* shifts into a police procedural and courtroom drama. No spoiler alert necessary: readers will likely guess that the accused will be vindicated at the last minute by a legal deus ex machina. When it does happen, however, the surprise arrives as more of a clever complication than a resolution, proving that for all the Earl Stanley Gardner and Scott Turow one might have devoured in one’s lifetime, authors can still wrangle surprises out of the judicial-system scenarios.

An interesting technique here is the use of multiple narrative foci. In the novel’s second half, the action shifts between Michael’s brother, Phillip, defense attorney David Bailey, sundry DAs and investigators, and a police chief somewhat distractingly named Tuberville. (I kept waiting for a one-armed man named Fulmer, but that will have to wait for the sequel, I suppose). The shifts from character to character prevent the reader from becoming attached to any one individual, somewhat flattening the emotional investment in the defendant’s predicament. That said, the plot complications are what are paramount here, and *Fracture*, unlike many contrived crime dramas these days, never splinters from the force of its twists.

Among the fruits of Hollon’s productivity, *Fracture* may not possess the metaphysical curiosity of his best-known work, *The God File*, or the absurdity of *Life is a Strange Place*, that soon-to-be-a-major-motion picture (*Barry Munday*) about a neutered lawyer.

Nevertheless, with intricate construction and taut, no-nonsense style, it more than acquits itself as original on the crowded docket that is contemporary legal fiction.

Kirk Curnutt is chair of the English Department at Troy University-Montgomery and author of Baby, Let’s Make a Baby Plus Ten Other Stories, published by River City Publishing.



Stories From the Blue Moon Cafe IV
by Sonny Brewer, editor

MacAdam/Cage, 2005
\$25, Hardcover

reviewed by Anita Miller Garner

Rick Bragg recently quipped, “With all due respect to Mississippi, Alabama dirt grows the best writers in the country.” From the brief biographies in the back of this book, a reader would hardly suspect that the majority of the authors have Alabama connections. They do. That said, rest assured that Volume IV serves up the same high-quality, irresistible fare we’ve grown to love in the first three volumes. This one offers the Baskin-Robbins 32-flavor choice with 32 authors

represented. While most of the selections are short fiction, the few essays and creative nonfiction pieces (and even fewer poetry selections) may prove to be your favorites.

Charles Simic’s essay “Down There on a Visit” which previously appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, was worth anthologizing. And if we take to heart the statement in the editor’s introduction—that a *New York Times* article reported more manuscripts were submitted for publication in 2003 than there were people who claim to read books on a regular basis—Ellen Douglas’s essay “Taking Off From Welty” is unforgettable advice for writers of all levels and could perhaps be the single most useful piece of writing in the entire anthology.

Many of the selections are from prize-winning, well-known authors such as Rick Bragg, Diane McWhorter, and Daniel Wallace, and their work does not disappoint. But of course the true delight of the Blue Moon series has been the discovery of writers who have yet to win a Pulitzer or sell movie rights to their novels.

Blue Moon IV presents substantial selections of lesser-known authors who offer witness to the fabric of Southern life: insanity, country music, chitlins, kudzu, and murder. Janet Nodar’s story “Rehab” chronicles the regrets the elderly ponder. Philip Shirley’s “The Turkey Hunt” uses a modern-day rural legend as the backdrop for a story of the ultimate competition between two brothers. M.O. Walsh’s story sketches perfectly the dysfunctional Southern family funeral.

Stories From the Blue Moon Cafe IV serves up hours of masterful storytelling. A final word to the wise: Buy this book in hardcover. You’ll want the Blue Moons on your permanent bookshelf.

Anita Miller Garner teaches English at the University of North Alabama and received the 2006 Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowship in fiction.

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Rick Bass

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Senator Henry "Hank" Sanders

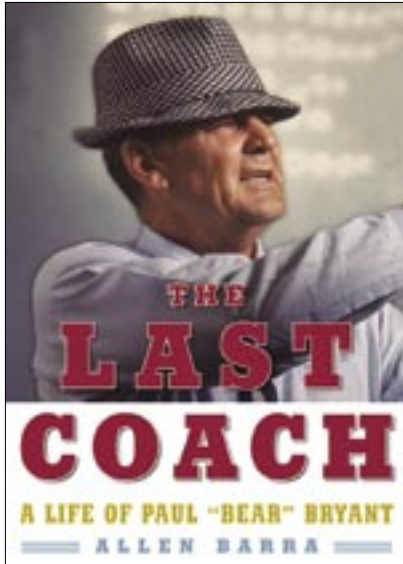
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The Last Coach
A Life of Paul
"Bear" Bryant
by Allen Barra
W.W. Norton and
Company
\$26.95, Hardcover

reviewed by
Larry Moffi

If you're from anywhere but Alabama, Paul "Bear" Bryant is merely one of the greatest football coaches of all time. For Alabamians, Bryant is the only coach,

and for good reason. Allen Barra, himself an Alabamian and a gifted writer, doesn't go quite that far, but his comprehensive and endearing biography, *The Last Coach: A Life of Paul Bear Bryant*, substantiates the legend—yes, he did once wrestle a bear—without sidestepping some less pleasant issues, including racial segregation.

Bryant, who broke into college football coaching with a band of World War II veterans he recruited for the University

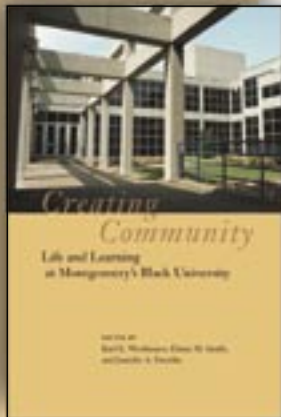
of Maryland, retired in 1982 as the winningest coach in college football history, since broken by Penn State's Joe Paterno. His winning percentage during the era of limited substitution was fifth of all time.

