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THE JOURNAL OF THE ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM • SPRING 2010

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

Contact The Alabama Writers' Forum

P.O. Box 4777 • Montgomery, Alabama 36103-4777

Phone: 334-265-7728 • Toll Free: 866-901-1117

FAX: 334-265-7828

writersforum@bellsouth.net • www.writersforum.org

Editor-in-chief: Jeanie Thompson

Managing Editor: Danny Gamble

Design/Production: Faith Nance



DIANE PROTHRO

Kirk Curnutt is English Department chair at Troy University-Montgomery. His latest novel is *Dixie Noir*.

The Alabama Writers' Forum

Taking Literature from Gown to Town

When I first moved to Alabama sixteen years ago, my vision of the literary life was pretty sugar-plumb. I had spent the previous ten years on various college campuses, both as a student and as a teacher, and I was convinced I knew where the life of books belonged: in the cathedral-like silences of library stacks, in echoing old lecture halls, on the green carpentry of a manicured quad, and in the ad-hoc salons that met wherever the pizza and libations happened to be cheapest.

It was thus something of a shock to arrive at Troy University's Montgomery campus as a newly-minted assistant professor and realize that not every learning environment took those accoutrements for granted. In the parlance of the profession, my new employer was a "non-traditional" school, which in practical terms meant that the lifestyle I associated with the liberal arts simply wasn't relevant. There were no poetry slams or controversial figurers brought in to rattle the rafters, not even the bull sessions at which one could debate whether this or that writer was the greatest of his generation. There was hardly time for reading, much less talking about books.

Perhaps most unexpected of all, there was the sneaking suspicion that literature only existed to give otherwise unemployed PhDs like myself a job.

More than a decade and a half later, I can honestly say I'm grateful to have spent my career in an unconventional setting. It has taught me, first and foremost, that the worst thing that can happen to fiction and poetry is to become so associated with the gown that it seems to have no relevance to the town. As my students have made it abundantly clear, literature has elitist connotations that don't have much to do with the pressures and demands of their world. To a large extent, my teaching has been preoccupied with the challenge of proving the books I've always loved are indeed meaningful outside of ivory towers.

I won't claim to have slain any dragons, and there have been plenty of times I've walked out of class wondering why anyone should lend his attention to *The Great Gatsby* or even *To Kill a Mockingbird* when layoffs are imminent and bills are due. But those doubts somehow manage to find their calm, sometimes by remembering the lessons of books such as Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* or Paula Huntley's *The Hemingway Book Club of Kosovo*, which narrate tales of how good books provide analogues for understanding roiling moments of political and social upheaval.

At other moments, I'm reassured by hearing the positive experiences of my good friend Marlin Barton, who is kind enough to share his successes in the Writing Our Stories program. In still other cases, I'm lucky enough to participate in Big Read events, where I realize, despite the dire warnings, that in the real world people do still read books, and that they do so with critical eyes.

Mostly, however, I'm comforted by the students who let me know, sometimes years later, the impression that a certain work of art made upon them, and how because of it, they've never quite since seen the world the same way.

I'm thus grateful for the chance to join the Writers' Forum's Board of Directors because of the further opportunity it gives my particular Troy campus to continue disproving those literature—elitism preconceptions.

Kirk Curnutt

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

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



JOHN ADAMS-ADAMS IMAGING

Carolyn Haines at home

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PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMIE MARTIN



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Natural Born Storyteller

CAROLYN HAINES WINS THE 2010 HARPER LEE AWARD

by Aleta Boudreaux



JOHN ADAMS-ADAMS IMAGING

Carolyn Haines is the thirteenth winner of the 2010 Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year. It seems an appropriate number for a writer whose books usually surround someone else's bad fortune.

While Haines is best known for her Sarah Booth Delaney Mystery series, always involving a murder, sometimes a stolen pet, and an ever-present friendly ghost, she has also published general fiction, crime novels, suspense, short stories, and non-fiction.

A storyteller by nature, Haines grew up frightening her childhood friends by telling them ghost stories and wanting to be a mystery solver like Nancy Drew. "Our house was haunted," she said. "My mother and grandmother were excellent ghost story tellers."

Growing up in Mississippi, Haines was intrigued by the people and history of the area. Echoes of the places where she played as a child, the Leaf, Chickasawhay, and Pascagoula

Rivers and the pine barrens around Lucedale, often find their way into her novels. When asked about the characters in her books, Haines said, "The South has a great love of unusual and strange characters, and they populate Southern fiction. I've always been fond of bizarre characters who are out of step and out of time."

Haines' parents, both journalists, encouraged her to pursue her own career in writing. After graduating from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1974, she worked for the *Mobile Register/Mississippi Press* and eventually *The Huntsville Times*. She began to write short fiction for her own enjoyment and received encouragement from the editors of several national magazines. She signed with an agent, which gave her the confidence to move from short fiction to the longer form of the novel.

As of this writing, Haines has published over nineteen books spanning a wide variety of genres. Her work has been translated into over a dozen languages. While this would be

considered a career by most authors, Haines can't resist new challenges. "Being successful in one field gives you confidence to try new things," she explained.

Her most recent venture is editing an anthology of short stories, *Delta Blues*, set around the musical form that sprang from the Mississippi Delta and a crime/noir element. The book includes a foreword by Academy Award® winner Morgan Freeman and short stories by authors including John Grisham, James Lee Burke, and Charlaine Harris. "It was an honor to work with such talented authors," Haines said, "and to have their materials entrusted to me." The collection will be released May 1. The book launch will be at Freeman's world-renowned Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale, Mississippi, on March 27.

Haines wandered into the realm of independent publishing when she and a friend, Rebecca Barrett, started KaliOka Press. Haines co-edited *Moments with Eugene: A Collection of Memories*, and later published her own work, *Shop Talk*, before closing the publishing house. "I learned an extraordinary amount about publishing," Haines explained. "I also learned that I'm a wretched business person. I love to write."

Haines has also tried her hand at writing screenplays. Her original horror script, *The Nester*, placed in the top twenty-five in the Slamdance Film Festival Screenplay Competition.

And Haines has been garnering praise since the beginning of her writing profession. She was awarded a Literature Fellowship by the Alabama State Council on the Arts in 1999, and in 2009 she was the recipient of the Richard Wright Award for Literary Excellence, an award given for a body of work.

Fever Moon, a literary historical thriller set in 1940s Louisiana and released by St. Martin's Press, was a Book Sense notable book, and *Penumbra*, set in 1952 Mississippi, was named one of the top five mysteries of 2006 by *Library Journal*. "It's nice to be acknowledged for your work," Haines said.

In addition to her career as an author, Haines is an assistant professor at the University of South Alabama, where she received her master's degree in English in 1985. She teaches graduate and undergraduate fiction writing classes and is the fiction coordinator. "I encourage my students to read with their guts," Haines said. "And to marry a good forward moving story with excellent writing skills."

One of Haines' students has made the leap into publishing. Jeannie Holmes signed a three-book contract with Random House. Her urban fantasy, *Blood Law*, will be published this year. "Quality fiction can be written in any genre," Haines explained. "Jeannie's work is proof of that."

