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Cornbread & Sushi: a Journey Through the Rural South

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cornbread & sushi

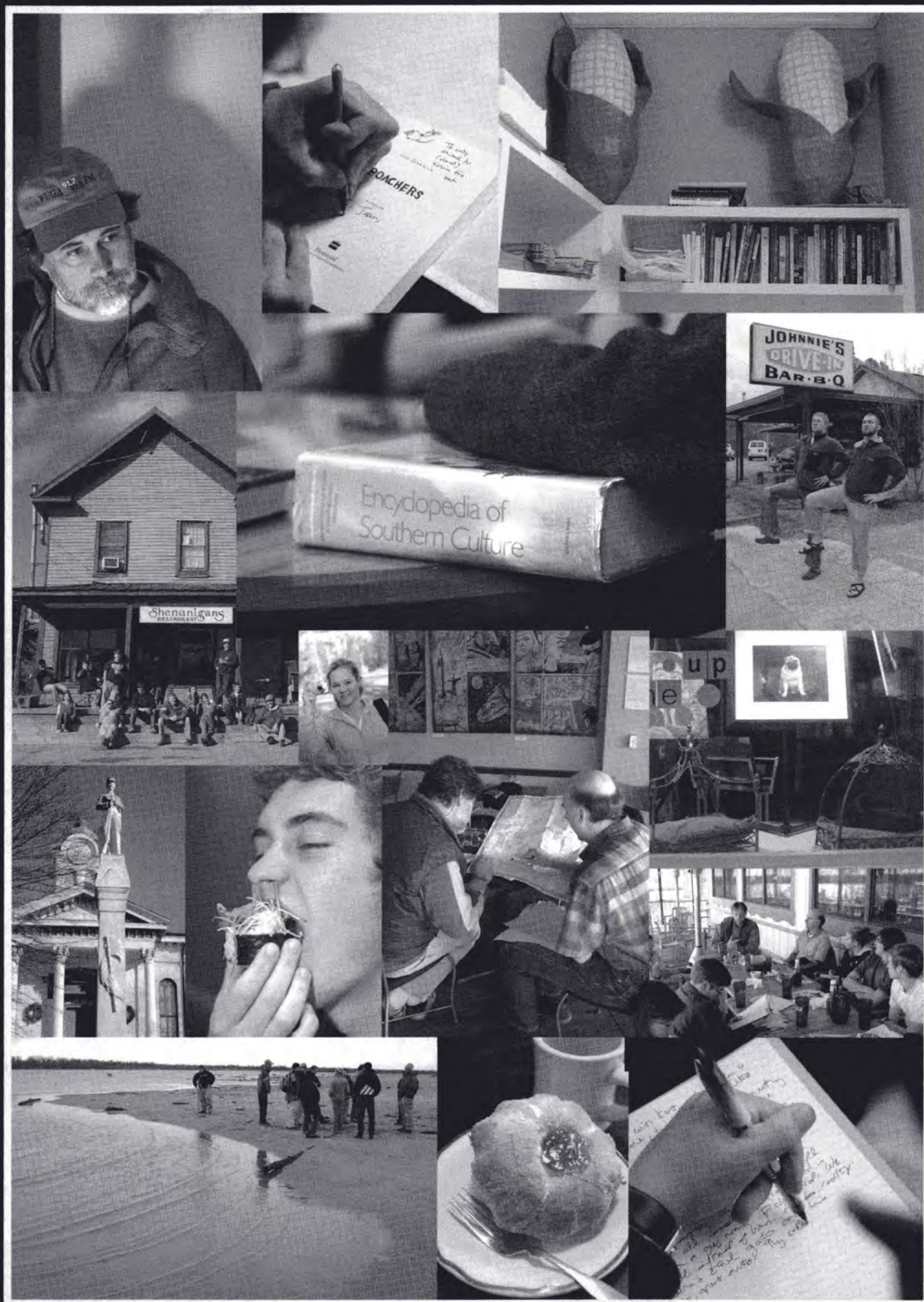
a journey through
the rural South



selected & edited by: Austin Baker • Casey Lambert
John Lane • Lewis Lovett • Mark Olencki
Hallie Sessoms • Deno Trakas
Laura Vaughn • Leland Wood

cornbread
& sushi

A hand-drawn sign with a rectangular border and two vertical legs. The text "cornbread" is on the top line and "& sushi" is on the bottom line, both in a simple, hand-drawn font.



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This extraordinary educational experience was made possible
by the vision and generosity of the Watson-Brown Foundation,
and for that reason we dedicate this book to them.

Foreword, In Which I Ramble

by Deno Trakas

At one of President Bernie Dunlap's advisory meetings to discuss the arts at Wofford, Tad Brown came up with the idea: why don't John and Deno design a course in which they teach about the rural South using contemporary writers—the Watson-Brown Foundation might fund it. He said this to Dr. Dunlap, who is a tireless and devoted seeker of art and truth, and money to support them. The President relayed the message to us. John went home and banged out a draft of a proposal. And now here we are at the end of the first year of Cornbread and Sushi.

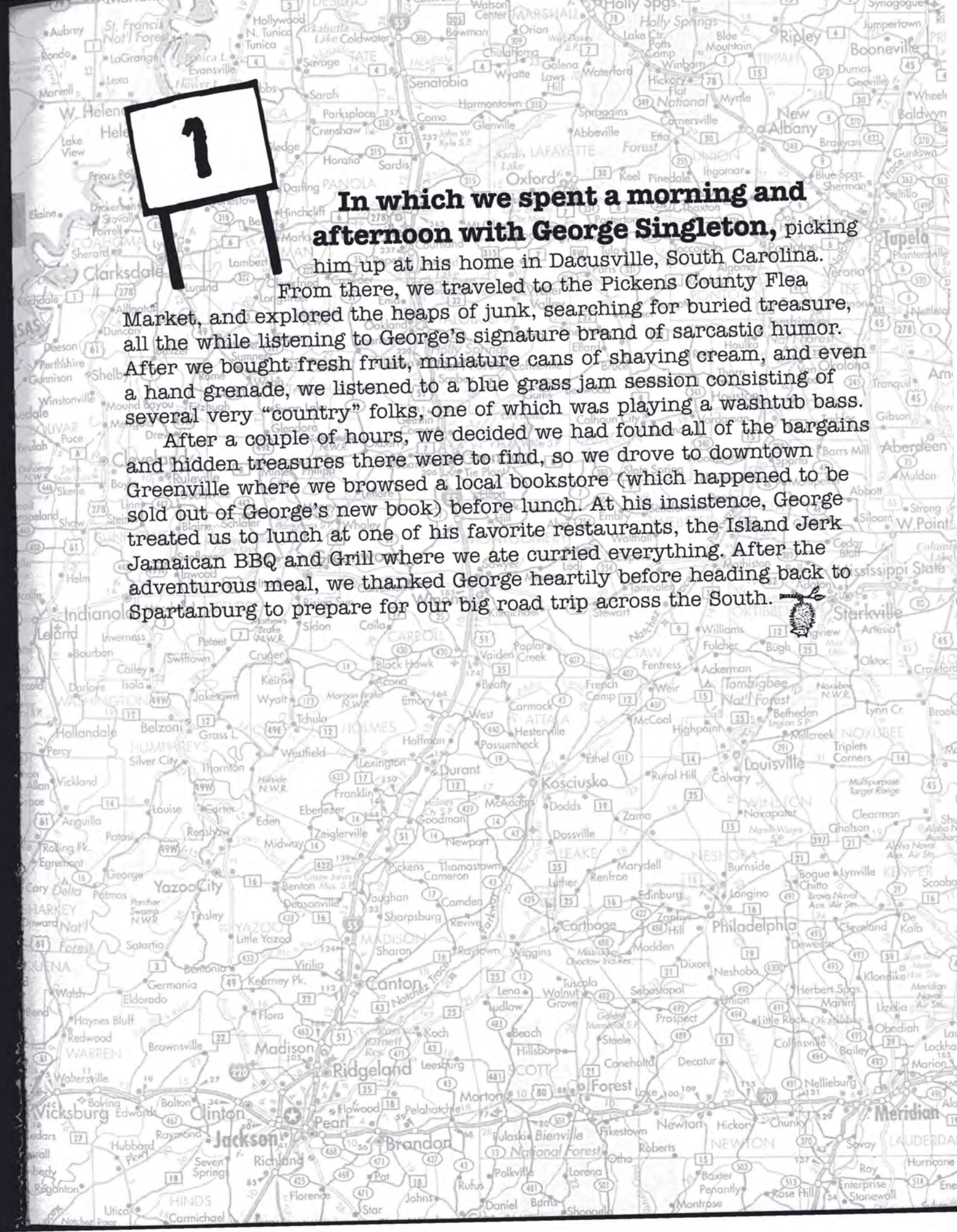
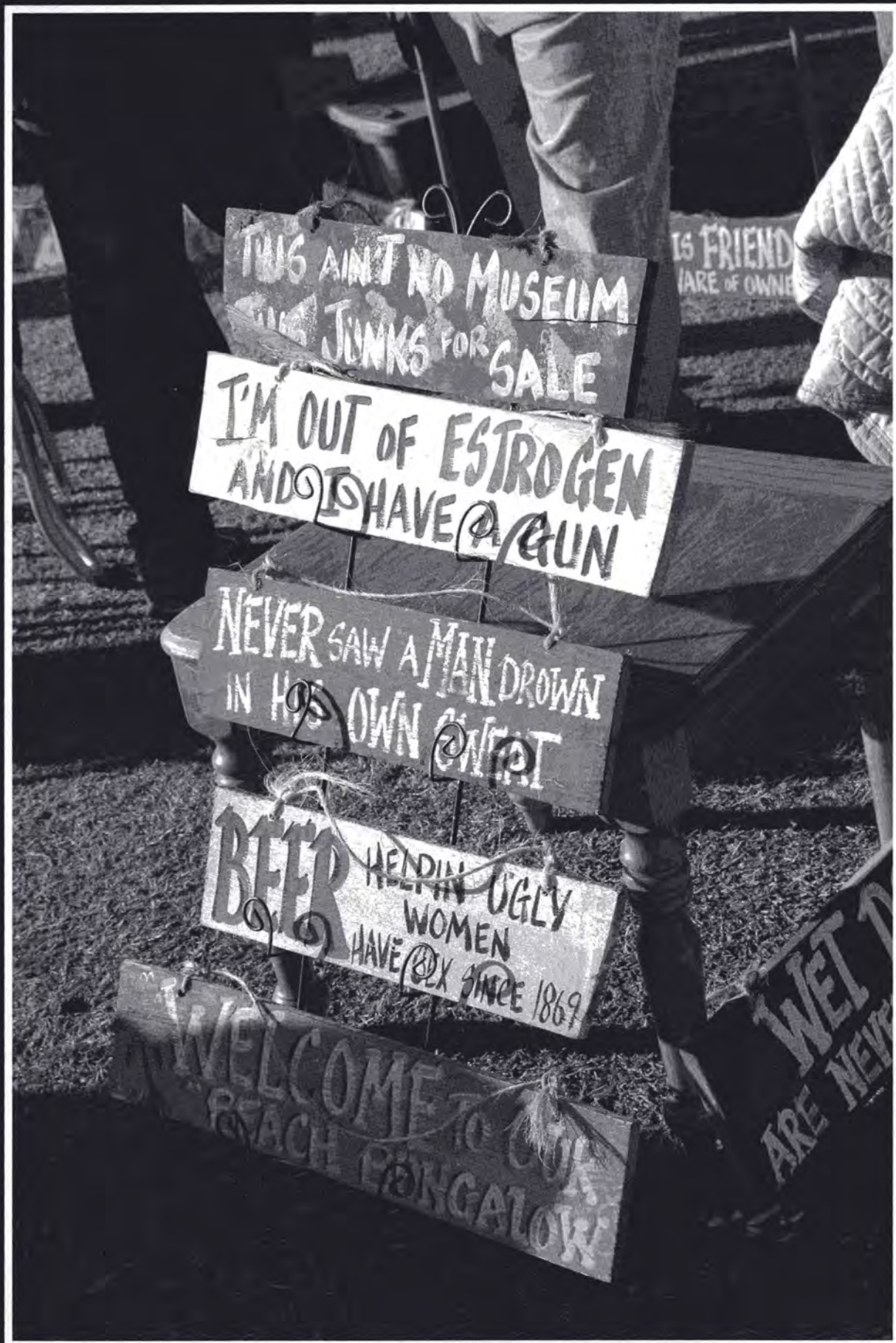
It's been a great ride. In the fall we taught a seminar with twenty curious students. We read stories and essays and asked questions such as these: Is the past dead or still alive in the rural South? What's the appeal of the rural South that has caused so many to celebrate it in fiction, prose, and poetry? Is Wal-Mart's march through the South as destructive as Sherman's? And finally, borrowing from Lee Smith, what does it mean to the South today that you are just as likely to find a sushi restaurant on the town square as a meat-and-three with good cornbread?

We also asked these questions of our sixteen distinguished guest speakers: philosopher/historian Jack Temple Kirby, creative activist Janisse Ray, Professor Jim Proctor of the Success Initiative, Professor of English William Koon, Professor of History Melissa Walker, novelist George Singleton, novelist Dori Sanders, Chaplain Ron Robinson, novelist/poet Ron Rash, Professor of Sociology Gerald Thurmond, English Professor/musician Steve Harvey, former Wofford President/historian Joab Lesesne, Vice President/political historian Don Fowler, Professor of Religion/columnist Larry McGehee, journalist Hal Crowther, and novelist Lee Smith. Their essays, stories, and lectures helped us define our place and our people. They filled us with ideas, anecdotes, and reasons to believe. It was almost too much, almost overwhelming, so we added a week of Southern music starring Little Pink Anderson, Robbie Fulks, Jason Ringenberg, Fayssoux McClean, and Baker Maultsby.

In January we hit the road. We rented a couple of vans and took ten of our students and professional photographer Mark Olencki on several day trips and one ten-day journey mostly through the rural South. We counted road kill because it was sad and funny, respectful and silly. We saw way too many dead possums, dogs, deer and USBs (unidentifiable small blobs). We also saw a suspected platypus, and, as William Gay pointed out, "You get a lot of points for spotting a platypus."

Whereas the fall seminar was simply fantastic, the January interim was phenomenal, and the evidence is here to behold. This book, this scrapbook/anthology, which we've put together and will give away, was the third and final stage of Cornbread and Sushi—it's a sample and testament to what we read, saw, heard, and felt from the wild wilderness of north Georgia, to the serene sandy bank of the Mississippi, to the ravages of Katrina on the Gulf coast; from the home of William Gay to the home of William Faulkner; from the garden of Eudora Welty to the front porch of Flannery O'Connor. Our students were wonderful traveling companions, never complaining about quick-stop sandwiches or two-star motels and constantly entertaining us with brilliant, hilarious, inane van chatter. We wish we could keep them with us and do it again but, alas, this course of cornbread & sushi is over. We're full and satisfied.





In which we spent a morning and afternoon with George Singleton, picking

him up at his home in Dacusville, South Carolina.

From there, we traveled to the Pickens County Flea Market, and explored the heaps of junk, searching for buried treasure, all the while listening to George's signature brand of sarcastic humor. After we bought fresh fruit, miniature cans of shaving cream, and even a hand grenade, we listened to a blue grass jam session consisting of several very "country" folks, one of which was playing a washtub bass.

After a couple of hours, we decided we had found all of the bargains and hidden treasures there were to find, so we drove to downtown Greenville where we browsed a local bookstore (which happened to be sold out of George's new book) before lunch. At his insistence, George treated us to lunch at one of his favorite restaurants, the Island Jerk Jamaican BBQ and Grill where we ate curried everything. After the adventurous meal, we thanked George heartily before heading back to Spartanburg to prepare for our big road trip across the South.

How Pickens County Gives Me Material, Whether I Want It or Not

by George Singleton

The subject matter—the conflicts—in my short stories and novels took a turn on one particular humid summer day in 1994, inside a family-run convenience store in Dacusville, South Carolina. Up until this point I had been writing pretty much smart-ass first person narratives about a smart-ass character who knew more than anyone around him; all of the other republican-voting, ex-debutante, family-moned characters entered in and out of the stories as cardboard cutouts, showing up only long enough for the main character to harass or make fun of them. Sometimes, if I was lucky, I'd have sense enough to make the main character somewhat self-effacing so that the reader wouldn't hate him entirely. More often than not the conflict—before the summer of 1994—involved a misunderstood, woe-is-me protagonist who more or less allowed the action to take place ahead of the path he walked. This particular narrator didn't fight back, so to speak, or make connections, or spend nights awake fretting over resolutions.

I bought beer on a Saturday afternoon. The man in front, older than I, wore cutoff blue jean shorts. He didn't sport a shirt or shoes, and had his hair slicked back in a way that suggested a freak hailstorm couldn't dent it. He might've been about sixty pounds overweight, maybe eighty. I wasn't unused to standing behind such men in Dacusville (or Darlington, or Hodges, or Ware Shoals, or any other small South Carolina town where I stood in line with enough sense to buy booze on a Saturday, seeing as otherwise I would have to drive all the way to North Carolina should I run out Sunday morning).

Outside were two gas pumps with four handles. A six-wheeled farm truck eased up pulling a horse trailer. Behind me, in a little, darkened, secluded room, a couple of Baptists hid away playing video poker. I held a twelve pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon in one hand, a twelve in the other. The man ahead of me—I've never been a scholar in the field of dermatology, but some of those moles and freckles appeared to have lives of their own—bellowed out, "What the hell kind of donkeys is *them*?"



A man playing a washtub bass

I looked out at the horse-trailered pick-up. The two or three people in front of my sartorially-minimalist consumer-in-arms looked out the plate glass window, as did the cashier. No one said a thing. They stared. I was an alien to these people, a foreigner—I am to this day, and will be if I live here another 150 years—because I wasn't twenty-seventh generation Dacusville. So I wasn't going to be the one to pipe up, "You idiots, those are *llamas*," and then go try to convince them that the word is actually spelled with two ells at the beginning, but not pronounced with a stutter, et cetera.

I waited my turn, bought my beer, got the hell out of there, and drove straight back home to my typewriter.

* * *

Here's what happened: Dacusville, up until 1990 or so, was a wide sweep of farmland and woods, halfway between Greenville and Easley. Everyone seemed to be named Looper, Latham, or Dacus. After crossing the Saluda River on Highway 183 there weren't too many visible abodes on either side of the asphalt, all the way to Pickens. The back roads—like Hester Store Road where I live—held about as many churches as they did houses or mobile homes. Then, as Greenville swelled like an already genetically-questionable dead gar fish on the berm, Dacusville began to show signs of life. Entire beautiful hardwood tracts got razed—revealing wonderful views of Table Rock, Paris Mountain, Caesar's Head—and in their place cropped up one of three things: subdivisions for single and doublewides, subdivisions for underpinned single and doublewides, and subdivisions with houses in the over-4000-square-foot range. There wasn't much in between. Dacusville went from an area of hardworking related families—people who didn't succumb to the cotton mills in nearby towns; people who raised cattle, horses, goats; tree farmers, country store merchants, farm equipment mechanics—who made good livings, to an unzoned crazy quilt of working poor laborers and wealthy white collar workers born not only outside of Dacusville, not only outside of South Carolina, but outside of the South altogether.

This is a gigantic generalization, of course, but when twenty-seventh generation locals collide with people who get nails in the front tires of their new BMWs and think nothing of buying four new tires instead of getting a plug, some squint-eyed, distrustful,



On the road to Clemson

comments and actions take place. It's all about the Old South being forced into the world of the New South, and nothing but "Conflict with a capital C" can emanate from such a misguided union.

* * *

In 1998 I decided that I wanted to write some linked stories that involved the weekly flea markets in our area. I began with the immense Pickens County Flea Market, but also visited Smiley's up in Fletcher, North Carolina; Tab's somewhere halfway down Wade Hampton Boulevard; the White Horse Road Flea Market in Greenville; Sunny Slopes in Gaffney; and the Chesnee Flea Market. To write about these places I wanted to do more than walk around as a supposed buyer. I wanted to get behind a table and hawk some wares. Unfortunately—though I didn't think so at the time—I had saved up a slew of Joe Camel products gained from sending in Camel Cash. I had Zippo lighters, highball glasses, Joe Camel can insulators, gift tins, ashtrays, T-shirts, key chains, salt and pepper shakers, and so on. I backed my car up to a table, set down what I didn't know at the time were collectibles, and sold out directly. My net gain, after the \$5 table rent, was about seventy-five bucks.

I didn't know that the government would cause R.J. Reynolds to discontinue Joe Camel products seeing as they were too like cartoon characters or toys that children might want, which would—cause-and-effect—have them down at the local country store jonesing for cigarettes while men and women chaperoned llamas outside. So my first foray into flea market selling taught me a lesson, namely to read up on everything.

Understand that at right about this time all of those television programs like *Antiques Roadshow* began to air and spawn. People learned that their old mechanical banks were worth more money than their cars, et cetera. At about this same time my deceased father's old vacant business got hit by a tornado, and I had to sell off a bunch of machinery for scrap. I also kept what tools I needed, and took the rest to the flea market. Here were my buyers, haggling: twenty-seventh generation Pickens County residents who still used hand saws, and nouveau riche people who wanted genuine, wooden-handled, rusted hand saws to decorate their bonus rooms. I had people tell me that a particular skiving knife was too rusty to be worth a dollar, and people tell me that it wasn't rusted *enough* to be considered quaint.

And I listened to the real sellers around me. I'm not certain, but I think one guy tried to sell off a melted down Coke bottle as the Hope diamond. I watched a crying girl stand next to her father as he sold her pony. The flea market offered up nothing but desperate sellers with no hope trying to gain hope, or buyers with the hope of finding a genuine Dave the Slave jug leaving empty-handed and distraught. If regular air was conflict, this place offered a steam room.

I listened, learned, stole, and wrote.

* * *

So that's about it. Maybe it was coincidence, but I seemed to find my voice right about this time, and I started getting lucky in the publishing world. I find that sitting my butt down in a chair every morning helps that luck continue. That, and keeping one or two dogs in the room who stare at me. Sometimes if I feel like I'm running out of ideas, I'll go into the old Dacusville General Store (now a Spinx station), or the Farmer's Porch, or the 183 SuperStop. I'll walk over to the coffee urn, lean over to an old-timer, and whisper, "That rich guy who just walked in? I think he drove up in a Mercedes. I overheard him say that people around here don't know crap about steam engines or wheat threshers." If there's an obvious non-Dacusvillian getting coffee I'll lean over and say, "Guy in the overalls over there says you got ugly donkeys."

Then I stand back, notebook in hand, to see what happens.

An Interview with George Singleton We Wish We'd Had

The group met George Singleton in Dacusville, SC (i.e. the middle of nowhere), just past Memory Lane and around the corner from Blackie the Pig and Molly the horse, and rescued him from ice-cracked trees and his own pack of wild dogs, including Hershey who carried a club in his mouth. George's award-winning collection of face mugs and ceramic art by his partner Glenda miraculously remains intact despite waves of dogs washing constantly through the living room. After picking up George we proceeded to his favorite research site, the Pickens County Flea Market, where we wish the following interview had taken place.



George Singleton bargaining the price of a face jug.



Part of the Singleton face jug collection

So George, where do we find the good deals?

GS: Everybody to the right's really desperate. That's where I'd start. Don't go under the covered tables. That stuff's from Taiwan.

Where are the hand grenades?

GS: We'll get to them, but first we have to pass the shotguns, the KKK medals, and the boxes of used toiletries.

Shotguns?

GS: SLED only checks the handguns, so go get yourself a good deal.

Where do we find relief from despair?

GS: That's under the covered tables, but you have to haggle. It will cost you more than a hand grenade.

Have you heard of the mulungeons?

GS: I think they have a booth—it's under cover. They sell bedpanjoes.

Is it easy to find comedy at the flea market?

GS: I don't make anything up. I simply transcribe—the signals are sent from above, or below. Hanging out with these people makes me appreciate the biodiversity of the rural South.

Where's the coffee?

GS: Right here. I'll buy you a cup. I just got a check for my novel, *Novel*.

Why would anyone call a novel *Novel*?

GS: It made sense at the time.

What are you going to call your next book?

GS: Drinking. Or Southern Hex. Or maybe *The Hex of Southern Drinking*.

Why don't you call it *Sequel*?

GS: Why don't you call yourself *Smartass*?

Why did you become a writer?

GS: To avoid housekeeping and to pay off old drinking debts.

Do you ever feel attracted to your face jugs?

GS: Shut your face.

George then got cussed out by a vendor for making a rude comment about his high prices. We headed back to the van carrying our tarps, jars of honey, and glitter purses. After that, George took us to a Jamaican restaurant in downtown Greenville for lunch, and we continued to make up this interview.

George, what should we eat?

GS: Try the curried goat or the oxtail. But come over here. Pick up that can and drink some of this. [He picks up a can.] Now that, my friends, is crap. It tastes terrible and it's very thick. It also causes you to grow hair in indescribable places.

So why did you decide to write a novel after so many years of writing short stories?

GS: I got longer.

Is that a sexual reference?

GS: No, it's existential.

George, what advice do you have for budding young authors like us?

GS: Write, write, write, and read, read, read. Then read some more. Then go live at a flea market and eat expired Little Debbie cakes. They lube up the ole synapses. Then write some more. Oh, and buy an old hand grenade. It'll protect you from the inevitable. It'll also protect you from the crowds of beautiful males and females who'll follow you when you become famous. Here, give me that check—I'm buying.

How to Collect Fishing Lures

by George Singleton

~ 1 ~

Move off of the family farm, go to a state university that offers a degree in textile management, get a job at a cotton mill that will eventually fail during the Reagan years, marry a woman who will go back to college later on in life then leave you for three states south, have one son named with only initials like—V.O.—and try to get him to understand the importance of moving out of the textile town, get fired so that the company no longer has to pay a pension, and spend too many days sending out resumes to other failing cotton mills that have no need for a forty-seven-year-old midlevel executive. Send your son off to college and wonder what he sees in literature, history, philosophy, art, and Eastern religions.

Try not to think about your lungs looking like kabobs of half-eaten cotton candy. Go to the unemployment office in your small South Carolina town and feel worthless, useless, lost, and emasculated. Spend time watching programs that have more to do with collectible treasures and less with world, domestic, regional, or local news. Watch infomercials into the night. Go to a bookstore where too many young people hang out without touching books, find the section of antique price guides and memorize the names, photographs, and prices of jigs, topwater plugs, spinners, spoons, minnow tubes, and frog harnesses. Decide to take a scuba-diving course that won't cost more than one (1) unemployment check. Learn to



An unusually happy George Singleton at the flea market

cook and eat macaroni and cheese, spaghetti, ziti, rice, and mashed potatoes. Remember the documentary you saw on carbo-loading. Invest what extra money you don't have into a wet suit, oxygen tank, mask, and flippers. If, for some reason, you did not acquire forced shallow breathing (FSB) from the mill, invest only in goggles and snorkel.

Drive to the nearest man-made lake and walk it. Step off distances. Practice at home using a yardstick so that your steps equal thirty-six (36) inches with each pace. Take extensive notes as to where men older than you fish for largemouth bass. Make a map of the place. Point out points, coves, creek mouths, beaver dams, and where the men in boats—usually the men a level above you at the cotton mill, or their sons—drop anchor or troll.

Realize that just because an antique-price guide claims that a Clothes Pin Minnow goes for two to three hundred dollars (\$200-\$300) doesn't mean that anyone in Forty-Five, South Carolina, might pay that much money for it at an antique show, flea market, or yard sale. Just because someone in New York, California, or Colorado might be willing to lay down two to three thousand dollars (\$2,000-\$3,000) for a Flying Helgramite Type IT, manufactured by the Harry Comstock Company out of Fulton, New York, in 1883 before being bought out by Pflueger Enterprise Manufacturing Company in Akron, Ohio, doesn't mean that everyone will offer only five bucks (\$5) for the thing in Atlanta, Charleston, Charlotte, or Raleigh.

Go to the closest bars, roadhouses, and bait shacks and talk to every human being possible. Pretend to be interested in how they caught their biggest bass. Secretly tally who used live bait, who used rubber worms, and who used lures that you want.

By this time, too, it should become apparent that you should no longer tell friends or relatives about your latest ambitions. They will insist that you go to the local psychologist and take a battery of examinations ranging from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) to the Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI), with everything in between—vocational-interest tests, career-interest inventories, the John Holland Self-Directed Search, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and a dexterity test that involves pegs, washers, and caps.

You've already withstood these tests one long afternoon instead of standing in line at the unemployment office.

Buy an underwater flashlight, a mesh cloth bag, and some needle-nosed pliers. Take the first dive somewhere near a cache of sunken Christmas trees. After you find your first Surface Tom, King Bee Wiggle Minnow, or Hell Diver, stick it in your bag and resurface. I don't want to make any broad generalizations or cheap jokes, but you'll be hooked. Go buy a johnboat immediately.

You'll need the boat in order to go out past dusk—using the flashlight—and drop heavy objects into the water where you know men and women fish. Cement blocks work well, as do long bent pieces of rebar, old front fenders, spools of barbed wire, and certain cement statuary (lawn jockeys). Leave these in place for at least two months before visiting the scene. What I'm saying is, be a patient farmer—harvest, sow, reharvest. If you have searched all of the likely lost, snagged, and badly knotted fishing lure regions of a

particular lake, then go to another lake, map it out, talk to locals, and so on. Allow Lake Number One (#1) to repopulate itself with the bait you will find later.

Remember: Scuba diving is not an inexpensive mode of transportation. It's better to take two or three trips down for a hundred lures than a hundred trips for a hundred lures. For those who've retained Pink Lung and chosen simple snorkeling, no one knows for sure about the Bends, really.

Now that you have a good collection of rare vintage fishing lures in various stages of wear, think about presentation. Stick them haphazardly in a shadowbox. Attach them to mesh bags similar to the one you use while on a pilgrimage. Gently stick them into the yardstick you own if that yardstick has some kind of maritime theme, viz., Shady Grady's Bait 'n' Tackle-We'll Give You Worms; or Gene's Marina-All Size Slips. Either clean the lures until they look-unused and put them in a fake original box, or dirty them up more so.

There are people out there with large vacation houses who will buy the latter option. It might not be bad to purchase a few bobs, run them over with a car, then reglue them nearly together. The vacation-house people will buy anything to give themselves a sense of doing something dangerous and near-tragic when they grew up.

As did your wife three states away.

If you choose to sell off duplicates—and you will—and if a day comes when you feel a full-lunged breath release from your body for the first time since losing the job, maybe send your ex-wife a cheap Ball Bearing Spinner, plus a note saying that y'all's son is well, and that signs of panic and danger diminish with each new morning. By this time she'll know about your irrational hobby. Write, in detail, complete lies about snapping turtles, gar, water moccasins, a big sale of Wilcox Wigglers and the women who bought them.

Or get in the johnboat, turn off all lights, ride as fast as possible until you hit an exposed stump, and sink.