Having grown up in poverty near an Arkansas crossroads called Moro Bottom, Bryant remained ever conscious of his roots. That awareness helped shape his uncommon civility and won him instant respect among many of his recruits and their families. Bryant served as mentor to many great coaches including Charlie McClendon, Sylvester Croom, Howard Schnellenberger, and Jerry Claiborne, among others. He also coached and helped mold a passel of stellar quarterbacks, among them Babe Parilli, Joe Namath, and Ken Stabler. While his tough love suspensions of Broadway Joe and The Snake are legendary, that approach also hampered some players from reaching their potential, a fact that troubled Bryant throughout his life.

As Barra notes, "Bear Bryant represented the last generation of college coaches who came of age when college football was football to America." Equally important, he was devoted to education.

Less than a month after his final game in 1983, Bryant died of a heart attack. He was born to coach and to lead. He excelled at both. *The Last Coach* reaffirms those special accomplishments.

Larry Moffi's next book, The Conscience of the Game, will be published in 2006.



Education at Its Best

Creating Community

Life and Learning at Montgomery's Black University

EDITED BY KARL E. WESTHAUSER, ELAINE M. SMITH, AND JENNIFER A. FREMLIN

Explores how faculty members at Alabama State University, a historically black university in Montgomery, have been inspired by the legacy of African American culture and the civil rights movement and how they seek to interpret and extend that legacy through teaching, scholarship, and service.

Contributors

Robert Ely
Janice R. Franklin
Jennifer A. Fremlin
Sunita George
Kathy Dunn Jackson
Virginia M. Jones
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Frank E. Moorer
Elaine M. Smith
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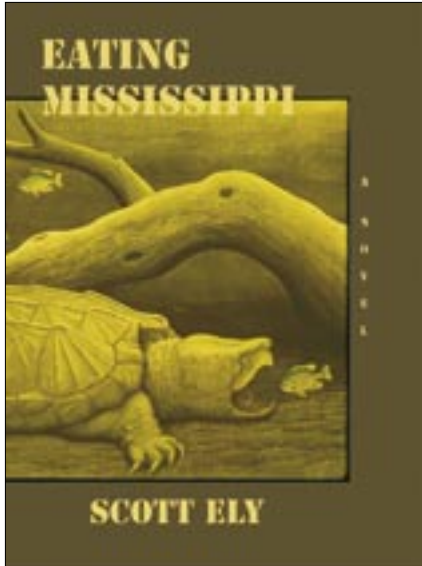
—Judith Paterson, author of *Sweet Mystery: A Book of Remembering*

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Eating Mississippi
by Scott Ely
Livingston Press,
2005
\$26 Hardcover;
\$14.95 Paperback

reviewed by
Jim Fraiser

Having served in Vietnam, Mississippi author Scott Ely is doubtless no stranger to violence, emotional disturbance, and sudden, unalterable

loss. He investigates these concepts in his latest novel, *Eating Mississippi*, crafting a dual story of a modern-day grieving widower, Robert Day, who travels with three tennis buddies down the Pearl River, living off the land from Jackson to the Gulf of Mexico, and of Octavius Maury, a runaway slave, as told by Day through excerpts from Maury's 1868 diary. The men hunt, fish, and steal food off riverside farms while retracing Octavius's route by day and listen to his shocking revelations each night.

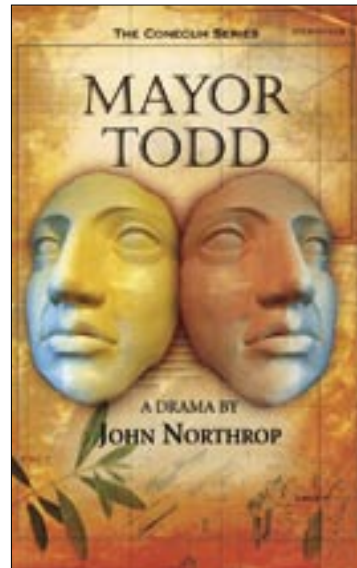
Octavius has murdered his master (and male lover) for both jealousy and freedom, and he commits other largely pointless murders of men and women, slave and free, en route to the Gulf. As the men retrace his path and absorb his sordid tale, they sink further into their own individual states of emotional degradation. Handing a map to his companion, one of the men asks, "Show us where the devil lives."

"Inside of us," the other replies. "Haven't you been paying attention to Octavius's story?"

The Robert Day narrative is not aided by the novel's slow, exposition-heavy beginning, stilted dialogue, and choppy style, nor by the fact that the other tale is more compelling and smoothly turned. Ely does succeed in drawing subtle comparisons and contrasts between Octavius, who bluntly confesses his damnation for the murders he has committed, and Day's friends, who rationalize their petty thievery and plundering of wildlife for entertainment's sake. On the other hand, they, like Octavius, also kill to survive, and they suffer unexpected losses along their journey. Ultimately, though, both these men and Octavius underestimate the degrading effect upon their psyches wrought by their arbitrary acts of violence.

Only a writer with a keen understanding of the dark side of human nature can invest a pair of simultaneously told stories with sufficient emotional depth to sustain them. Ely warms slowly but surely to the task before bringing both to a satisfying, if not entirely realistic, conclusion.

Jim Fraiser is the author of two novels, Shadow Seed and Camille, and seven nonfiction books.



Mayor Todd: A Drama
by John Northrop
NewSouth Books, 2005
\$13.95, Paperback

reviewed by Jim Reed

Every town has its secrets, both open and hidden. In the case of Birmingham, Alabama, most of those secrets have been outed and exposed to the light of day. Hundreds of books and articles and treatises and electronic media reports have examined Birmingham's shaky journey toward

redemption and reconciliation since the end of the civil rights wars.

You'd think we'd examined those issues from every conceivable angle—but of course you'd be incorrect in that assumption. There's always something more to learn.

John Northrop's new stage play, *Mayor Todd*, retells the story of one race-tinged incident that caused a small revolution in Birmingham. This time, the tale is related as fiction, but anybody who's lived in this part of Alabama knows it's true, if not completely actual, as the author admits. His experience as journalist and educator brings a maturity and wit to this play that might go wanting in the hands of the average dramatist.