When she's not writing or teaching, Haines' free time is absorbed with animal rescue, rehabilitation, and educating the public about the need to spay and neuter pets. "Spaying and neutering is no longer an option; it is a must. I hope to work to help pass legislation to that effect." Most of the twenty-three animals on her farm are rescued dogs, cats, and horses.

Continued on page 6



Books

- Bone Appétit*,
Minotaur Books, 2010
- Delta Blues*, ed.,
Tyurus Books, 2010
- Greedy Bones*,
Minotaur Books, 2009
- Wishbones*,
Minotaur Books, 2008
- Ham Bones*,
Kensington Publishing, 2007

- Fever Moon*,
Minotaur Books, 2007
- Penumbra*, Minotaur Books, 2006
- Bones to Pick*, Kensington Publishing, 2006
- Judas Burning*, River City Publishing, 2005
- Hallowed Bones*, Delacorte Press, 2004
- My Mother's Witness: The Peggy Morgan Story*,
River City Publishing, 2003
- Crossed Bones*, Delacorte Press, 2003
- Splintered Bones*, Delacorte Press, 2002
- Buried Bones*, Bantam Books, 2000
- Moments with Eugene*, ed. with Rebecca Barrett,
KaliOka Press, 2000
- Them Bones*, Bantam Books, 1999
- Shop Talk*, KaliOka Press, 1998
- Touched*, Dutton, 1996
- Summer of the Redeemers*, Dutton, 1994

Awards

- The Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished
Writer of the Year,
Alabama Southern Community College, 2010
- Richard Wright Literary Excellence Award,
Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration, 2009
- Notable Book: *Fever Moon*,
Book Sense, 2007
- Top Five Mysteries: *Penumbra*,
Library Journal, 2006
- Top Five Mysteries: *Hallowed Bones*,
Library Journal, 2004
- Literature Fellowship,
Alabama State Council on the Arts, 1999



Continued from page 5

When she has time for recreation, Haines can be found riding her horse, a magnificent gray Connemara cross, Cogar, or walking with her six dogs in the woodlands near her home in Semmes, Alabama. Her animal friends are a constant inspiration for the animal characters in her books. All of her friends know that sooner or later their eccentric attributes will show up in her novels, blended and sometimes embellished for fiction.

Haines' enthusiasm for writing is consuming. "It has become so much a part of who I am that I can't imagine not writing," she said. And her readers wouldn't want her to stop. They look forward to Haines' books and newsletters and following the lives of her characters.

It is evident by the quality and quantity of her work that Haines has made a lifelong commitment to writing and to sharing her love of writing

with others. The tenth book in her Sarah Booth Delaney mystery series, *Bone Appetit*, will be released in July.

Haines will receive the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer of the Year at the Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville on April 30 at the annual luncheon. The conference will meet April 29-May 1 at Alabama Southern Community College.

See more at www.carolynhaines.com.

Aleta Boudreaux is the author of Song of the White Swan (Laughing Owl Publishing, 1997). She conducted a workshop for writers for Writing Mobile Bay: The Hurricane



H. J. BOUDREAUX III

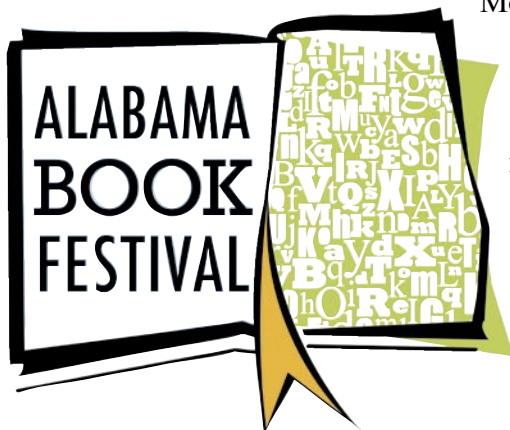
Project, an Alabama Writers' Forum project in 2006. She works with animal rescue for Good Fortune Farm Refuge and chairs community projects in her hometown.

Readers, Writers, Artists, & You!

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Left to right: Ronn K. Smith, Mildred Langford, James Bowen, Cameron Knight, Margo Moorer, Hollis McCarthy and Adam Richman

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BOOKS, GHOSTS, & SUNDAY DINNERS

The Legacy of Mobile's Termite Hall

by Eleanor Inge Baker



Eleanor and Adelaide on the steps of Termite Hall circa 1940

COURTESY OF TERMITE HALL

Termite Hall



ANGELA TRIGG

Down in Mobile it's Halloween Night at Termite Hall. Brambles, crepe myrtles, and unruly boxwoods shield much of the house from view of busy Dauphin Street. Overnight, a cold front pushed out the warm tropical breezes of the past week. A half-opened iron gate near the street creaks back and forth in the tempered arctic blast—a testament to Mobile's varied, coastal climate. Our party makes its way up the path to the Halloween festivities, and we duck under a rickety arbor covered with thorns. Tinkling voices and laughter spill over the well-lit porches as live oaks curtsy low to the ground to greet cars bumping down the root-distorted drive. My seventy-one-year-old father-in-law, dressed as an astronaut, grew up in the neighborhood. "As kids we wouldn't dare go up this walk on Halloween," he said. "We called this house haunted." My mother-in-law, dressed as a witch in a soft shade of lavender, suddenly screams. A thorn has plucked her pointed satin hat off her head. We are giddy and everyone shrieks as a massive garden spider, illuminated by a tiki torch, appears just above eye level along the path.

Termite Hall, originally a stagecoach house prior to the Civil War, is set midway between the Mobile County Courthouse downtown and Springhill College. Since that time, it has expanded into three stories with a massive Victorian facade of deep porches, multi-paned windows, and gingerbread archways.

For some costumed guests, this is their first soiree at Termite Hall; however, many of the night's revelers have been coming here for decades. They are drawn not only to the Faulknorean patina of the place, but to the good friends, artists, writers, and lovers of literature who have, at one time or another, called it home. The two people most responsible for the home's literary legacy are Eleanor Marston Benz and Adelaide Marston Trigg. In 1919, when the girls were toddlers, they moved into Termite Hall, also known as the Greene-Marston House, with their parents and widowed grandmother who bought the house.

During the Great Depression, their mother, Regina Rapier Marston, opened the home to destitute female relatives and then rented rooms to boarders during Mobile's housing shortage of World War II. This resulted in a constant influx of new people throughout the years.

Termite Hall has a personality of its own and has now been in the family for ninety years. It earned its name in jest. According to the family, Eleanor and Adelaide were little girls sitting on the balustrade outside the parlor on the side porch when their mother called them into the house. When the girls jumped off the termite-infested railing, it disintegrated into a cloud of dust. Luckily the rest of the house was termite-free. Still today, there is an openness, an irreverent playfulness about the house that lacks pretense and lends itself to creativity and fun.

With little money during the Depression, a fanciful house, plenty of books, and acreage to explore, Eleanor and Adelaide created their own entertainment. Tom Mason, a good friend of the two sisters and former *Mobile Press-Register* reporter mused, "They were truly spontaneous. They loved to dance. Eleanor and Adelaide were both incredibly well-read but not intimidating about it. They were unbelievable storytellers and very funny, telling bawdy jokes and cutting up. We used to have this fantasy: 'Oh, we ought to write a book about nun jokes that are too dirty to say out loud.' Then Eleanor



ELEANOR INGE BAKER

Current owner
Angela Trigg in
the Termite Hall
library.

and Adelaide would proceed to tell every nun joke they had ever heard since their education at the convent. They were hilarious women, playing off each other since they had been together so long. Storytelling is a performance art, and they were so polished at it. They would weave a

story together that could make you weep or laugh hysterically."