~ 2 ~

Set your alarm clock for 4:00 in the morning on Saturdays and Sundays if you live within a half-hour of a flea market. Otherwise set it accordingly. Make a Thermos of coffee the previous night. Sleep in your clothes if at all possible. In the winter, wear a watch cap. In warmer weather wear a sleeveless shirt and pants with at least one (1) hole in them. Either wear old Converse tennis shoes or comfortable hiking boots. Pick up the morning paper at the end of the driveway.

Be sure to have a pocketful of case quarters only.

Don't wear a goofball cap that reads I COLLECT FISHING LURES on the front. Take along a flashlight and a bag that isn't mesh or plastic. The people selling good old lures at a flea market see you coming with the hat, they'll jack the price about four (4) to ten (10) times what they originally wanted. There's been documentation. If they see a bag that they think contains lures, they'll at least double the original asking price. You have only quarters because if someone's asking, say, two dollars (\$2) for a lure,

automatically say, "Will you take a quarter for it?"

Let's say y'all dicker until it gets to a dollar, a fair price for a Rhodes Wooden Minnow seeing as it books between fifty (\$50) and seventy-five dollars (\$75). Then say you forgot to take your quarters, and pullout a twenty-dollar bill. The seller might be likely to either, (A) not sell you the lure; or (B) kill you.

Nevertheless, do not take a loaded pistol with you, especially if someone plans to tag along.

I'll explain this later. Go alone whenever possible, of course.

Now. Get to the flea market and focus on lures. Take out the flashlight—it'll still be dark when you arrive—and shine it on tables. Stray from people who sell figurines, baby clothes, pit bull puppies, rebuilt lawnmowers, action figures, fast-food restaurant toys and giveaways, Pez dispensers, yellowware, silverware, socks and underwear, baseball cards, chickens/rabbits/goats, heart pine furniture, shot glasses, phonographic equipment, Rottweiler puppies, used books, VCRs, computers, advertising yardsticks, and hippie decals.

Look for tables filled with fishing rods, cigar boxes, used tools, guns, and tackle boxes. Look for tables filled with a mixture of everything. Shine your light on wrinkled men who might be selling off their oxygen tanks, flippers, masks, snorkels, needle-nosed pliers, and whatnot, men who've given up altogether on the fishing-lure collectible craze because they didn't map out lakes, talk to old men, plot strategy, sink cement blocks, and everything else detailed in Part One (1) of "How to Collect Fishing Lures."



When you come across a table or display of everything from Gee-Wiz Frogs to Arrowhead Weedless Plugs, keep your beam on them for exactly one nanosecond (one-billionth of a second). Pretend that you have no interest in the fine Celluloid Minnow or the Jersey Expert. Look over at the AK-47 on the table, or the Zebco rod, ball-peen hammer, and socket-wrench sets. Feign disinterest, is what I'm saying. Go, "Oh, man, I ain't seen one them since I grew hair south," or something.

Say a personal mantra that the man doesn't know what he owns. Over and over in your head say, "Quarter-quarter-quarter-quarter," and so on.

Here's the worst scenario: he says, "Yeah, the T.N.T. number six-nine-hundred was real popular. It's going for upwards of seventy-five dollars on the market, but I'm only asking thirty for it."

Flea market walking sticks



Ton-o-Toys

Do not walk away. Don't nod in agreement. Don't shake your head sideways, either. Slowly direct your flashlight's beam into the man's face and, using all common sense and knowledge of the human condition, measure how desperate he is. Don't blurt out, "Will you take a quarter for it?" Maybe say, "I'll check back with you later," or "Good luck," or "It's supposed to be a nice, sunny day."

After you have picked through all the tables—if this particular flea market has indoor booths and outdoor tables you need only concern yourself with the tables—go back to your pickup truck, turn on the overhead light, and read through the Garage/Yard Sale section of the Classifieds. Circle the ones that'll be near your drive home. Also, look under Antiques and see if anyone sells a large quantity of vintage lures at rock-bottom prices, which won't be there. But you have to look, seeing as you've gotten to the point of obsession.

Drive slowly past the front yards of strangers and make educated guesses as to whether they'll have any lures. The formula is about the same as the flea market—if you see an inordinate amount of baby clothes heaped up on card tables, drive on. If you see a table saw and leaf blower, stop. Yard-sale lures run cheapest, but after factoring in gasoline and wear and tear on the pickup truck it might end up about the same as the sixty-two-and-a-half-cent (62.5¢) average you keep at the flea markets.

It's now seven-thirty or eight o'clock in the morning. Stop and get a six-pack of beer. Carry what lures you nearly stole and catalog them immediately. Write down name, price

you paid, and what the particular lure books for.

Open the first can of beer. Change the truck's oil. Cut the grass. Rearrange all of your lures in alphabetical order, followed by price, followed by oldest to latest model. Watch one of those fishing programs on the same channel that showed infomercials back when you didn't know what to do after becoming unemployed. Give your dogs a bath.

At exactly noon drive back to the flea market and find the man who wanted thirty bucks for the T.N.T. #6900. He'll be sitting on the tailgate, probably staring at the ground. Go ahead and say, "I'll give you five dollars for this lure." He'll get offended but eventually sell it, seeing as it's exactly what it cost him to rent the table. If you want, on the drive back home, tally up what you bought and what you spent—nineteen lures for seven-sixty (\$7.60) and one for five bucks (\$5). That comes to \$12.60 for twenty vintage lures. It comes to sixty-three cents on average, I promise.

Finally, the reason why you're alone and without a pistol is because a friend, son, spouse, or significant other is always apt to walk ahead of you, find a cheap and rare lure, hold it up and yell, "Hey, here's what you've been looking for!"—which—will cause the seller to jack the price times fifty. Then you'll have to shoot your passenger.

Prisoners can't keep lure collections in their cells, what with the barbed hooks. So that means more for you. As always, you want more.

~ 3 ~

There will be days when you find no lures beneath the surface of natural lakes, man-made lakes, farm ponds, or slow-moving murky rivers. No one at flea markets in a tri-state area will have any on display. A traveling antique roadshow might come through the area and nobody there will have a single common lure, much less overpriced Paw Paw Spoon Belly Wobbler Minnows, Paw Paw Spinnered Plunkers, and Paw Paw Sucker Minnows. You will wonder if your chosen field of expertise has bottomed out. You will think back to the supply-and-demand lecture you heard years earlier in college. If the drought turns into a month, you'll find yourself seeking a palm reader. On a good day she'll tell you all about how long some scientists dedicate themselves to a specific disease, virus, or birth defect without giving up hope. On bad days she'll laugh at you and say, "Fishing lures? You collect fishing lures? Good God, man, get a life—there are three million homeless people in America."

It might cross your mind that idiotic dictum that goes, "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day; teach him how to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime." If this occurs as a soothsayer tries to make sense out of the lines in your palm, remember this one: "Find yourself a lure and you got the beginning of a collection; carve yourself a lure and chances are some moron from New York City will think of you as a primitive artist and want to represent your work."

Okay. It is my belief that you won't find lures for extended periods of time because your body tells you that it needs a rest from either A) staying under water too long; or B) because you're about to lose your temper at a flea market and thus get shot by a seller

without a sense of humor or patience. It is at these times that you need to go find an old-fashioned dollar store, a five-and-dime, a Woolworth's if they're still in operation. Buy a bag of wooden clothespins. Buy some plastic eyeballs at a hobby-and-craft shop, and eyelets. Buy red, yellow, and green enamel car-model paint and a thin, cheap brush. Go get some three-pronged trebles at the nearest three-pronged treble outlet.

Because you own a pickup truck and have been in textile management most of your life, you will have a nice folding knife. Thin the midsections of each clothespin, between the head and the two line grippers. Whittle away. Paint the things differently, so it doesn't come across as

assembly-line work. Make spirals and polka dots. Paint racing stripes down the legs and think up cool names like JumpaToad, JumpaFrog, JumpaSkink, JumpaMander, JumpaCricket, JumpaHopper, JumpaMinnow, JumpaMouse, JumpaBlowfly, JumpaShiner, JumpaWobbler, and Junipa-Wigwag-Humdinger-Smacker. Break off some of the legs of every other lure so you can add "Junior" to the title.



A bluegrass banjo player

With your needle-nosed pliers, open up the treble hooks, insert the free end into an eyelet, close the circle back up, and screw the eyelet into the clothespin's end.

Always screw last.

It is too hard to paint the lure afterwards. To make an authentic homemade primitive lure might cost as much as a dime (10¢). You have two options: either go to the flea market and try to sell them for fifty bucks (\$50) each, in hopes of selling one or two to men who also collect fishing lures and haven't been able to find any of late, or for two dollars (\$2) apiece, in hopes of selling the entire lot in one sweltering summer day out on the jockey lot.

I've done both. Because you know about men and women with a pocketful of case

quarters, it's easier to wait out for wealthy people traveling from elsewhere who think they've found a regular idiot-savant craftsman.

I'm not sure, but I think it's how Bill Gates and every televangelist got started. No matter what, do not think about your life prior to collecting and selling fishing lures. Forget that your ex-wife gave up on her wrong-headed singing or acting career and is about to marry a cattle-and-citrus tycoon down in Florida. Forget that your son writes folk songs about check dams, culverts, and the silt of humanity when he's not making a hundred grand a year getting hired out as an anti-PR idea man. Don't remind yourself that the neighbors are about to start up some kind of homeowners' association and they'll write a letter about your yard presently, seeing as when you came home from flea markets as outlined in "How to Collect Fishing Lures," Part 2, you never cut the grass.

Remember the hum and drone of the spinning room, before the government lifted sanctions, tariffs, taxes, and whatnot on Southeast Asian countries. Smell the linseed oil barely solid on wooden loom-room floors, and the older doffers, weavers, and spinners who spoke of textile-league summer baseball games as reverently as they spoke of their mothers and friends without fingers.

Think about how you don't want to be remembered merely as a human being who crunched numbers and yelled at workers for not getting yarn and cotton thread perfect.

Understand that there's something magical in a fishing lure—between two-and-a-quarter inches and five inches long, single, double, or triple-trebled, reversible metal discs and wings, with or without bucktail, propellers, belly weights, joints, week guards, head plates, side-hook hangers, and nickel finish. Revel in the mystery of how such a device could, without pheromone or promise, attract descendants of the first living creatures worth noticing.

Admire the notion of symbiosis. Think of how the lost, snagged, sunken lure needs you as much as you need the lost, snagged, sunken lure. On good days, think of yourself as a lure of some type, only half-human.

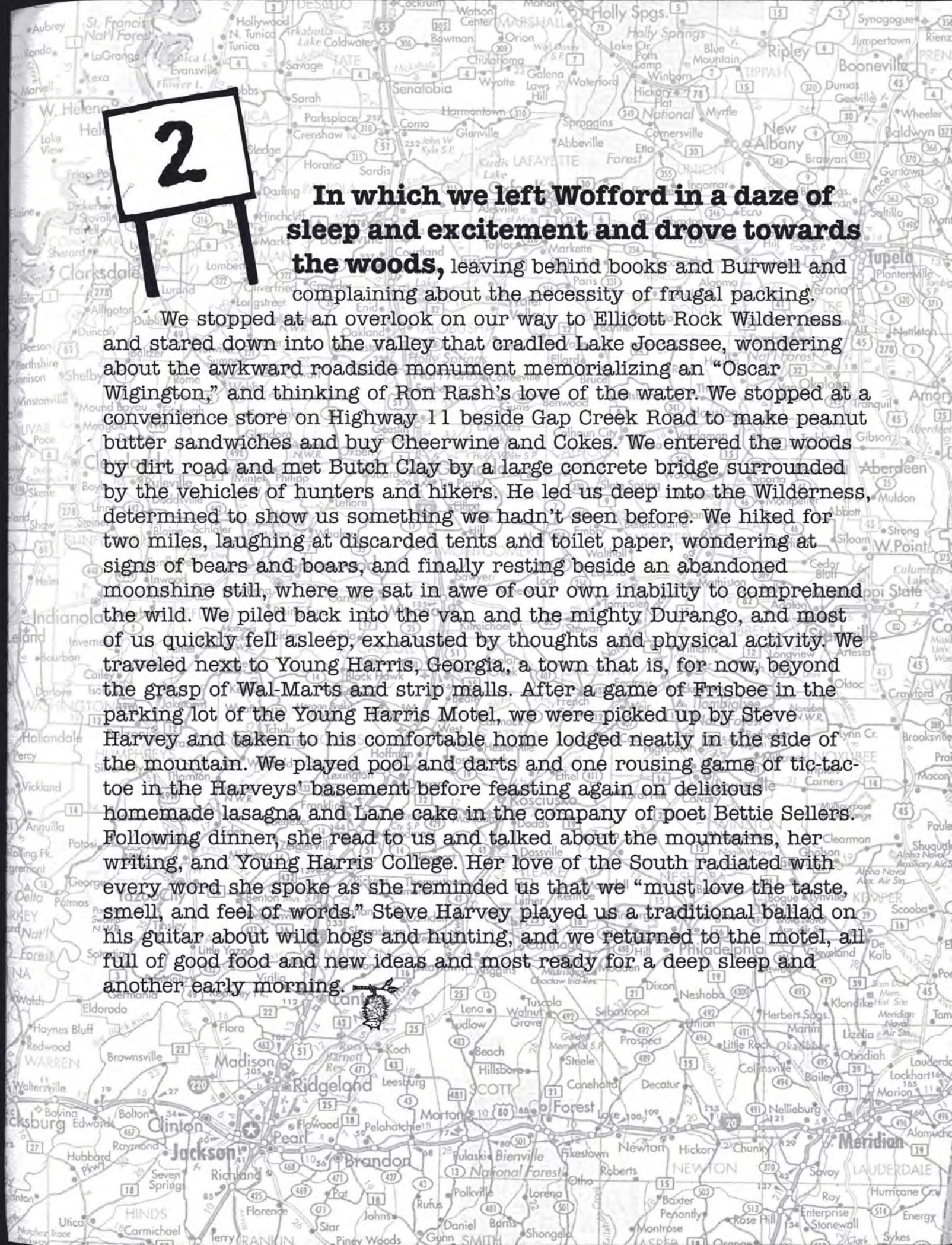




2

In which we left Wofford in a daze of sleep and excitement and drove towards the woods, leaving behind books and Burwell and complaining about the necessity of frugal packing.

We stopped at an overlook on our way to Ellicott Rock Wilderness and stared down into the valley that cradled Lake Jocassee, wondering about the awkward roadside monument memorializing an "Oscar Wigington," and thinking of Ron Rash's love of the water. We stopped at a convenience store on Highway 11 beside Gap Creek Road to make peanut butter sandwiches and buy Cheerwine and Cokes. We entered the woods by dirt road and met Butch Clay by a large concrete bridge surrounded by the vehicles of hunters and hikers. He led us deep into the Wilderness, determined to show us something we hadn't seen before. We hiked for two miles, laughing at discarded tents and toilet paper, wondering at signs of bears and boars, and finally resting beside an abandoned moonshine still, where we sat in awe of our own inability to comprehend the wild. We piled back into the van and the mighty Durango, and most of us quickly fell asleep, exhausted by thoughts and physical activity. We traveled next to Young Harris, Georgia, a town that is, for now, beyond the grasp of Wal-Marts and strip malls. After a game of Frisbee in the parking lot of the Young Harris Motel, we were picked up by Steve Harvey and taken to his comfortable home lodged neatly in the side of the mountain. We played pool and darts and one rousing game of tic-tac-toe in the Harveys' basement before feasting again on delicious homemade lasagna and Lane cake in the company of poet Bettie Sellers. Following dinner, she read to us and talked about the mountains, her writing, and Young Harris College. Her love of the South radiated with every word she spoke as she reminded us that we "must love the taste, smell, and feel of words." Steve Harvey played us a traditional ballad on his guitar about wild hogs and hunting, and we returned to the motel, all full of good food and new ideas and most ready for a deep sleep and another early morning.



The Importance of Place

by Ron Rash

When I was five years old, one of the most remarkable moments of my life occurred: my grandfather read to me. It was a warm, summer evening, and my grandfather, still dressed in his work clothes, was smoking a Camel cigarette as he lingered at the kitchen table after a hard day's work. But when I handed my grandfather the red and blue book and asked him to read to me he did not offer any excuse, not even the most obvious one. Instead, he laid the open book on the table before us, peering over my shoulder as he turned the pages with his work-and-nicotine stained fingers, and I heard the story of a talking cat and his high, blue-striped hat.

What makes this anecdote so remarkable is that my grandfather could not read or write. He had grown up on a farm in the North Carolina mountains where children spent their mornings in fields instead of classrooms. What he had done was make up a story to fit the pictures that lay on the pages before us. Not surprisingly, I quickly realized that the



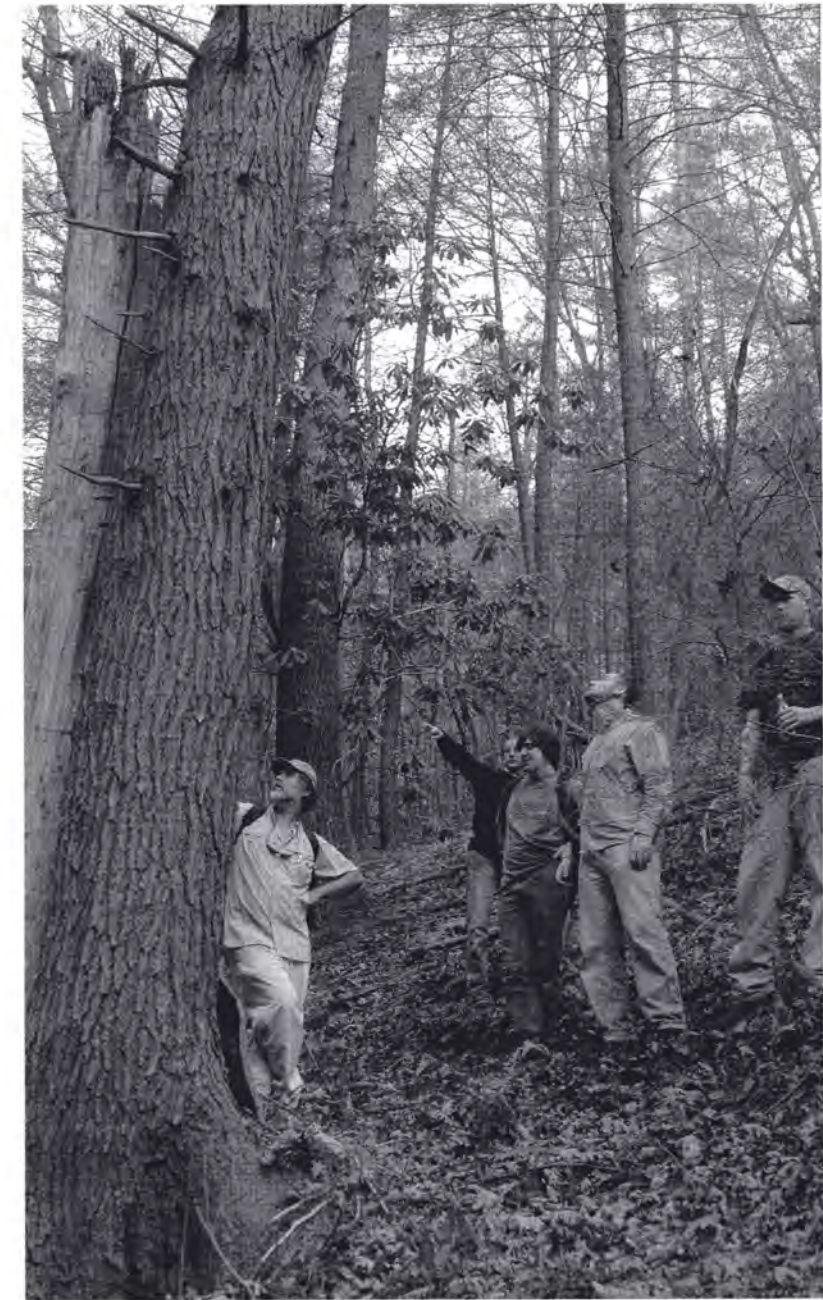
Butch Clay, Laura, Wilson and Jason ford a creek

story he was reading was very different from the one my mother had read from the same book.

The effectiveness of my grandfather's performance was verified by my begging him to read *The Cat and the Hat* again the following Sunday. His story was different this time, the cat got into more trouble, and out of it less easily. It was as if the words on the page had scrambled around and rearranged themselves. At every opportunity in the following weeks I ambushed my grandfather so I might hear what new events might occur in this cat's ever-changing life. My grandfather dutifully opened the book. His imagination, however, unlike his patience, was limited. After a half dozen variations, what I heard was pretty much repetitious, but there always seemed to be some sudden veering—a new line of dialogue, plot twist, or further description—that made each version unique. How could I not grow up believing words were magical? How could I not want to be a writer?

There were setbacks, of course. One of the great disappointments of my life was in Mrs. Brown's first grade class when I realized the words below the pictures of Dick, Jane, Sally, and Spot were as stubbornly fixed to the page as bubble gum on shoe soles. No matter how many times I opened and closed my book, the words, unlike my grandfather's, stayed on the same page and in the same order.

Nevertheless, this was only a momentary setback. My grandfather could not teach me how to read, but he had taught me how to use my imagination, and soon I was supplying words of my own to describe each scene. Before too long I was ignoring the drawings in the book as well. I made up Dick and Jane stories of my own. Not surprisingly, my Dick and Jane lived in a small town very similar to my own, and the ways of rural Carolina, became their ways. In my version Dick and Jane said "you all," and "pecan," and "yes'm." They ate fried okra, grits, red-eye gravy and cat-head biscuits and drank sweetened ice tea



John Lane and students look up into the trees.

and “co-colas.” I changed Jane’s name to Sarah Jane and (since my father would not allow me to have one) gave Dick a Marlin .22 rifle so he wouldn’t have to play with that sissy blue and yellow beachball anymore.

So it was that in my earliest attempts at creating an imaginative world my stories were set in the place I knew best. They still are, for almost all my work is set in South Carolina or North Carolina, the two places where my family has lived, worked, loved, and died for over two hundred years. “One place understood helps us understand all other places better,” Eudora Welty reminds us, and she is right, for one of the most interesting aspects of literature is how the most intensely regional literature is often the most universal. The best regional writers are like farmers drilling for water; if they bore deep and true enough

into that particular place, beyond the surface of local color, they tap into universal correspondences, what Jung called the collective unconscious. Thus Faulkner’s Mississippi, Munro’s Ontario, and Marquez’s Columbia are both exotic and familiar.’

When I wrote *One Foot in Eden*, I set the novel in a place, Jocassee Valley, that now is buried beneath a reservoir. Joyce, another great regionalist, once claimed that if Dublin were destroyed, it could be recreated by reading *Ulysses*. I would make no similar claim for my novel’s depiction of the Jocassee Valley, but I have brought all that I know of that place into my story, hoping that I might go deep enough to bring something of that place, and all places, to the surface.



An Interview with Ron Rash

The *Cornbread and Sushi* project met poet and novelist Ron Rash at his favorite local restaurant, the Riviera, a Turkish place on the outskirts of Clemson, SC. We noticed right away he had fans there—the two dust covers of his first two novels were displayed in a small poster case beside the door. After a buffet lunch of Middle Eastern chicken, beef, rice, and, strangely enough, banana pudding and collard greens, the ten students and two faculty members gathered on the patio out front to talk with Ron about his novel, *One Foot in Eden*, set in the nearby Jocassee valley before Duke Power flooded it to create a lake in the 1970s. In the fast growing Carolina foothills it was only appropriate that our conversation was punctuated by a bulldozer on the lot next door clearing trees for a commercial development. Our first questions had to do with the larger issue of regional change and development. We posed these first questions for the author of this award-winning novel of the rural South and the conversation rolled quickly from there.

What happens when a large dam is built? Who wins? Who loses?

RR: Before I wrote *One Foot in Eden* I thought that the building of a reservoir was one of the most striking images available to a novelist in the New South. Of course they’re built to provide energy, control flooding, and create vacation homes, but the image suggests much more than that.

Like what?

RR: Human loss, destruction of communities and families. There is a human cost to progress, and it’s not always a positive gain. Many families lost property when that dam was built and those stories really connected with me. My family lost land when the Blue Ridge Parkway came through the mountains. Family land was taken by ‘eminent domain.’ Several thousand people were displaced in the Jocassee Valley as well.

What was the purpose of the dam there?

RR: Lake Jocassee was different than Hartwell [part of the upper Savannah dammed in the 1950s] and Keowee [the lake just below Jocassee dammed in the 1960s]. There was no real reason to do it. The dam for Santee Cooper [in the lower part of South Carolina] provided 40 or 50 thousand people with electricity, but Jocassee provides very little power. They just did it—they knew the people who lived in that valley were poor and

powerless. Most say Jocassee was one of the most beautiful river valleys in the region. The question you need to ask about the South is 'Are we going to destroy the very things that make it beautiful?'

So it shouldn't have been built?

RR: You'll have people argue it was for the 'greater good.' There was the idea that these lakes would make South Carolina less backward. They would bring recreation and money. But there's been a cost in human terms. When I wrote *Eden* I wanted to write about people you wouldn't hear about in the power company ads. It's heartbreaking to talk to people who were in Jocassee Valley. Many of the old folks died within 6 months of leaving the valley. It was the only world they knew.

How did you keep the novel from being a black and white story, a simple battle of right and wrong?

RR: Well, a novel has to have tension and complexity, and you can't become didactic. You know, the evil power company and the noble riverbottom farmers. I hope my readers don't have a clear idea of how I really feel. I don't like black and white answers. Because I'm a novelist it's the human terms I'm interested in.

But we, today, know little about farming. We lead independent lives. We're mostly college-educated and middle class.

RR: I try not to sentimentalize the rural life in my fiction. I have an uncle who lost his whole crop one winter when his barn burned. His life was hard. I don't want that life. At the same time there are important things a farmer gains. Take awareness of weather and land. We're so far from the land, and we have no connectedness and that breeds a kind of arrogance.

So will we ever get back to that sort of connectedness?

RR: I want to live long enough to see it. There will be a time, I believe, before long when we'll be living closer to the land than we are now. I might be wrong, but I think we need to keep believing that.

Are we really different from that farming culture or is it simply that the world is, as Thomas Friedman says, becoming 'flatter' today and we're actually all coming back together again? After all, human beings all over the globe are one species—*Homo sapiens*.

RR: That's a good point, but when so much change and destruction comes to an isolated rural area like Jocassee Valley—which was utterly destroyed—a whole community is denied a chance to become itself. When communities are destroyed we cut the edges, make it all palatable. It's like living in a mall all your life.

What about the world your children are growing up in?

RR: There is a positive side to it as well. If things work out, you all will be able to live where you want to live. You might be able to live in the country and do your work by computer. In my own family so many could not find jobs in the mountains. They wanted to stay, but they had to leave.

So the children of those who lived in Jocassee might be better off?

RR: We want to believe it will work out.

But the 'Eden' you describe in your novel is gone. There's nothing there but a lake now.

RR: A world disappeared under Jocassee and nobody on the outside noticed. People lived there for generations. Families lived there. That world is worth remembering. Art refuses to allow things to be forgotten.



John Lane looks out over Lake Jocassee.

An Excerpt from **One Foot In Eden**

by Ron Rash

The water barely covered my boots at first. I was still in the field, or what until a few days ago had been a field. It was like slogging through a black-water swamp, for the mud hid the limbs and trees the loggers had left. I stumbled twice before I'd even got out of the field. I could feel the others behind me, the rope tightening and tugging each time they stumbled or paused. I glanced back and it was a sorry-looking sight. The rain had drenched their clothes, and they hung onto the rope like shipwreck survivors. They'll never make it, I thought. I'll end up crossing this river alone.

Beyond the field the going got easier despite the current. The river ran dingy from the rain, but unlike in the fields you could make out the bottom. I found the shallows below a blue hole and started across. I took my time, looking for patches of white sand between the trees and limbs and rocks. The water rose to my kneecaps but no higher.

I didn't know I was across until I bumped against the bank. I half-stepped and half-crawled to where the water got swampy and still again, but not before I'd slipped and slid back down the bank a couple of times. It was a hard thing to do without dropping the shovel or cabbage sack.

I pulled the others up the bank.

"That river's rising," Sheriff Anderson said. "This needs to be done fast."

Sheriff Anderson handed the shovel to him.

"This way," he said, not waiting for Sheriff Anderson to finish looping the rope. He led us through the shallow water, using the shovel like a cane to keep his balance when he stumbled.

We started up Licklog. The rain came harder now, a cold rain, the kind that soaked to your bones. We were all shivering and miserable, not a stitch of dry clothing among us. The clouds looked low enough to touch.



Ron Rash speaks to class

"Here," he said. "It's right around here."

He stepped around the stumps, trying to find the one that belonged to the ash tree. Then he stopped.

"This is it," he said, standing in a clear spot. He held out the shovel and moved it over the ground like a dowsing stick.

"Somewhere right in here," he said.

He dug on one side and I started on the other. The rain had made the ground soft so it was easy going, easy enough to where my thoughts could go where they wanted. That wasn't such a good thing. My mind was tangled as a blackberry patch and it seemed to be getting more tangled by the minute. An hour ago I'd wanted to believe there was only one way I could feel about the man beside me but that had just been wishful thinking on my part. We'd shared too much.

Even now we worked together, side by side, the same way we'd done my whole life. My deepest memory—deeper than Mrs. Winchester's eyes on me at church, deeper than Momma rocking me when an earache wouldn't let me sleep—was being with him in the fields, a jar of pretty-colored potato bugs in my hand. Helping him, or at least that's what he told me those days I followed him through the fields.

Think of something bad he did to you, I told myself. But there wasn't anything. He'd never raised a hand against me or cursed me. He'd punished me when I'd deserved it, but ever always in a gentle way. My not being his son hadn't stopped him from loving me like a son.

The rain suddenly came harder, like a big knife had slit the sky open. I couldn't see but a few feet in any direction. It was like a white curtain had fell around us, shutting off the rest of the world. If he's not your father, who is he then? I thought.

"Hurry," Sheriff Anderson said.

You could tell he fretted more and more about getting back across the river. I stepped out of the empty hole I'd made and started again, closer to the ash tree this time. I dug a good three feet before my shovel brought up something that wasn't a root or rock. I kneeled down and rubbed the dirt off, dirt a different shade than what I'd dug before.

It was a chain, two pieces of rusty metal dangling from it. I closed my hand around the pieces. I didn't do it hard but they crumbled like butterfly wings. I dug faster now. I found a medal with the silk still attached, a couple of boot eyelets and some bone chips. I put all of it in the sack with some of the dirt.

I kept digging but all I found was a few shards of Indian pottery and more roots.

"That's all there is, son," Sheriff Anderson said.

I didn't want to believe that. I didn't know what I thought I was going to find but it was ever so much more than what laid at the bottom of the cabbage sack.

"Let's go," Sheriff Anderson said, his hand settling firm on my shoulder, because I still kneeled on the ground, sifting through the mud for something I might have missed. But I knew I was searching for something I wasn't going to find.

I stood up and looked at the people who'd raised me. What am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to feel? I wanted to ask.

We sloshed back through the woods, my mind still tangled as memories grabbed hold of me like briars. I remembered him sitting on the bed, waiting for me to fall back asleep after a nightmare.