The play's narrative is gripping, but the reviewer is at a distinct disadvantage. This is a PLAY, and it would better serve the author and his readers for me to review a performance. Once it's staged, or performed as a live reading, I'll re-review it. Suffice it to say, the subject matter is controversial and tough to face, but the journey is worth it.

The comedian Brett Butler, herself a Georgia-Alabama native, made the observation, "Segregation became unfashionable before it became unjust." Her comments ring true, and the reality of this fact underlies the dialogues between a doomed mayor and an up-and-coming mayor. Black-white issues are worked out through relationships and the realities of modern times, modern commerce.

John Northrop has nailed the feelings of the times, and, as always when discussing race relations in the South, we are reminded of how far we've yet to go, how far we've come. Frustration mixed with optimism is one way to characterize present-day Birmingham and its seemingly never-ending trek toward peace.

The journey is engaging, sometimes dangerous, always frightening.

Jim Reed is editor of Birmingham Art Journal and owner of Jim Reed Books and the Museum of Fond Memories in Birmingham.

SOUTHERN SAMPLER

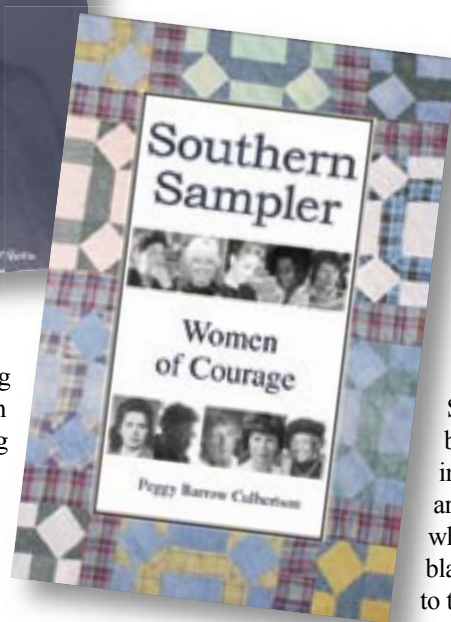
Women of Courage

by Peggy Barrow Culbertson

Warren Publishing, 2005

\$17.95, Paperback

reviewed by Frye Gaillard



When Peggy Culbertson was a young mother of four, she became caught up in a swirl of historic events. She was living in Charlotte, North Carolina, when that city emerged in 1969 as the national test case for busing to integrate the public schools. Culbertson, an Alabama native, was living in one of her city's most exclusive neighborhoods, serene and handsome with its oak-shaded streets, an area in which nearly all of the residents could easily afford the cost of private schools.

As many of her neighbors were making that choice, Culbertson and her husband Bob decided to resist that particular temptation. They both believed in the value of public schools, and they believed that if people of influence deserted the system, the schools would lose credibility and resources. Over time, they became champions of the cause of public education, and despite the mounting displeasure of their peers, they supported the busing of children from their own neighborhood to schools that had recently been all black.

Thirty-five years later, Culbertson downplays the bravery of her own stand, but I suspect her experience is squarely at the heart of her decision to write about women of courage. Whatever its origins, her book recounts in an empathetic way the important stories of fourteen Southern women who took their stands in the cause of social justice.

Among her subjects is Shirley Sherrod, a native of Baker County, Georgia, who saw her father gunned down by a neighboring farmer – a white man – when she was only a senior in high school. Until that moment, Sherrod had dreamed of moving away from south Georgia. She wanted to go to college and

get her degree – to build a life for herself of opportunity and freedom. But after the unpunished murder of her father, she vowed to remain in the place she was raised and help her fellow African-American farmers build a better life for themselves.

Now regional director for the Foundation of Southern Cooperatives, she and her staff teach better business practices to black farmers, helping them hold onto their land. Their programs are working. In the south Georgia counties where the foundation is active, the number of black farmers is actually increasing, a contrast to the trend nationwide, and no longer do these African-American landowners fear the capricious hostility of their neighbors.

In telling the story of Sherrod and other women, Culbertson focuses primarily on the interlocking issues of race, gender, and poverty. She writes about Deirdre Melessa Phillips, a health care provider in rural Mississippi; about Dorothy Counts Scoggins, a black woman in Charlotte who braved jeering mobs as a teenager to become the first black student at an all-white school; and about Carter Heyward, an anti-war activist and Episcopal priest who took her stand for the ordination of women, and later for the rights of lesbians and gays.

Culbertson writes in an extended interview format, letting her subjects tell their own stories, with the added insights of their colleagues and friends. The result is an important, understated collection that should be an invaluable addition to women's studies programs – and to library collections all over the country. For anyone, in fact, concerned about the issue of justice, and the role that women have played in its pursuit, *Southern Sampler: Women of Courage* is a deeply satisfying work.

Peggy Culbertson clearly understands her subject, in part, I would argue, because she has lived it.

Frye Gaillard is writer in residence at the University of South Alabama.



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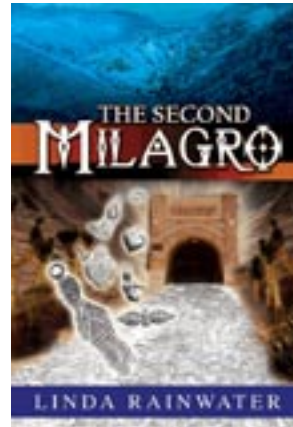
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ANNOUNCING



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LINDA GAULDING RAINWATER is an Alabama native. She taught at Oxford High School, Jacksonville State University and Auburn University, where she earned her Ph.D. *THE SECOND MILAGRO* is her first novel. It grew out of her southern past and her travels in Mexico. She has two other novels in the works, *THE DREAM CHANGED* and *FRAMING THE TRUTH*. She now lives in Virginia with her husband, Ray. She has two sons, Jason and Joey Thrower and four grandsons.