Eleanor now lives in Orlando with her daughter, clinical psychologist Sarah Phillips, but she still comes back to visit Termite Hall when she can. When asked about her family's literary legacy, she said, "A love of reading has always been in our family. My grandmother, Regina DeMouy Rapier, sat in that rocker in the library at Termite Hall all day and read and didn't do much else. Mother had written for the *Press-Register*, and her father, Col. John Rapier, had owned and edited the paper. Mother taught me and Adelaide how to write and gave us many tips she learned at the paper. Writing and reading were just a part of our family."

One anecdote of Eleanor's own literary history originated when she was working at the Mobile Public Library. She said,



Left: Illustration in the alphabet book Eugene Walter made for Adelaide's son, Peter Trigg: *A is for Adelaide, the Goddess of Puns.*

Right: *H is for Haunted*, Walter's illustration for *The Haunted Book Shop*.

to music and danced and painted pictures and climbed trees and ate and gardened and read and ate. Naturally, it is haunted, delightfully so."

In *Moments with Eugene: A Collection of Memories*, edited by Harper Lee Award winner Carolyn Haines and Rebecca Barrett, Frank Daugherty, journalist, novelist, and program coordinator of the English Language Center at the University of South Alabama wrote,

"It would not be too much to say that [Termite Hall] had a kind of presence. Besides Eugene's cookbook, there was a play written about the house in the '50s by Thomas Atkins, and another by Thomas Perez in the '80s. Many lives and fates had been lived out there, and not only Eugene but other guests as well spoke of seeing ghosts. Sometimes, sitting at the dining room table, Eugene and other people saw a woman with marcelled hair and in a beautiful gown, as for a Mardi Gras ball, passing down the entrance hall toward the front door. She would smile as she glanced into the dining room. [Eugene] said that ghosts are a kind of crystallization of lives at certain moments and emotions."

Before playwright Thomas Perez lived at Termite Hall, he wrote *Cockroach Hall*, inspired by the place. In the play, he mentions several ghosts. It was not until he lived there, though, that he experienced the ghosts' mischief firsthand. Perez explained, "One morning I woke up and all the pictures in my apartment were on the floor leaning against the baseboards. I didn't hear them fall in the night and the glass had not broken. When I told Adelaide, she just giggled and said, 'Well, you know who did that? We've got more ghosts than just the three you wrote about in your play.' She wouldn't tell me which ghost had done it. She wasn't surprised a bit that all my damn pictures were down and not a pane of glass broken. It scared me to death!"

Eleanor, head librarian at McGill-Toolen High School for forty-six years and for whom the library is now named, had a profound influence on many of the students who wandered into her library, including Perez. He explained, "I came from a family where neither my mother nor father had gone to college because of the Depression and my mother had eleven children. Books were just not in the house. I walked into the library one day and said, 'Mrs. Benz, I want to read a book.' She said, 'What do you want to read?' and I said, 'I have no idea. I just want to read something good.' So she took me to a shelf and pulled off *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. She said, 'This is for the girls, but it's a classic.' It was a magical moment in my life because it was the first book I ever read."

"One day when I was working at the circulation desk, a man came in and asked me what I liked to read. I said, 'I like to read all sort of things. I like to have a balanced diet of books, but I have just finished a book by James Street that I thoroughly enjoyed.' Then the man said, 'Well, I'm James Street.' The well-known writer from Mississippi happened to be in town and we had a wonderful conversation about all sorts of books. It was just such a coincidence!"

John Sledge, noted architectural historian and editor of the *Mobile Press-Register* Books Page said, "Termite Hall has been somewhat of a literary incubator for quite a long time, primarily because Adelaide ran The Haunted Book Shop, famed in Mobile history, and Eleanor was a librarian in the Catholic schools. Anyone involved in the arts, especially the literary arts, in Mobile found their way to Termite Hall. Whether it was an opera singer in town for a performance who needed a place to spend the night or Eugene Walter, who lived there during several different periods of his life, it was a natural magnet for creative people."

The literary legacy of Termite Hall can not be separated from the flamboyant and creative touch of Renaissance man Eugene Walter. Angela Trigg, Adelaide's granddaughter and now the fifth generation of the family to call Termite Hall home, said, "Eugene needed a place to stay after he came back from Paris and Rome, so he lived at Termite Hall. After the Time Life Series commissioned him to travel the South and write *American Cooking, Southern Style*, he wrote the cookbook *Delectable Dishes from Termite Hall*. People who had never heard of the house before were suddenly intrigued. Our family had always had Sunday night dinners when family and friends dropped by, but Eugene turned those dinners into a salon of sorts, recreating what he had in Rome all those years."

In his introduction to his cookbook centered around the meals of Termite Hall, Walter wrote, "The Hall has always been a place where people came for a week's visit and stayed a year, where everybody read and ate, ate and read, and listened

Adelaide's co-founding The Haunted Book Shop in 1941 with Cameron Plummer put the sisters at the heart of Mobile's literary scene. The book store had not been open a year when famed German novelist and Nobel Prize laureate Thomas Mann came to town for a book signing. According to family lore, Mann borrowed Adelaide's fountain pen to sign books and never gave it back. Recently, though, Angela found an old journal Adelaide kept at the store in which she wrote, "Thomas Mann borrowed my fountain pen and I'm hoping the literary germs rub off!" It is unclear if Mann actually stole her pen or not. Perhaps she did not know the pen was missing until the next day.

After Adelaide married, she moved away from Mobile and sold her share of the shop. When she returned with her family to Termite Hall, she started a business called The Far Corners Book Search, where she found rare books for people for a commission. When Far Corners' clients came to the house to pick up their books, they were often offered sherry or some other libation. Adelaide discussed new writers, classics, and the arts with them. It served as an excuse for people to come to Termite Hall and visit. She ran Far Corners Book Search until her death in September 2008.

Adelaide's granddaughter, Helen Scully, set her first novel *In the Hope of Rising Again* at Termite Hall. Helen, who currently lives in New Orleans, said, "I finished the novel there. I spent stretches, two and three weeks just working on the upstairs porch. Then I would go down to dinner and hear more stories about the family. It's a creative environment all around. And we're all artistic." Regarding her siblings and first cousins, Helen added, "I'm a writer, my sister's a painter, my brother's a classical musician, my two cousins in Los Angeles are in film, and Angela's a historian. When you look at how we've come into adulthood, it's pretty clear that house had an effect on all of us creatively." Helen has recently completed the manuscript for her second literary novel and is working on revisions with her agent.