"You get that from me," he said. "I had bad dreams when I was a kid, too." He'd patted me on the shoulder. "Don't fret, son. You'll soon outgrow it same as I did."

Then another memory tore into me, a night years later at the county fair when I'd raised a pellet gun and hit the bull's eye. "You're a good aim, just like your daddy," Momma had said. His eyes had met hers and Momma's face had lost its smile and the teddy bear I gave her couldn't bring that smile back.

And the memory that tore deepest of all, because it was one that asked a question I had to answer.

"You're a Winchester, aren't you?" Mr. Pipkin had asked.

When we got to the bank the water was higher but that wasn't the worst of it. The river was muddy now. There'd be no way to tell where we stepped.

Sheriff Anderson unraveled his rope.

"You best leave those shovels," he told us. His teeth chattered as he spoke. "You're going to have enough trouble getting yourself across."

He nodded at the sack in my hand.

"You could leave that too. You could save us all a lot of trouble if you did. My deputy's on the way up here. Once he sees what's in that sack this is a murder case."

I looked at Momma and the man who'd raised me. Beg me to do what he says, I thought. Make this somehow easier. But they didn't say a word.

I knew at that moment I had to make a choice between the man who'd raised me or the sack of bones and dirt in my hand, and that choice had to be made on this side of the river. It wasn't near that simple, of course. It wasn't a matter of what was the right or the wrong thing to do or what I owed the men who claimed me as a son or to Momma or Mrs. Winchester. The only thing that mattered was what I could live with.

I stepped into the river and didn't stop until the water got to my knees. I turned, my eyes on Momma and Daddy. The current pushed hard against my legs but I stood firm. I grabbed the Gold Star from my pocket and dropped it in the sack. I raised the sack in my right hand and held it between us for a moment before I let it slip through my fingers. The current toted the sack a few feet downstream before it sunk.

"Let the dead bury the dead," Sheriff Anderson said.

Nobody else spoke or moved. For a few seconds the only sound was the rain.

Then Sheriff Anderson threw me the rope end and I started across water that seemed a lot colder than a half hour ago. I waded blind now, moving my feet slow and careful across a bottom I couldn't see. The current ran stronger, pushing me below where we'd crossed earlier. I wasn't halfway and the water almost reached my waist.

I didn't know whether to go back or go on. I just stood there, my brain working like it was in slow motion. I looked back at the others, spread out across the water with the rope in their hands like we were working a seine.

"Go on," Sheriff Anderson shouted from the shallows and I did, because I no longer

seemed to be able to think clearly for myself.

I unraveled the rope from my hand. If I slipped I didn't want to carry them with me. I took a few more steps and the water started to get shallow again.

Suddenly the rope tightened.

"I'm caught," Daddy shouted. "My leg's under some timber."

He had one hand on his leg, the other clutching the rope. The water pressed against him and I knew he couldn't keep his balance long.

"Hold on to the rope," I shouted.

His eyes met mine. I took a step toward him, then another. I kept my eyes locked on his, almost like they were another rope to keep him up. He must have felt the same way for he didn't so much as blink. For a moment the river and rain weren't there. It was just me and him.

Then the current bent him like it would a reed and he went under. Momma went under too, jerking the rope from my hand and the Sheriff's. I lost my balance, the current carrying me into deep water where cold ran up my spine like electricity. When I came up I didn't see anyone but Momma, who was downstream.

I tried to swim back to where Daddy had gone under but the current shoved me farther downstream with every stroke. I turned and saw the back of Momma's head bobbing as the water pushed her into an eddy.

I let the water tug me downstream but the current swept me past Momma. When the current slowed I was ten yards below her. I managed to get out of the main current and into the eddy. I swam toward Momma and yelled at her to swim toward me. But the cold had numbed her brain. She looked my way but it was like she didn't even recognize me.

She turned her face upstream toward where Daddy had gone under. She raised her arms out of the water and started splashing, trying to swim toward him. Then she raised her arms above her head like she was surrendering. Her head went under and her arms and finally her hands.

"Momma!" I shouted.

I swam to where she'd gone under. I took a deep breath and dove but the current had taken her away. I dove four times, the current pushing me farther downstream until the water was no more than hip-high again. I bumped up against a big log and that gave me the leverage to stand up to the current. My teeth rattled and my mind was groggy.

Then it was like I forgot who I was looking for or even where I was. It suddenly seemed stupid to be fighting the current when I could just lay down and let it cover me like a warm blanket. I leaned back the same way I'd lean back in a bed. I felt the water cover me and for a few moments everything became dark and peaceful.

Then I felt hands on me, strong hands, pulling me back to the surface, dragging me toward shore.

"You could have let me sleep a while longer, Daddy," I said, then everything went dark again.

Gypsies and Water Moccasins

by Bettie Sellers

Two things we feared!
 snakes to strike bare feet,
 and the gypsies camped in ragged caravans
 at Double Sewers where Shoal Creek
 ran deep under Highway 16.
 A moccasin bit Eula Dragg
 (she did my mama's washing,
 brought it home tied in a sheet
 balanced on her head).
 For twenty years, the misery in her leg
 had told of rain long before the thunder spoke.
 "I shoulda took that ol' snake to ol' Ida,
 she woulda conjured the pain away."
 From our porch we could see the lights
 criss-crossing the leaning cabin
 where Old Ida cast her spells.
 Folks came in big cars,
 big cars from Griffin and Barnesville—
 Mag said they came to get spells for enemies,
 and love potions—but Old Ida had the evil eye, too.
 She cursed Mag's man, and he was gone.
 Come dawn, the devil flapping at her window,
 heavy like a Yellow Hammer nailing on the roof-tree.
 The gypsies came with dog days in July,
 roaming Highway 16 for unguarded horses
 and unwary children.
 Mama said they sold you into white slavery
 (whatever that was)
 and their black iron cooking pots bubbled
 greasy with stews of somebody's chickens
 charmed from the henhouse on a moonless night.
 I killed my first snake,
 slithering in our swimming hole
 dammed up at Double Sewers,
 one July day when the gypsies had gone.

In a Dark Wood

—for Barth

by Bettie Sellers

That it may be a sun-lit mountainside
 with laurel edging the creekbank
 pink like Grandmother's petticoat lace,
 with peace so tangible
 I could pick a bouquet and decorate
 my table where only shadows sit
 to watch me eat.

The wood, then, is not place
 or time
 but like a cave
 so convoluted that no light
 bends to find its deep
 recess.

In our valley, a man lies on the ground.
 For touching our sons with lust,
 he is the evil dragon, and we,
 self-righteous Beowulf, have torn off
 his arm and watched his blood
 down the ridge to darken the stream.

That same self-righteous grease
 oozed to shine on the upturned face
 of a father once kneeling on my office floor.
 "Your class has persecuted my son," he said,
 and prayed Almighty God to strike me
 dead for all my sins.

Forgive me, for all my sins.

For owing Mary Ann Nash a nickle borrowed
 to see a Tarzan movie forty years ago.
 Interest compounds, those years of childish
 guilt bound up with shrill cries
 of whippoorwills, reminder that Satan waits
 in darkness outside the thin-walled house.

Mag told me so. With instinct, black
wisdom, she knew, her witch doctors
a world away compounding here
a puritanical ointment
of her forefathers and mine.

Barth's grandmother came from Latvia
with a ticket tied around her neck;
mine was a lady and wore a diamond ring
under her milk-white gloves
to the Methodist church on Sundays
to sit in the second pew
between the Good Shepherd
and "Suffer the Little Children."
I have forgotten the sermons
but red and blue robes flowing down
the Savior's limbs are glazed behind my eyes.

Forgive me for not being the woman
my mother was. When she died, I gave away
her things in a plastic garbage bag,
brought home the Raggedy Ann she rocked
up and down the corridors of Shady Rest.
Brought it home to sit at my table
and eat my food. Mother never wrote a check
or drove a car, but baked sugar cookies
for all the neighbors' kids while I write words
and weep because she lived five years
so far inside the cave
she could not find my name.



*Bettie Sellers discusses poetry at
Steve Harvey's house.*

Journal Entry

by Hallie Sessoms

I didn't believe him when he said
"wilderness." I asked myself how much
of the South could possibly still be wild,
untouched, and alone. I knew wild. I'd lived out
West among it, where it was real and unending.
They told me this wilderness consisted of a
couple thousand acres, surrounded by states
with drawling names like Georgia and
Tennessee, not wild names like Wyoming,
Montana, and Utah. I have friends who hunted
on preserves bigger than a few thousand acres.
I prepared myself for disappointment.

I've always had a love-hate relationship with travel. I want to see, see, see, but I also like the comfort of security and support. I like knowing where I am because, as Wendell Berry said, you can only know who you are when you know where you are. I often tell myself I know who I am, but I've never really accepted that I only tell myself this when I'm somewhere far from home. Home usually forces me to question my identity more than any other place.

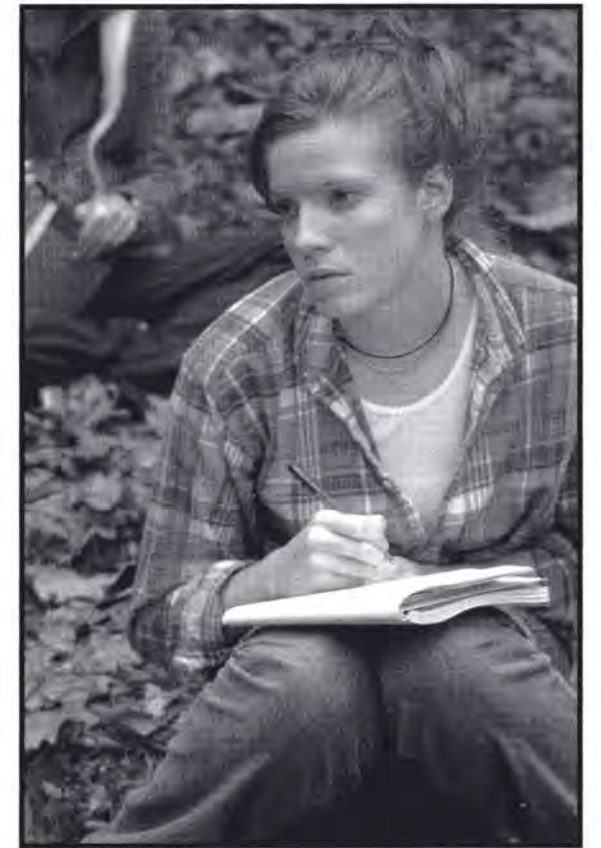
We jumped out of the vans, hungry and disillusioned by the peanut-butter sandwiches we'd eaten in the parking lot of a convenience store on Highway 11. I love to hike, but I also love to eat, so I wondered if I could manage a hike of several miles with just a peanut butter sandwiched on my stomach. I suppose I didn't really have a choice.

Butch spoke to us quietly, reserved, and comforted by the extent of his comfort in this wild land of Ellicott Rock Wilderness. It didn't look wild to me, with the large concrete bridge and several torn up Chevy trucks lining the edge of the road. I listened skeptically. I watched my fellow students watch the man who watched the sky, wondering at the possibility of rain. We started the hike, encouraged to look and think as we walked. We played games instead, shouting back and forth, comparing every actor, animal, musician, and element in improbable battles of doom.

"Chuck Norris versus a Giant Squid!"

"Chuck Norris definitely, have you seen his roundhouse?"

"Chris Martin versus Ben Gibbard!"



A thoughtful and hungry Hallie.

“Ben Gibbard, damnit!”

“Nature versus Nurture!”

Low groans of sarcasm. “Way to be literary, Jason.”

I wondered to myself if the man in the navy blue, skipping easily over the fallen trees and ducking the low-slung branches, could hear us and was disappointed. We paid no attention to the ground that groaned silently as we trudged about. We barely noticed the heavy fog that seeped between the high tree limbs, settling around us quietly, waiting to be taken in. We didn’t. We even disregarded the stumpy wild hog shortly after watching him root about in the ground for whatever it is that hogs look for in the ground. He appeared black and coarse, even from across the ravine, and his thick tusks soon inspired another round of play.

“A Wild Hog versus a Giant Squid!”

“That’s a tough one, man.”

I could almost feel the man’s heart sink. It just wasn’t hitting us like it should. I wondered what I was doing wrong and realized I just wasn’t looking or thinking. But I honestly didn’t know how to start.

I assume he finally got fed up with our incessant talking, laughter, and scuttling about. He made us circle up, like a mismatched basketball team, and he looked at us intently. He asked us to take ten steps backwards and turn around. He asked us to ignore one another, to not say a word, to sit and think and most importantly, listen. I was skeptical that it would help, but I sat and began to watch the leaves, waiting for something to happen.

On our walk through the woods, I had thought them silent and still in comparison to our shouting voices. As we sat, together and simultaneously alone, I began to realize that the ground, the trees, and the sky were constantly moving. I smelled the dampness, and it felt real against my skin, like the familiar breath of a lover. The leaves were thick and undisturbed



Butch Clay wishes us well on our journey with a poem.

and a small green spider moved through and between them without taking much notice of me. I wondered if he could hear his own footsteps even though I couldn’t. I wondered if he could hear me breathing, and I hoped he didn’t.

Somewhere deep in the woods, a bird called out and pulled me away from my small bottle-green friend. I realized I hadn’t thought of the others behind me for several minutes. I hadn’t cared if they were listening. I felt safe and quieted by the scenery. I felt peaceful and wild. I felt disappointed that I hadn’t focused more on the surroundings that had led us off the trails and deep into the mountains, deep into this supposed silence. For the first time since I’d been out West, I felt like I was with myself, fully and completely. Myself. Me. I realized that maybe Hardee’s cheeseburgers and peanut butter sandwiches weren’t as important as sitting, listening, and understanding. Some things were more important, more vital than we give them credit for being. Butch Clay understood that, and you could see it in his eyes as he woke us from our contemplations. Five minutes brought it all into perspective, giving us a glimpse we couldn’t hold onto, though we tried.

I wish I could say we didn’t talk the whole way back and that we took it all in in silence and peace, but we didn’t. We kept playing our games and laughing, but we were slightly different. We stood in reverence of bear scratches etched into the side of a giant oak, exhilarated by the simple beauty and danger of the marking. We pointed out leaves and noticed fallen trees, intertwining them into our general discourse. We’d found a piece of ourselves without realizing it and began our trip with a perfect perspective of wilderness. We wouldn’t fully realize it until later, when we were immersed within the city of Nashville or walked the shores of the Mississippi, but in the back of our minds it festered. There was something wild in our South and in each of us, and it was worth remembering.



The remains of a moonshine still in Ellicott Rock Wilderness.

There's a Wild Boar in the Woods

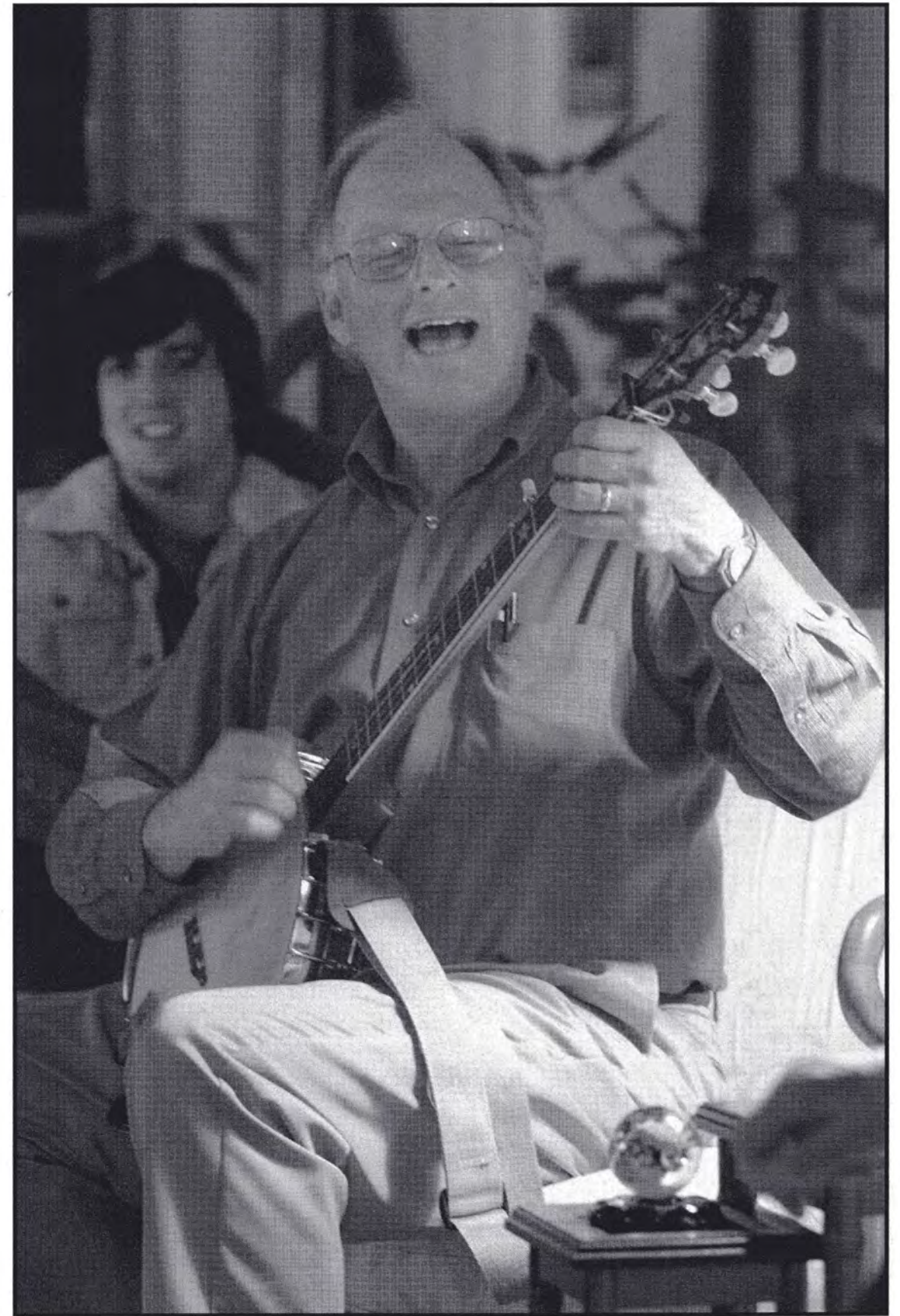
A Folk Song taught to Steve Harvey by locals at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, Georgia

There's a wild boar in the woods
La-de-do and la-de-day.
There's a wild boar in the woods
Do-di-diddle-di-day.

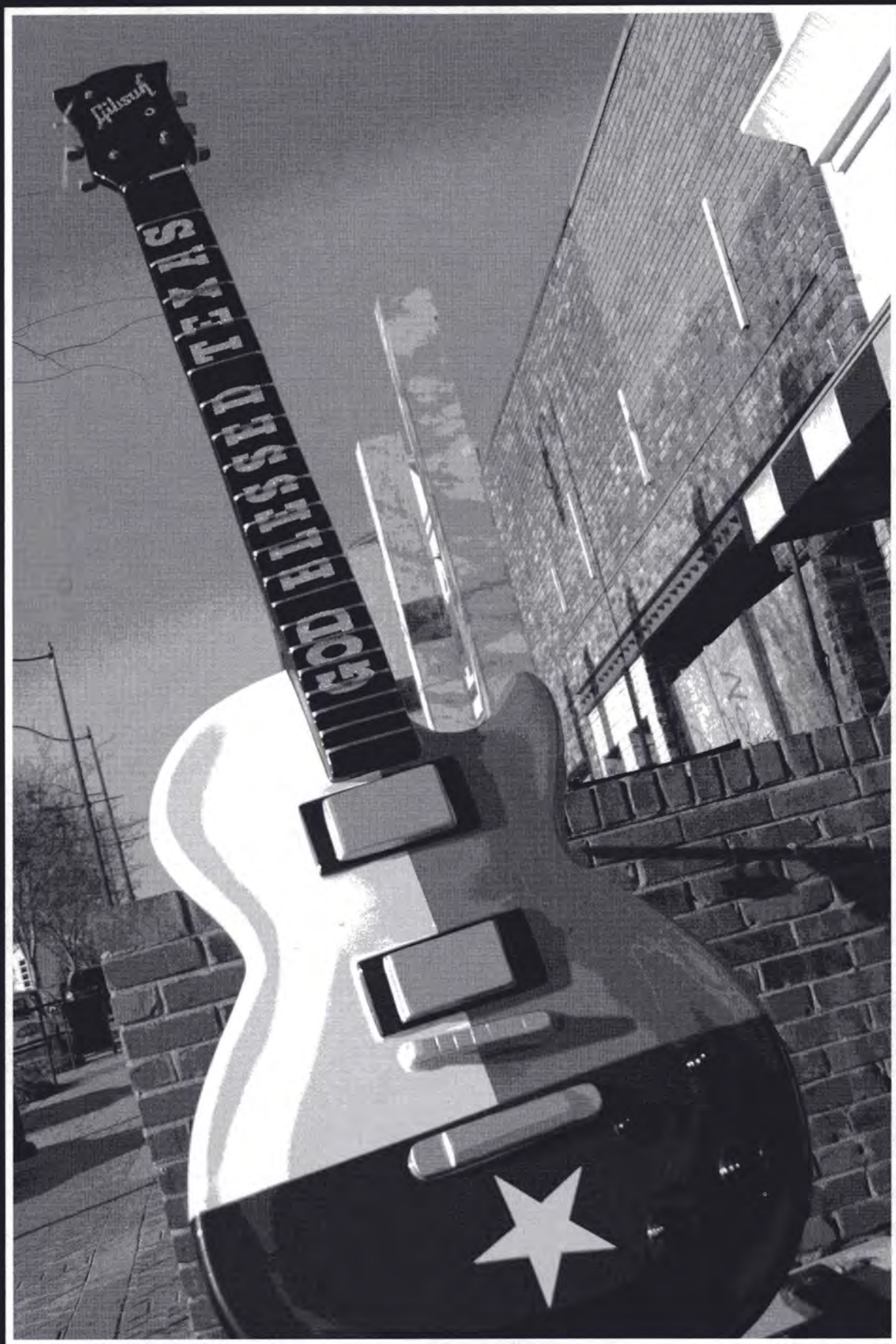
There's a wild boar in the woods
He'll eat your meat and drink your blood.
I'll chir the kitty along
The kitty along tonight.

Bangum Wood to his doom does ride,
Sword and pistol by his side.
He went on into the lion's den,
And found the bones of thirty men.

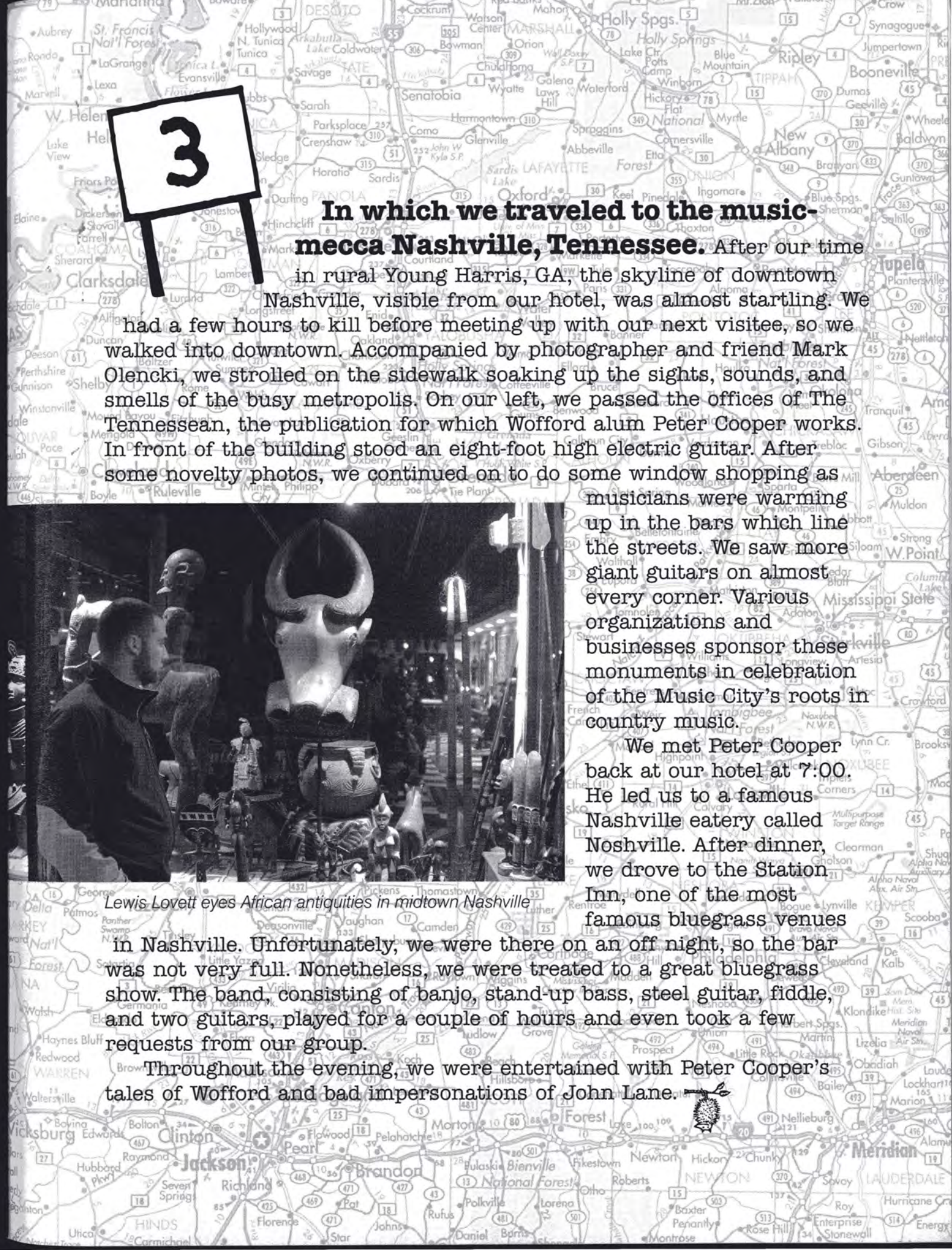
There's a wild boar in the woods
La-de-do and la-de-day.
There's a wild boar in the woods
Do-di-diddle-di-day.



Steve Harvey plays his banjo for a post-supper serenade.



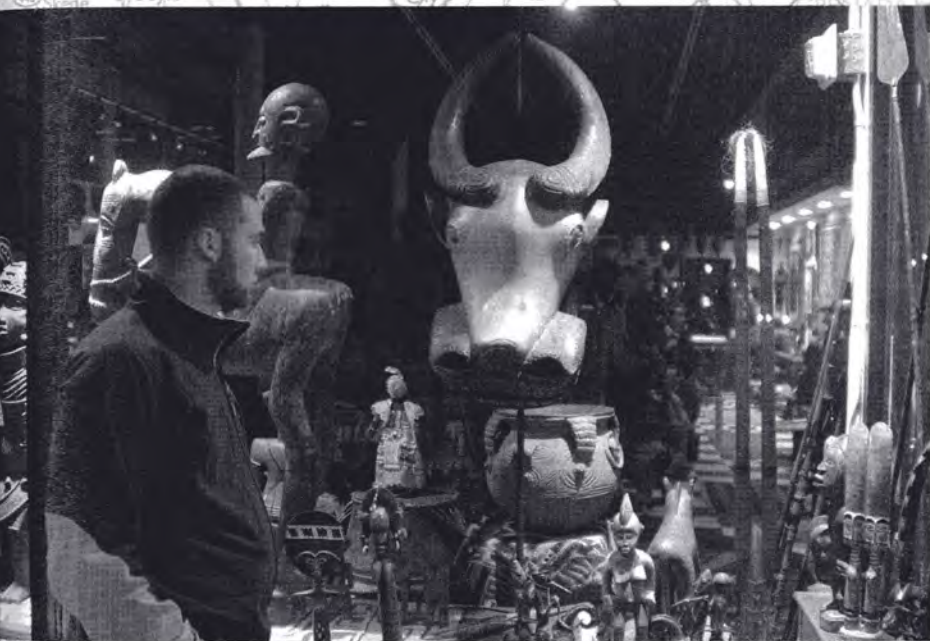
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In which we traveled to the music-mecca Nashville, Tennessee.

After our time in rural Young Harris, GA, the skyline of downtown Nashville, visible from our hotel, was almost startling. We had a few hours to kill before meeting up with our next visitee, so we walked into downtown. Accompanied by photographer and friend Mark Olencki, we strolled on the sidewalk soaking up the sights, sounds, and smells of the busy metropolis. On our left, we passed the offices of The Tennessean, the publication for which Wofford alum Peter Cooper works. In front of the building stood an eight-foot high electric guitar. After some novelty photos, we continued on to do some window shopping as

musicians were warming up in the bars which line the streets. We saw more giant guitars on almost every corner. Various organizations and businesses sponsor these monuments in celebration of the Music City's roots in country music.



We met Peter Cooper back at our hotel at 7:00. He led us to a famous Nashville eatery called Noshville. After dinner, we drove to the Station Inn, one of the most famous bluegrass venues in Nashville. Unfortunately, we were there on an off night, so the bar was not very full. Nonetheless, we were treated to a great bluegrass show. The band, consisting of banjo, stand-up bass, steel guitar, fiddle, and two guitars, played for a couple of hours and even took a few requests from our group.

Throughout the evening, we were entertained with Peter Cooper's tales of Wofford and bad impersonations of John Lane.

“Little Pink” from **Hub City Music Makers**

by Peter Cooper

Alvin “Little Pink” Anderson, son of the most important blues musician in Spartanburg history, meets me on a Sunday afternoon in the parking lot of The Beacon drive-in restaurant on Reidville Road in Spartanburg. Two weeks after his release from a Greenville prison, Anderson is glad to be a free man and pleased to answer questions about his life as the son and sidekick of Pink Anderson. We drive to Alvin’s girlfriend’s apartment for the interview, and I present Anderson with a compact disk called *The Blues of Pink Anderson: Ballad and Folksinger, Volume 3*.

The disk, recorded in Spartanburg in 1961, thirteen years before Pink’s death, contains liner notes in which Pink is called “one of the greatest in Piedmont-style guitar-picking songsters, an inspiration to the British art-rock band Pink Floyd and to such folk-blues troubadours as Roy Book Binder and Paul Geremia.” The photograph on the cover depicts Pink, then sixty years of age, sitting on the steps of his Forest Street home with his smiling, suspender-clad, six-year-old, Alvin. Alvin has never seen the photograph before, though he remembers precisely the



Alvin “Little Pink” Anderson on the porch of his boyhood home and home of Pink Anderson, his father

situation and time of day that it was taken. We put the disk on the stereo and the memories return in a flood.

In 1961, when Alvin was six years old, his mother died. “When my mama died, I was crying. He [Pink] said, ‘I can’t stop you from crying, and I know you’re gonna miss your mama, but you still got me.’ When he said that, he proved it. He was mother and father to me from 1961 to 1974. He was everything to me. I can remember hearing him praying: he would ask to be able to take care of me, and to live long enough to see me get grown.”