Available soon through Amazon.com or your local bookstore.
Linda invites you to visit her at lindarainwater.com



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BOOKS RECEIVED

In Bitterness and in Tears

Andrew Jackson's Destruction of the Creeks and Seminoles

by Sean Michael O'Brien

The Lyons Press, 2005

\$14.95, Paperback

O'Brien chronicles the account of the Creek War of 1813, the Seminole War of 1818, and the tragic displacement by the U.S. Army of the defeated Creeks and other Native Americans to marginal lands west of the Mississippi.

Those Pearly Gates

A Homegrown Novel

by Julie Cannon

Touchstone Books, 2005

\$13.00, Paperback

The story of Imo Lavender and her spirited family continues in this third installment of the Homegrown series. "... a picture window raised wide open on small-town life in the South," writes *The Asheville Citizen Times*.

The Gin Girl

by River Jordan

Livingston Press, 2005

\$14.95, Paperback

This is a true Florida tale, a multicultural and spiritual journey from mystery to betrayal to final redemption, and a story that introduces characters as endangered as the land they cherish.

Theatre and Travel, Vol. 13

Tours of the South

by Susan Kattwinkel

The University of Alabama Press, 2005

\$22.50, Paperback

This edition of the Theatre Symposium series, a publication of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, is a collection of essays that explores an understudied but pervasive aspect of American theatre—theatre on the road—from minstrel shows and Toby shows to contemporary African American theatre, 19th-century circus rail travel, and small-town opera houses.

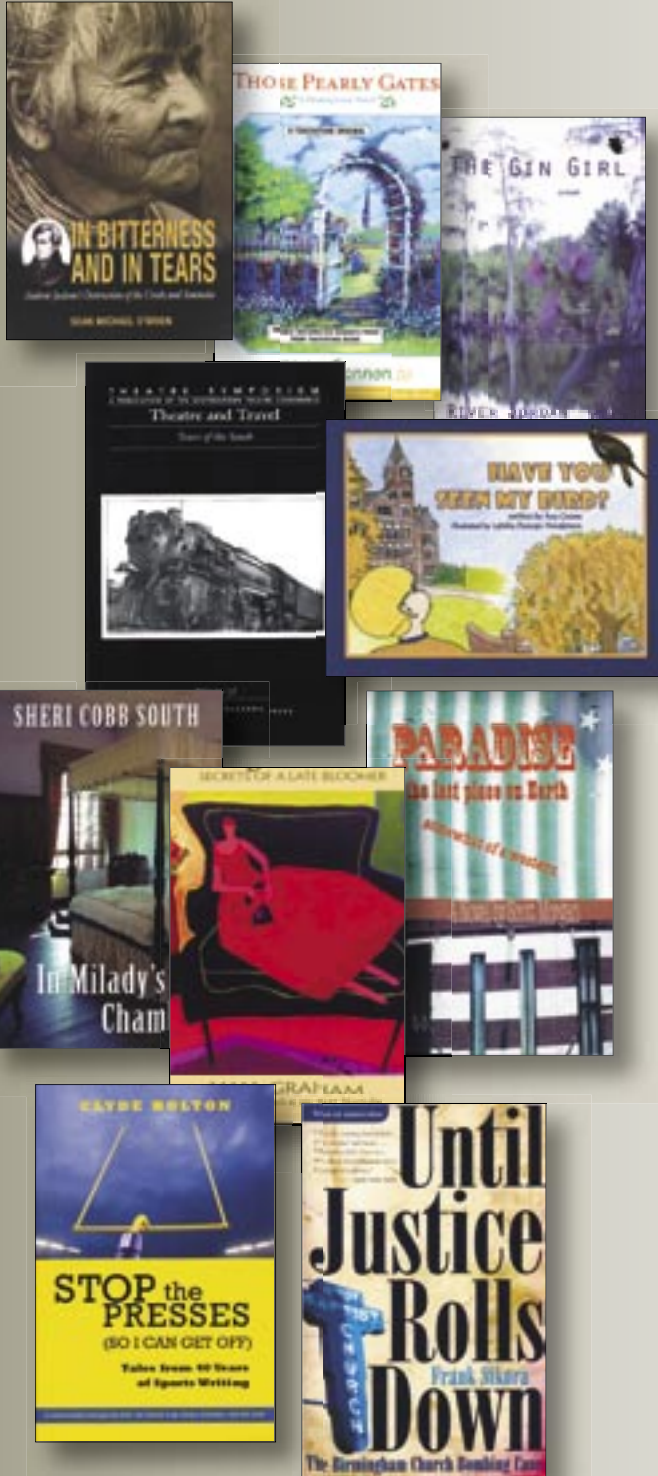
In Milady's Chamber

by Sheri Cobb South

Thompson/Gale Publications, 2006

\$25.95, Hardback

Another mystery novel by Sheri Cobb South that will appeal to a wide audience while telling a simple story of a classic lovers' triangle.



Stop the Presses (So I Can Get Off)
Tales from 40 Years of Sports Writing
by Clyde Bolton

The University of Alabama Press, 2005
\$25.00, Paperback

This story, based upon Bolton's collection of material gathered throughout his extensive sports-writing career, is a blend of memoir, opinion, and sports from an Alabama original.

Have You Seen My Bird?

by Roy Crowe
illustrated by Latisha Duncan Henderson

Educational Adventures, 2005
\$15.00, Paperback

Have You Seen My Bird? is a story of a group of children looking for a friend's bird on the campus of Auburn University, home of Tiger, Auburn University's golden eagle. In the course of their search they discover many birds of prey and learn interesting facts about each. A picture book for all ages.

Paradise: The Last Place on Earth
Somewhat of a Western

by Scott Morgan
Livingston Press, 2005
\$15.95, Paperback

A tale about the journey through the cruelty of an unforgiving world and the consequences of drug addiction.

In a Magnolia Minute
Secrets of a Late Bloomer

by Nan Graham
John F. Blair, Publisher, 2005
\$14.95, Paperback

Nan Graham, sometimes called a Southern humorist, dissects the agenda of many typical Southern experiences in this book about a girl who endures it all through growing up and developing later than most.