The literary gene did not skip a generation. Helen's mother, Mary Scully, who earned her masters in English from Purdue University, has made her career as a magazine editor and freelance writer. Of growing up at Termite Hall, Mary said, "The house was covered with books and the library was our main room for entertaining and lounging around. We were constantly reading. Growing up, there were five kids in the house: me, my siblings, and my two first cousins. Living in a place like Termite Hall was so unusual. It had the power to fire a child's imagination." Mary recently completed a science thriller set in the Middle East, titled *The Harp*, and is looking for an agent to represent the novel. She and Helen are also collaborating on an historical romance mystery novel centered around the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition of 1884, held in New Orleans. Also, Angela's father and Mary's older brother, Peter Trigg, was a life-long newspaper man and worked for several publications including *The New York Times*. He died in 2007.

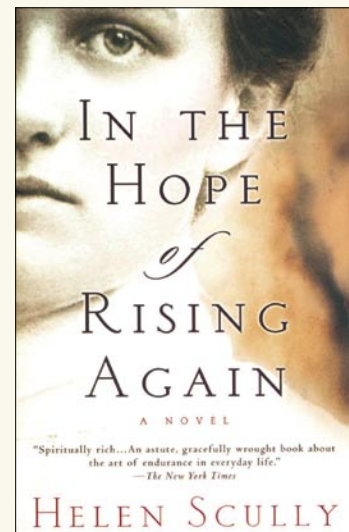
Angela, now living at Termite Hall, wants to revitalize what was so prevalent in the years when her grandmother and great-aunt lived there. She said, "What I've been hearing mostly around Mobile is that there isn't a place where people can just meet casually to share ideas about the literary arts. I'd love to rekindle Sunday night dinners. I value tradition and those suppers were a big part of the past life of Termite Hall. I hope to invite local and visiting writers to stay here. It would be a great way of honoring my grandmother, my great-aunt, and Eugene. It would be a way to help carry on Mobile's literary tradition."

View Angela Trigg's multifaceted restoration project at www.termitehall.org.



Eleanor Inge Baker is a freelance writer living in the Oakleigh Garden District of Mobile, Ala. She is currently pursuing her MFA in creative writing at Spalding University.

MEGGAN HALLER / KEYHOLE PHOTO



While Regina and Charles convalesced in the Cawthorne Hotel, buying a new house was left up to Regina's brothers. They toured the Dauphin Street house just to please the estate agent; they had already made up their minds. It was essentially a farmhouse, though of grand proportions, with a wide central hallway that cut front to back, with parlor and library to the right, dining room and the small room Regina would sew in to the left. The second floor was identical, with the same hallway and two bedrooms on both sides of it. The house was wired for electricity. A stifling-hot third floor, unsealed, was filled with dusty broken furniture of the previous owner, a cypress baron. Mahogany paneling in the dining room, library and hallways, broad two-tiered porches that circled the house, and the magnolias and oaks, lining the various driveways were other of the baron's marks. It was the fourteen acres of pecan orchard, however, that struck the brothers' collective fancy. The basic productivity of trees was a delicious revelation to them so late in life. That they could profit from this productivity with little effort was hilarious to them. They loved pecan pie. "It's a gold mine," Felix announced.

from *In the Hope of Rising Again*
by Helen Scully
Penguin Press, 2004
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Writing Our Stories Tips-off Lucky 13

Photos by Jamie Martin

Writing Our Stories: An Anti-Violence Creative Writing Program, a partnership of the Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS) and the Alabama Writers' Forum, entered its thirteenth year this fall with the release of three new student anthologies of poems, stories, and memoirs.

Alabama State University men's basketball coach Lewis Jackson tipped-off this year's events at the book release for *Open the Door12* from the student writers at Lurleen B. Wallace School on the DYS Mt. Meigs Campus on October 22. On October 29, Alabama State Senator Linda Coleman (D-District 20, Jefferson) addressed the *Keep It Real* contributors from Sequoyah School on the DYS Chalkville Campus. Alabama State Representative James Fields Jr. (D-District 12, Cullman) delivered the keynote address for the release of *Courage Is*, written by students at Adele Goodwyn McNeel School, on the DYS Vacca Campus on November 4.

Each event featured a reading by the newly published poets, fiction writers, and memoirists and a reception held in their honor for family and visitors. Here's their story in photographs:



"It takes a certain amount of discipline, of creativity, of motivation to accomplish what you've done with this book," said Alabama State University men's basketball coach **Lewis Jackson**, addressing the newly-published authors of *Open the Door12* at Mount Meigs. "You've stuck with the program, and that's a strong accomplishment." Teaching writer **Marlin Barton** edited the anthology.

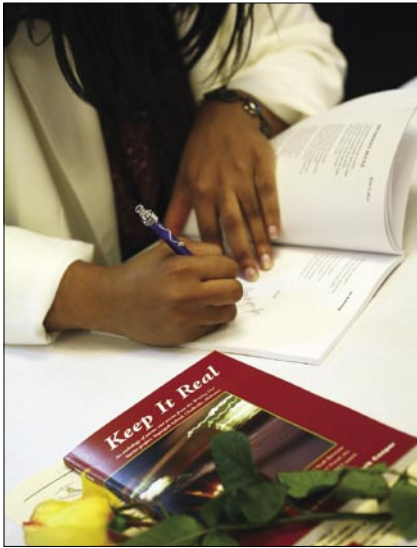


"Your words move others," said Alabama State Representative **James Fields Jr.** (D-District 12, Cullman), addressing the Vacca writers, "so make sure that your words that others hear move them in the right direction." Here Rep. Fields has his copy of *Courage Is* signed by a student writer while McNeel School principal **Arthur Tigner** looks on.

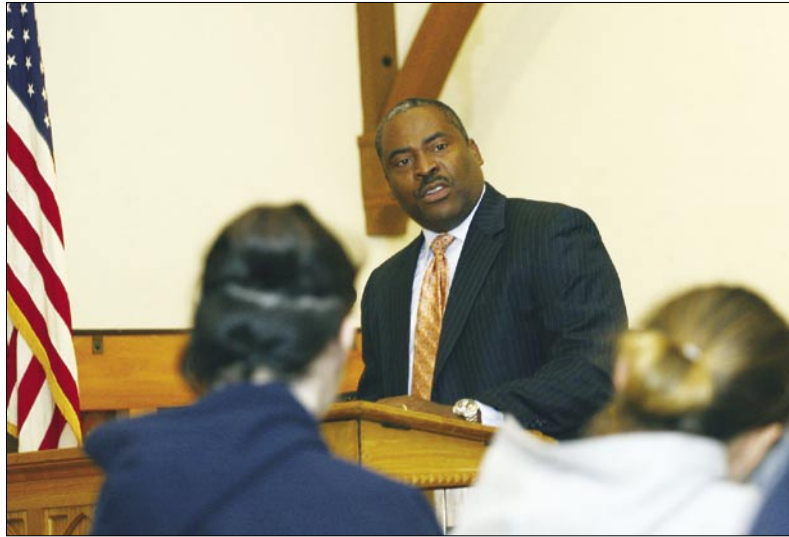


"We have many state dignitaries here today, and they are important," DYS Executive Director **J. Walter Wood Jr.** told the Vacca writers, "but they are not as important as you. You are the most important people in this room today."

Learn more about Writing Our Stories at www.writersforum.org/programs/writing. Copies of the new anthologies are available for a \$5 shipping and handling fee for each book. Contact the Forum toll free at 866-901-1117 for more information.