Samuel Charters came to Spartanburg to record Pink Anderson later in 1961, and Alvin was there for those sessions. The boy also tagged along with Pink on gigs in and out of Spartanburg. “He’d play up at Franklin Wilkie’s store. He used to set up in front of the store with his guitar and his records. I’d get my little guitar and my little hat, and I’d try to play. Mostly I’d collect money. Even today, a lot of older people from that time remember my face. My name has never been Alvin in Spartanburg: it’s always been Little Pink.

“When I’d play with my old man on the street, the people would give me quarters and dimes and nickels. So my pockets were fatter than any kid’s in town. He made me accustomed to guns and money. Both of them will get you in trouble, and he thought if you were used to them as a child that you’d know how to handle them when you got older. I’d walk around the house with real pistols strapped on my side, or play ‘Cowboys and Indians’ with real guns.”

Alvin also became well acquainted with the non-musical addendums to Pink’s income. “He sold white lightning, and for every quarter shot of liquor I sold, I kept the quarter. Fifty-cent shots and up, he’d keep. He kept the liquor buried beneath the ground, and he had a dog, named Dad that would lay on top of the ground where the liquor was. Back then, the young boys would come along and steal the bootleggers’ liquor. They came up on that dog one night, pushed the dog off the stash, dug it up, covered the hole back up, and put the dog back over the hole! The sorry dog never even barked; he wouldn’t do nothing but eat, but my daddy was crazy about that dog. He used to tell me, ‘That’s all you do, too, and I’m crazy about you.’

The dynamics of the relationship between Pink and Alvin are difficult to grasp for people separated by years and social station from the carnival life. No parenting guides would condone allowing a six-year-old to walk the neighborhood with real pistols strapped to his waist, using a small child to sell bootleg liquor, or even taking a child Alvin’s age on the road with the medicine show. Alvin’s later problems with the law might seem traceable to those formative years, though he protests that “he didn’t raise me to do those crazy things I did. I wasn’t raised to want to go out and fight and do all this other crazy stuff: I was raised to play music. I was raised walking the streets with a black Stella guitar in my hand.”

There were advantages to being Pink Anderson’s son that extended beyond the easy acquisition of quarters and dimes. Unlike most of Spartanburg’s black citizens, Pink’s reputation as a musician allowed him access to all parts of town and discouraged overt (read: violent) racism towards Alvin. “When people started talking about segregation and racism, I was lost,” says Alvin. “I couldn’t associate segregation because I never had to



Little Pink strikes a pose on his porch, the same as his daddy decades earlier

deal with it because I was Pink's son. He could pick up his guitar and walk anywhere, and nobody ever bothered him. He was a man who tended to break barriers."

Alvin was almost ten years old when his father suffered a stroke that severely hampered his ability to play music. The stroke, which hit Anderson some months after playing a "legitimate" gig at Clemson University with Bobby Tate, was extremely serious. "The doctors said he would never play again," says Alvin, yet Pink eventually regained about ninety percent of his skill. "After the stroke, he stopped trying to play as much in front of crowds, but he still played at home."

"When I first started to play on my own," says Alvin, "I was uncomfortable playing his [Pink's] style of music. I've always loved it, but I wasn't comfortable playing it. I played

electric blues, and I used to think that the guitar was just good to get a few extra dollars and a woman. He told me, 'One day, you gonna pick up that guitar and you gonna take it serious. That guitar will feed you when nothing else will.' You know, if I had it to do over again there's a lot of things I would do different."

With Pink primarily bound to his house because of health problems, Alvin got, as he put it, "wilder and wilder." Alvin's musical stature around town was growing, but so was his penchant for trouble. In the early 1970s, Alvin was sentenced to a fifteen-year jail term at the same time that his father was reclaiming his guitar skills that had been depleted by the stroke.

Alvin Anderson remembers that Pink made \$3,200 on the Northern tour, and Book Binder confirms that figure. "We were pretty tickled when we sent him home with that pile," Book Binder says. "The next time I came down, he had two refrigerators, a new gun, a guitar, and beer and wine in the refrigerator."

"He sent \$1,500 of that to me," says Alvin. "I sent it back to him, because with the skills he taught me with a deck of cards I was doing real well. He came to visit me when I was doing a fifteen-year bid in the worst penitentiary in the state of South Carolina, and I gave him something like \$6,000. He used to say, 'Boy, you need to slow down. Somebody is gonna kill you.' I used to say the same thing he'd say: 'I ain't going nowhere 'til it's my time.'"

Pink's time came on October 12, 1974. "The day before he died, I called home," says Alvin. "He said, 'Boy, I ain't gonna be with you much longer. I'm dying.' I tried to tell him that he wasn't dying, and he said, 'All I ever wanted out of life was to see you be grown. I don't like where you are, but you're a man. I know you can take care of yourself now, so if I die tonight I'll die happy.' The next day, he died."

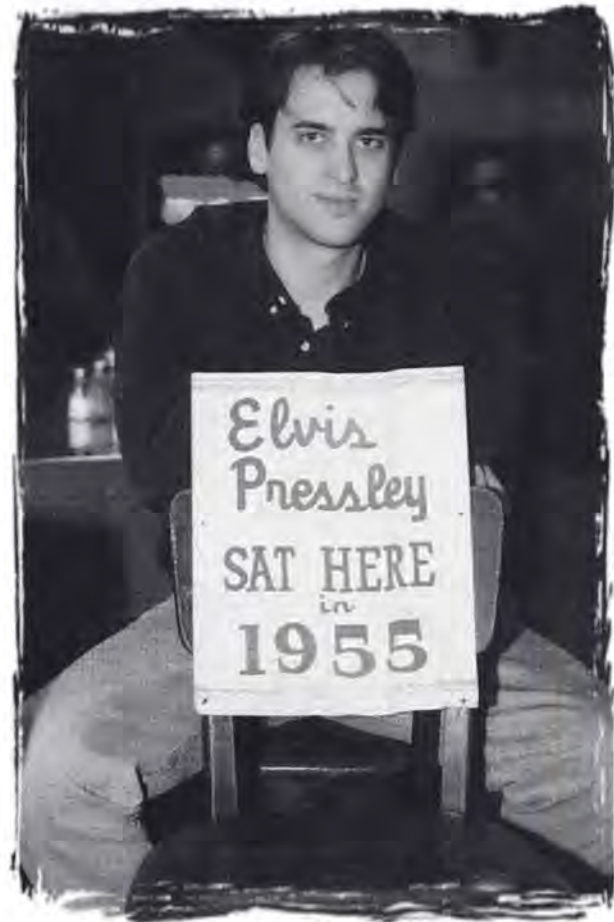
Alvin Anderson continued to play music even while in prison, though it was not the country-blues of his father. As the lead guitar for the traveling penitentiary band, The New Coronets, he began to garner a good bit of attention. He played an electric guitar that Pink had bought for him. "I was doing fifteen years, but we went to the streets four nights a week to play," says Alvin. "On my guitar case, I had 'Pinkie' written on it, and the state ordered this light especially for me: they would turn a pink light on me when I would play a solo."

Released from prison in the 1980s, Alvin began the process of trying to put his life back together but relapsed after his baby son went into a coma and died. Soon after his son's death, Alvin went back to the penitentiary. The year 1996 found "Little Pink" back out of prison and determined to make a better life for himself. "I'm finally screwing my head on straight, and I know life has to go on," he says.

Alvin is also beginning the process of rediscovering and relearning his father's style of music, and he speaks of carrying on the legend of Pink Anderson. "I'm at peace with myself now, and his style of music is now my style of music. See, that's my roots. I'm not going to try and walk in his footsteps, because I need to make my own tracks. I can still walk in his shadow, though. I've always been there, and that's where I'll stay."

"The music game is a tough game. I've thrashed on for thirty years, and I've had a decent career. But sometimes I'm driving down the highways pondering it all and thinking, 'If I got murdered tonight, would it make the *Rolling Stone*?' Probably not. We're on a small-time circuit. At this level, the whole thing is a carnival: a hustle. You play shell games with promoters and record companies and club owners. You have to wonder what success is. It would be cool to make \$100,000 a year, but it would change things. I don't know if I want to change things. I do a hundred dates a year and travel around in my house on wheels with a picture of Pink Anderson in my kitchen."

"I stop by and grab the biggest bouquet of flowers off somebody else's grave. I bring it over and put it on Pink's. I know he'd like that."



Writer, musician, and Wofford alum, Peter Cooper at the historic Piedmont Cafe in Spartanburg

An Almost Completely Fabricated Non-Interview with Peter Cooper

Senior Laura Vaughn was immediately enamored with the lanky Peter-Frampton-meets-Johnny-Cash upon his 7:30 arrival at Nashville's classiest Comfort Inn. He wore a black sports coat over a grey button-down shirt, untucked, top button unbuttoned—with cowboy boots like two stallions the color of night. Laura immediately sought Hallie for advice on horses.

After a brief ride in the van, the group sat at two tables at Noshville in Nashville as Laura checked out and photographed the pickle bar. "I've never seen a pickle bar so in-Noshable as in Nashville."

Jason: Laura, how many pickle bars have you seen in your life?

Laura: Actually, none.

Jason: So, really, it's the most noshable pickle bar you've ever seen.

Peter Cooper told us the story of his life, which included amateur and semi-professional musicianship and his development of a writing career made possible by Wofford College professor John Lane's bout with the flu. John sent Peter to cover a concert in Asheville. He told us of his brief stint in professional heckling, culminating in a riveting account of the climax of his career as a basketball fan at Wofford College when the coach of Newberry's team threw a cup of water in his face after Peter said, "win or lose: no matter what is the outcome of this game, you're still going to wake up in Newberry!"

Some of Peter's early instruction in writing came at Wofford in Professor Lane's English 200 class. Mr. Cooper recounted Professor Lane's difficulty in inspiring enthusiasm for the great classic *Oedipus Rex* who "married his own mama and got so mad that he poked his own eyes out!" (Can you imagine?)

After Lewis and Jason D. ordered two Cokes, two milkshakes, thirteen pickles, a main course, an after-dinner cognac, souvenir t-shirts and a happy ending, saying, "Charge it to the grant!" we headed to the local used record/CD/comic book/vintage porn/sock and

underwear store and canoe rental. Standing on the street, we plotted how to get the underagers into the local Station Inn for a night of gambling with destiny to the strains of bluegrass music. The ensemble of seven was made up of middle-agers shod in white orthopedic shoes and boasting Nashville tourist t-shirts. Resident bluegrass expert, Wilson, explained to the novices what their opinions of the group would be: "Despite the often unpleasant nasal tones of their voices, the instrumentation was both adept and original. Their solos were spontaneous and not canned." His analysis was lost on the rest of the group, for they had never heard cans make any noise at all. Leland was still pondering why his request for "Phantom of the Opera" had been rejected.

The night ended in shock and disappointment as Jason was unable to sneak out with the three-thousand dollar bass without being seen. At that point, one of Lewis's friends showed up, evacuated the lawless group, all of whom were disappointed with the knowledge that the press—our own Peter Cooper—had already left the building.

Peter Cooper, we salute you. And Laura salutes your black stallion cowboy boots.



From "Mountain Minor"

by Steven Harvey

"I don't usually do this kind of work," Brenda, a biologist I know, said when she left a message on my phone. "But I found a dead possum that you might like and threw it in the refrigerator for you." When I told Brenda and others that I was going to make a banjo and needed an animal hide, they got carried away. A neighbor stopped me on the way to the post office with directions to a dead squirrel on the side of the road, and a friend delivered news of his latest decomposing find to me as I sat at a crowded lunch table. Pretty soon people in three counties were pulling off the road and tossing carcasses in the back of their cars—for Harvey. "Every time I see roadkill," my friend John told me, "I think of you."

When the dogs brought a mangled groundhog to my porch, I knew that it was time to put an end to the scavenger hunt and asked Dick Aunspaugh—an artist with an abiding love for Native American lore—to help me make a rawhide top for my homemade banjo. He suggested deer.

Dick picked the hide up at a local slaughterhouse and when I arrived was already fleshing out the inside with a tool, fat and goo falling away as he scraped toward himself. "You have to bring the tool straight toward you," he said, handing the blade to me. "Go too far this way or that," he added, moving his hand like a loose rudder, "and the skin will tear." My gestures were timid—I probably would have thrown up if I had thought about what I was doing—and when I reached the teat of the doe and scraped right over it I did wince and get a little queasy.

Later we stretched the skin across a rack and leaned it against a teepee made from oak trunks. It was a beautiful fall day—windy with a bright blue sky, the mountains around us choked with autumnal colors and the lawn littered with yellows and reds. "It should dry in a few hours out here," Dick said while giving the hide one more scraping, the juice from the skin running off the blade into the grass.

It wasn't until the next day, though, that we got to work again, and by this time the hide had turned light brown, streaking here and there with dark colors. "Blood," Dick said—some apparently remains in the blue-white skin even after repeated scrapings. We turned the rack over and began to shave the fur away from the top with another blade, this one set to cut at a right angle with the hide. "This is the dry-scraping method," Dick said, "the one used by Indians in tribes all across America."

As I scraped away, trying to see in a banjo in all this, Dick pointed to a hole in the

shoulder of the hide. "See? The hunter must have been in a tree stand, up above." A bullet like that would make a mess of an animal's insides, I thought watching Dick trace the trajectory of the bullet across the skin. "Look," he said, holding up the opposite edge, exposing a hole the size of a fist ripped into tough flesh. "It blew out here."

* * *

A banjo is more like a wonder of nature than a musical instrument, in the same league as panther, lightning bolt, and tornado. Like a mountain, it has no will of its own and succumbs to no one. Like a creek, it makes the same noise over and over and never repeats itself. Like the wind, it changes what it finds and leaves nothing behind. It does only what it does and that is always too much. Cussedly limited, it follows the path of most resistance, creating music from the sparks.

It is hysterical. Those who hear only happiness in its jangle—and see blank-faced minstrels or hillbillies or bewhiskered beatniks when they hear the name—mistake its hysteria for happiness. It asks ears to bear all that fingers can do, and when the fingers stop and the banjo is safely back in its case, what it has done rings on in the ears, the limping and thumping of its clawhammer beat nestling deep in the body and, in due time, becoming one with the lub-dub and whoosh of restless and ailing hearts.

Next to writing, the banjo is the hardest skill I have ever learned. For twenty-five years a banjo that my father bought for me when I was a boy had leaned unused against the wall in my closet, a mystery, a be-devilment. Most of the problem was a lack of time—I was busy earning a living and raising a family and the banjo was low on the list of things to do. The rest of the problem was that the licks—the motions of the right hand—did not come naturally to me, probably because I play the guitar.

The basic pick on the guitar is down and up—down with the thumb and up with the fingers. With the banjo, the clawhammer stroke is all down—a bit like shaking water off the fingers—and, probably toughest of all for the guitarist who leads with the thumb, the banjo player leads with the nail of the index finger, picking out melodies, the thumb, coming down last in the sequence, an afterthought.

Those years of playing the guitar had ruined me in another way. Unlike the guitar, the highest string on the banjo is set beside the lowest, so when I picked the instrument up it seemed upside down, no matter how I held it, and when I played—or tried to play—I felt as if I were doing a headstand. Oddly, walking while playing seemed to help, especially if I side-shuffled to the left in a vain attempt to move the instrument where the fingers would not go, but that was a little too comic, me playing the same chord over and over and walking out the back door and across the yard, ending up somewhere near the trash cans and smiling apologetically to neighbors driving by. So, time after time, I put the damn thing away in disgust.

While the banjo sat, propped against the wall and ignored behind the pantlegs in my closet, I would still listen enviously to banjo music and hear the controlled stumbling of its rhythms in my head. A few times—I remember this distinctly—I dreamed the

fingering, over and over all night, doing it perfectly in sleep, and upon waking, drawn irresistibly to the back of my closet, yanked the cursed thing out of its spot, tuned the old strings, and, in broad daylight, tried again. Each time, after these dreams, I almost had it, my tongue crawling out of the corner of my mouth as I tried to get the fingers to do my will, but sooner or later, I began to lean to the left and, after a few bars, had a funny feeling that if I kept on like this my head would fall off.

There is really no other sound like the clawhammer, and for this I guess we should be grateful. It is called clawhammer because the hand is curved and fingers extended in a way similar to a hammerhead, the name suggesting a brittle, constricted movement. To me, the hand looks more like a scampering rabbit, an undulation with a kink in it. The kink is the first downstroke, the nail of the forefinger hitting the string, the hare leaping over fallen trees while other notes scamper along ignominiously behind, all hindquarters and scurrying legs. To learn how to play I would slow the stroke to an agonizing tortoise crawl, methodically going through the motions. Imagine sex that is all foreplay, the rhythm of the bodies never catching up with the breathing of the lovers. It was frustrating.

Then one day it clicked. I have to admit I had been practicing with the usual ludicrous results, but success came, as it often does, when I stopped trying. I was sitting in my office after a day of teaching, grading papers in silence, when I looked up and knew I could do it. Something snapped—some old guitar string of mind—and the clawhammer, even many of its variations, was suddenly available to me, and I could play it standing stock still. Even now, after years of successfully keeping my head on as I play, I am so happy it is hard to repress a smile.

As a boy I recall going along with Dad to the woods to get the timber for banjo-making. He selected a tree by its appearance and by sounding...bitting a tree with a hammer or axe broad-sided, to tell by sound if it's straight grained.

—Frank Proffitt

It wasn't long after I got the hang of playing the banjo that I decided to make one. I went into the woods behind my house and considered the possibility: a banjo cut from a tree by my favorite creek. I even banged on a few trunks with a hammer, the clang echoing off the hills around me. "I can't describe it in words," Frank Proffitt once said, "but I see inside the tree by the sound of hitting it." Well, I couldn't see a thing. No matter how many times I banged on a trunk, the bark remained inscrutable. Soon I gave up. I had never felled a tree before, and visions of being pinned under an enormous poplar kept me from trying.

My next plan was to go to a lumber mill, but after visiting three mills in North Carolina, I gave up on that idea too. These places were doing big jobs—with eighteen-wheelers hauling out flats of hardwood lumber for furniture makers. No one had time for a lone banjo. "I'd have to stop these jobs and reset the saw to give you a finished piece," the manager of the third mill told me. "We can't do that until dinner." He spat on the gravel parking lot, and we both looked together in silence at the grey tree line and a sky as

dull and colorless as galvanized metal. Things were looking glum, and he could sense, I guess, my disappointment. Behind us the saw never stopped grinding. "Hell," he added at last, looking around to be sure no one could hear. "They sell the stuff at Lowe's."

So I collected the poplar for my authentic banjo by sounding the wood at the discount hardware store. I stood for an hour or more at the display eyeing the long boards for the neck and checking the grain on the wide boards that would make up the body. I bought other supplies there—stain, brass screws, and drill bits—saving the best for last. I had read that most homemade banjos had a six-inch skin head because the skin had to be fitted over a standard piece of stovepipe. Sure enough, stovepipe—in many lengths—could be found in the wood-burner section of the hardware store, all of it with six-inch diameters. After a day of gathering supplies, I had all that I needed and headed home, over the mountain, a banjo—or most of it at least—clattering unshaped and un-built in the trunk of my car.

My earliest memory was of waking up on a wintry morning and hearing my father picking... in a slow mournful way.

—Frank Proffitt

The patron saint of the mountain banjo is Frank Proffitt. There are, of course, several contenders for the position, since the mountains from Georgia to West Virginia have produced many great traditional banjo players—Buell Kazee, Bascom Lunsford, Clarence Ashley, Samantha Bumgardner, and Hedy West to name a few—but Proffitt, who played the songs on the banjo he made, sang with such simplicity and directness, such dignity, that it broke your heart. If saints can come bearing wood, hide, and catgut, than Proffitt was one.

He was born and raised in Beech Mountain, NC, an area that was once rich in songs and music making. His life was isolated. His father, Wiley Proffitt, never saw a city until he was middle-aged. Frank didn't either, until he was fourteen and, with friends, hiked to Mountain City, Tennessee. It was, by and large, a life insulated from the modern American experience. "I reckon you might call me a loner," Proffitt once admitted. Sometimes he would spend an entire day in the cabin near his house that served as a workshop and retreat. "I like people, you understand, but I look forward to coming here to the old house where I make the banjos...It gives me time to think."

It was in the cabin, while he was working, that the lyrics of songs, carried in his memory on the voices of his father and others like Noah Proffitt, would come to him, hundreds and hundreds of tunes, most of which can be traced back to ancient English ballads. Others, such as "Tom Dooley," grew out of local legends and lore. Some of his earliest memories included sitting on the hearth by the fire listening to the adults in his family tell tales and sing. Most of what he knew about music he learned from them, especially his father, a man Proffitt described as "always busy but never hurrying."

Frank Warner, singer and song collector, brought Proffitt's music to the larger world. Together he and the mountain singer went to the folk festival at the University of Chicago. There Proffitt heard bluegrass pickers using a flashy Scruggs picking style,

and he had to resist the temptation to change the way he played. "I'd be myself," he thought,"and if they liked it fine. If they didn't, well, I would just come one back here to the mountains and forget the whole thing." Sandy Paton, who recorded Proffitt's songs, once asked him what he thought of Scrugg's picking. "I'd like to be able to do it," Proffitt said, "and then not do it."

What he did do—it was his holy calling—was remain faithful to the tradition of singing and banjo playing he inherited. "I know I'm not much, musically speaking," he said once. "I do what I am able, trying to keep to the original as handed me from other days." By being himself and nothing more, Proffitt claimed his inheritance, taking his place in a lineage that bound him to "other days"—a heritage that carried him back, as certainly as the genes in his blood, to the first song, a continuous, evolving tradition passed from the lips of one person to the ears of another, the songs, as old as the human race, arriving as naturally as the color of eyes and hair.

The Bluegrass Sound: Innovation in Tradition

by Wilson Peden

Kenneth Clark, in his book and television series *Civilization*, cites a culture's art as the most "trustworthy book" to record its existence and history, more so than written records of events. In Bernini's sculptures, I think, there is an idea of the grandeur and optimism of the Catholic Reformation. In Mozart's symphonies, we can see the empirical brilliance of the Enlightenment. What do we look to for a picture of the American South? What records can we boast? The saga of the South has been recorded in words, in paint, but most notably, and originally, perhaps, in song, perhaps in bluegrass music.

Start with the Mason Dixon line. Extend it west from the Atlantic, taking in Virginia, West Virginia, but head South once you reach Ohio, follow that river down to wrap the line around Kentucky (the Bluegrass state, of course) and take it just west of the Mississippi. Then slide the rest of the way down the delta to the Gulf Coast. Here is one of many cradles of civilization, framed by rivers and coasts, with the arch of Appalachia to add some backbone. If you wished, you could break this down into smaller cradles—the rolling Piedmont regions on either side of the mountains, the Atlantic coastal plain, the Gulf Coast. But this is the area that for most purposes we, like most Americans, will refer to as The South. It's a region unified by a culture that is made up of dozens of sub-cultures from each sub-region within. The culture in this region is one that has been historically obstinate and almost incestuous in its determination to stay close to the past, but it is changing and growing faster than we observe. The South is letting in the world, and it's exporting itself out in return. If we want to look at the dynamic growth and change of that culture, we can look at bluegrass music, an original creation of the region that is both firmly grounded in tradition and radically new.

There is a widely prevalent and incorrect belief that bluegrass music is the traditional old-time music of the Southern Appalachians. This probably is rooted in a coincidence of timing more than anything. The popularity of radio was just hitting its peak in the late nineteen thirties when bluegrass music was in its early developmental stages. Old time and country music were just starting to reach the airwaves, and to someone unfamiliar with the sounds, bluegrass was just one more old timer that found its way to the airwaves. While bluegrass music certainly pulls heavily from localized musical traditions, its present state is due to the musical determination of a few individuals who pulled all those different influences together around one sound that was flavored and changed by the

ideals of one man—Bill Monroe.

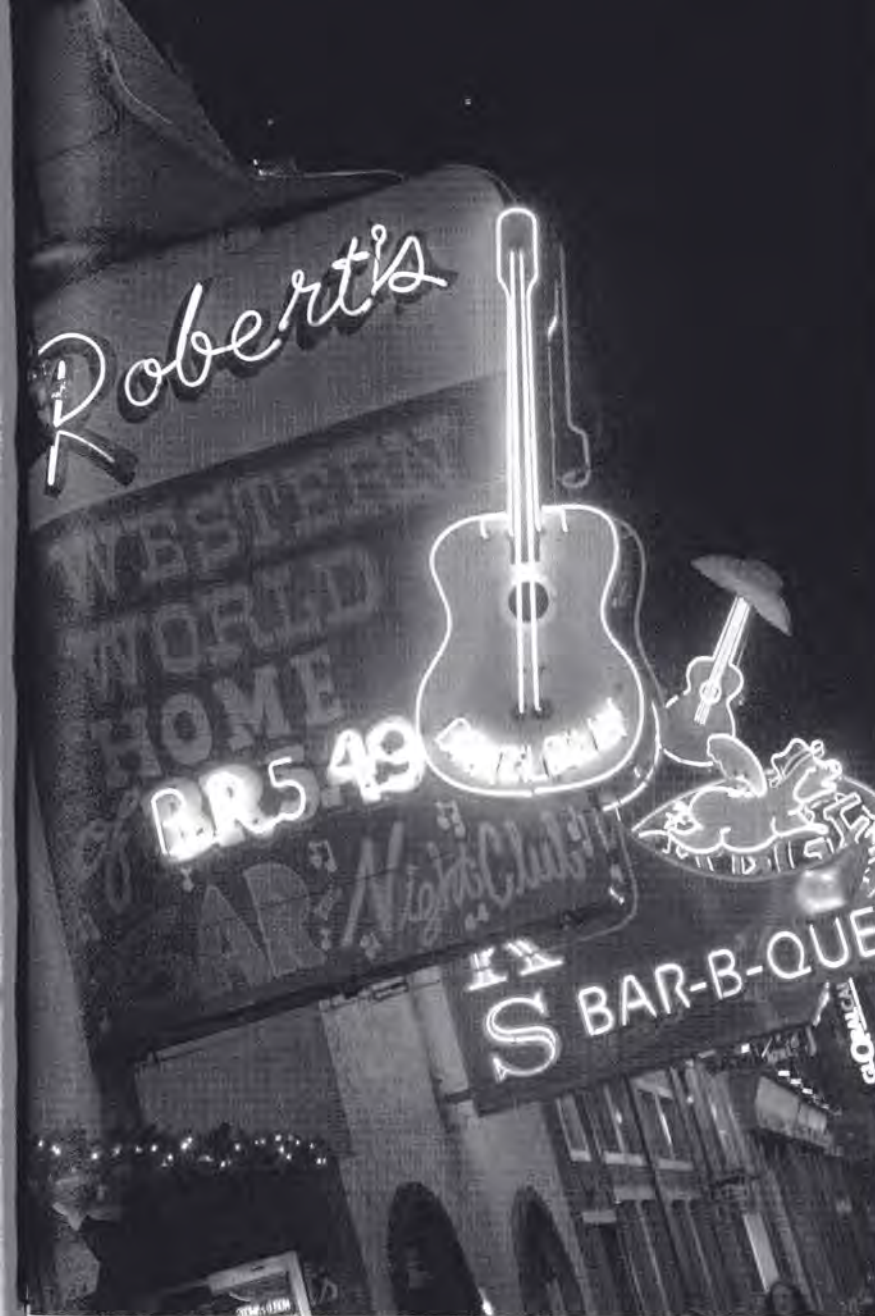
William Monroe was born in 1911 in Rosine, Kentucky. Rosine was important for Monroe's early musical development, and subsequently the invention of bluegrass Music. Rosine is located in the Piedmont region of central Kentucky, in close proximity to the Appalachian stringband culture and the bluesy Mississippi. Mary Katherine Aldin, who compiled Monroe's recordings for the Decca label, notes the influence of Monroe's home life in Rosine on his development: "In the family band which his parents encouraged the children to form, many of his older brothers and sisters played instruments and sang; as the youngest and smallest, by the time he was old enough to learn music, only the mandolin was left." Monroe's first recordings on the radio with his brother Charlie stand as a milestone—the introduction of the mandolin, an instrument brought to the United States by Mediterranean immigrants, as a key instrument in hillbilly music.

Aldin also notes the influence of two key musicians in Monroe's childhood years, Pendleton Vandiver and Arnold Schultz. Vandiver, known as "Uncle Pen" to Bill, was an

old time fiddler who played traditional dance tunes on the fiddle—songs from England, Scotland, and Ireland that found their way to the Appalachians in the waves of Scotch Irish immigrants and flourished there in the isolation. Vandiver's influence had several effects. First of all, it brought the fiddle, and its melodic potential, to Monroe's attention, and one or more fiddles would always be featured in Monroe's later bands. Also, the rapid tempos of the reels and dances, and the steady beat necessary for dancing, made an impression on Monroe, especially in his own mandolin playing. This exposure also had a remarkable influence on Monroe's ideas of tonalities.

Arnold Schultz, a neighbor of the Monroes, also proved to be an important contributor to the father of bluegrass. Schultz was a piedmont bluesman who played guitar, and Bill quickly recognized how different his style of playing was from all the white guitar players he knew. The blues would become an important part of Monroe's music, particularly from a

One of the many nightly performers in Nashville's musical district near Printers' Alley



The bright lights of Nashville's music and culinary scene

Bill's music, the vocal flavor, says Neil Rosenberg, came straight from Protestantism. The high, drawn out vocal melodies of gospel were perfect for Monroe's soaring tenor. But the gospel harmony was the most distinctive influence. On choruses to songs, or in some cases on all the verses, two to four part harmonies pulled all the members of the band together, stacking the harmony notes one on top of the other over the melody note.

These three genres form the major strains that Monroe wove into bluegrass music. However, the simple presence of these influences is not what made the sound so distinct. Monroe's recording of "Get Down on Your Knees and Pray" features all these genres—modal tonalities, gospel harmony and content, a distinct minor blues flavor—but it is not immediately recognizable as bluegrass so much as it is a bluesy gospel song, or a religious blues. Compare this to "New Mule Skinner Blues." In addition to the content of the lyrics, these songs have much in common in vocal style, tonalities, and structure. What is

structural standpoint. The simple three or four chord progressions of the blues would become the basis for most of Monroe's song writing and adaptation. Where Monroe really struck out on new ground, however, was where he combined the modal tones of the mountains with the simple progressions of the blues.

By laying the modal melodies over the major chord progressions, Monroe and those influenced by his music set about making a new sound, one that combined the simple joy of the major scale with the mournful tone of a minor key. This combination became the basis of all of Monroe's later work and is still a quintessential part of modern bluegrass.

There was one final powerful influence from Bill's early life: the Methodist Church. The Monroes were a Christian family, and Bill was exposed to southern gospel music at an early age. While blues and mountain fiddling may have been the primary elements of the instrumental and structural side of

missing from “Get Down on Your Knees and Pray” that is striking in “New Muleskinner Blues” is Monroe’s characteristic drive, the pull of his mandolin chopping the music forward.