Until Justice Rolls Down
The Birmingham Church Bombing Case
by Frank Sikora

The University of Alabama Press, 2005
\$20.00, Paperback

In this revised edition of his 1991 account of the investigations and trials of the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four young girls, Frank Sikora revisits this historic event in the Civil Rights movement.

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Literary News

Frye Gaillard awarded 2005 Lillian Smith Award for nonfiction

Alabama native and former *Charlotte Observer* reporter Frye Gaillard was awarded the prestigious 2005 Lillian Smith Award for Nonfiction for his book



Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement That Changed America, published in 2004 by the University of Alabama Press. According to UA Press materials, *Cradle of Freedom* puts a human face on the story of the black American struggle for equality in the 1960s. Gaillard ties the story to the chronology of pivotal events that occurred in Alabama, including the Montgomery bus boycott, the Freedom Riders, and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. See excerpt p. 42.

Gaillard grew up in Alabama during the civil rights struggle, and while on a school field trip to Birmingham, he witnessed the arrest of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Good Friday, 1963. Gaillard and his wife now live in Coden, Alabama.

The Lillian Smith Book Award is given annually by the Southern Regional Council, and is a much sought after award by publishers. Gaillard's award marks the third time in six years – and the fifth time overall – that it has been awarded to a University of Alabama Press book. According to Press officials, only one other publisher in the country has been honored more times.

Cradle of Freedom will be published in paperback this spring.



Forum announces Marie Stokes Jemison Creative Nonfiction Awards for young writers

The Alabama Writers' Forum has announced that a genre of the statewide High School Literary Arts Awards has been named for Birmingham writer and activist, the late Marie Stokes Jemison. Jemison was known throughout the state of Alabama as a supporter of the arts and a champion of literacy, civil rights, and women's issues. The Forum has named the creative nonfiction award in her honor, beginning with the 2006 contest.

The Marie Stokes Jemison Creative Nonfiction Awards are given to young Alabama writers in grades 9-12. Students regularly submit essays and memoirs to this division of the competition with subjects as far-ranging as family, politics, and current events. The contest is held in the spring each year, with winners named and honored in the state Capitol in April.

Ms. Jemison graduated from Finch College, New York. She co-authored *I Wish I Was in Dixie* with Jim Reed and with Ellen Sullivan edited *The Alabama Scrapbook*. She served as a founder of the Friends of Miles College, co-founder of the Jefferson County Women's Democratic Club, founder of the Southern Women's Archives, and chairperson of the Alabama Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. She also served as co-founder of the Friends of the Birmingham Public Library.

Ms. Jemison's interests in public affairs and other issues were broad. She was affiliated with the Alabama Women's Caucus, the Birmingham City Arts Council, the NAACP, the National Historic Trust, the National Organization for Women, the Sierra Club, and the Southern Regional Council.

A multi-year commitment to the High School Literary Arts Awards to support creative nonfiction was made from Jemison Investments and the Jemison and Day families.



Marie Stokes Jemison with Jim Reed, co-author of *I Wish I Was in Dixie*

Online journals continue to win awards

Two online journals promote Alabama and Southern authors.

Thicket (www.athicket.com) is supported by the Alabama Center for Literary Arts at Alabama Southern Community College and produced by *storySouth*. The current issue features fiction by **Anita Miller Garner**, **Robert Maxell**, **Janet Nodar**, **Philip Shirley**, and **David Lumpkin**; poems by **Peter Huggins**, **Charles Ghigna**, and **Diann Blakeley**; and other essays and editorial matters, including **R.T. Smith's** "Turn a Blind Eye: A Sensible Case for the Defense."

storySouth (www.storySouth.com), co-edited by **Jake Adam York** and **Jason Stanford**, keeps back issues on line and available for research and reading. The current issue has



a special feature, "Six Southern Women Poets," selected, edited, and introduced by **Tara Powell**. Archived back issues from Fall 2001 to Fall 2005 provide

a wealth of fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and highly topical editors' essays. Although a relatively young journal, *storySouth* has already garnered awards from the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* Arts and Letters Daily, *e2ink* anthology of best web-published fiction, North American Travel Journalists Association (NATJA), and others.

NOTE: *First Draft* welcomes information about new or continuing Alabama literary journals and online publications.



Eugene Walter Writers Festival offers lucrative contest prizes

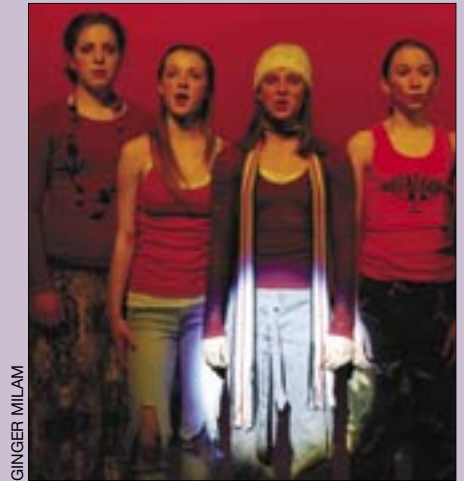
The 2006 Eugene Walter Writers Festival takes place October 6-8 in Mobile, Alabama, featuring poet Marge Piercy and other writers. According to the Festival's organizers, Eugene Walter, a native of Mobile, was "one of literature's most inventive and fun-loving characters. Although Eugene is no longer with us in flesh (he passed away in 1998), he certainly remains with us in spirit. To honor Eugene's life

and literary contributions, a three-day forum (some might call it a party) has been created in his honor—the Eugene Walter Writers Festival."

A special feature of interest to writers is the Festival's awards competition which includes cash awards for novels, screenplays, poetry, and short story. The Award for Best Novel offers a \$1,000 first prize, \$150 second prize, and \$75 third prize; the Termite Hall Screenplay Award provides that the first place winner will be read by a Hollywood producer. For the Vivian Smallwood Poetry Award and the William March Short Story Award cash prizes are \$100, \$50, and \$25. Complete details, including submission fees for all awards, are available at www.ewwfest.com or people may write Eugene Walter Writers Festival, P.O. Box 81229, Mobile, AL 36689. Deadline for entry postmarks is July 1, 2006.