A Chalkville student signs a copy of *Keep It Real* for a visitor at a reception following the book release celebration. Teaching writer Priscilla Hancock Cooper edited the anthology.



"You are now a published writer, and not many people can say that," recently appointed DYS Superintendent of Education **Tyrone Yarbrough** told the Chalkville authors. "I can't say that. And you now have an accomplishment you can place on your resume."



Vacca students await their turn to read their selections from *Courage Is*. Teaching writer **Tony Crunk** edited the anthology.



"Where you came from has nothing to do with where you're going," said Alabama State Senator **Linda Coleman** (D-District 20, Jefferson), addressing the Chalkville writers. "You can succeed in life, but it's up to you. The world is waiting for what you have to offer."



Chalkville teaching writer **Priscilla Hancock Cooper** waits to have her copy of *Keep It Real* signed while Alabama State Senator **Linda Coleman** (D-District 20, Jefferson) looks on.



"The title of this year's anthology is *Courage Is*," said teaching writer **Tony Crunk**, pictured here with his Vacca students. "The courage my students have shown in their writing has made this program successful."

A SPIRIT AMONG US

Helen Keller Statues Installed in Washington and Montgomery

by Jeanie Thompson



PHOTO: ROBIN COOPER

WASHINGTON, D.C.—ON OCTOBER 7, 2009, a statue of an internationally-known native Alabamian was unveiled in the United States Capitol. The monument to Helen Keller was placed in the Main Hall of the new 580,000-square-foot Capitol Visitor's Center.

The Keller statue was commissioned by **Gov. Riley** and the **Alabama Legislature** and paid for with a combination of individual and corporate donations. “Helen Keller is one of the world’s most recognized and honored Americans,” Gov. Riley said. “Her sculpture in Statuary Hall will continue to bring credit to her and Alabama as it will be the first sculpture in the U.S. Capitol of an American with disabilities and the first sculpture of a child.”

Nationally recognized sculptor **Edward Hlavka** was commissioned to create the statue. He was chosen by a committee of Alabamians, the **Helen Keller Campaign and Artist Selection Committee**. **First Lady Patsy Riley** served as honorary chairperson for the committee. **Dr. Joe Busta**, Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs at the University of South Alabama, and **Elmer Harris**, retired CEO of Alabama Power Company, served as co-chairmen of the

committee. They worked with the **Alabama State Council on the Arts** to solicit artists' proposals for the sculpture.

The sculpture depicts Helen Keller as a child, vividly capturing the moment at her family's Tuscumbia farm water pump when she first successfully communicated with the outside world. "At this moment, when Helen Keller was a child, she showed us the power of a determined human spirit and reminded us all that courage and strength can exist in the most unlikely places. Alabama takes great pride in being Helen Keller's home state," Mrs. Riley said.

Keller, born in Tuscumbia on June 27, 1880, lost her sight and hearing after contracting meningitis when she was nineteen months old. She overcame these enormous obstacles and went on to become an internationally recognized author and activist. Keller was proclaimed in *Life* magazine as a "national treasure" and "one of the 100 most important Americans of the 20th Century."



Shortly after the unveiling of Alabama's latest contribution to Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C., audience members, including Gov. Bob Riley and Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL; far right) gathered around the rendering of young Helen Keller in her "moment of epiphany" at the water pump.



ROBIN COOPER

Utah artist Edward Hlavka was commissioned to create the Helen Keller statue by the Alabama State Council on the Arts. His maquette was the only one submitted that portrayed Helen as a child, which caught the attention of First Lady Patsy Riley and others on the selection committee.



ROBIN COOPER

Gov. Bob Riley appears to meet Helen for the first time in Statuary Hall. During a dinner the night before the unveiling ceremony, Gov. Riley told guests that while he was serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, he and Mrs. Riley envisioned a statue of the young Helen Keller residing in Statuary Hall as an inspiration to children everywhere of the possibilities of overcoming any human obstacle.

PERSONAL RESPONSES TO THE STATUARY HALL UNVEILING



ROBIN COOPER

After speeches by the minority and majority leaders to both houses of Congress, the governor of the honoree's home state, and other dignitaries, the bronze statue honoring Helen Keller was revealed when a burgundy cloth slipped aside.

The first to experience the statue was Dr. Carl Augusto, President of the National Foundation for the Blind, who was led to the statue by Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Honorable Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). In the

Dr. Carl Augusto, President of the American Foundation for the Blind, reads the Braille inscription on the base of the statue.

rendering, Utah sculptor Edward Hlavka portrays a well-known figure—the young girl of *The Miracle Worker*—manipulating a water pump with one hand and feeling the rush of water with the other in the well-known "moment of epiphany" as she understood "w-a-t-e-r."

Although the visiting delegation had been seated for almost two hours, we held back in a kind of respectfulness as those who represented the spirit of Keller, the visually impaired, saw the artwork first with their hands. After a few moments, we made our way down front for a closer look.

Continued page 16

Continued from page 15

As I moved in the crush, someone to my left spoke: “Did you enjoy the ceremony?” Turning, I saw a woman who appeared to be looking at me, but slightly over my shoulder. I didn’t answer at first because I wasn’t sure to whom she was directing the question. Another woman (whom I learned later was her interpreter), her hand busily finger-spelling in this first woman’s, said to me, “She is speaking to you.”

“Yes,” I answered, realizing I was talking with someone who was both visually and aurally impaired. Her assistant smiled at me.

As the crowd moved along we conversed easily, and she recited a short, encouraging poem to me, even before we exchanged names and e-mail addresses. We had instantly bonded in the moment of Helen Keller’s celebration. I learned that Ann C. Black has a brother in Huntsville, Ala., and that she has never visited Tusculumbia, home of Ivy Green, Helen Keller’s birthplace. I

ROBIN COOPER



Ann C. Black (Washington, D.C.), who met Helen Keller when Black was a small child, feels the sash of Keller’s dress in the Statuary Hall rendering. Black became deaf-blind later in life and now works to help provide services to the deaf-blind in her community.

expressed to her that she must come to Alabama and that I would enjoy going with her when she visited the famous location of Helen Keller’s entry into

language. Her interpreter led her to the statue where she was photographed using “touch communication,” as she calls it, to see the statue of her hero, Helen Keller.

In those few moments, buoyed along with the crowd, many of whom had been anticipating this moment for years, I sensed a palpable spirit among us. For the woman who had been one of the chief encouragers to ever walk the earth, this would’ve been a typical experience of meeting like-minded strangers on common ground. For me, it was a further sign that my interest, as a poet, in Helen Keller the writer, and Alabamian, would continue to deepen and grow.

Later, I wrote to Ms. Black, asking her what it meant to her to be there. She answered, “After it was over, I ran up to the statue to touch Helen Keller and, wow, so many details! I felt a big bow on the back of her dress, lace on the bottom of her dress, her shoes, and

Continued next page

HELEN KELLER II TOURS ALABAMA 2010



BARBARA REED

Helen Keller II, an exact replica of the Statuary Hall sculpture, was unveiled in Montgomery at the State Capitol on Dec. 4 and will remain in Alabama. Gov. Bob Riley and First Lady Patsy Riley (left) hosted the event. Keller’s great-grandniece, Keller Johnson Thompson, an Ambassador for the American Foundation for the Blind, assists while Al Head and Joe Busta look on.

sculpture will reside at Ivy Green in Tusculumbia, where visitors come from all over the world make pilgrimages to see Keller’s birthplace and the setting of the play *The Miracle Worker*.