If the mandolin was new to rural music, Monroe’s sound was new to the mandolin. Although he played with remarkable virtuosity and even delicacy at times, what made Monroe different from other players was the driving sound he pulled from the instrument, making use of its double strings for spectacular down beats. In rhythm, particularly, he stood out, bringing the pick down on the strings in a heavy, muted “chop” on the offbeat, playing opposite the bass on the down beats. This driving chop allowed Monroe to hold a band together when playing at the rapid tempos he chose to play at. With these fast tempos came improvisations. Unlike in most traditional rural music forms, Monroe and his side men did not just repeat the melody with their instruments, but they improvised and changed as they played, like jazz musicians. As one instrument took the melody, the others reverted to backing, then a verse, then a solo, and so on.

As distinctive as this sound was, it was the only sound Monroe wanted. He had broken from his brothers after spectacular fights over musical differences in which Monroe refused to compromise. Set on pursuing music his own way, Monroe formed his own band, “The Bluegrass Boys,” named for his home state and later the name of the genre of music he created almost single handedly. Aldin notes that Monroe was a strict professional as far as music was concerned and had little trouble attracting musicians to fill openings in his band. However, once they were there, turnover was a different story: “He was a tough task master who expected much, paid little, and tolerated little deviation from his musical straight and narrow, but once you had served time in his band, you were a professional,” wrote Aldin of Monroe’s band policies.

Rather than backfire and kill the bluegrass music in its developmental stages, Monroe’s acerbic management style actually ended up propagating the music in a way he never could have achieved through simply influencing other musicians through his recordings. The best and brightest of the acoustic musicians in the Southeast came and went in his band. Musicians who entered were pushed to expertise on their instruments, given the indelible stamp of Monroe’s drive and then left in rage at Monroe’s stinginess and stubbornness. And then those musicians would continue to play music in their own bands that they formed, causing the genre to spread and grow in popularity. And for all Monroe’s stubbornness, the influence worked both ways. Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs brought unique guitar runs and driving banjo style that fit perfectly with Monroe’s musical sensibilities. The work of these two men would be the basis of all banjo and guitar players’ styles who were to follow the duo. Flatt and Scruggs, in turn, became enamored with the bluegrass style and spread its popularity with their own bands, as they performed in such Hollywood appearances as “The Beverly Hillbillies” and on the sound track of the highly successful 1967 film “Bonnie and Clyde.”

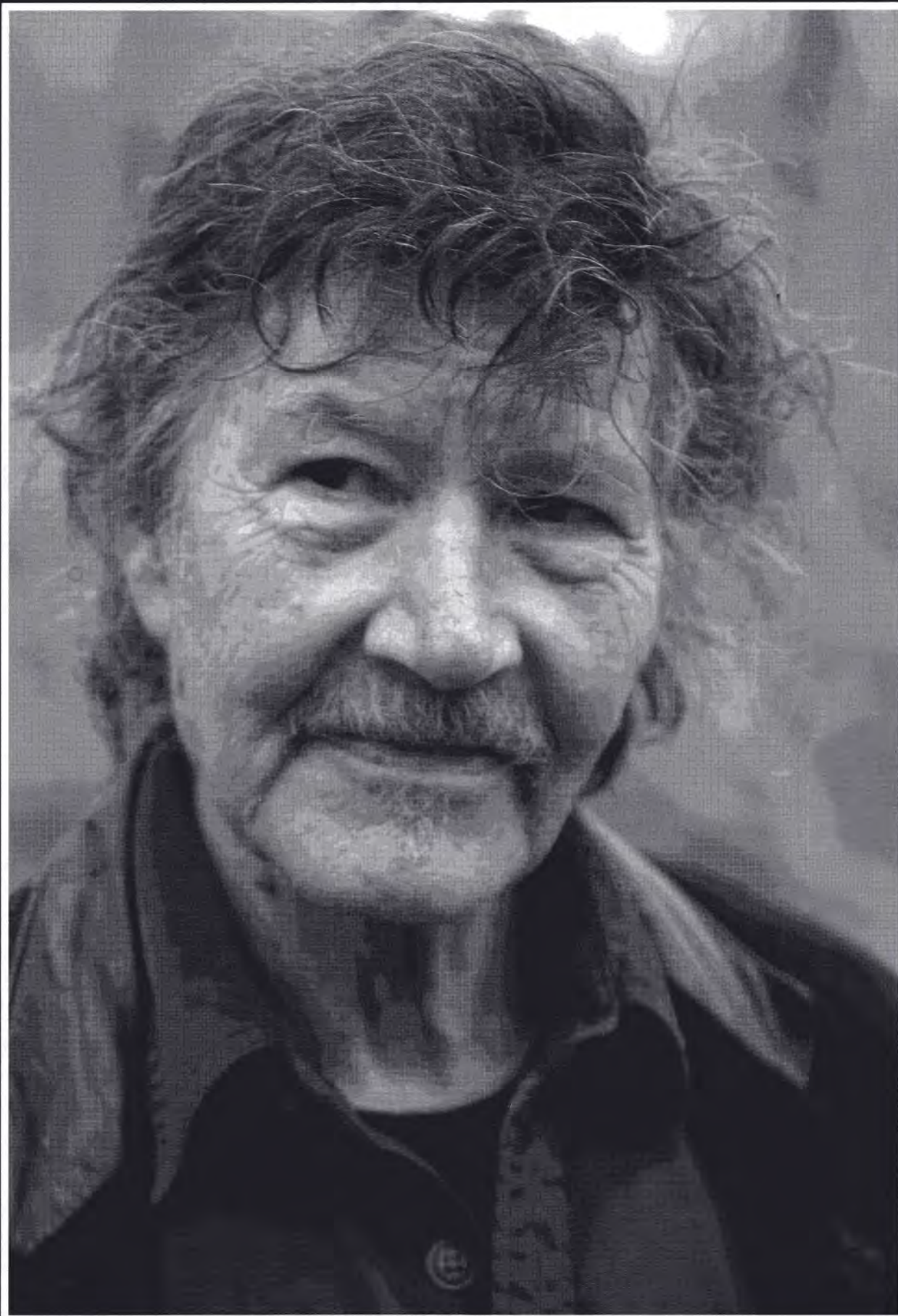
By the fifties, when Monroe started recording regularly for the Decca label, the essential bluegrass song had been established, as can be seen in the 1950 recording of “New Muleskinner Blues.” This would be the major strain of bluegrass music for years

to come, even into the present day. Bluegrass music had been push and pull between past, present, and future, much like the culture of the South as a whole. From the nineteen sixties onward, there has been a distinct “New Grass Movement,” a body of musicians who bring influences of rock and jazz and other styles into bluegrass as a way of modernizing it. Some musicians continue to pioneer new influences, while others remain steadfastly true to the past. Blue Highway, a bluegrass group considered by many to be one of the more forward thinking, progressive bluegrass bands, still slips into traditional modes on such recordings as “Man of Constant Sorrow.” Tony Rice and J.D. Crowe, some of the most progressive members of the newgrass movement during seventies, in 1980 formed the Bluegrass Album Band, a project dedicated to recording bluegrass music in the more traditional styles of the first generation of bluegrass bands, including an album of songs composed and performed by Bill Monroe.

I myself, an amateur bluegrass musician, had the opportunity to play with one of Bill Monroe’s old sidemen, the fiddler Bobby Hicks (who also recorded on the “Bluegrass Albums” with Rice and Crowe). It was at a jam session at a local Baptist church in Pumpkintown, South Carolina, one that I had attended several times before. I played my chords and runs the way Lester Flatt would have done it, the way Bill Monroe would have wanted it, along with three other guitarists eager to share the honor. In fact, we had a little too much of just about every instrument, as everyone cramped into a side room in the little church community building to share in the event.

Bobby Hicks looks like you’d expect a bluegrass fiddler to look: tall, sun tanned, sturdily built, a little bit of a paunch hanging over his large belt buckle, thinning hair that’s still dark, and sharp eyes that smile out of the crags and wrinkles of his face. He wore faded blue jeans and a plaid work shirt, tucked in with the sleeves rolled up. He played standing up the whole time, we all did, running through the classic fiddle numbers like “Cotton-Eye Joe” and “Sharecropper’s Son.” Then he switched to a slow song, a country song called “Faded Love.” As he played the slow melody, he played his own harmonies on the fiddle, a soaring tenor line above the melody he was playing. As I marveled at this virtuosic touch, I noticed something different about his fiddle—it had five strings instead of the usual four.

Hicks’ fiddle is a perfect example of the changes that have occurred, or can occur, in bluegrass music and in Southern culture as a whole. Innovation doesn’t have to be destruction of tradition—it can be a complement. The high harmonies on Hicks’s augmented fiddle were as distinctively bluegrass as anything Bill Monroe ever recorded, a throwback to the high harmonies Monroe’s vocalists sang together and the twin fiddle sound he loved. The change to Bobby’s fiddle only enhanced his ability to play music of all kinds. The same thing can happen in the South. We don’t always have to choose between innovation and tradition; they’re just two sides of the cultural coin. A tradition, whether it’s bluegrass music or cornbread, is nothing but an innovation that has grown old and been accepted. Bluegrass musicians will probably continue to look forward, but they won’t forget the past either.



4

In which we traded a bustling Nashville for Hohenwald, hometown of William Gay.

After a series of U-turns and a concert of rustling maps, we wound our way through the woods, trailers, houses, and farms of Tennessee, finally finding Little Swan Creek Road. We were then greeted by Gay's two dogs in the driveway outside his log cabin. Giving our esteemed author the honored passenger seat next to George Singleton's hand grenade, our stuffed possum mascot, and Mark Olencki's plastic-looking pickled eggs, we headed fifteen minutes back into town to Rio Colorado, one of maybe four restaurants in the area.

After fajitas and quesadillas, navigated by a reluctant Gay, we went in search of an illusive elephant sanctuary which remained just that—illusive and unfound. One van, however, stumbled upon a large tree gnawed by a beaver. These markings they found so interesting that they were compelled to pull over and photograph them in spite of the imminent risk of being shot-gunned for trespassing.

The wonderful wanderings and delays eventually led us back to Gay's home where he read us one of his prize-winning short stories, "The Paperhanger." Being in the author's low-lit living room and surrounded by the landscape that had inspired the stories added an urgent reality and sincerity to the fiction.

Gay, a worn-in, somewhat reclusive spirit with curling gray hair, pained yet playful eyes, wore spectacular, black high-top sneakers, spent a generous amount of time answering our questions, telling stories, signing books, taking pictures, and letting us play on the slide in his yard.

Satisfied yet a little saddened at the thought of departure, we piled back into the vans and drove past the headless eagle at the end of Gay's dirt driveway and out of the darkening disgruntled Tennessee South. The old Natchez Trace carried us to the Best Western of Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where some sold out and went to Outback Steakhouse, while the rest mused over four not-so-appealing menu items at the local bar-b-quey. The night was topped off with a milkshake expedition which helped us all to find redemption, before we headed to the beds of Muscle Shoal's finest Best Western.

Closure and Roadkill on Life's Highway

by William Gay

Raymer had been working at the housing project for more than a month, and during this time the little old man had consistently moved with the sun. Raymer had begun work during the chill days of a blackberry winter, and the man had shuttled his chair as each day progressed, claiming the thin, watery light as if he drew sustenance from it. Now it was well into June, and at some point the man had shifted into reverse, moving counterclockwise for the shade but always positioning his lawn chair where he could watch Raymer work.

Raymer hardly noticed him, for he was in more pain than he had thought possible. He could scarcely get through the day. He was amazed that hearts could actually ache, actually break. Secretly he suspected that his had been defective, already faulted, a secondhand or rebuilt heart, for it had certainly not held up as well as he had expected it to. Corrie, who had been his childhood sweetheart before she became his wife, had, inserted the point of a chisel into the fault line and tapped it once lightly with a hammer, and that was the end of that.

By trade he was a painter, and some days he was conscious only of the aluminum extension ladder through his tennis shoes and the brush at the end of his extended arm, which leaned out, and out, as if gravity were just a bothersome rumor, as if he were leaning to paint the very void that yawned to engulf him. When Raymer came down to move the ladder, the old man was waiting for him at the foot of it holding a glass of iced tea in his hand. He was a wizened little man who did not even come to Raymer's shoulder. He had washed-out eyes of the palest blue, and the tip of his nose looked as if, sometime long ago, it had been sliced off neatly with a pocketknife. He was wearing a canvas porkpie hat that had half a dozen trout flies hooked through the band, and he was



Eagle sentry at the beginning of William Gay's driveway

dressed in flip-flops, faded blue jeans, and an old Twisted Sister T-shirt.

My name's Mayfield. Drink this tea before you get too hot.

Raymer took the glass of tea as you'd take a pill a doctor ordered you to, and stood holding it as if he did not know what to do with it.

Drink it up before that ice melts. You don't talk much, do you?

What?

You don't have much to say.

Well, I work by myself. Folks might think me peculiar if I was having long conversations.

I mean you ain't very friendly. You don't exactly invite conversation.

I just have all this work to do.

Who do you work for?

Raymer sipped the tea. It was sweet and strong, and the glass was full of shaved ice. A sprig of mint floated on top, and he crushed it between his teeth. I work for myself, he said.

I been watchin you ever since you come out here. You're right agile on that ladder. Move around like you was on solid ground. How old a feller are you?

I'm twenty-four, Raymer said, chewing the mint, its taste as evocative as a hallucinogenic drug, reminding him of something but he could not have said what. Where'd you get that T-shirt?

It was in some stuff that my daughter left when she married, Mayfield said. You ever do any bluff-climbin?

Any what?

Bluff-climbin: Climbin around over these limestone bluffs down by the Tennessee River.

No.

I bet you could, though. I used to do it when I was a hell of a lot older than twenty-four. I can't do it now, though—my joints has got stiff, and my bones are as brittle as glass.

I'm sorry, Raymer said, feeling an obscure need to apologize for infirmities of age he hadn't caused. He was thinking of Corrie the last time he'd seen her, thinking of her hands pushing against his chest.

It ain't your fault. Listen, I got somethin I need a coat of paint on. You stop by when you knock off work this evenin, and I'll show it to you.

Well, I don't know. I push myself pretty hard. I'm usually about worn out by the end of the day.

It ain't much, and I ain't lookin' to get it done for nothin. I'll pay you.

If I'm not too tired.

The main thing is I want to talk to you. I've got a business proposition for you.

Raymer drained the glass and handed it to the old man. He began repositioning the ladder. I'll see at quitting time, he said.

He made it through the day, and when he was behind the apartment building, washing

his brushes, he thought he might make it to his truck and escape without painting whatever it was the old man wanted painted. He wanted to go home to the empty house and sit in the dark and think about Corrie. But Mayfield was a wily old man and had anticipated him. He was leaning against the front of Raymer's truck when Raymer came around the building with his brushes in his hand. He had one flip-flop cocked on the bumper and was leaning against the grille with an elbow propped on the hood. He wasn't much taller than the hood of the truck. I'll show you that thing now, he said. It's over on the porch of my apartment.

Raymer didn't even know what it was. It appeared to be a sort of flattened-out concrete lion. Its paws were outstretched, and its eyes looked crossed or rolled back in its head. It looked like an animal on which something had fallen from an enormous height, flattening its back and leaving a rectangular cavity.

What the hell is it?

It's a homemade planter, of course. It was my wife's. It's all I've got left after fifty years of marriage, all I have to remember her by.

Raymer gazed at the sorry-looking thing. It seemed precious little to have salvaged from fifty years of marriage, but he guessed it was more than he had.

What color you want it? Paint won't stay on that concrete anyway, not out here in the weather.

I ain't worried about the weather—that thing'll be on this porch longer than I will. Paint it red, brighten things up around here.

While Raymer painted it red, the old man told him a tale.

I was watchin the way you get around on that ladder, he began. You ain't got no fear of heights. That ladder must run out forty foot, and you never make a misstep. Course it wouldn't take but one, and that'd be all of you. I was thinkin about them bluffs down on the Tennessee River. Down there below Clifton. I bet a young man like you wouldn't have no trouble climbin up to some caves I know of on them bluffs.

Raymer was barely listening. While he was painting the lion, he was replaying a loop of tape in his head of Corrie telling him about the emptiness in her life. What's the matter? he had asked, but whatever was the matter was so evasive and intangible that it couldn't be pinned down with a word. No word was precise or subtle enough to explain it. We never have enough money, but it's not really about money, she had said. He had dropped out of college so that Corrie could finish nursing school. She had dropped out of his life, and the bottom had dropped out of everything. My life is empty, she said, before she packed her bags and rented an apartment in Maury County. He didn't know what kind of emptiness, or what had been removed to cause it, but the space must have been sizable, because she had found a six-foot-foot guitarist in a country band to fill it. The guitarist's name was Robbie, and he had a wild mane of curly red hair and a predatory, foxlike face.

Hell, he's not even good-looking, Raymer had told her. He looks like a goddamned fox.

Like a what?

Like a fox. A red fox. That sharp nose, all that red fur. Hair. Hell, I'm better-looking than he is.

You're very good-looking, Buddy. You're a lot better-looking than he is—but life's not always about looks, is it?

You a married man? Mayfield asked.

She quit me, Raymer said, putting the finishing touches on the lion.

I bet ten thousand dollars would put things in a whole other light, Mayfield said.

It wasn't really about money.

It's never about money, but still, a few thousand dollars would fill a lot of things right up. Smooth things over, round off a lot of sharp corners. She got another man?

Raymer was growing uncomfortable talking about it. Thinking about it. Not until after she left, he said carefully.

I bet she had him picked out beforehand, though.

Raymer laid the brush aside. You do? What the hell do you know about it? What is it to you anyway?

I know I'm seventy-five years old, and I ain't went through life blindfolded. I know you're pretty down in the mouth, and I know there's nearly twenty thousand dollars in that cave I was tellin you about. I put it there myself, a long time ago. You can't even get to it from the top, from the bluff side. You got to get up to it from the river. A little over nineteen thousand dollars, to be exact.

A little over nineteen thousand is not exact, Raymer said.

Nineteen thousand seven hundred something, then, Mayfield said. At that time Alabama was dry for beer. Dry as a chip. I lived right across the state line then. I had two coolers on my back porch and didn't sell nothin but tallboy Bud. Sunday afternoons in the summertime you could stand in my front yard and look up the highway and the line of cars windin around my house looked like it went on forever. You'd wonder where all them cars come from. Where they went. I had a beer truck comin from Tennessee twice a week. I was payin off everybody from county judges to dogcatchers, and still I was hooked up to a money machine. I didn't drink, like most bootleggers. I didn't gamble. What was I goin to do with all that money? Put it in the bank? Mail it to the IRS? I was makin money faster than I could spend it, and I was never a slacker when it come to spendin money. We had a daughter in a finishin school in Atlanta, Georgia, and we was drivin matchin Lincoln Continentals. I was accumulatin it in fruit jars, paper sacks. The money kept growin all the time.

Why didn't you just bury it? Raymer asked, as if he believed any of this.

I did, but folks was always slippin around and tryin to dig it up. They took to watchin me in shifts. They knew I had money. I had to get it somewheres nobody prowled around. I was thinkin in terms of a sort of retirement fund. Then I come in this part of the country and found that cave. You can barely see it from the river, much less get into it. Nobody had been in there in a hell of a time. Some skeletons were in there, and old guns. Swords. I've got one of them I'll show you. It was a old Civil War cave.

Let's see it, Raymer said, interested in spite of himself.

The sword was wrapped in what looked like an old tablecloth. The old man unfolded the oilcloth and held up the sword for Raymer to see. Raymer was expecting something polished and lethal, but the steel had a dull patina of time, and it seemed to draw light into itself instead of reflecting it.

It's one of them old CSA officer's swords, ain't it? the man said.

I really wouldn't know one from a meat cleaver, but I guess it is if you say it is. It's certainly some kind of sword. What else was in there?

Belt buckles. Rusty guns. Bones, like I said. Further back there was different kinds of bones, arrowheads, and clay pots. That place was old. I ain't no zoologist or nothin, but them was Indian bones.

Hellfire, Raymer said. I thought you needed someplace nobody knew about. It sounds like folks were just tripping over each other to get into your 'cave. It must have been the Grand Central Station of caves.

The old man took the sword back and folded its shroud around it. Nobody's interested in that kind of stuff anymore, he said. Everybody's forgot about it. When I was in there, I guess I was the first' in seventy-five years. Nobody's been there since—I'd bet on it.

If you left nineteen thousand dollars in there, you bet pretty high, Raymer observed. I thought you said you didn't gamble.

Mayfield had not yet turned on the lights in his living room, and behind him the door loomed dark and silent. Raymer thought of his own still house, where he must go.

I've got to get on, he said. What happened to your nose?

I had plastic surgery. I wanted it this way. I picked this nose out of a book.

Were you in an accident?

No, he did it on purpose. I was in a beer joint over on the Wayne County line. Goblin's Knob. This big farmer off of Beech Creek set on me and held me down and cut the end off of it with a pocketknife.

Jesus Christ.

No, he was a Pulley. He disappeared right after that. Nobody ever knew what became of him. I believe he's in a dry cistern with his throat cut and rocks piled down on him.

What do you think?

I think I can feel you pulling on my leg again.

Maybe. Maybe not.

* * *

Six weeks after she left, he had seen her in a mall, coming out of a JCPenney. She had had her hair shorn away and what was left dyed a glossy black. She was slim and graceful, and she looked like the willowy child he had grown up with. He walked along beside her. Standing by a wishing pool where coins gleamed from the depths, and with a brick wall hard against her back, he kissed her mouth until she twisted her face away. Let me alone, she said. What are you trying to do?

He was still holding her. He could feel the delicate framework of bones beneath her flesh. Like a rabbit, a fawn, like something small. I'm trying to save our marriage, he said.

She shook her head. This marriage is shot, she said quietly. A team of paramedics couldn't save it. This marriage wound up roadkill on the life's highway.

On the life's highway, Raymer repeated in wonder. You've been helping Robbie with his country lyrics, haven't you?

She was pushing harder against him, but he was still holding her. His arms wouldn't release. When they finally did, they hung limply at his sides, like appendages he hadn't learned the use of. She was looking into his eyes. Was she about to cry? Maybe. Maybe not. She turned away, and he didn't follow.

Corrie lived in an apartment complex near the college where she was learning to be a nurse. He had been there a time or two before she took up with the country musician. Tonight her light was out. Early to bed, early to rise. Robbie owned an old green Camaro, and Raymer drove around the parking lot until he found it. Then he got back on the interstate and drove toward home.

It's in a five-gallon vinegar jar, Mayfield said.

What in the world would a person ever do with five gallons of vinegar? Raymer said.

They'd make a lot of pickles. Anyway, that's where it's at. I started out with fruit jars, but they were too hard to keep up with. I figured, keep all my eggs in one basket. If the weather clears up, we might do it this weekend. I believe it'd do you good to get your mind off that girl that quit you. We might fish a little. You get down on that river, you'll be all right.

I never said I believed any of this tale. And I damn sure never said I'd do it.

You never said you wouldn't. We'll split right down the middle, half and half. I'd even give you the even ten.

Raymer was sitting on Mayfield's porch, a porch stanchion against his back, drinking from a warming bottle of beer and watching rain string off the roof. A sudden squall had blown in from the southwest, and Mayfield had been standing there in the rain waiting for him before he had his ladders and tools stored away. Now Mayfield was rocking in the porch swing, and for some time he studied Raymer in silence.

What you're doin is draggin this out way too far, he said. You're a likely young feller. Not too bad-lookin. You need to get over it. Get on to the next thing. You need some kind of closure.

Closure? Raymer was grinning. Where did you hear that? Was relationship therapy part of the bootlegging trade when you followed it?

I heard it on TV. I got no way of gettin out anywhere. I watch a lot of TV. Them talk shows-them shrinks and social workers are always talkin about closure. Closure this, closure that. I figure you need some. You need somethin for sure. You got a look about you like you don't care whether you live or die, and maybe you'd a little rather die. I've seen that look on folks before, and I don't care for it. It ain't healthy.

Raymer was thinking that maybe the old man was right. He did need something, and closure was as good a word for it as anything else. Everything had just been so damned

polite. She hadn't even raised her voice. Just I'm going, goodbye, don't leave the light on for me. If only she had done something irrevocable, something he couldn't forget, something so bad she couldn't take it back. Something that would cauterize the wound like a red-hot iron.

Did it have a metal lid, this famous jug?

What?

If it did, after twenty years in a wet cave the lid's rusted away and the money's just a mildewed mess of rotten goop. A biological stew of all the germs that came off all the people who ever handled it. Fermenting all these years.

I never heard such rubbish. Anyway, I'm way ahead of you. The money's wrapped in plastic, and I melted paraffin in a cooker and sealed it with a couple of inches of that. Like women used to seal jelly.

This silenced Raymer, and he took a sip of beer and sat watching Mayfield bemusedly. After a while he set his bottle aside. He seemed to have made up his mind about something.

Do you believe in God? he asked.

Do what? Of course I do. Don't you? Do you own a Bible?

I believe there's one in there somewhere.

Go get it.

Mayfield was in the house for some time. Raymer watched staccato lightning flicker in the west out of tumorous storm clouds. Thunder rumbled like something heavy and ungainly rolling down an endless corridor, faint and fainter. When Mayfield came out, he had a worn Bible covered in black leather. He held it out to Raymer.

Did you want to read a psalm or two? he asked.

Raymer didn't take the Bible. Do you swear you're telling me the truth about that money? he asked.

The old man looked amused, as if he'd won some obscure point of honor. He laid the Bible in the seat of the lawn chair and placed his palm on it. I swear I hid a vinegar jar with nineteen thousand seven hundred dollars in it in a cave down on the Tennessee River.

Raymer figured he might as well cover all the contingencies. And as far as I know, it's still there, he said.

And as far as I know, it's still there, Mayfield repeated.

It was never about money, Corrie had said, but Raymer thought perhaps it had been about money after all. Corrie had been happiest when they had money to spend, and she fell into long silences when it grew tight. The happiest he had seen her was when they bought an old farmhouse to remodel. But everything ate up money: mortgage payments, building materials. Anyway, what Corrie seemed to enjoy was the act of spending, not what she bought.

He had given her a \$300 leather jacket for her twenty-second birthday, and she had left it in a Taco Bell and not even checked on it for a week. Naturally, it was gone. They probably made a lot of others just like it, she said. Somewhere someone Raymer didn't

know was wearing his \$300.

He cut the motor and let the boat drift the last few feet toward shore, rocking slightly on the choppy water. He took a line up from the stern and tossed it over a sweet-gum branch. He drew it around and tied it off and just stood for a moment, staring up the face of the bluff. The cliff rose in a sheer vertical that he judged to be almost two hundred feet. The opening he was looking at was perhaps thirty feet from the top.

You went up that thing?

I damn sure did. With a five-gallon vinegar jug of money.

The hell you did.

The hell I didn't. It's not as steep as it looks.

It better not be. If it is, Spiderman couldn't get up it with suction cups on his hands and feet. Are you sure it's the right one?

I'm almost positive, Mayfield said. He had opened a tackle box and sat with an air of concentration, inspecting its contents. At length he selected a fly and began to tie it to the nylon line on the fishing rod he was holding.

It was ten o'clock on a balmy Saturday morning. They had already been inside several inlets where the river backwatered and had inspected the bluffs for caves. They had seen two openings that could have been caves, but the openings had not looked right to the old man. Mayfield had brought a cooler of beer and Coca-Colas, a picnic basket filled with sandwiches, his tackle box, a creel, and two fly rods. Raymer had brought only a heavy-duty flashlight and a two-hundred foot coil of nylon rope, and he was disgusted. If we had one of those striped umbrellas, we could lollygag on the beach, he said. If we had a beach.

He began a winding course up the bluff. It was cut with ledges that narrowed as the bluff ascended, and sometimes he was forced to progress from ledge to ledge by wedging his boots in vertical crevices and pushing himself laboriously upward. From time to time he came upon stunted cedars growing out of the fissured rock; but he didn't trust them to hold his weight.

Halfway up, the ledges ceased to be anything more than sloping footholds on the rock face, and he could go no farther. He stood on a narrow ledge not much wider than his shoe soles, hugging the bluff and glancing up. The rest of the bluff looked as sheer and smooth as an enormous section of window glass. The hell with this, he said. He worked himself down to a wider outcropping and hunkered there with his back against the limestone and his eyes closed. He could feel the hot sun on his eyelids. When he opened them, the world was spread out in a panorama of such magnitude that his head reeled, and for a moment he did not think of Corrie at all.

Everything below him was diminished—a tiny boat with a tiny man casting a line, the inlet joining the rolling river where it gleamed like metal in the sun. Far upstream, toward the ferry, a barge drifted with a load of new cars, their glass and chrome flashing in the sun like a heliograph. Mayfield glanced up to check his progress and waved an encouraging hand. Raymer was seized with an intense loathing, a maniacal urge to throttle the old man and wedge his body under a rock somewhere.

When he reached the base of the cliff, he was wringing wet with sweat. He waded out into the shallow water and got the coil of rope. Mayfield was unhooking a small channel cat and dropping it into his creel.

What's the trouble? he said.

Raymer shook his head and did not reply. He lined up the mouth of the cave with a lightning-struck cypress on the white dome of the bluff and went up the riverbank looking for easier climbing. He entered a hollow, topped out on a ridge, and then angled back toward the river looking for the cypress. Finding it seemed to take forever. When he did find it, he tied the end of the rope around its base and dropped the coil over the bluff. Then he hauled thirty or forty feet of rope back up and began to fashion a rough safety line. The idea of swinging back and forth, pendulumlike, across the face of the bluff, dependent on an old man with a fishing pole to rescue him, did not appeal to him, but he tied the rope off anyway. He felt like a fool to the tenth power, and in his heart of hearts he knew he wouldn't find any money.

His feet reached the opening first, and for a dizzy moment they were climbing on nothingness, pedaling desperately for purchase until the bottom of the opening connected with his shoes. When he was sure he was safe on solid rock, he unclipped the flashlight from his belt and shone it into the opening. This could not be it. Here was no huge room like the one the old man had described, no dead soldiers or guns, no money. It was not even a proper cave—just cannular limestone walls thick with bat guano, sloping inward toward the dead end of a rock wall. He rested for a time and then clicked off the light and went hand over hand back up the face of the bluff.

When Raymer waded out to the boat and tossed in the rope and the light, Mayfield did not seem concerned. Likely it's another bluff, he said. All these sloughs get to lookin' the same, and it's been upwards of twenty years since I was here. I used to fish all these backwaters when I first come up from Alabama. Now I think on it, it seems the mouth of that cave was just about hid by a cedar. That's why I picked it to begin with. I never would have found it if I hadn't been watchin' a hawk through some field glasses.

Then you just deposited your twenty thousand and sat back waiting for the interest to add up.

I told you, I didn't need it. I'd tip a waitress a dollar for a fifty-cent hamburger. I never cared for money.

I guess you were just in the bootlegging trade for the service you could render humanity.

Right.

I wish I had sense like other folks, Raymer said. Why does everybody think I just fell off the hay truck?

You've got that red neck and that slack-jawed country look, Mayfield said placidly. And a fool is such a hard thing to resist.

He had sent her three dozen American Beauty roses, and the apartment was saturated with their smell. Raymer sat on the couch with his legs crossed and a cup of coffee balanced on his knee and had the closest thing to a conversation he had had with Corrie

since the day she left.

This is so unlike you, she said. All these flowers. How much did they cost?