UA Press announces PEN Oakland-Josephine Miles National Literary Award

The University of Alabama Press recently announced that Aldon Nielsen, Kelly Professor of American Literary at The Pennsylvania State University, was one of the recipients of this year's PEN Oakland-Josephine Miles National Literary Awards. PEN Oakland is a branch of the PEN Center USA West, and the Josephine Miles National Literary Awards are designed to honor excellence in multicultural literature. Professor Nielsen's book, *Integral Music: Languages of African American Innovation* (2004), was one of six books chosen for the award.



GINGER MILAM

l-r, Conner Milam, Alyson Wells, Cailin Thomas, Katie Wesler.

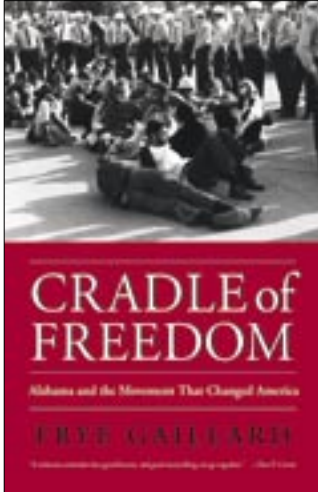
*Writing Our Stories poem
performed at
Summerfest DefJam*

On February 11, a poem written by one of the students in the "Writing Our Stories: An Antiviolence Creative Writing Program" at Sequoyah School became the inspiration for a performance in the Summerfest Performing Ensemble's Def Jam musical in Birmingham. "The Substance That Cost You Your Life," by a student identified as A.M.W. in the 2001 anthology *Look Into My Soul*, was performed by the ensemble.

Nicole Smith, marketing director for Summerfest, said, "The Summerfest Performing Ensemble members formed a line and then took turns walking up and speaking a line of the poem. They all jingled car keys in the rhythm of a heartbeat while they sat around large ties. This, combined with the dark red and blue lights, expressed strongly the powerful message of the poem."

Speaking of the first collaboration between the Alabama Writers' Forum and his company, Keith Cromwell, Executive Director of Summerfest, said, "The arts offer a way to bridge societal and economical gaps in a fractured society. Assuring that the inspired voices and wisdom of our youth are heard is vital to both Summerfest Musical Theatre and the Alabama Writers' Forum. The performers and audience who witnessed the presentation of 'The Substance That Cost You Your Life' will be forever affected by the impact of this newly forged collaboration."

Teaching writer Priscilla Hancock Cooper worked with Summerfest to select the work.



*Alabama author Frye Gaillard opens his book *Cradle of Freedom* with a description of the first days of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the 50th anniversary of which is now being celebrated in the state. Gaillard writes not only about the movement icons, but about the ordinary people who were, he argues, the backbone of the struggle. The book, now out in paperback, was published by the University of Alabama Press. This excerpt is reprinted with permission of the author.*

They filled the church by late afternoon, and soon they were lining the sanctuary walls, and spilling from the balcony to the stairs and then to the parking lot outside. Bob Graetz

had gotten there late. Already he could hear the music and the prayers, the fervent voices coming from a source that he couldn't really see. By the time he arrived, the crowd had spread across the street, maybe 4,000 people scattered across the yards in this all-black neighborhood in Montgomery, Alabama.

In a sense they were there to honor Rosa Parks, a respected black woman who had refused to give up her seat on a bus. But as Graetz understood it, there was a lot more at stake. Graetz was a white man, the Lutheran minister to a black congregation, not yet fully plugged into the community. He had called Mrs. Parks, a neighbor and a friend, when he had heard there was some kind of trouble on a bus – an arrest, perhaps, of somebody important.

"Do you know who it was?" he wanted to know.

There was a moment of silence on the other end of the line, and then Mrs. Parks admitted with a sigh, "Well, you see, Pastor Graetz, it was me."

As the word quickly spread, Graetz was astonished at what happened next. On December 5, 1955, the black community of Montgomery seemed to change. It was a day that would live forever in his memory – that would become, for him, a kind of demarcation in time, a dividing line between the days of racial oppression in the South and the dawn of an era a little more just.

There had been a few people who dreamed of such a day, who believed it could happen, but there were not many. What Graetz discovered when he came to Montgomery was a people defeated, devoid of any hope. Even their body language made it clear, the slouch of the shoulders, the aversion of the eyes, as they made their way through their daily routines. But this particular day it was different. They came together at Holt Street Baptist, a church that was chosen that night for its size. It was a handsome building of sturdy red brick, with Corinthian

columns and stained glass windows and wooden bell towers that made it the tallest building on the street. The people were dressed for a festive occasion, the women in hats, the men wearing ties, but there was a certain solemnity in the moment also.

When Graetz arrived with a deacon from his church, he noticed that the crowd was almost silent. Soon that would change with the singing and the prayers, a release of emotion that was so overwhelming, one white reporter from Montgomery would declare: "That audience was so on fire ... on fire for freedom."

Graetz was determined to take it all in, and with his deacon, Robert Dandridge, at his side he squeezed through the door and into the vestibule of the church. But the sanctuary was already full, and there was simply no way to make it any further. Graetz couldn't see the pulpit from where he was standing, and he thought it was strange when the program began that none of the speakers was introduced by name. It was a remnant of fear, he would later understand, an old terror of retribution by the whites.

Soon it would vanish, but in the meantime, Deacon Dandridge knew the sound of every voice. "That's Ralph Abernathy," he would say, and then at the end: "That's Martin Luther King."

Graetz had already met Dr. King, and like most people he was favorably impressed. King was young, still a few weeks short of his twenty-seventh birthday, but he was bright and articulate, a black man who was finishing his Ph.D., and there were not many of those in the state of Alabama. He seemed to be a man who was sure of himself, and for Graetz, it was hard to imagine, when he heard about it later, that on the afternoon of the speech King had been so overwhelmed by his doubts, his sense of inadequacy for the task that lay ahead, that he laid his trembling pen aside and prayed that God would help him find the words.