According to Georgine Clarke, Alabama State Council on the Arts visual arts program manager, “A lot of effort has gone into making it possible for the statute to be displayed at Ivy Green. People are very glad that Helen is coming home.” In August and September, Helen Keller II will be at the Mobile Museum of Art, in October at the Montgomery Museum of Art, and finally she will return to the State Capitol. (For exhibition information, contact the museums.)

At the unveiling of the statue dubbed “Helen Keller II” in the Alabama State Capitol on December 4, Executive Director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts Al Head spoke about the earlier installation of Helen Keller in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C.: “One of my lasting memories of this project will be that of Edward Hlavka’s Helen Keller being hoisted by a boom-truck more than a hundred and fifty feet in the air to the portico balcony of the brightly lit U.S. Capitol around midnight. A seven-year-old girl at the pump had become a beacon of light from a condition of total darkness.

“The moon was full, the Mall with the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial were aglow as always. But this night all these icons of our great country seemed to be welcoming a young girl to this much deserved place of honor.

“Now, all of us welcome Helen Keller to Alabama’s Capitol. Here she will be a source of light for all those who can see and those who can’t. Helen Keller’s bronze image makes us proud she was one of us and we are honored to have her spirit in our most public of public buildings.”

Helen Keller II has been on view at the Huntsville Museum of Art and will move to the Birmingham Museum of Art mid-spring. In June and July, the

her hands. Two reporters noted that I was touching the statue and took pictures as well as interviewed me. I told them I met Helen Keller when I was five years old and it was an awesome experience, not knowing that I myself would be deaf-blind.”

In a second e-mail, Black elaborated about meeting Helen Keller when she herself was a young student with a disability, learning to understand spoken and written language at the Adam School in Washington, D.C. “One day when I was five years old, Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan visited my school.... Helen put her hand on my head to feel my curly blond hair and the shape of my face with a smile. The other hand was on Anne Sullivan’s for information. Helen spoke and said to me, ‘You are a pretty girl!’ I hugged her. Indeed it was a memorable time for me as I never dreamed I would be deaf-blind myself.”

Black began losing her sight when she was a junior in college but learned Braille, persevering to graduate from college, marry, have children, and continue her career. Currently she is helping Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind set up services for the deaf-blind community, but, as with many non-profits, funding is a problem.

A delegation of Alabama State Council on the Arts members attended the Washington event, including Ralph Frohsin, Chair (Alexander City); Julie Friedman, Vice Chair (Fairhope); Elaine Johnson, Secretary (Dothan); Dora H. James (Auburn); Rebecca T.B. Quinn (Huntsville); Jim Harrison III (Tuscaloosa); Linda Rochester (Ashland); Lee Sentell (Montgomery); and former Council member Frank Helderman (Atlanta, Ga.).

Frohsin, who recently passed the Council gavel to Friedman, said about the event, “From beginning to end the whole event was very impressive. I had not anticipated being as moved as I was, from the entrance of the colors presented by the historic military guard, to the fact that all of the leadership of the U.S. House and Senate participated, with the Speaker of the House presiding. It was a moving and inspiring ceremony. The fact that the students from Talladega were there and their voices were heard in the Rotunda made it a ‘goose bump experience.’ I know it will be very meaningful for people with disabilities to see and experience this statue of Helen Keller.”

DAVID CAMPBELL



Adria Ferrali, founder and artistic director of New Dance Drama (Florence, Italy), performed *Hamletus Stirps Virilis* at Alabama State University during the Spring 2009 Italian Arts exchange in Alabama. She is creating a new dance inspired by Helen Keller. Shown here: Adria Ferrali as Ophelia and Thomas Johansen as Hamlet.

HELEN KELLER *Inspires 21st Century Art and Discussion*

Parallel with the creation of two bronze sculptures of Helen Keller, one now residing in Statuary Hall in the nation’s Capitol and one at home in Alabama, artists and scholars are inspired to consider the life of Helen Keller, both the well-known popular story of her life and the lesser known aspects of her life as a woman, an activist, and a prolific writer.

Adria Ferrali, founder and artistic director of New Dance Drama, based in Florence, Italy, has created a dance in the tradition of Martha Graham based on the adult life of Helen Keller. The dance will debut in Pietrasanta, Italy, during the Danza International Festival, August 28–September 5. The work depicts Keller and Anne Sullivan’s relationship as pupil and teacher, as well as deeply connected friends, and Keller’s brief, thwarted engagement to Peter Fagan when she was thirty-six. Ferrali said in an e-mail message that the dance pays homage to Keller’s writing, too, and “is a tribute to all writers.”

Also, as part of the ongoing Alabama/Italy arts exchange (see *First Draft* Fall 2008), the Montgomery (Alabama) Ballet will travel to Pietrasanta to perform in the Festival under the artistic direction of Elie Lazar. Ferrali hopes to bring her company to Alabama, to perform the Keller work and to continue the professional liaison with the Montgomery Ballet.

No doubt Helen Keller has also inspired many poems, stories, and other written works, but two Alabama poets have recently published poems inspired by aspects of the internationally-known Alabamian’s life. Alabama Poet Laureate, Sue Brannan Walker, now in her second term, composed a sestina, “Helen Keller Comes to Know Water,” on the occasion of the Statuary Hall event. She read the poem at the celebratory dinner the night before in the Russell Senate Office Building and presented the Rileys with a commemorative edition of the poem.

Jeanie Thompson has been at work on a book-length series of persona poems about Keller’s adult life, keying on her relationship with Peter Fagan, and other aspects of her womanhood and artistic endeavors. Some of the poems have appeared in *StorySouth.com* and *Southern Women’s Review*, and two poems were produced in Theater Tuscaloosa’s *Page To Stage*, directed by Tina F. Turley, along with works by Alabama writers Fannie Flagg, William Bradford Huie, and Nanci Kincaid. Thompson hopes to adapt the entire sequence for stage performance or film.

According to Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF) Grants Manager Susan Perry, *Becoming Helen Keller*, a proposed series of public programs for Spring 2011, is under discussion at the Foundation, contingent on funding and AHF Board approval. “*Becoming Helen Keller* is an educational documentary film and public project that will foster knowledge about the needs of visually impaired people in Alabama,” Perry said.

“The film will be the catalyst for civic discussions and teacher workshops to improve understanding of visual disability and to dispel lingering myths, assumptions, and stereotypes by examining these cultural legacies,” said Perry. “There has always been an international, national, and statewide fascination with Helen Keller and recent interest in the reexamination of her impact on the visually impaired and disabled community.”

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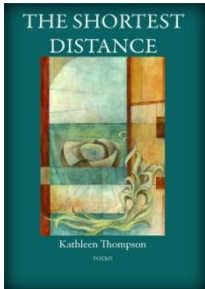
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We would like to thank Alabama Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, Alabama Humanities Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Tuscaloosa Council on the Arts, and The University of Alabama for their support.