They were day-old roses, half off. I told you it didn't matter.

And climbing around in caves looking for hidden treasure. It's so unpredictable. Who would have thought it of you? Are you having some sort of a crisis?

Raymer kept glancing around the apartment. He had neither seen Robbie nor heard mention of his name, but the place made him nervous anyway. It was fancier and more expensive-looking than he remembered, and he wondered how she could afford it. Everything looked like a sleek and dynamic symbol for a life he could not aspire to. The furniture was low and curvilinear, as if aerodynamically designed for life in the fast lane.

He's almost certainly senile, she said. What makes you think he's telling you the truth?

I know he's telling the truth. He's religious, and he laid his hand on the Bible, and wait a minute—quit that. It may be funny to you, but he took it seriously.

Religious and bootlegger just sort of seem contradictory terms to me.

I'm not going to argue semantics. The point is, he's telling the truth. I even drove down below the state line and talked to some folks who used to know him. He was a bootlegger, and he was successful enough at it to have socked away twenty thousand dollars without missing it. That's ten thousand for me. Us, if I can talk you into it. We could just spend it, just piss it away. Buy things. Go on a cruise. I'm making money for us to live on, and I've got more work to do.

She gave him a sharp look of curiosity. What's in it for you?

You. If you'll give me a chance, I'll win you back. By the time we spend ten thousand dollars, I can persuade you to give it another shot.

We gave it a four-year shot. It wasn't working.

I'll try harder.

Oh, Buddy. If you tried any harder, you'd break something. Rupture all your little springs or something. It wasn't you. It was just a bad idea—although you did make it worse. You're such an innocent about things. You get a picture of things in your head and your picture is all you see. You don't know me. You don't even know yourself. All you know is your little picture of how things ought to be, and that's the way you think they are.

Well, whatever. Ten thousand dollars is still a lot of money.

She didn't argue with that. Wouldn't it be fun to go down to the Bahamas? I'm on summer break. We could lie on the beach. All that white sand. We could just lie in the sun and drink those tall drinks they have with tropical fruit in them.

Then you'll do it?

I'll think about it. Like you said, it's a lot of money. She paused, and was silent for a time. There's just one thing, she said. Where's the fox at?

Robbie? He's playing a string of club dates in Nashville, trying to get a record deal. By the way, you shouldn't call him that—it just shows how petty you are. I told him about it, and he wasn't amused.

Piss on him. I never set out to be a comedian.

Back to what I was saying. The way you tell it, you're doing all the work. Swinging around on those bluffs—that's dangerous, you could get killed. I'm only twenty-three, and I could be a widow. I think you deserve the entire twenty thousand.

Hellfire, Corrie, it's Mayfield's money, not mine.

You said yourself he doesn't care about it. Besides, it would take twice as long to spend it. If you're really trying to, as you put it, win me back, this would give you twice as long to do it.

Raymer was put off balance by what she'd suggested, and he felt a little dizzy. He thought the smell of the roses might be getting to him. The room was filled with a sickening sweet reek that seemed to have soaked into the draperies and the carpet. It smelled like a wedding, a funeral. You may be right, he said.

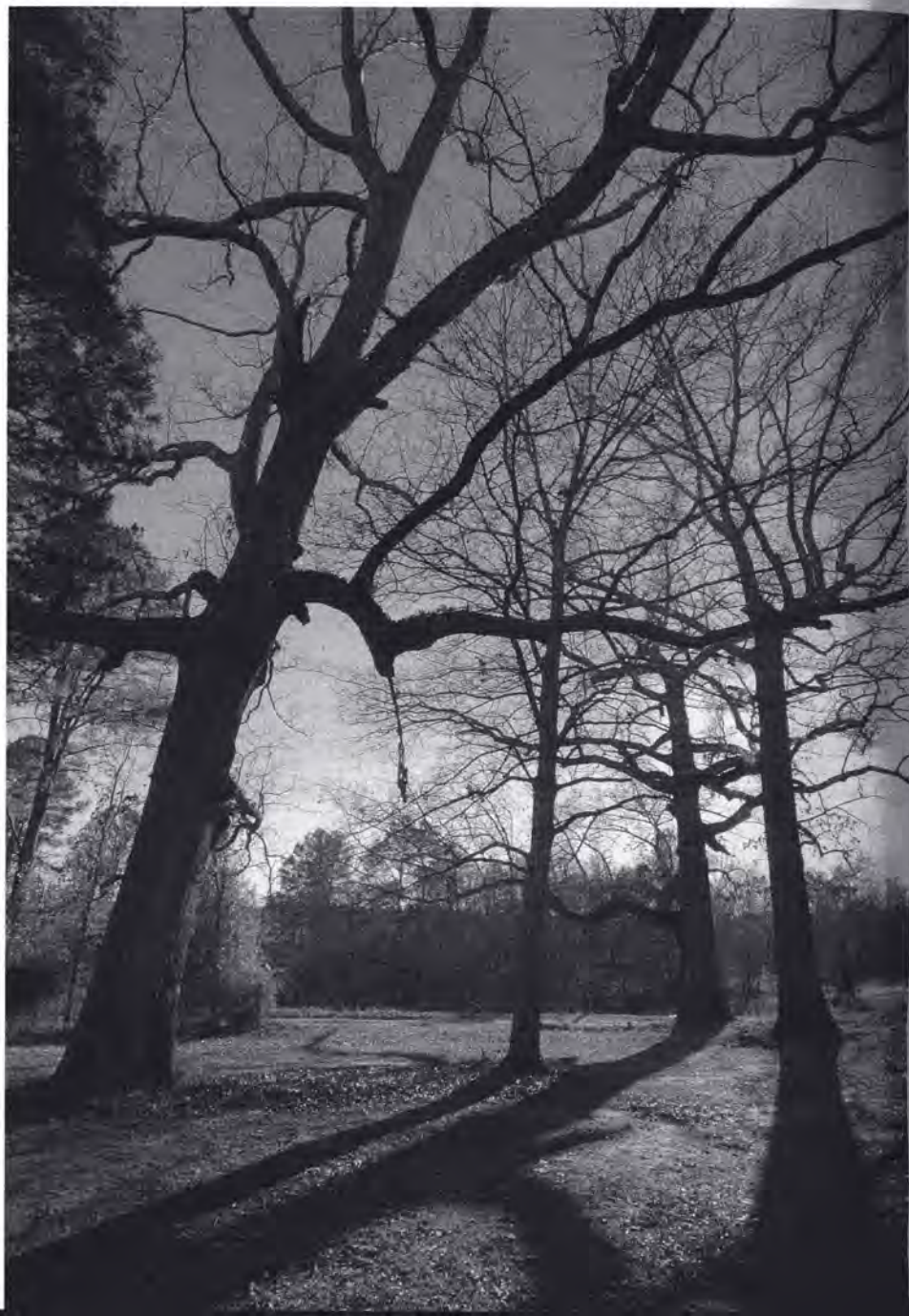
Of course I'm right. You could take six months off from work. We could spend it remodeling the house. Maybe you're learning, Buddy. You did right to tell me this.

I could tell you about it all night long, Raymer said. He'd heard that money was an aphrodisiac, but he suspected this was more likely to be true of actual as opposed to conjectural money, and Corrie's reply bore this out.

I've got to think all this through, she said. I've got to decide what I'm going to tell Robbie.

At the door she kissed him hard and opened her mouth under his and rounded her sharp breasts against his chest, but her mouth did not taste the same as it had that day by the wishing pool, and the odor of the roses had even saturated her hair. An enormous sadness settled over him.

Going back, he was five miles across the county line when a small red fox darted up out of the weedy ditch and streaked into his headlights. He cut the wheel hard to miss it, but a rear wheel passed over the fox, and he felt a lurch in



the pit of his stomach. Goddamn it, he said. He put the truck in reverse and backed up until he could see the fox. It wasn't moving. He got out. The fox's eyes were open, but they were blind and dull; its sharp little teeth were bared, and blood was running out of its mouth. Its eyes had been as bright as emeralds in the headlights, and they had gleamed as if they emitted light instead of reflecting it. I don't believe this, Raymer said. This is just too goddamned much.

He rose and took a drop cloth from the bed of the truck and wrapped the fox in it. He stowed it in the back of the pickup and drove on toward home.

Raymer was shaking his head. Why don't you just admit it? he asked. You wanted to go fishing. You wanted to get away from the project and picnic on the river. So you fed me all this bullshit, and here you are, with your little basket and your little fishing pole.

Mayfield regarded him placidly. It don't matter what you think, he said. The money's not there because you think it is. It's there because I put it in a jar and poured paraffin over it and packed it up the side of that bluff. If you think it's not there, that don't change nothin. It'd be there even if you didn't exist.

Because you packed it up the side of that bluff.

Right.

Raymer sat in the stern of the boat looking at his hands. He had slipped twenty scary feet down the face of a bluff before he could stop himself, and the nylon line had left a deep rope burn across each palm, as if he'd grabbed a red-hot welding rod with both hands.

Truth to tell, though, exploring the caves was interesting. He had not found any dead Confederates, but he had been in a cave in whose winding depths Indians had left flint chippings, pottery shards, all that remained of themselves.

As always, Mayfield seemed to know what he was thinking. Why won't you admit it yourself? You know you're gettin a kick out of it. I bet you ain't thought of your wife all mornin.

Raymer shook his head again. He grinned. You're just too many for me, he said. Thursday he was rained out in midafternoon, and he drove to the bank and checked the balance in his account. It was a lot higher than he had expected. He was amazed at how little he had spent. Like the old man, he seemed to be accumulating it in paper sacks, fruit jars. It was growing all the time.

He asked to withdraw \$500 in ones and fives. The teller gave him a peculiar look as she began to count out the money.

It's for a ransom note, Raymer said, and for a moment she stopped counting. She was careful to keep any look at all from her face. Then she resumed, laying one bill atop another.

He drank the rest of the day away in a bar near the bypass. The place was named Octoberfest and had a mock-Germanic decor, and the waitresses were tricked out in what looked like milkmaid's costumes. He drank dark lager and kept waiting for the ghost of Hitler to sidle in and take the stool across from him. A dull malaise had seized him. A sense of doom. A suspicion that someone close to him had died. He had not yet

received the telegram, but the Reaper was walking up and down the block looking for his house number.

You've sure got a good tan, the barmaid told him. It looks great with that blond hair. What are you, a lifeguard or something?

Something, Raymer said. I'm a necrozoologist.

A what? Necrowhat?

A necrozoologist. I analyze roadkill on the highways. On the life's highway. I look for patterns, migratory habits. Compile statistics. So many foxes, so many skunks. Possums. Try to determine where the animal was bound for when it was struck.

There's no such thing as that.

Sure there is. We're funded by the government. We get grants. She laid a palm on his forearm. I think you're drunk, she said. But you're cute anyway. Stop by and see me one day when you're sober.

When he went to use the pay phone, he was surprised to see that dark had fallen. He could see the interstate from there, and the headlights of cars streaking past looked straight and intent, like falling stars rifling down the night.

The phone rang for a long time before she answered.

Where were you?

I was asleep on the couch. Where are you? Why are you calling?

I've got it, he said.

Jesus. Buddy. You found it? All of it?

All of it.

You sound funny. Why do you sound like that? Are you drunk?

I might have had a few celibatory-celebratory-beers.

If you were going to celebrate, you could have waited for me. I'm waiting for you. now, he said, and hung up the phone.

* * *

A chest freezer stood on the back porch of the farmhouse they had bought to renovate. Raymer raised the lid and took out the frozen fox, still wrapped in its canvas shroud. He folded away the canvas, but part of it was seized in the bloody ice, and he refolded it. He slid the bundle into a clean five-gallon paint bucket. A vinegar jar would have been nice, but he guessed they didn't make them that big anymore. The money was in a sack, and he dumped it into the bucket, shaking the bag out, the ones and fives drifting like dry leaves in a listless wind. He glanced at his watch and then picked up the loose bills from the floor and packed them around the fox. He stretched a piece of plastic taut across the top of the bucket and sealed it with duct tape. He replaced the plastic lid and hammered it home with a fist. Then he went into the kitchen and filled up the coffeemaker.

When headlights washed the walls of the house, he was sitting at the kitchen table drinking a cup of coffee. By the time he had crossed to the front room and turned on the

porch light, Corrie was standing at the front door with an overnight bag in her hand.

She came in looking around the room, the high, unfinished ceiling. Looks like you quit on it, she said.

I guess I sort of drifted into the doldrums after you left, he said. Is that bag all you brought?

I figured we could buy some new stuff in the morning. Where is it? I want to see it. He'd expected that. He pried off the lid and showed her. He'd been working on the wiring in the living room, and the light was poor here. She was looking intently, but all it looked like was a bucket full of money.

Can we dump it out and count it? I thought it was in some kind of glass jar.

The jar was broken. I think a rock slid on it. If he hadn't had the whole mess airtight in plastic, it would probably have been worthless. I've already counted it, and we're not going to roll around in it or do anything crazy. I still don't feel right about this, and we're leaving for Key West early in the morning, before I change my mind. I can see that old man's face every time I close my eyes.

Whatever you say, Buddy. Five gallons of money sure has made you decisive and take-charge. It looks good on you.

Later he lay on his back in bed and watched her disrobe. You don't have to do this, he said. We don't have to rush things.

I want to rush things, she said, reaching behind to unclasp her brassiere.

Raymer's mind was in turmoil. There was just too much to understand. He wondered if he would ever drive confidently down what Corrie had called the life's highway, piloting a sleek car five miles over the limit instead of standing by the road with his collar turned up and his thumb in the air. There were too many variables—the rates of chance and exchange were out of balance. The removal of Corrie's clothing was to her a casual act, all out of proportion to the torrent of feelings it caused in him. Her apartment was less than forty miles away, but it was no-man's-land, off-limits. She had laid stones in the pathway that had driven him to a despair that not even the sweet length of her body laid against his would counterbalance.

An hour or so after he should have been asleep, he heard her call him. Buddy? When he didn't answer, she rose, slowly so that the bed would not creak. She crossed the floor to the bathroom. He could hear the furtive sounds of her dressing, the whisper of fabric on fabric. Then nothing, and though his eyes were still closed, he knew that she was standing in the bathroom door watching him. He lay breathing in, breathing out. He heard her take up the bucket and turn with it. The bucket banged the doorjamb. Goddamn, she breathed. Then he heard the soft sounds of bare feet and nothing further, not even the opening and closing of the front door, before her car cranked.

It was hot and stale in the room. It smelled like attar of roses, like climate-controlled money from the depths of a cave, like a rotting fox in the high white noon.

He got up and raised a window. Night rushed in like balm to his sweating skin. She hadn't even closed the front door. The yard lay empty, and still and so awash with moonlight that it appeared almost theatrical, like the setting arranged for a dream that

was over, or one on which the curtain had not yet risen.

When he crawled back into bed, he lay in the damp spot where they had made love, but he felt nothing. No pleasure, no pain. It was just a wet spot on a bed, and he moved over and thought about getting up and changing the sheets. But he didn't. He was weary and, despite all the coffee, still a little drunk. He tried to think of Corrie's lips against his throat, but all his mind would hold on to was the hiss in her voice when the bucket banged the door. Then even that slid away, and on the edge of sleep a boat was' rocking on sun-dappled water, an old man was changing the fly on his line, and Raymer was feeling the sun hot on his back and wondering, Would you really lay your hand on the Bible and swear a lie? The old man's face was inscrutable, as always, but somehow Raymer didn't think he would, and when he slipped into sleep, it was dreamless and untroubled.

An Interview with William Gay

We had all seen the photo on the back flap. Thin as the barn door planks in the background, cigarette hanging unlikely from fingers buried shyly inside his jean pockets, a figure—more ghost than man—smiled back, his jaw set in a friendly frown. The name under the picture said William Gay, but no one really knew if the two corresponded and so an unsure silence pooled as we pulled up to the sturdy log cabin off Little Swan Church Road, waiting, wondering who would emerge.

Perhaps the whole thing had been made up. Maybe the book had just written itself. Hohenwald, William's hometown, sounded more like a province of Narnia or Yoknapatawpha County than a place on the map. Luckily, the man who emerged looked much like the face from the jacket photo and so we all let out a breath as the silence was broken by the yapping of Gay's two frisky dogs, a brindle pit bull mix named Augustus McCrae and a part Sharpee named Heathmore.

The soft-spoken writer then accompanied us to Rio Colorado, one of, let's say, four restaurants in the area, which would be the site of the interview. We seemed small within rooms big enough to accommodate the town's entire population, but the owner's optimistic spirit was appreciated. As the smell of tacos, burritos, and quesadillas engulfed us, the man from the photo bashfully answered all our questions about his bold fiction.



Gay's companion, Heathmore, becomes disconcerted upon our departure.

How did you make a living before you were a writer?

WG: I was in the Navy, lived in New York. Then I came back here and I was a carpenter and traveled to do construction for years. I learned to lay brick for a while—all this to support my family.

And then you started writing?

WG: I'd been writing since I was fourteen. Then I was in the navy, Vietnam, New York, Chicago. All this time I was writing. When I was young I was reading Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner. It seemed like a natural progression to go from reading *Look Homeward Angel* and *The Sound and the Fury* to writing. I started sending stories out—first *The New Yorker*, then *Harpers*, right on down the list. After a while I figured out I should be submitting to the literary quarterlies. I had some success there. An agent saw a story and asked me if I had a novel and I wrote *The Long Home*. The title is a metaphor for death, from Ecclesiastes. It's set in the same place as *Provinces of Night*, right around here.

Did you get Faulkner when you were young?

WG: Probably not. I read it for the roll of the language. The whole idea from the beginning was to write good sentences, sweet sentences.

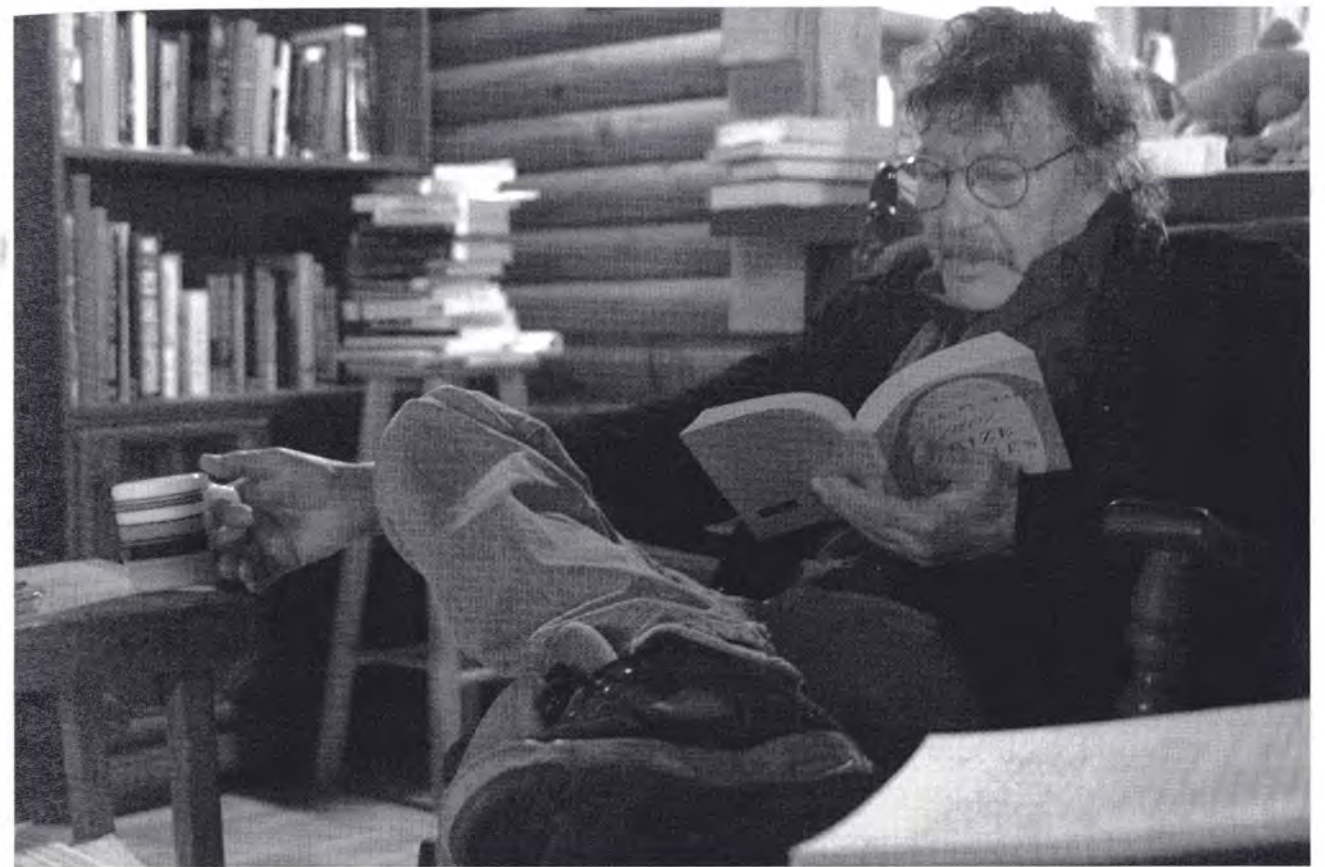
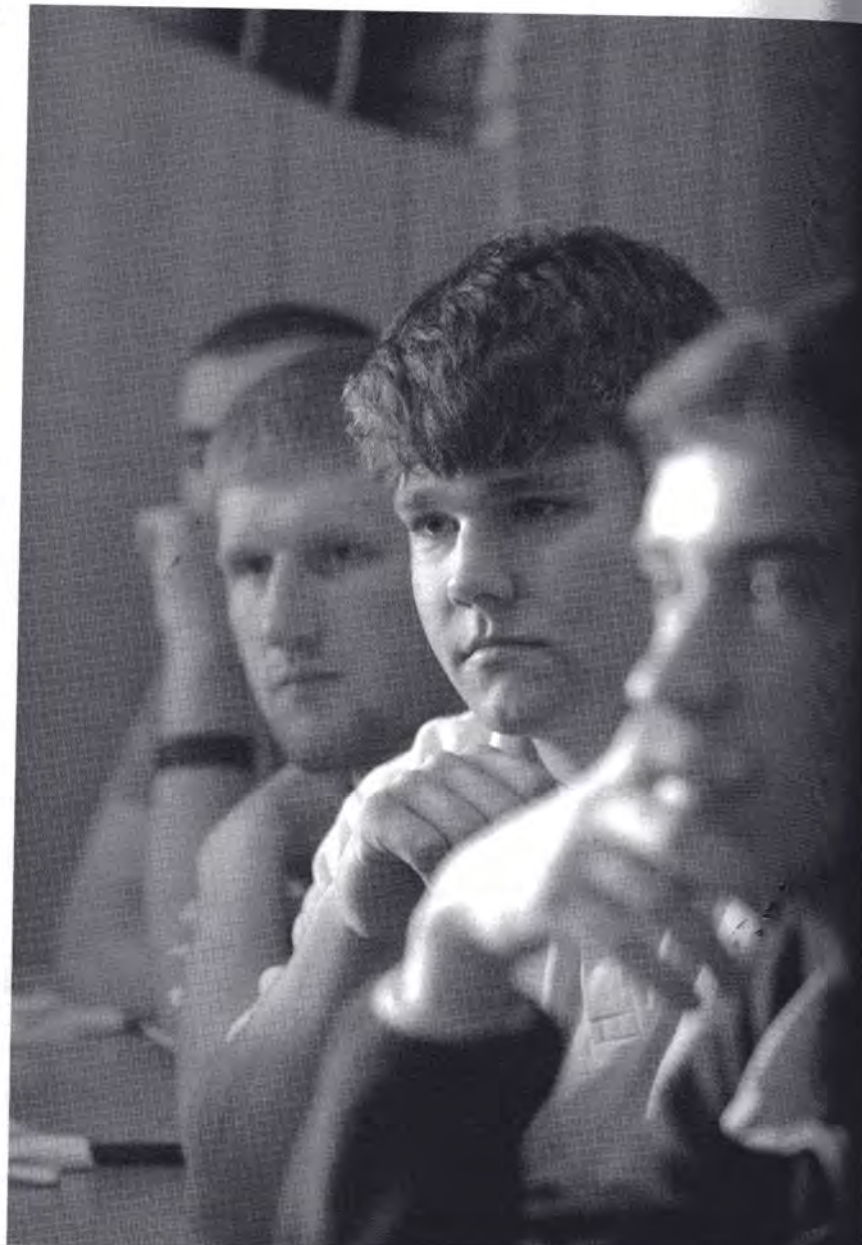
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Wilson, Dunk and Jason listening to William Gay



William Gay reads his prize-winning short story, "The Paper Hanger," in his Hohenwald cabin.

How long have you been back in Hohenwald?

WG: I've been here almost constantly for 25 years.

Has this area of the rural South changed much?

WG; Saturn [the auto plant 25 miles away] changed everything. We had people coming in here who didn't want to live there; they wanted to live at a reasonable distance. But it probably changed before that. The rural South began to change in the 50s when people got TV. They saw how others lived and they went north from here and got decent jobs.

Ron Rash says we're losing a connectedness to the land. Do you believe that?

WG: It's sure threatened around here. The timber's being cut, even the little stuff. They chip it. There is a disconnectedness from the land but there's not much we can do about it. People don't feel connected to it anymore. Now it's like most people are just gypsies.

You write about those people?

WG: The wanderers are just more interesting to me. The people I write about don't usually know when they get up in the morning where they will be in the evening.

How did you make a living before you were a writer?

WG: I was in the Navy, lived in New York. Then I came back here and I was a carpenter and traveled to do construction for years. I learned to lay brick for a while—all this to support my family.

And then you started writing?

WG: I'd been writing since I was fourteen. Then I was in the navy, Vietnam, New York, Chicago. All this time I was writing. When I was young I was reading Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner. It seemed like a natural progression to go from reading *Look Homeward Angel* and *The Sound and the Fury* to writing. I started sending stories out—first *The New Yorker*, then *Harpers*, right on down the list. After a while I figured out I should be submitting to the literary quarterlies. I had some success there. An agent saw a story and asked me if I had a novel and I wrote *The Long Home*. The title is a metaphor for death, from Ecclesiastes. It's set in the same place as *Provinces of Night*, right around here.

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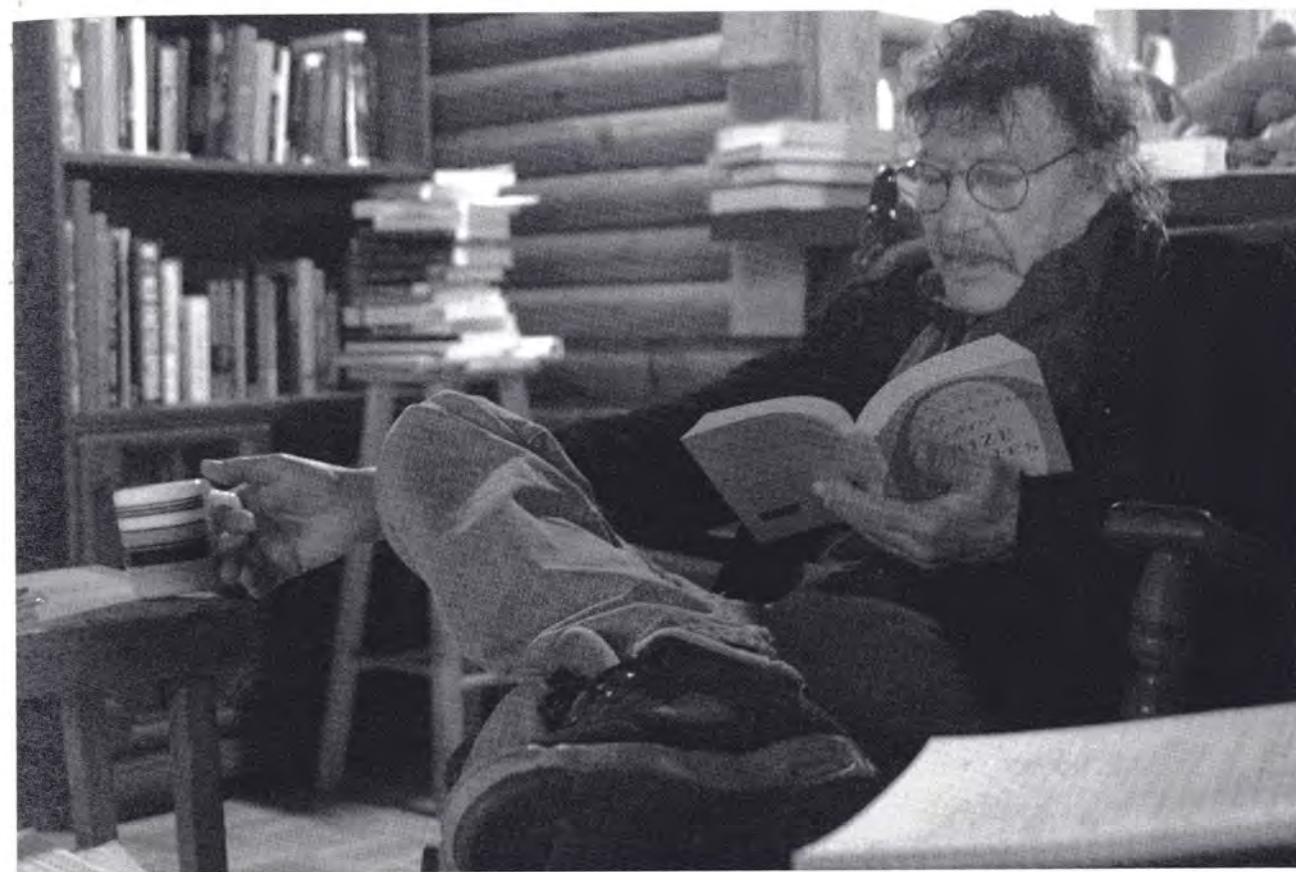
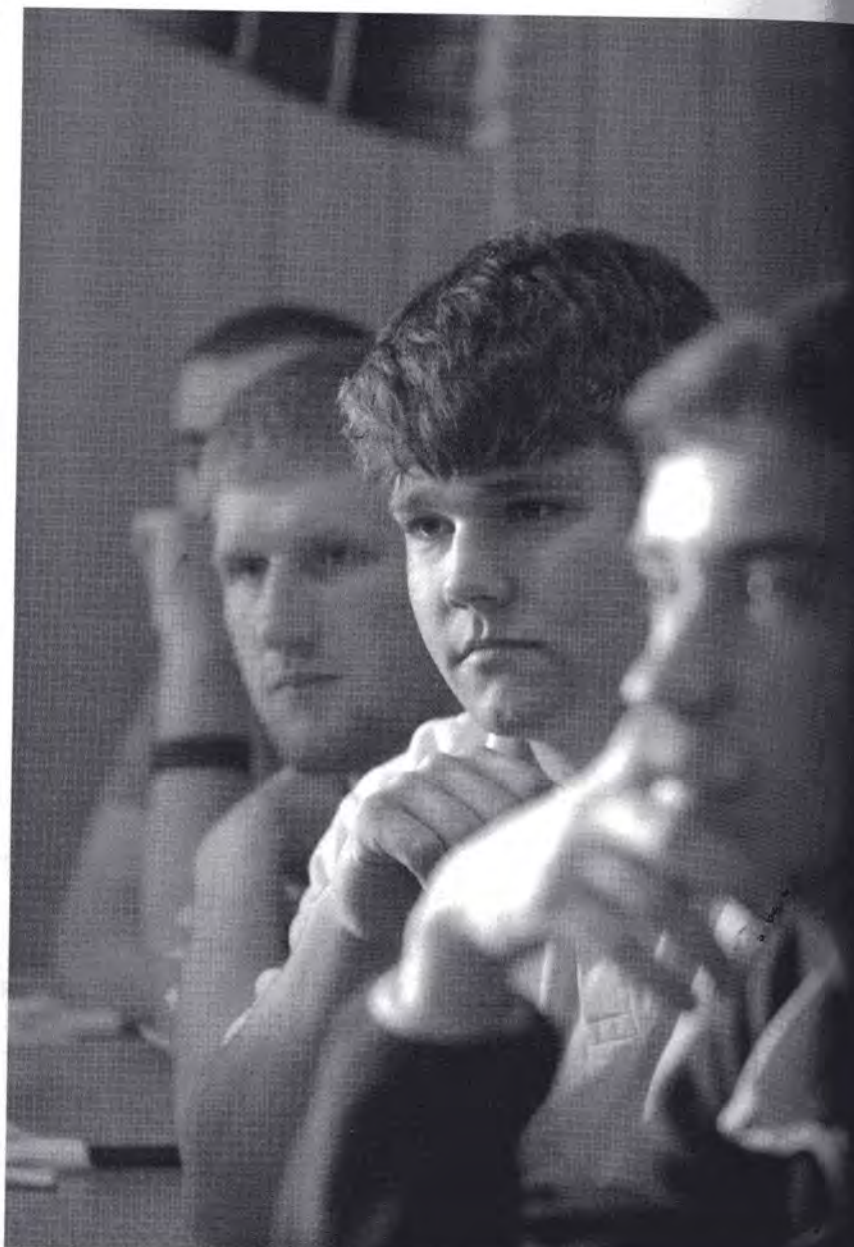
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You also write about young people.