He had only twenty minutes to prepare, and he knew that his mission that night was double-edged. On the one hand, it was important for blacks in Montgomery to draw the line, to proclaim with unmistakable resolve that the years of mistreatment on the buses had to stop. All

Continued on page 44

The Arts Community and Hurricane Katrina

Since August 28, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina brought her decimating force to my former hometown of New Orleans, as well as the entire Gulf Coast, the word *response* has been a mantra vibrating at the back of my brain. Along with the rest of the nation, I have reached, mostly in vain, toward an achievable response to this phenomenon that the human mind can't possibly hold. Like the rest of the nation, I have felt helpless in the face of it, and then like a great many other Americans, I've taken a deep breath and tried to take one step on the path toward action.

As a writer, it seems trivial to offer descriptions of my feelings, of what the scene must look like, of what we've lost. The news media has beaten the poets to the punch. How can I compete in words with the footage of the woman lifted from her rooftop in a sling to the helicopter hovering above the flooded street? Who would want to read *poems* about Hurricane Katrina? (This writing paralysis is familiar. Recently, in my *Poems Abandoned* file, I found the 9/11 draft that I had forgotten, and that now – oddly in honor of the hurricane victims of my own state and those nearby – I will attempt to revise.)

As an arts administrator, I had a little more chance of realizing a response. Colleagues in Texas and other coastal states designed and attempted to launch arts programs for at-risk youth adrift in shelters, now even more vulnerable and, frankly, more dangerous to society. But I watched as they grew frustrated while federal machinery to fund these programs ground and ground. Before the programs could begin, the shelters closed and the youth were redistributed to cities across the country.

But then someone dropped in the magic oil and the machinery got going again. Funds came from the National Endowment for the Arts through the Southern Arts Federation to the affected Gulf Coast states' arts agencies to begin Katrina Arts Relief programs for organizations, displaced artists, and schools with arts programs.

The mantra vibrating at the back of my brain got a little louder, a little more focused. Here was our chance, as a *writing community*, to work in concert with the rest of the responders. With the encouragement of ASCA executive director Al Head and



Jeanie Thompson

PHOTO BY AMBER DICKINSON

with funds from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, we quickly put together "Writing Mobile Bay: the Hurricane Project." Community arts specialist Grady Hillman designed our programs in Grand Bay, Bayou La Batre, and Fairhope, and we enlisted area authors Carolyn Haines, Aleta Boudreax, Roy Hoffman, and Suzanne Hudson to conduct nonfiction writing workshops in their communities.

The blessed nature of this project was evident in the way everyone contacted said yes. Each of the teaching writers has a full-time job, and all are working on new books, but

they readily agreed to be a part of "Writing Mobile Bay." Our heartfelt thanks go to them for their generosity. Joe Formicello, director of the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts, quickly offered his organization's help in publicizing and promoting the project. Space was provided by the Grand Bay – St. Elmo Community and Senior Center and the University of South Alabama Baldwin County Campus, two new partners in the collective response. The Forum was able to marshal a community response through writing, and the larger arts community response emerged organically from this effort.

The writing community response takes the form of simply offering time and space, with the encouraging teachers nearby, for residents *to begin* to articulate their stories of the storms that ravaged their homes and towns – for many of them, ancestral lands and structures. In "Writing Mobile Bay" participants began with simple writing exercises to sharpen their skills, then wrote mini-essays about memories of childhood storms, stories of how pets were affected by the rising waters and howling winds, and then tales about the more recent storms Ivan and Katrina. These stories will be collected and published in time to share at the inaugural Alabama Book Festival in Montgomery on April 22. Out of the soaked and sodden lives of a few Alabama Gulf Coast residents have come stories, a response to the dismantling of their world. Perhaps the historic literary response will in some small way re-mantle their community as they tell about hurricanes past and prefigure hurricanes to come.

The day that we traveled south to interview teaching writers

Continued on page 44

Gaillard continued from page 42

over Alabama, it was perhaps the most insulting form of segregation – black people paying their money at the front, then walking around to the rear door of the bus and taking their seats in the rows near the back. The price for defying the system was high. In the city of Mobile a few years earlier, a black man had been killed by a white bus driver, and in Montgomery, Birmingham and other places, there were stories of black women cursed by the drivers and sometimes arrested and hauled off to jail.

Now, suddenly, the Negro community in Montgomery had a symbol, a woman revered by everybody who knew her. If it could happen to Mrs. Parks, King had heard people say, then of course it could happen to anybody in town. He was determined to channel the new wave of anger, to encourage the awakening they had seen that day, as black people by the thousands stayed off the buses, demanding justice as the price of their return. And yet he knew they were playing with fire, stoking a rage that ran deep in the psyche of virtually every black person in the South. It was a rage that could easily get out of hand, and so he told the people at the church: “In our protest, there will be no cross burnings. No white person will be taken from his home by a hooded Negro mob and brutally murdered. There will be no threats and intimidation. We will be guided by the highest principles of law and order.”

But they were not wrong, and they would not stop.

“If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong.... If we are wrong, justice is a lie.”

In the decades after that December 5 speech, there were many historians who understood clearly that the civil rights movement found a leader that night – a man of such rare and unaccustomed eloquence that black and white people all over America would be struck by the power of his vision for the country. Many would admire him; a few would hate him, but he was not a man many people could ignore.

Bob Graetz certainly believed that was true. But as a person who was both a foot soldier in the movement, and later a historian, Graetz also believed that the opening day of the bus boycott had an importance much larger than Martin Luther King. December 5, 1955 was a day for the people. Dr. King may have put their feelings into words, but the feelings, Graetz believed, would have been there without him. For the Negro citizens of Montgomery, Alabama, the time had finally come to take a stand.