The Shortest Distance poems by Kathleen Thompson



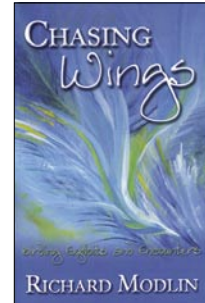
Kathleen Thompson's poems evoke a kind of Southern feminism that is more poetic than political, speaking to the strength and centrality of

women and the realm of their traditional roles of cleaning, teaching, mothering, gardening, and canning, all in a voice neither sentimental nor submissive, a voice genuine and strong.

—Robert Gray,
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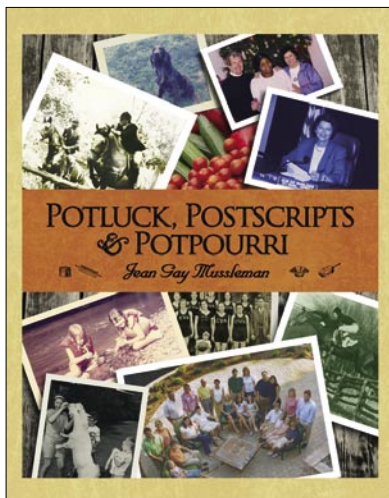
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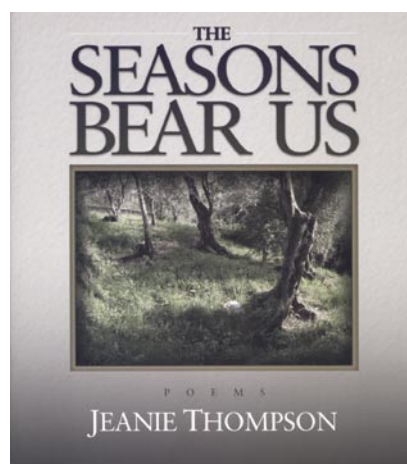
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MARY KAISER,
VIRGINIA GILBERT
NAMED 2010 LITERARY FELLOWS

**ASCA Recognizes
Two Poets**

by Danny Gamble

JEROME SAINT-JONES-ALABAMA A & M



Virginia Gilbert



ANNA QUINLAN

Mary Kaiser

Poets Mary Kaiser of Shelby County and Virginia Gilbert of Madison received the 2010 Literature Fellowships from the 2010 Literature Fellowships from the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA). The Council awarded fifteen arts fellowships totaling \$75,000 last summer. The most prestigious of grants awarded to individuals by ASCA, Fellowships are given to individuals working in literature, crafts, dance, design, media/photography, music, theatre, visual arts, and arts administration. Fellowships are granted to individual artists based on merit of work, career achievement, career potential, and service to the state. Recipients may use funds to set aside time to create art, to improve their skills, or to do what is most advantageous to enhance their artistic careers. Individual Fellowships include a \$5000 stipend.

“The ASCA Fellowship has benefited me in material ways that are particularly welcome in these hard economic times, but even more importantly, the grant validates and supports my efforts as an artist, and for that I am deeply grateful to the citizens of my state,” said Kaiser.

Kaiser said that she plans to use her Literature Fellowship for research travel, manuscript shopping, and technology upgrades.

“I like to write about events in the real world, and that often requires some research, though not the kind of systematic research a scholar would undertake,” said Kaiser. “For my recent poems, I traveled to Kentucky to visit the Shaker community of Pleasant Hill, and for my current work, I used grant funds to visit the Metropolitan Museum in New York to see the recent exhibit by photographer Robert Frank of his collection titled *The Americans*.”

After decades of teaching and scholarship in British and American literature, Kaiser began publishing poetry in her forties. In 2005 she won a Hackney Award from the Writing Today conference at Birmingham Southern College, and her chapbook, *Falling into Velázquez*, won the 2006 Slapering Hol Chapbook Award from the Hudson Valley Writers’ Center. In 2009 a selection of poems from her current collection was a Distinguished Entry in the Campbell Corner Poetry Competition.

Kaiser received her PhD in English with a concentration in modern poetry from the University of Denver, an MA in English from the University of Detroit, and a BS in Chemistry from Marygrove College of Detroit. She has taught English at Jefferson State Community College since 1991. Kaiser lives in Shelby County with her husband Kieran Quinlan, and their two children, Anna and David.

“I am very grateful to the Alabama State Council on the Arts for their choosing my work for one of this year’s awards in literature,” said Gilbert. “As I begin looking for a publisher for my next book, I hope this Fellowship will encourage editors to look even more closely at my writing. I hope, too, that this grant, besides bringing more attention to my work, will also bring more attention to the writers of North Alabama, both inside and outside of the state.”

Like Kaiser, Gilbert said she plans to use her Fellowship to upgrade her technology, to promote her work, and to travel.

A Peace Corps volunteer in South Korea in 1971-73, Gilbert said, “I attended the South Atlantic Modern Lan-

guage Association Conference in Atlanta last October where I was a part of a Special Event reading of Peace Corps poets. The year 2011 will be the fiftieth anniversary of the Peace Corps. I am working to organize another Peace Corps reading in Washington, D. C., for this anniversary. I also attended a Peace Corps Volunteer and Staff reunion in South Korea last October.”

Gilbert’s chapbooks include *To Keep at Bay the Hounds*, *The Earth Above*, and *Greatest Hits*. Her first full-length book of poems is *That Other Brightness*. Her awards include a National Endowment for the Arts grant, the 2006 Alumni Achievement Award from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and First Place in the Sakura Festival Haiku Contest Award. She was also the 2001 Alabama Poet of the Year, and she won First Place in the Alabama State Poetry Society’s first Poetry Slam in 1998. In the summer of 1993, she was a Fulbright scholar in China. Besides being a poet, Gilbert is also a noted photographer, having won a number of local, national, and international awards.

Gilbert received a PhD in Creative Writing-Poetry and English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, an MFA in Creative Writing-Poetry from the Iowa Writers Workshop, and a BA in English from Iowa Wesleyan College. She retired as a Professor of English at Alabama A & M University, and she was a longtime Director of its Program in Creative Writing and its reading series. Presently, Gilbert is Secretary to the Arts Council of Huntsville and a past President of the Huntsville Photographic Society and the Huntsville branch of The National League of American Pen Women.

The Alabama Writers' Forum,
a statewide literary organization promoting writers and writing, wishes to thank its
generous partners and friends who have supported the literary arts in Alabama.

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Greetings, Salutations, & Goodwill

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S JOURNAL

Dear AWF:

When I read Jeanie Thompson's piece "The Writer Within the Community" (*First Draft*, Fall 2009), I said to myself, "Yes, that's it!" Writing at its most basic is a form of communication, not demonstration. Which means, when we go out into the world to share our work, it is exactly as Jeanie discovered—not about us at all, but about the audience, the listener, the reader. It's about our poems and stories helping others to create their own poems and stories, and then turn around and share them with us. Thank you so much for this wonderful reminder as I set out with my debut novel *Leaving Gee's Bend*.

Irene Latham
Birmingham, Ala.
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LITERARY NEWS

Dear AWF:

What a fantastic job you do with your *Literary News* e-newsletter. I have shared your excellence with Utah's Literary Arts Director, Guy Lebeda. Equally impressed, he is trying to emulate your skillful newsletter, and I am so pleased.