WG: I like writing about young people and old people. The young are interesting because everything's up for grabs.

We're going to Oxford next. Any thoughts on it?

WG: I thought Oxford was like Oz; once you pass the city limits you fade out. There's a presence there. I guess it's the whole Faulkner mystique. They say Rowan Oak's haunted. Piano music. They say you can still hear it.

The check came and Gay rose, his plate untouched. We packed into our vans and rode in search of an Elephant Sanctuary for retired circus elephants. We didn't find it. Instead we followed the creek through pure rural country—winter timber, creek bottom fields, small patches of wasted corn, and horses in every field, then backtracked to William's house.

Inside the cabin, a blanket lay on the sofa missing the body that had slept under it. The author's other basic needs were close at hand: a guitar resting on the recliner, a half-eaten sleeve of saltines, and a prominent music and DVD collection that threatened to overflow the wooden shelves.

William, much smaller in his rocker beneath his owl-shaped glasses, read us his O'Henry Award winning short story "The Paper Hanger" from behind his unpretentious, curly gray moustache. He talked of writing, and his life through a generous hour.

WG: After my ex-girlfriend read that story I think she was kind of scared of me. She broke up with me after that.

What are three things you like about the South?

WG: By and large the people. Things are slower. People think a little slower and people down here take a little more time to think about things. I like the fact that the landscape is different. I couldn't live where there weren't trees—thunderstorms, changes in the weather. Is that three?

And the one thing you don't like?

WG: Southerners can be short-sighted, particularly about race.

Something Old, Something New— Possibilities for Defining the South

by Wilson Peden

Hohenwald. Say it fast and it sounds like "hole in the wall." That's kind of what Hohenwald is. If Tennessee is a city block, then Hohenwald is that restaurant you'd call a hole in the wall; there's a shabby looking facade, but you know there are some treasures on the inside. Like fiction writer William Gay.

William Gay shows a little bit of that "hole in the wall condition" himself. Simply looking at William, it's perfectly believable that he scares other writers at conventions. His hair is gray and wiry, growing long and curly in the back almost to his shoulders. A scruffy mustache and soul patch do little to hide the deep creases along his mouth—cigarettes and hard living taking their toll. But when he speaks, his voice is soft and gentle. There's no country slang or broken grammar—every sentence is lucid prose. This is the voice he writes his fiction with.

Though the voice of Gay's fiction is almost poetic, his scenarios and characters are rough—"at the fringes" he would say, working class people who don't know where their next meal is going to come from, or what they'd be willing to do to get it. The Bloodworths, the family at the center of Gay's novel, *Provinces of Night*, seem to have a lot in common with Faulkner's Snopeses. More than forty years after Faulkner's death, the Southern Gothic is alive and well, and so is the land that it sprang from.

Gay's novels aren't a throwback to or imitation of an earlier style—he writes about what he knows, about places like Hohenwald. Hohenwald still stands today as testament to some of the best and worst of what many call a bygone era. There is rural, open space, small farms and undeveloped land, natural wilderness beauty. There is also, according to William Gay, economic depression and stubborn closed-mindedness. Hohenwald is in many ways a portrait of the typical Southern town in the mid-20th century.

It's easy to make broad generalizations about the South. An outsider might say the South is a backwater region that has refused to move into the future. A patriotic Southerner might counter with reports of foreign immigration, increased industry moving in, and the existence of liberal meccas like Chapel Hill and Asheville. The truth is that they both exist, often within a few miles of each other.

I have been aware of the great geographic and cultural diversity of the South for some time, since my grandfather first took me traveling in the Southeast, up the Appalachians and across the Cumberland Gap, forging into horse country in western Tennessee and Kentucky. The people on one side of the mountain aren't the same as the people on the



other side. Don't even get me started on the mountains versus the coast. It's easy to see how disparate geographies have created a kaleidoscope culture in the South that shifts with the landscape. What's harder to see is that the South still exists in many different times.

Hohenwald, the town that wouldn't leave the fifties behind, is not so far from Nashville, a definite urban center. Nashville is a thoroughly modern city, with the interstates and skyline to prove it. Nashville might be built on a musical heritage, but that heritage has been so commercialized that it's been locked away behind glass in shops and museums. The only things left in the streets are concrete and neon. Nashville could be anywhere—you won't see anything Southern unless you pay the admission price.

If Hohenwald is a picture of the past, and towns like Nashville and Chapel Hill are the future, then if we look at enough towns and cities, we can get a sort of timeline of the South—snapshots at different stages of development. Instead of trying to define the South in one broad swath and say where it was and is, there is the opportunity to see

where it's going. With rural places like Hohenwald and the Mississippi Delta, there's a rare opportunity—a chance to see exactly what will happen to those places with the coming of development. A chance to step in and make the South what we want it to be.

Maybe some things shouldn't change. I, for one, would like to see some places stay as sparse as they are, leave a little room to breathe out in the countryside. I'd like to see places like Ellicott Rock Wilderness stay wild, and never see the touch of development. We've seen the might-be future of these places—mile-long strip malls like Muscle Shoals are not a pleasant thought to me. And they don't have to happen either.

Not that we should preserve everything. I've never seen such economic desolation as the ghost towns of the Delta, small towns that just linger in squalor. Nor do I want to hang on to the kind of deliberate ignorance that William Gay describes in his hometown. Some changes in the South have been for the good. In the late seventies, Oxford experienced a type of literary Renaissance spurred by the arrival of William Morris and the founding of Square Books, which not only brought about a mini-intellectual enlightenment, but breathed new life into the dying town square. All this was accomplished without making any sacrifices to the town's historic legacy, or inflating the small population there.

I don't know exactly what the South should be, or where it is headed on its current track. What I do know is that from what I have seen lately, much of the Old South still remains as it always was. There are still farms, wildernesses, small towns, strong traditions. And there are also some big cities, some new industry, some new cultures. There is still time to hang on to the Old South, or as much of it as we want to hang on to, and there are plenty of new things to build on as well. If there is one thing I have learned about the South, it is that the opportunity to define the South and what it means to be Southern in the twenty-first century is still very much an open possibility.



"Nashvillites" head out into the neon, admission cash in hand.



Racin' the Way it Ought to Be: Why NASCAR Is Still Southern

by Trish Makres

My first true NASCAR experience came two summers ago, when I joined the fans who instantly made me fall in love with the sport. Jim Wright, in his *Fixin' to Git: One Fan's Love Affair with NASCAR*, states that "NASCAR fans are the nicest bunch of folks you'd ever want to meet. True, there's the occasional nasty drunk, racist half-wit, and rude, slobbering idiot, but these are people you'd find anywhere there's a lot of beer being downed." And beer there is; my friends and I claim that a NASCAR race is the only place that you can carry a cooler around, pop open a beer, and down it right in front of the police—who are doing the same thing, although discreetly—and not get arrested for public intoxication. One August night (Bristol is known for its famous August night race), I met every kind of NASCAR fan. The two men who sat beside us in the Dale Earnhardt Terrace continuously offered us Crown Royal. When we looked like we weren't having fun, they passed it over to us; when we looked like we were having *too* much fun, they still passed it over. Dale Jr. won the Sharpie 500 that night, and, although we had to concentrate very hard, we saw him cross the finish line and complete his victory lap. After the race, we met the good ole boys, the fans from Louisiana who drove us around a junkyard that overlooked the track and told us how their wives could never appreciate Bristol the way they do. Then, after getting lost and somehow ending up on the opposite side of the track, we met the nasty drunk who thought we wouldn't notice that he was leading us *away* from where we wanted to go.

We never thought that we'd top August 2004, but a year later, we did. It was a memorable night because it was Rusty Wallace's last Bristol Race, and Rusty (NASCAR fans never use last names to refer to their drivers) loves Bristol. We had a special ceremony in which fans in one section of the track held up cards that spelled out "Thank you Rusty" in huge white letters with a blue background. Then two army jets flew over the track to honor Rusty's famous number two. And that was the night that we met the other kind of race fan, the completely redneck and aggressive drunk. My friend and I were very excited about our hand-made, sleeveless shirts that stated, "We love Dale Jr." But we didn't realize that they would draw so much attention. On the back, my shirt said, "Bump draft this," and my friend's stated, "Wanna rub fenders?" I had no idea that other fans would take "bump draft this" literally; all kinds of people bought us drinks because they simply couldn't resist staring at the back of our shirts. People even asked if they could take our picture. Sure, in exchange for a beer! Needless to say, we were once again

intoxicated without ever buying one beer. But our fun ended when my friend was slapped by a man's girlfriend. Apparently, he had been checking out our shirts as we walked by, and his girlfriend was not too happy about it. I turned around to find my friend on the ground with a bunch of men holding this strange woman away from her. The woman and her boyfriend were removed from the track, and my friend's face was a little swollen, but she was fine, thanks to all free beer we were given. Yeah, there can be the occasional aggressive and nasty drunk, but in general, race fans are very caring and passionate people. They're passionate about their driver and generous with their drinks, no matter who wins.

It has been my experience with NASCAR that fans who support different drivers get along just fine. But there is one exception: the Earnhardt fans versus the Gordon fans. Wright points out that "Winston Cup fans used to fall into three roughly equal-sized groups: Jeff Gordon fans, Dale Earnhardt fans, and everyone else." Though Earnhardt died tragically in 2001, the separation of fans into these three categories is still the present model. Dale Jr., Earnhardt's son, became the favorite among those fans who loyally supported his father. But his name wasn't the only reason for his success. When NASCAR returned to Daytona after Dale Earnhardt's sudden death, Dale Jr. finished with a victory, and following this emotional win, Earnhardt Jr. went on to establish himself as one of NASCAR's superstars, taking his father's place as one of Gordon's top rivals.

If you're a Dale Jr. fan, it's almost forbidden to support Gordon. Even when I attended my first true NASCAR race, I was aware of this unspoken rule. So when I ask people who they like and they say "Gordon," I simply walk away. Like avoiding danger, walking away from a Gordon fan is instinctual. In fact, you really don't even have to ask; one look at the cooler and koozie they're carrying and the hat and shirt they're wearing says it all. But shouldn't we all just get along? There seems to be a mixed verdict on that. The rivalry started, as Wright explains, before the death of Earnhardt:

When they were both driving, Gordon and Earnhardt were, by a wide margin, the two most popular and simultaneously least popular drivers on the circuit. Earnhardt fans were "old school," good old boys (and girls), the kinds of folks who drive pickups, sport tattoos, eat pork rinds, hunt, fish, and drink cheap beer. Gordon fans are "pretty boys" (and girls), younger, more attractive wine-and-cheese types who drive sports utility vehicles, are proficient at video games, and jog regularly to stay in shape.

Gordon took NASCAR's future in a new direction, but Earnhardt kept NASCAR tied to its rural Southern roots; he embodied the traditions that made the sport popular.

And the debate continues. The death of Earnhardt didn't end the rivalry; in fact, the success of Dale Jr. only heightened it. Dale Jr. fans will even include Earnhardt Sr. in the arguments, claiming Jr. is better simply because he came from legendary blood. A 2003 *Roanoke Times* article by Dustin Long points out this ongoing conflict:

[To Earnhardt Jr. fans] Gordon represents what is wrong with NASCAR. Gordon isn't a Southerner, has too clean an image and won too much without struggling early in his career.

Earnhardt Jr.—carrying the traits of his late father—represents the South, a hard-nosed approach and a rough image. Of course, Gordon fans disagree. Drawn by their driver's good looks and winning ability, they grew NASCAR from a regional obsession to a national sport. Either way, there is a natural tension among their fans.

Dale Jr.'s father embodied the mythic Old South, and Jr. represents the South's future. He's promoting NASCAR by appearing in advertisements and on TV shows. His rough appearance and bachelor status have made women love him (as I demonstrated at the August 2005 race with a shirt that said, "Born to be Mrs. Dale Jr.") and men idolize him. Earnhardt Jr. embodies the New South. He remains true to our culture but is willing to incorporate our nation's new developments such as technology.

Although Gordon also incorporates the nation's changes, he cannot represent the New South simply because he is not Southern. The incorporation of a driver from California has drawn more fans to the sport and, but at the same time, caused controversy among Southern fans: how can an outsider be the one to perfect a Southern sport? The root of the argument between Gordon and Earnhardt fans will always be that one isn't from the South and one is. In a message to non-Gordon fans, Wright proclaims, "to the legions of Gordon-haters, I say, 'Get over it.'" As an Earnhardt Jr. fan and a Southerner, I say, "Never."

The sport of NASCAR has, no doubt, increased its popularity nationally. In the beginning, it boasted Southern champions, raceways and fans. Today, however, there's competition from outside of the region. But Southerners still claim NASCAR. It originated out of *our* moonshining ancestors trying to outrun the law on the South's back-roads. Its fan base is still mostly Southern white men, and it greatly embodies both New and Old South traditions and culture. The debate among fans is whether the sport is still Southern. Earnhardt Jr. fans blame Gordon for invading a Southern sport, and Gordon fans think Earnhardt Jr. and his followers are keeping the sport from becoming a national and global phenomenon. It's a battle between the South and the rest of the nation. Our beloved sport is becoming popular, but that doesn't mean that it's not Southern. By golly, NASCAR *is* Southern, and nothing that happens will change the fact that its roots belong to us. Non-Southerners may be increasingly bumping our fenders, but when the race is over, we hold the checkered flag.



Quenching the Devil's Thirst

by Ivy Farr

History books are crammed full of stories about Prohibition—the American “alcohol holiday” of the 1920s and 30s that led to the peddling of illegal alcohol throughout the country is one example. Chicago was a hotbed of illegal activity. Names such as Al “Scarface” Capone and “Bugs” Moran are nearly as widely-known now as they were then, and the story of the Saint Valentine’s Day Massacre has since horrified the American people through books, television, and other popular media.

The *Reader’s Digest* article “American Folklore and Legend” asserts that “the illegal manufacture, importing, and distribution of booze during the Thirteen Years became the foundation on which present-day organized crime came into being.” It’s no surprise that the mere mention of “Prohibition” conjures images of tommy guns, mobsters, and widespread violence.

But omitted from most books is the history of the rural South and the impact that illegal alcohol had on its culture during Prohibition, pre-Prohibition, and even in modern times. Moonshining, boot-legging, and liquor-running were closely-guarded secrets in their heyday and still remain so to this day; but the impact that the illegal practice had on rural southern culture is evident in both obvious and subtle forms today in cartoons, advertising, movies, music, and sports.

The practice of making homemade liquor can be traced back hundreds of years. Many Southerners’ ancestors had made it in their home country before they ever came to America. The tradition was passed through the generations, not as a means of making money but mainly for recreational purposes. The year 1794 brought the first tax on alcohol, which resulted in the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania and Ohio. The government continued to collect these taxes until 1918 when Prohibition began, making the distillation and selling of alcohol illegal.

In the late 1910s a long period of economic hardship began for rural Southerners. King Cotton had been depleting the southern soil’s richness throughout generations of improper farming techniques, so cotton crops were sparse to begin with. To compound the situation, the boll weevil was introduced in the southwestern United States in 1892 from Mexico. This pest soon devastated the South’s cotton crops, entering Alabama in 1915 and destroying the vast majority of its crops by 1919. In 1921, the weevil entered South Carolina.

The Great Depression, which officially began for the country in October of 1929, took



A moonshiner's abandoned mash pit in Ellicott Rock Wilderness

its toll on the entire country and made no exceptions for the already-suffering rural south. Workers at a few factories in the South lost their jobs when those factories shut down, and the Depression pushed matters from bad to worse for small subsistence farmers. They needed another form of income to supplement the meager earnings they could get from their farms. Prohibition had made alcohol illegal in 1918, yet Northerners continued obtaining the contraband from Canada throughout the dry period.

Prohibition had been especially popular, ironically enough, in the South, but the demand for alcohol was certainly not absent there. Southerners had been making their own alcohol for years. Moonshining presented an excellent opportunity to rural Southerners who needed to pay debts. Folks could produce it on or close to their own property and sell it tax-free—that is, if they could evade the law long enough to deliver it to the buyer.

The seclusion of rural Appalachia was ideal for producing moonshine. The two most important elements for the process were seclusion and running water. The shadowy Appalachian Mountains supplied both the solitude and isolation necessary to hide stills from law enforcement agents as well as plentiful creeks and streams to distill the strong product. The cool water of the Appalachian springs was perfect for the final step in the distillation process. The prime “cooking season” was during the summer, or at least while the leaves were still on the trees. This hid the smoke that rose from the stills as the beer was brewed and fermented. The dense forests also provided the best wood for making moonshine. Hickory and locust wood was best for heating the fires, because they produced less smoke.



Producing only a few gallons of moonshine required massive amounts of supplies. One recipe shown on an Internet encyclopedia called for 50 gallons of water, a bushel of cornmeal, a peck of wheat bran, 25-50 pounds of sugar, and between one-half to one gallon of corn malt or yeast. The concoction was boiled in a 55-gallon still where it would take about four or five days to ferment. Often, the beer produced after fermentation was sold, since more beer could be produced from such a recipe than could liquor. The yield of liquor for this recipe was only one or two gallons.

There were three names for homemade liquor. “Moonshine” got its name because the distillation process usually took place at night because it limited smoke rising from the mountains which would signal that a still was operating. “White Lightnin’” was so-named because of the feeling one got after drinking a slug of the potent stuff. White Lightnin’ was much stronger than most of the commercial liquors available today. “Mountain Dew” was also a popular name, which evoked images of the dew-covered grass on a misty mountain morning.

Though rural Appalachia was ideal for *producing* moonshine, transporting it presented a different problem. After Prohibition, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Commission was determined to collect the taxes due to the federal government for alcohol consumption, while moonshiners were determined to outrun those tax-collectors to provide tax-free liquor to consumers. The rural Southern moonshiner was pitted against the city-slicker federal agent in an all-out war. One “old timer” cited on Wikipedia recalled that a bootlegger he once knew “always took different ways home, just in case the revenuers were waiting on him.”

Rural Southerners designed cars that were ideal for carrying liquor and that could easily dump the stuff should the driver be followed by a federal agent. Powerful motors were placed in small, lightweight cars, making them able to run at incredible speeds. Bootleggers thus gained an extreme advantage over federal agents. Instead of using violence to defend their territory as the gangs of Chicago had done, bootleggers used their advantage of speed to outrun rather than to outshoot their rivals.

This battle between bootleggers and federal agents was immortalized in the movie *Thunder Road*, filmed in 1958. A primitive version of cinematography compared to today’s standards, it portrays the life of Luke Doolin, a bootlegger who hauls his father’s moonshine from the mountains of Kentucky to Memphis and to Asheville. The movie opens with a few lines describing the enormous monetary loss incurred by the U.S. due to moonshining. A special branch of the government was dedicated to seeking out and shutting down illegal stills and impounding the powerful cars used for transport.

The movie depicts just how dangerous the life of a bootlegger—the man who actually ran the liquor to the distributor, not to be confused with the moonshiner who manufactured it—really was. It excites audiences with car chases between Luke and the federal agents he tries to outrun on several occasions. It also gives the viewer a picture of the moonshining process as a business. Each community had its own area to which it distributed, and conflict arose if another bootlegger invaded their territory. In a meeting concerning a rival gang of bootleggers, a moonshiner says, “We’re in a business, Jess. We

have to keep up-to-date or go under.” As a result, bootleggers were always embellishing their cars with more powerful motors and other innovative features to increase their advantages in car chases.

The movie’s theme song, “Thunder Road,” rose to the top of the music charts after the movie was released. Sung by Robert Mitchum, who played the lead role in the movie, the lyrics paint an accurate picture of the bootlegger’s life:

*Sometimes into Asheville, sometimes Memphis town,
The revenuers chased him, but they couldn't run him down
Each time they thought they had him, his engine would explode
And he drove by like they were standing still on Thunder Road.
Thunder, thunder, over Thunder Road,
Thunder was his engine and white lightnin' was his load.
Moonshine, moonshine, to quench the devil's thirst,
The law, they never got him, 'cause the devil got him first.*

Lucas Doolin, infamous bootlegger and protagonist of the movie, dies in a fatal car accident after running over a track of nails set across the road by the rival gang of bootleggers, showing just how dangerous the life of a bootlegger could be. Driving in high-speed chases often led to horrific accidents or even death.

Out of these dangerous car chases came one of the most popular spectator sports in the United States: NASCAR. Young, hot-headed bootleggers had cars that could outrun federal agents. One may be sure that the exaggerated stories, bragging, and boasting so typical of Southern folk soon followed. All it took was one bootlegger to challenge another to a race. Add another racer, and you have a sport. Born in Asheville, North Carolina; Spartanburg, South Carolina; and Dawsonville, Georgia, the legend of NASCAR evolved out of the very tradition of moonshining and bootlegging, and has now grown into an incredibly successful spectator sport.

Remnants of a past filled with moonshiners, secret stills, and outrunning law enforcement can be seen in other ways as well. The backwoods of Appalachia is the setting for John Rose’s comic strip *Snuffy Smith*. A moonshiner himself, Snuffy, the rural, patch-work mountain man in a floppy hat, is always concocting some plan to evade the authorities, and, better yet, is always successful. Just this week’s strip depicts the sheriff accusing Snuffy of stealing some chickens. “I’ll have ya dead to rights on this-un ‘cuz I got full descriptions of th’ missin’ fowl. They wuz leghorns! White leghorns!” Snuffy then states proudly, “Sorry, sheriff—Can’t halp ya! Th’ only chickens in here are golden brown!” as Ma holds a plate of freshly fried chicken. The moonshiner is depicted even in this Sunday’s newspaper as a crafty man who is successful in breaking the law.

The world of music has developed the image of the moonshiner as well. George Jones popularized the song “White Lightnin’.” The song is a tribute to the life of a moonshiner: one with a rock ‘n’ roll beat and comic lyrics. Scottie Wiseman bought the rights to and produced a song called “Mountain Dew.” Accompanied by bluegrass instruments, he sings of the secrecy of obtaining moonshine and keeping it a secret from federal agents.

These humorous songs are an important part of Southern culture and were incredibly popular when they were released.

The “Mountain Dew” label is familiar to all those who enjoy a refreshing drink on a summer day. The first label of Mountain Dew, the mellow soft drink manufactured by Pepsi, depicted several moonshiners in their stereotypical felt hats, guns aimed at (invisible) federal agents. The bottle also included the phrase, “It’ll tickle yore innards!” an allusion to the sensation produced in the original “Mountain Dew”, and by the carbonation in the “soft” drink. The stereotypical image of the moonshiner as a barefoot mountain-man with a floppy felt hat and worn-out overalls is a popular advertising image for tourist sites as well.

NASCAR, popular music, advertising campaigns, cartoons, and movies have all been born out of the illegal moonshining culture. Festivals are held each year all over the South celebrating the illegal activity. Moonshining was terribly successful, and it quickly became the new “cash crop” of the rural South. It must be noted, however, that moonshining at its peak was not recreational; most moonshiners operated their stills out of necessity in order to be able to make ends meet. It was not an occupation that made people rich. “By no means,” W.D. Washburn says, “were these people living the rich wealthy life styles of the ‘Great Gatsby’ parties of the eastern shore or with the gangster flare of the notorious Chicago bootleggers, but instead, they were just simply surviving.” Moonshining and boot-legging saw many rural Southerners through hard times and also landed many of them in jail. But their illegal activity gave rise to an entire element of culture that gives the rural South much of the personality that it obstinately clings to today.

Journal Entry

by Laura Vaughn

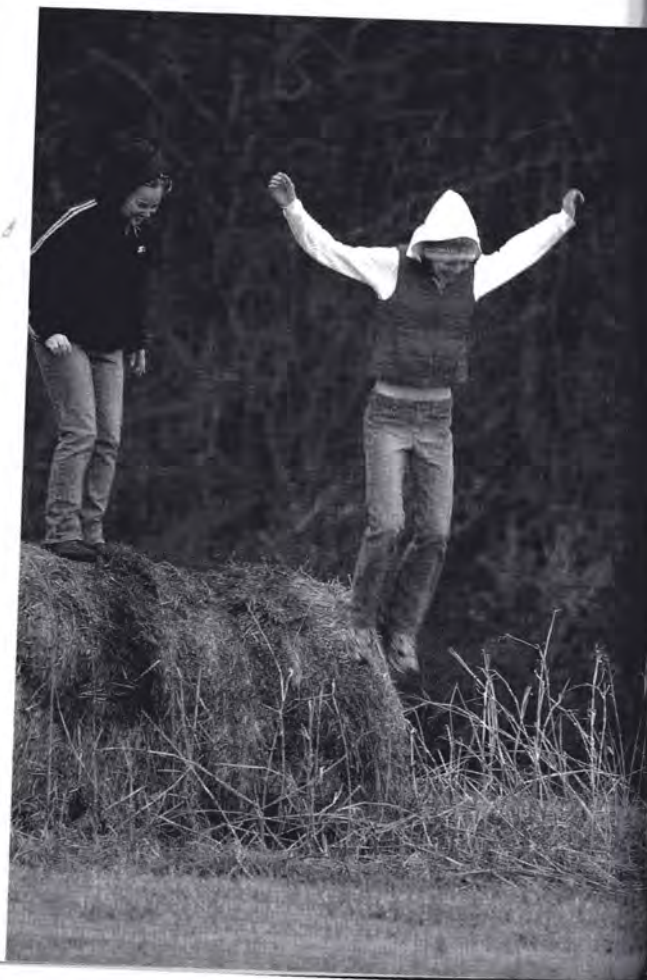
The morning started with a meeting in Trakas' and Lane's room. Scattered on the floor and over beds we started discussing what it always came down to in the end: Wal-Mart. I wondered and then suggested that the mega-chain was not actually a threatening concern for the average Southerner because they enjoyed the "low prices, always" and, in general, weren't as consumerist as the rest of the country. Not everyone agreed and I was shocked that not everyone conceded that my comment was brilliant. Oh, Laura.

While leaving Muscle Shoals we saw—

1. Advertisement for future hotel: *Southern hospitality at it's finest*
2. The Rocking Chair, a country store and rest area
3. Dixie Gas
4. Elegant bar named HOGS & HEIFERS
5. Cotton field
6. Railroad
7. Coon Dog Cemetery (but I think people are buried there)

A windy day on the Natchez Trace. Gay wrote a piece on the history of Natchez Trace but his dastardly ex-girlfriend stole his only copy. Heartless. So, relying on his memory, he recounted the old road's exciting history as a dangerous path plagued by one-eyed pirates and ax-murderers, (okay, maybe not pirates and murderers, but at least a few thieves), looking to confiscate from the north-bound travelers the goods that they had just traded for in the South. The dern thing, incredibly, was still pock-marked by the tracks where the wagons forded the river.

Laura leaps while Ivy contemplates the ethics of haybale jumping

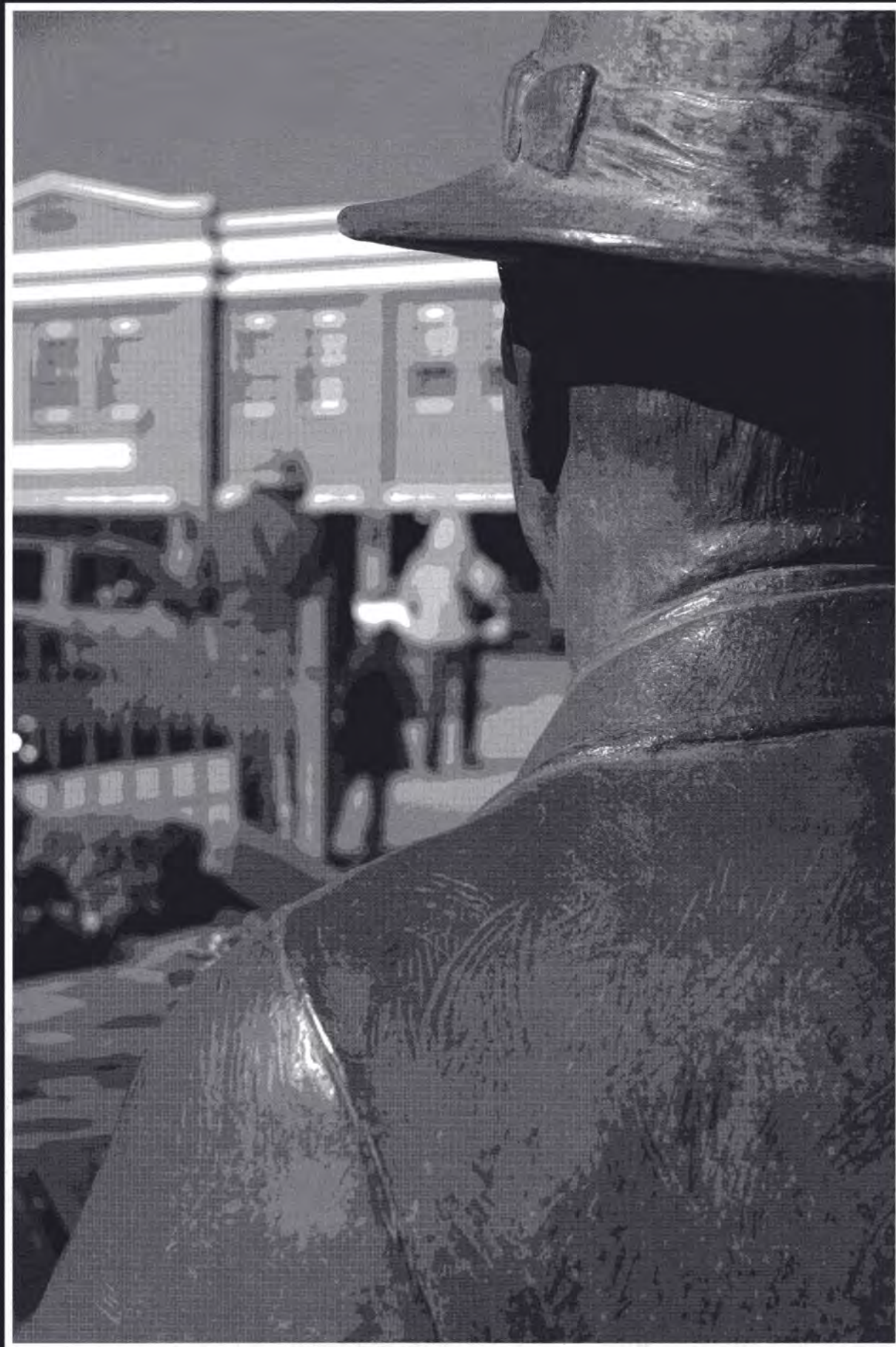


We stopped at the Indian burial grounds, Frisbee in hand. Good luck with all that wind. Though the soggy ground ate my shoes and the harsh gusts of winds ate my SOUL, I tried to be a cheerful complainer. The dead Indians—let's just say Native Americans for Dr. Mandlove's sake—looked warmer in their mounds. So many layers of history today. Highlight: jumping off an enormous hay bale with Ivy.