Thompson continued from page 43

and local literary arts leaders, we toured both sides of Mobile Bay to see as much of the actual damage as possible, then made a quick trip to Ocean Springs to lay eyes on our ravaged sister state, Mississippi. Everyone has seen it and yet it is not something any photograph or evening with the most thoughtful broadcaster can give you. You have to see it with your own eyes, and you *will* weep.

At the end of Washington Avenue in Ocean Springs, down by the seawall now holding back the Gulf, we saw live oaks, stripped of their leaves, with odd new growth appearing in early January, and among their limbs hung pieces of clothing, sheets, sails, whatever had been washed in and then adhered during the storm surge. *Why don't they clear these clothes out of the trees*, I thought irrationally when I first saw this. The mind wants order. The mind wants a response and this absurd mental attempt to clear out the trees was mine. People were still walking around the shattered home sites, appearing to pick up things, nearly five months later. The Highway 90 bridge to Biloxi, crumbled like giant wafers, was still there begging for someone to just come and straighten it out.

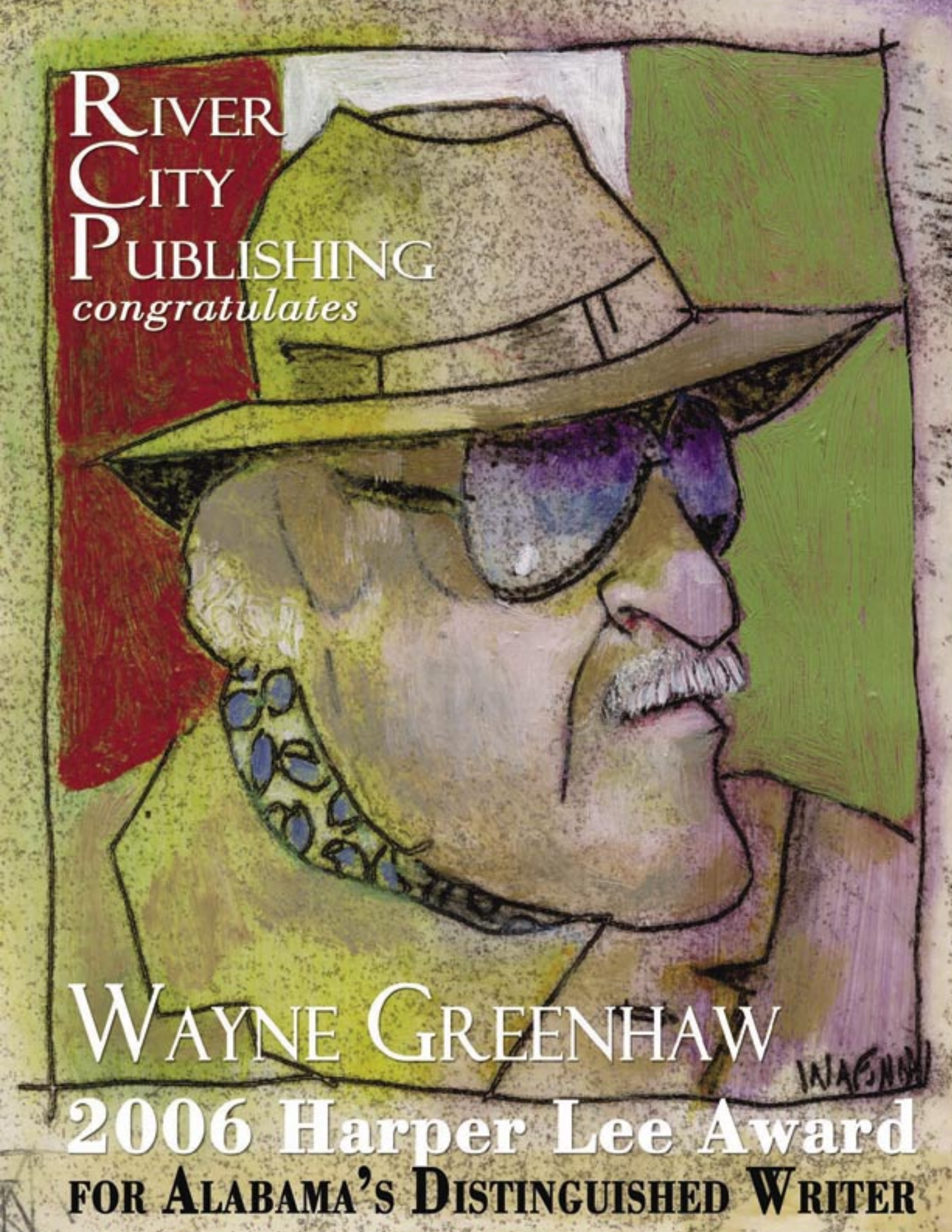
When the mind goes to this spot, there is only one way to bring it back. Start with what you can do, then go to the next thing, and the next. For writers, it is the word, the sentence, the story.

The Alabama Writers' Forum hopes, as I believe the funding agencies envision, that “Writing Mobile Bay” will provide a meaningful response to a wounded community, albeit a slowly rebuilding one. Roy Hoffman's reports to me of his “Writing Mobile Bay” students' breakthroughs are the clear focusing of this response. The lens sharpens every time one writer gets an image right. The Fairhope pier is still closed, but those who walked it every day for exercise and to breathe the sweet Bay air remember touching the pole at the end of the pier, then making the turn back toward land. And they can put this memory down in words.

Although one modest arts program cannot rebuild the Louisiana city I know to be America's unique treasure, or even rebuild a torn wharf in Alabama, the arts community *can* offer our response in the form of doing what we do best – using the resources provided to create the space for human beings to speak, write, and listen. Enlisting community arts partners to do this work is also what we do. The loaves and fishes parable is not far from the story line here – to feed the unimaginable multitude, a first step was taken. Break it and move on. The Forum is grateful that the bread arrived and that we were able to break it and move on.



Jeanie Thompson is the author of White for Harvest: New and Selected Poems and other works.



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