LaVerna B. Johnson, President
Utah State Poetry Society
St. George, Utah
www.utahpoets.com

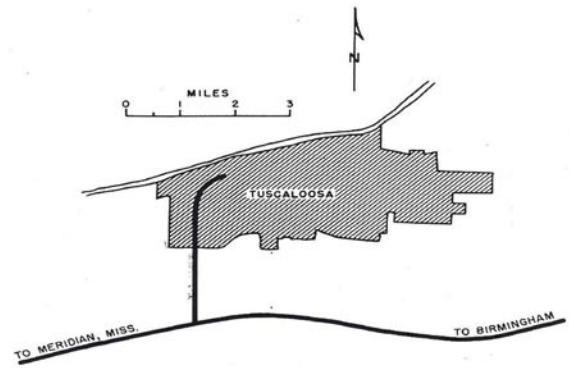
FIRST DRAFT BOOK REVIEWS ONLINE

Dear AWF:

Thank you for the thoughtful reviews of Sue Scalf's *Burnt Offerings* and Kathleen Thompson's *The Shortest Distance* (September 2009). I can't tell you how richly blessed I have been to have had the opportunity to work with these two very gifted poets. Thank you again for the reviews. You've done an excellent job.

Susan Shehane, Publisher
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SOMETHING FROM NOTHING



JAMIE MARTIN

The most memorable compliment I ever received was delivered to me during an awards ceremony where I had no idea I was eligible for the big prize, much less about to win it.

I was the editor of a brand new literary journal, the red-headed stepchild among all the other long-lived publications at The University of Alabama, including the *Corolla* yearbook and the campus newspaper, *The Crimson White*. Milling around at the University Club with the other editors on this evening in, dare I say it, 1975, I was dimly aware that something was about to happen. They were more dressed up than I was. There was a certain air of entitlement to the way they held their wine glasses. Or that's how I remember it.

In those days, the Board of Publications (precursor to the Media Planning Board of today) was populated with campus folks interested in publishing and writing, and the English Department representative was a young American literature professor, a native New Yorker who had landed in Tuscaloosa by way of Chapel Hill. It fell to him to present the Sarah Healey Award, named for the former Dean of Women, who had been on campus when my mother was a student in the '40s. This coveted award was given as the "best of show"—another fact of which I was not aware because I had only recently joined the team.

Holding the large wooden plaque, the professor looked down at it as if considering the litany of stellar editors it held—one name added each year. As he began to speak, I saw *The Crimson White* editor straighten and smile, as if she expected the award to be coming her way.

The professor's preamble was brief: "Many people have done wonderful things this year, and this award could go to several of them, but no one else has created something from nothing." At this point, the valences in the room shifted. There was something decidedly low-grade explosive happening with Dr. Don Noble's speech. "So this year, the Sarah Healey Award for Outstanding Achievement in Publication goes to the founding editor of the *Black Warrior Review*, Jeanie Thompson."

Or this is how I remember it. The point is I had worked very hard to produce two issues of the magazine knowing virtually nothing about the business, learning it all on the job with the help of mentors such as Thomas Rabbitt, Director of Creative Writing, and Bill Strickland at Drake Printers, because I believed we needed this magazine. I had jumped in feet first, never realizing the workload, the countless

decisions, and the considerable responsibility I was about to shoulder as an editor.

I stepped forward and had the amazing good sense to accept the award on behalf of all my staff. We had had a very bad fight within a small faction, and this was one of my early, instinctual moves to bring consensus and peace where it was needed. I gathered up my award, and didn't dare tell anyone in the room that a) I didn't even know this award existed before that night, and b) I couldn't believe they had given it to me. But now that I was holding it in my arms, it felt sort of cool to receive this award.

This spring I'd like to give a few personal awards of my own in honor of that fond memory. First of all, the Jeanie Thompson Award for Outstanding Achievement in Publication goes to Alicia Clavell, editor; Rebecca Reeves, art director; and Helen Silverstein, managing editor, who have published their second issue of *Southern Women's Review*. You can download the online journal in PDF format at www.southernwomensreview.com. A limited number of print copies of the inaugural issue are available. Focusing on the work of southern women poets, photographers, and writers, these editors provide a new venue for publishing. Bravo! Here's hoping they will have grant support necessary to bring the journal into print each issue.

My second award for Outstanding Achievement in Creating Something from Nothing goes to the Slash Pine Press Poetry Festival, an audacious gathering set for Tuscaloosa, April 23-25, which brings more than forty-five poets together in five venues, rain or shine, to celebrate the poem in all its many and varied incarnations during National Poetry Month. Organizers Joseph Wood and Patti White have taken the poetry reading out of the usual confines to revitalize it as a community-wide event. Again, Bravo! Find out more at www.slashpinepress.com/festival.

This spring Alabama is teeming once again with literary events, and many fine publications are alive and well in our state or edited by Alabamians elsewhere. I invite you to go to www.writersforum.org and spend a few minutes with the calendar. Or go to the Resources tab on the site to find journals and other vital contacts. When times are better, we'll rent the largest ballroom we can find, put on our tuxes and gowns, and honor the entire Alabama literary team with lots of glitter and sass. For now, I hope this recognition will help a few people realize that their work is noticed!

Jeanie Thompson's most recent book is *The Season's Bear Us*, from River City Publishing, www.rivercitypublishing.com.



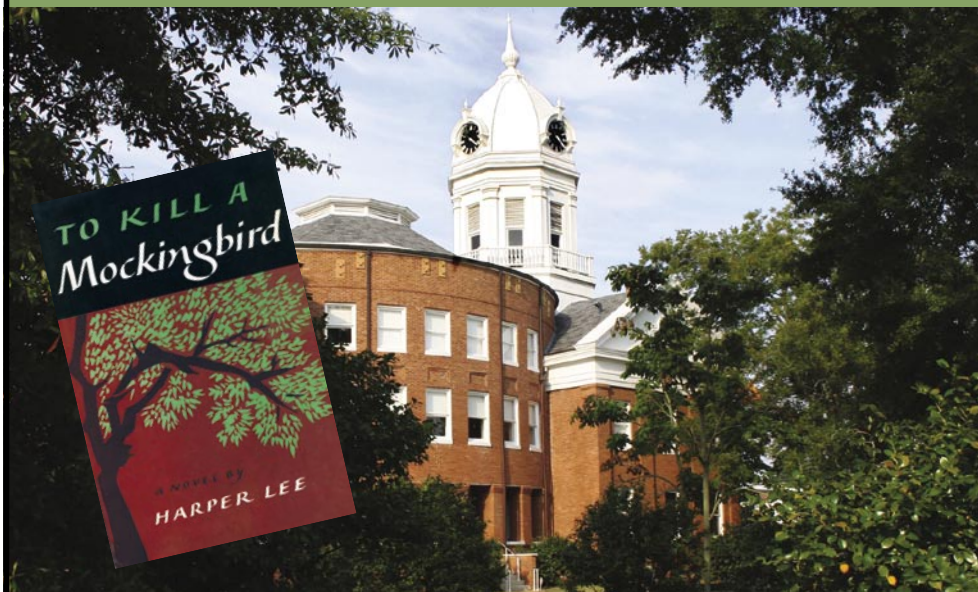
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