After Jason asked an official-looking local outside of Darie Kream (Laura, don't forget that this is not a spelling error) where the best hamburger in town could be found, we heeded his advice and drove up to Johnnie's Drive-In, where some guy named Elvis used to come by for one of their patties and an RC Cola. Our very lively waitress Treba [treee-ba] delighted in our floundering picture-taking and served us all some very crispy and very fried peach pies. With ice cream.

Look. There's Elvis' birthplace. Everyone jump out. Everyone back in. Over the river and through the woods. To father Faulkner's house we go.





5

In which we arrived in Oxford,

Faulkner's hometown in the rain, ready to stay put for a few days and catch up on some reading. We immediately ran to the famous Square Books, finding comfort and awe in the store revered by writers across the nation. After checking into our hotel, we wandered through the neighborhood and ate supper at a Greek restaurant, to pay tribute to Dr. Trakas' heritage, and that night some of the boys enjoyed the culture of the hotel bar. The next morning, we visited the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, located at the heart of the Ole Miss campus. There, curator and director Charles Reagan Wilson discussed graduate school, the Center's Southern encyclopedia, William Faulkner, and his church fan collection in his newly refurbished conference room. After a unique lunch at a local country cooking hotspot called Ajax, we visited the Faulkner house, awed by the quiet halls and the manicured lawn, and the literary history around us.

Later, we hiked back to our hotel, ready to shop and wander through the city on our own. The next day, we headed for the river in the company of Dixon Bynum. We marveled at the empty cotton fields, white farmhouses, and Parchman Prison on our way to the banks of the Mighty Mississippi. At the river, we walked across a broad stretch of sandy beach, where the river had receded but would soon rise to rule again. The boys got in touch with their inner cavemen, impressed by their ability to build fire in the wind in such a wild and natural place. We listened to Dixon's essays, watched the barges push down the river in the twilight, and returned in the darkness to our vans and civilization (and the end of the Carolina Panthers football game on the van radio).

On our last day in Oxford, we visited with author Tom Franklin who entertained us with stories of his own writings and his relations with some of the more colorful characters we'd met on our travels. We ate with the ebullient writer in the basement of Bouré, a local French eatery, and Tom continued his antics through dinner, drawing sharks and self-portraits and laughing about the defects of his genetics. That night we wandered the streets and bars of Oxford and played one last time with our new local friends, sad to leave but ready to meet up with the friendly faces of the Wofford kids who were cleaning up the Mississippi coast after Hurricane Katrina.

OXFORD

alaska

by Tom Franklin

Our aim was this: Alaska.

To abandon Mobile at dawn without telling anybody, not even our girlfriends or our boss at the plant. Bruce knew a bail jumper who got a deckhand job on a crab boat off the Alaskan coast where she made five hundred dollars a day. Bruce was divorced for the third time and I'd never been married, so we planned to sell our cars and Bruce's house trailer and buy an olive drab Ford four-wheel-drive pickup with a camper, fill it full of those sharp green pinecones hard as hand grenades. Bruce'd heard you could sell those suckers for five bucks apiece in New England.

They're crazy up there, he said.

Driving through Georgia and Tennessee, we'd look for tent revivals where they had faith healing. If we found a good one we'd stop and visit a service. Bruce would fake heart disease and I'd be an alcoholic—to make it convincing, he said I'd have to grimace, moan, and clutch his left arm, until we had the whole congregation praying for us. When the ushers passed the KFC bucket for donations, we'd shrug and say we were flat broke, just poor travelers. Homeless.

Bruce had stolen his ex-wife's Polaroid camera, which we'd keep handy for making pictures—hawks on fenceposts, grizzly bears, church marquees that said THE LORD IS COMING SOON, then right under that BINGO 8:00 EVERY TUESDAY. We'd have a stack of books-on-tape from the public library, too: John Grisham, Stephen King and even self-help. In the Badlands of South Dakota, when we pulled off the road to sleep in the back of the truck with our feet sticking out, we'd play an *Improve Your Vocabulary Tape*, learn words like *eclectic* and *satyr*.

At night we'd stop in dives, me in my dark glasses and Bruce in his eelskin cowboy boots. There'd be smoky harems of women interested in such eclectic guys, and they'd insist on buying us boilermakers. When I picked up a babe, I'd take the truck and leave Bruce arm-wrestling a drunk welder at the bar. Or if he got lucky and split with a startling honey, I'd amble to the jukebox and punch up John Prine and lure my dream girl away from the line-dancing bikers and cowboys. In the middle of the fight, I'd crawl bleeding out the back and sleep on a rock next to a cow skull and wait until the olive drab truck topped the hill in the morning.

We'd make pictures of the girls, too. You'd be surprised how many get off from posing in motel rooms, Bruce said. He would "let on" to some of the drunker ladies that we were

advance photographers for the swimsuit issue, our names Abe Z. and Horatio. At the other end of the bar I'd be telling them that we were scientists from Texas researching barn owls. But to that adventurous woman running the pool table, the redhead wearing tight cutoff jeans, the kind of woman you know has a green iguana tattooed on her hip, to her we'd tell the truth: Alaska. Bruce said she could tag along, but he was sure she'd get homesick thousands of miles before the crab boat. Imagine the scene: some dusty Wyoming ghost town and this woman sobbing and hugging our necks, angry that she's such a crybaby. She would climb the steps and we'd watch her sad pretty face in the window as the bus lurched off, and when she was gone Bruce would sigh with relief and, after a few drinks, we'd get in the truck and go north.

I'd miss her terribly.

If we saw the right brand of dog—it was a mutt we wanted, the ugliest in the lower forty-eight—we'd stop and bribe him with fast food. He could sit between us on the seat and lick our hands, and if he farted we could look at each other and yell, "Was that you?" and crank the windows down furiously. And, of course, we'd pick up chicks hitchhiking. When we got one, she could sit between us and hold the dog (we'd name him Handsome) and croon to him. We'd go days out of our way to get her home, but we wouldn't be crass and say, "Ass, gas or grass." All our rides would be free.

Because manners *were* important, we thought. So eating in truck stops, we'd put our napkins in our laps and remove our caps and say "Yes, ma'am" to the flirting women at nearby tables, would smile and wink and gather our doggie bags and leave 50 percent tips. Our waitresses would long to follow us, and the pretty gas station checkout girls would lean over their cash registers to read our names off the backs of our belts—not only because of our unusual looks and ugly dog, but our cultured Southern manners.

And sportsmen to the end, we'd skid off the road when we saw a private golf course. We'd step out of the trees in our loud pants and vault the fence and drive our used balls into the clouds, needing binoculars to watch the hole-in-ones three hundred yards away. The serious golfers, in their berets, would frown at each other as we played through, carrying only one driver each, and when the stern club attendant came, we'd disappear into the woods like satyrs and reappear magically at the clubhouse bar.

Or we'd stop if we found a good secluded pond, rig our rods with Snagless Sallys and pork rinds, cast into the hard-to-reach, around cypress knees, into grasses, keeping our lines flexible as the largemouth bass tore through the murk with the rind whipping against its gills. We'd set the hooks like pros and play the fish perfectly, then grill the shining wet lunkers over a campfire that night and sip the moonshine we'd stolen from bootleggers in Virginia. Handsome would prowl the pond and court his first she-wolf, the two of them baying softly, and in the firelight Bruce would uncase his mandolin and I'd warm up my harmonica, and we'd play tender ballads, love songs, so sweet the woods would grow still and sad around us, and just before we'd begin to lament all the people and places we'd left behind, things we'd never see again, we would stop playing as if on cue and look at each other, suddenly happy, remembering Alaska, waiting for us.

An Interview with Tom Franklin

We met Tom Franklin in his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, on a rainy Sunday afternoon. After walking twenty minutes from his home, he pulled us up the stairs of City Grocery, a bar known even in Oxford for its literary patronage. After quick greetings outside on the square he welcomed us to the upstairs balcony to begin our interview, a literary experience interspersed with banter and Bud Light. Tom explained to us, “I walked here to meet you guys. I like to eat. And I don’t exercise. I may die. This could be the last interview with Tom Franklin.” In turn, we felt more honored by our opportunity to interview Tom. Upon hearing that we had also interviewed William Gay, Tom exclaimed, “Sucks for y’all to see him and then me! It’s like a step down. Actually it’s like missing a step and then falling and breaking your ankle.”

Tom puts up an outrageous front. As he had a few afternoon drinks, Tom, noticing that no one else was drinking, said, “I feel like more of a drunk than normal. This is my first one today, by the way—with this hand.” During dinner he played up what seemed to be an exaggerated caricature of himself—the good ol’ boy turned story teller, a man who can drink with the best of them and still remember enough to write it all down in his next story. Being a self-proclaimed Southerner, Tom calls his four years at Arkansas, earning his MFA in creative writing, a trip to the North. Certainly liberal compared to the rest of Mississippi, Oxford is not the South Franklin usually writes about. But underneath the bluster there was also another Tom Franklin that we met, who spoke in between crude jokes and off the cuff anecdotes, a man who used to be the quiet fifteen year old from the introduction to *Poachers*, who never wanted to hunt and looked at working-class Alabama with the eyes of an outsider.



Tom, most of your writings seem to fit with an emerging genre that we call “Rough South,” a sort of new Southern Gothic. Why do you write in these settings, about these tough, unlikable characters?

TF: Well, I *like* those rough characters. If a character is too nice, I just don’t find him very interesting. And I really can’t write about “nice” characters—I’ve tried, and it just doesn’t work for me. A good thing for writers to remember is that no person is completely good or completely bad—almost everyone has a little of both in them. If your characters are too nice, no one will believe that they are real. Of course, the same goes for characters that are too bad—they become caricatures of villains. You have to actually care about the characters, or no one will keep reading. So I try to keep a balance, and I try to make sure that even my more despicable characters have some interesting and redeemable qualities.

Of course, most of these characters are at least partly me. Any character you create is going to have a little part of you in it. I guess I hate myself deep inside and it shows in

these characters. A lot of my writing is autobiographical in some sense. Most of these people and events are based on things that have happened to me and people I know. The three brothers from *Poachers* are based on three brothers who were my neighbors, the boys I described in the introduction of that collection. I played and fished with the Wiggins boys, and they were already expert hunters and fishermen when we were kids. Kent Wiggins could point at a spot, say “fish there,” and sure enough, when he cast to that spot, he caught a fish every time. They became the Gates brothers in *Poachers*. Snakebite, from “Grit,” was an actual man I worked with, at that same grit factory, and he *was* enormous, and he *did* have lots of knives, and he actually did have a tiny head. I’ve gotten in trouble for writing about people I know, or historical people, and writing too closely to the folks, or actually using their real names, idiot that I am.

Given all that you just said, it seems that your experiences growing up and working in Alabama are an integral part of your fiction. What advice would you give to other young writers for gathering the material for their fiction?

TF: Work lots of really weird jobs. I mean, you’ve read “Grit.” I actually met every one of those people. There’s plenty of good stuff out there without making anything up. You just have to find it and write it down. Of course, getting your heart broken is pretty good for a writer too.

Your stories tend to be based on real people and scenarios, but how do you actually go about writing them?

TF: It’s a lot of hard work, mostly. Fun, but really hard. Some people call fiction an art, but I think it’s a craft—you have to carefully sculpt your pieces, fit them together, make connections and smooth edges. For a long time I struggled with fitting together the pieces of my stories and making sense out of everything I wanted to write down. I had been working on *Poachers* for years, trying to find out why my characters showed up and did what they did. It took another writer’s advice to show me how a character’s past emotional makeup and past experiences formed the basis for his future actions, thus making the story move forward. “It’s called plot, shithead,” he said to me, but at the time it was a sort of revelation. When I write, I have to rework stories over and over again until all the events fit together smoothly and make sense. You have characters, they come into conflict, and a series of events results based on how those characters behave in the face of that conflict. I think the



best example for a beginning fiction writer is Dr. Seuss’s “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” In the first two lines of the story, you have an instant conflict, and everything else that happens occurs directly because of that conflict.

You’ve been open and forthcoming about all kinds of things. Are you equally willing to talk about the meaning of your stories?

TF: It’s fine to talk about theme and symbol, but mostly I try to leave that to critics. A fiction writer’s first job is to tell a story. That’s why it’s a craft—before anything artistic comes out, you have to construct a story that makes sense and is entertaining. That’s not all there is, of course. You can’t have a really good piece of fiction without good use of language. I rely heavily on my wife when I’m reworking stories, finding the words and phrases that will give the right mix of clarity and beauty to the language. Even with language, though, there’s an element of craft involved. Concrete words, nouns and verbs will always win out over abstract terms and meaningless adjectives.

Any final words on writing?

TF: Go out, live in the world, see some stuff, and you’ll have something to write about. My life and my writing both have been like an unplanned road trip—you don’t know exactly where you’re going to end up. You have to write, and write, and if you’re like me, a lot of it will end up discarded. But you have to just do it. Go stand in toxic waste up to your waist, drive around with a psychotic neo-Confederate, and then sit down for some long, hard work. Then you’re ready to be a writer.

Eating Oxford: Three Meals That Changed My Life

by Austin Baker

Sweet tea, fried chicken, collard greens, cornbread, and banana pudding all are decidedly Southern dishes. During our trip, I was shown a new definition of the “rural South” through its authors and food. The meals we ate during our ten-day road trip and three day-trips, which spanned several thousand miles of roads through the heart of Dixie, were amazingly diverse. From curried goat at a Jamaican place in Greenville, South Carolina, to Elvis Presley’s favorite “dough” burgers at Johnnie’s Drive-In in Tupelo, Mississippi, to the best sushi I’ve had since a vacation in Honolulu, Hawaii, at Akai Hana Japanese Restaurant in Carrboro, North Carolina, none of it was traditional, yet all of it was somehow Southern. But it turned out that Oxford, Mississippi gave me my greatest insight into the culinary smorgasbord that is the rural South.

Definitive meal one: Oxford, an amazing mecca of writers, scholars, and artists, and home to literary legend William Faulkner, painted one of the most interesting pictures yet of the South through its many varied restaurants. After a stop in Hohenwald, Tennessee, to meet William Gay, where we ate at an uninspiring Mexican restaurant, and also a night spent in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where we ate at a disappointingly mediocre barbecue joint, Oxford’s food was a refreshing change of pace. Author Tom Franklin recommended we try the Ajax Diner. I later learned that Prince Edward had stopped in for lunch there a little less than a year before our visit.

Our group of thirteen was lucky enough to find seating on our third attempt to eat there; both of our other attempts were thwarted by hour-long wait times. Our waitress recommended “The Big Easy.” The “burger” consisted of a piece of country-fried steak covered in a dollop of homemade mashed potatoes, a spoonful of homemade gravy, and lima beans, all sandwiched together between two hamburger buns. Served with a house salad and french fries that the Food Network has listed as some of the “world’s best,” the dish put a new spin on several Southern favorites.



The service was great, as well as the presentation of the restaurant and bar. The most unique aspect of our experience came when we looked up and saw literally thousands of toothpicks mysteriously lodged in the ceiling tiles. It only took ten college students and three professors about fifteen minutes to discover the secret to the toothpicks. By placing one end of the straw in your mouth, then dropping the toothpick into the straw, then placing a finger over the open end and blowing furiously to build up pressure, then quickly removing the finger, we shot our of Taylor, Mississippi, located about ten miles from Oxford. Though we were basically in the middle of Nowhere, USA, we were intrigued with the small town, home to Old Taylor Grocery, serving the best fried catfish in Mississippi and possibly the world. Every author we met, upon telling him or her that Oxford would be one of our stops, told us to make sure we ate there. When our group tried the previous evening, the wait was already up to two hours at only 6:15. But Mark and I were surprised to find the restaurant open, especially since the hours posted on the door told us it was closed. We called the group, but they would not be able to make it down to Taylor before they closed that afternoon, so Mark and I decided to sample the famous fish as a sacrifice for the sake of the class. Upon entry, the owner kindly said, “Y’all find a seat wherever y’all like, ya hear?” There were no menus; the waitress told us we could have either the catfish or the buffet. We both opted for the catfish. Within ten minutes, and after an interesting conversation with a woman sitting at the table next to us who had been a lifelong customer, a Styrofoam plate piled high with crispy, golden-fried catfish fillets topped with a couple pieces of raw onion, hushpuppies, fries, coleslaw,





and tartar sauce was set down in front of us on the plastic red and white checkered table cloths. It is little wonder the food is so famous; fried to perfection, with just the right amount of crunch, the sweet, mild, and flavorful fish simply melted in our mouths once our teeth penetrated the crunchy, salt and peppered breading.

The restaurant has seen many famous literary legends. Rumor has it that they call the tartar sauce “Dickey Sauce,” in honor of a drunken James Dickey consuming three or four cups of it and declaring that it was “the best damn soup I’ve ever had!” The restaurant is a favorite of *New York Times* best-selling author John Grisham, and I also heard that award-winning actor Morgan Freeman sometimes drops in for a catfish plate when he is in the area.

Definitive meal three: We spent a rainy afternoon with author Tom Franklin on the balcony of City Grocery, his favorite bar and grill, while he sipped on a Bud Light. We had a very lively and entertaining discussion with him on subjects that ranged from his book *Poachers*, to fellow author William Gay, to the difficulties of creating characters different from himself. When the rain slacked off, we walked to Boure’, a local steakhouse only a city block away from both City Grocery and from our hotel. There I had a dish that epitomized the collision of old South and New—Cajun fried crawfish with teriyaki dipping sauce. A marinated sirloin, grilled to a perfect medium-rare, followed, but the taste of what the dish meant in terms of our quest to define the South stuck around the table much longer than the actual dish.

Breakfast-lunch-dinner-DONE!



Journal Entry

by Leland Wood

Last night at a little past midnight, Jason, Natalie, Wilson and I drank liquor at William Faulkner’s grave in the moonlight. I had intended to have a nice quiet late-night walk around the town square, but, the moment I left Wilson at the hotel and headed towards the parking lot, Natalie and her friends showed up. I suspect she was there to see Jason, since they ARE soul mates, which Jason declared no less than twenty times after we met Natalie. So after the pleasantries and hugs, we mutually decided that it was far too nice a night to stay in the hotel, and we made a rather impromptu decision to go visit William Faulkner’s grave, since the weather was nice and the spirits equally pleasant. We quickly rounded up Wilson and Jason. The walk to the graveyard was half the fun—we all kept wondering if we could find the grave at all since in the moonlight the graves all looked the same. By the time we reached the graveyard we had split up; Wilson and Jason walked around the upper level, and I went with Natalie





down to the lower level. We found Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner after a few minutes, thanks to the handy “historical monument” marker, and I set Natalie down on a stone bench and went to grab Wilson and Jason.

So within a few minutes the four of us found ourselves sitting by Faulkner’s grave, saying a few spur-of-the-moment (but in my opinion very worthy) tributes to Faulkner, commending him for inspiring us to read Southern literature. Jason, Wilson and I poured a few shots of rum on his marker (Mrs. Faulkner only got one since she’d been a prude and apparently had a frosty relationship with her husband). It was such a carefree, wonderful moment. I think that single escapade really encapsulated what college is all about: that adventurous, intrepid appetite for growth and new things. It was very peaceful just to sit with the cold January breeze at our backs and talk about Faulkner while listen-

ing to Natalie’s French accent as we discussed writing and the concept of immortality.

Relaxed and carefree, the four of us lay back in the grass and dead leaves and passed the bottles around as we shared stories and thoughts. It was amazing, gazing at the moon as silvery clouds passed under it, arguing over whether the trees looked Burton-esque and wondering what it was like to be dead. I was surprised that the Faulkners had such a simple grave marker; you’d think that someone of his reputation would have something really grand, but it was no different from the hundreds of others around us. I found it quite reassuring to know that people who had every right to be arrogant were content to rest in a simple coffin and not on a bed of laurels.

It was around one thirty by the time we left, and it was nearly two before we came to the hotel. I think I knew right then and there that this would probably be the most memorable moment of the trip, barring something random like the bus tipping over or Louis getting knocked out by a Frisbee. If Faulkner were alive, I like to think he would salute our little adventure with a shot of rum. If his spirit gets restless, well, there’s always the bottle of rum we left at his grave.





William Faulkner surveys the Oxford Square



far top left: *Laura Vaughn taking a much-needed break on the windowsill of Shenanigan's restaurant in Sewanee, TN*

left top: *A little girl playing on the same windowsill shortly after Laura*

left bottom: *Produce vendor at the Pickens County Flea Market*

bottom: *Hallie Sessoms, caught deep in thought, downtown Chapel Hill, NC*





above: Creek scene from the Ellicott Rock Wilderness
left: Heron tracks on the Pascagoula coast



top: Panoramic view of the Mississippi River and bank

above: Art in motion, Nashville, TN

below: The afternoon sun filtering through stained glass windows in the cathedral on the campus of the University of the South
bottom: Jars of sourwood honey at the Pickens County Flea Market



top: Hand saws for sale at the Pickens County Flea Market
above: A neighborly warning from Lafayette County, MS



above: Just off the square in Oxford, MS

top right: Downtown Milledgeville, GA

bottom right: Interior of Taylor Grocery, outside of Oxford, MS







above: Ocoee River at dawn, low water

right: Signs on the back dirt roads somewhere in Lafayette County, MS

previous pages: Reflection of trees in Sweetwater Creek, along the Natchez Trace



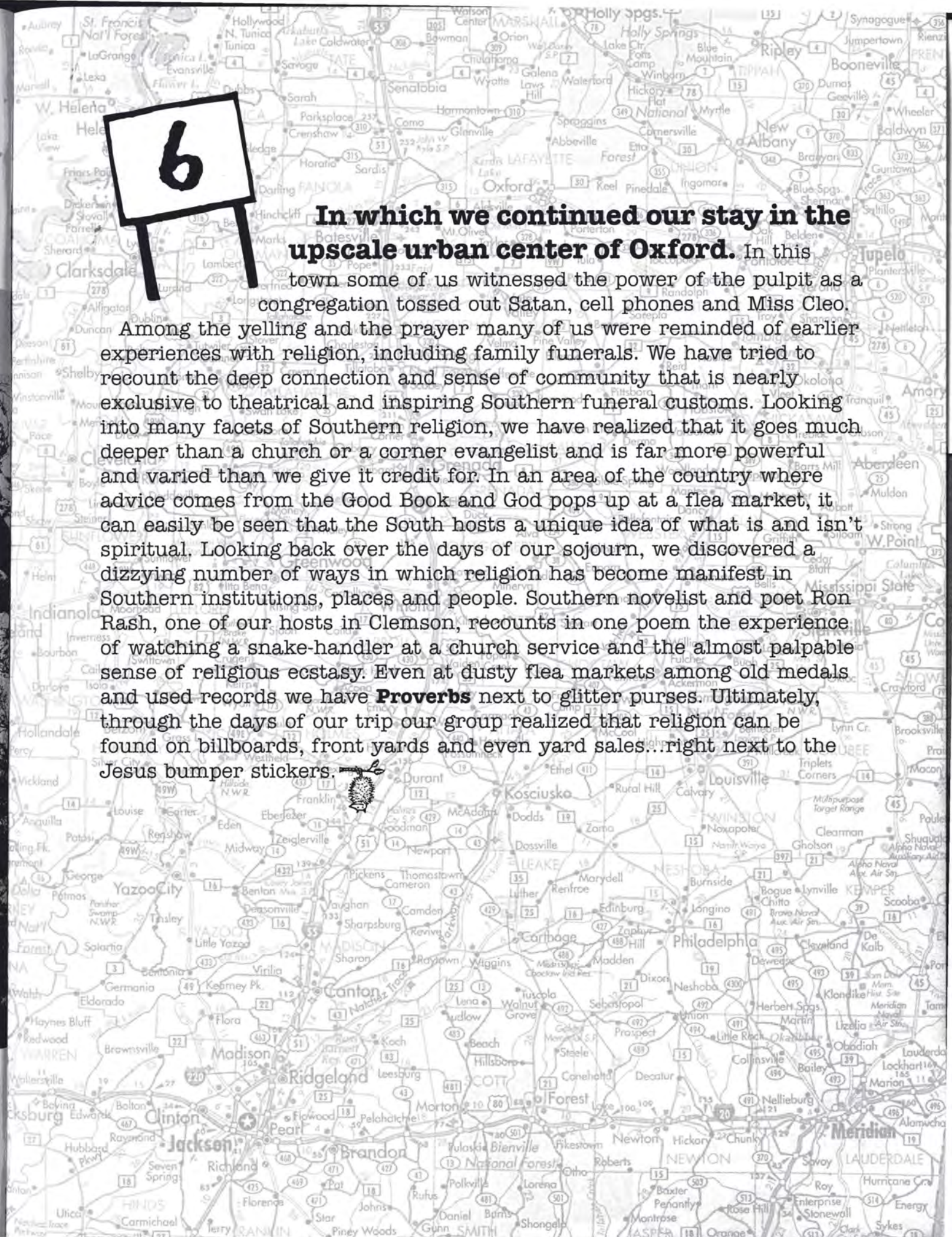


Battered flag in front of a Katrina-damaged house on the Pascagoula coast

6

In which we continued our stay in the upscale urban center of Oxford.

In this town some of us witnessed the power of the pulpit as a congregation tossed out Satan, cell phones and Miss Cleo. Among the yelling and the prayer many of us were reminded of earlier experiences with religion, including family funerals. We have tried to recount the deep connection and sense of community that is nearly exclusive to theatrical and inspiring Southern funeral customs. Looking into many facets of Southern religion, we have realized that it goes much deeper than a church or a corner evangelist and is far more powerful and varied than we give it credit for. In an area of the country where advice comes from the Good Book and God pops up at a flea market, it can easily be seen that the South hosts a unique idea of what is and isn't spiritual. Looking back over the days of our sojourn, we discovered a dizzying number of ways in which religion has become manifest in Southern institutions, places and people. Southern novelist and poet Ron Rash, one of our hosts in Clemson, recounts in one poem the experience of watching a snake-handler at a church service and the almost palpable sense of religious ecstasy. Even at dusty flea markets among old medals and used records we have **Proverbs** next to glitter purses. Ultimately, through the days of our trip our group realized that religion can be found on billboards, front yards and even yard sales...right next to the Jesus bumper stickers.



Just Another Sunday in Oxford

by Ivy Farr

After a croissant and a flavored mocha for breakfast, Laura Vaughn and I began our trek to Second Missionary Baptist Church in Oxford, Mississippi. I'm not sure if it was the caffeine rush or just the anxiety I felt upon approaching the first all-African-American church I had ever been to that gave me the apprehensive feeling, but I am pretty sure that it was the latter. Either way, I had kamikaze butterflies in my stomach as we approached the front door.

In the parking lot was a father, dressed in a dark suit, walking with his four- or five-year-old, a scene that eased my mind somewhat. I was anxious about how two white girls from South Carolina would be received by an all-black congregation, for even the tan that I had worked on so diligently at the beach could not help me blend in with this congregation. Would we be welcomed? Would we be stared at? Would people think that we were there to analyze their culture?

My uneasiness increased as we walked into the sanctuary. Aside from one white couple sitting near the windows and a photographer documenting the pastor's final sermon, we were the only pale-skinned people there. Shortly after we sat down, though, we were approached by a very friendly lady dressed in a white suit from head to foot that made her resemble a nurse. She handed each of us a visitors card to provide personal information. I've always been wary of those little cards before, since at my grandparents' church they read out your name during a special visitors' moment. All the visitors have to stand up when their names are called, and everyone stares at them until everyone's name has been called. "Great," I thought. "As if we needed to draw any more attention to ourselves."

As the members of the church listened to the announcements, I settled into my seat and started to feel more relaxed. "This is a lot like our church," I thought, "except I don't think that our church would ever host a 'Ballers for Christ' Basketball Tournament." My uneasiness began to slip away little by little and, by the time the youth choir had completed their enthusiastic praise hymn, I honestly felt right at home. My only apprehension at that point concerned what was going to happen next because in this church I had no idea what to expect.

The religious experience was so wholly different, so infused with religious fervor, that I hardly knew what to do. My thoughts continued to drift back to my reserved, traditional, unadventurous small-town church at home. Maybe I should arrange a field

trip to Oxford for my own congregation; it wouldn't hurt to ignite a flame in our sanctuary every now and then.

Brother Leroy Wadlington began his sermon by checking his watch, which must have already read 12 noon (the service had begun at 11) and by assuring us that he would keep his message short. He read from 1 Peter 5:7—"Cast all of your cares upon him"—several different versions of the scripture, with emphasis placed on key words to make sure that everyone understood what would be the subject of his talk. What follows is a summary of his message.

"As long as you're on this side of the river, you're gonna' have cares.

"When we have so many cares, we can slip into the temptation of *worry*. But *worry* is a *useless exercise*." The sermon had been punctuated all along with "Amen, brothers" and "Yessir, yessir's," and these comments only increased as Pastor Wadlington went on. "Worry does nothing positive. Tell me one sickness that worrying has cured? Tell me one *problem* that *worry* has *solved*? We all have cares; it's just a matter of how we deal with them.

"Your cares may be a disobedient child or a marriage gone sour. Your cares may be conniving, back-biting coworkers. They may be about a member of your family who has taken all kinds of your possessions and pawned them off to support a nasty drug habit. But whatever your cares are, place all of them on Him." I was amazed at the frankness of his message. My church would have never addressed our community's issues as directly as Brother Wadlington addressed the issues in his.

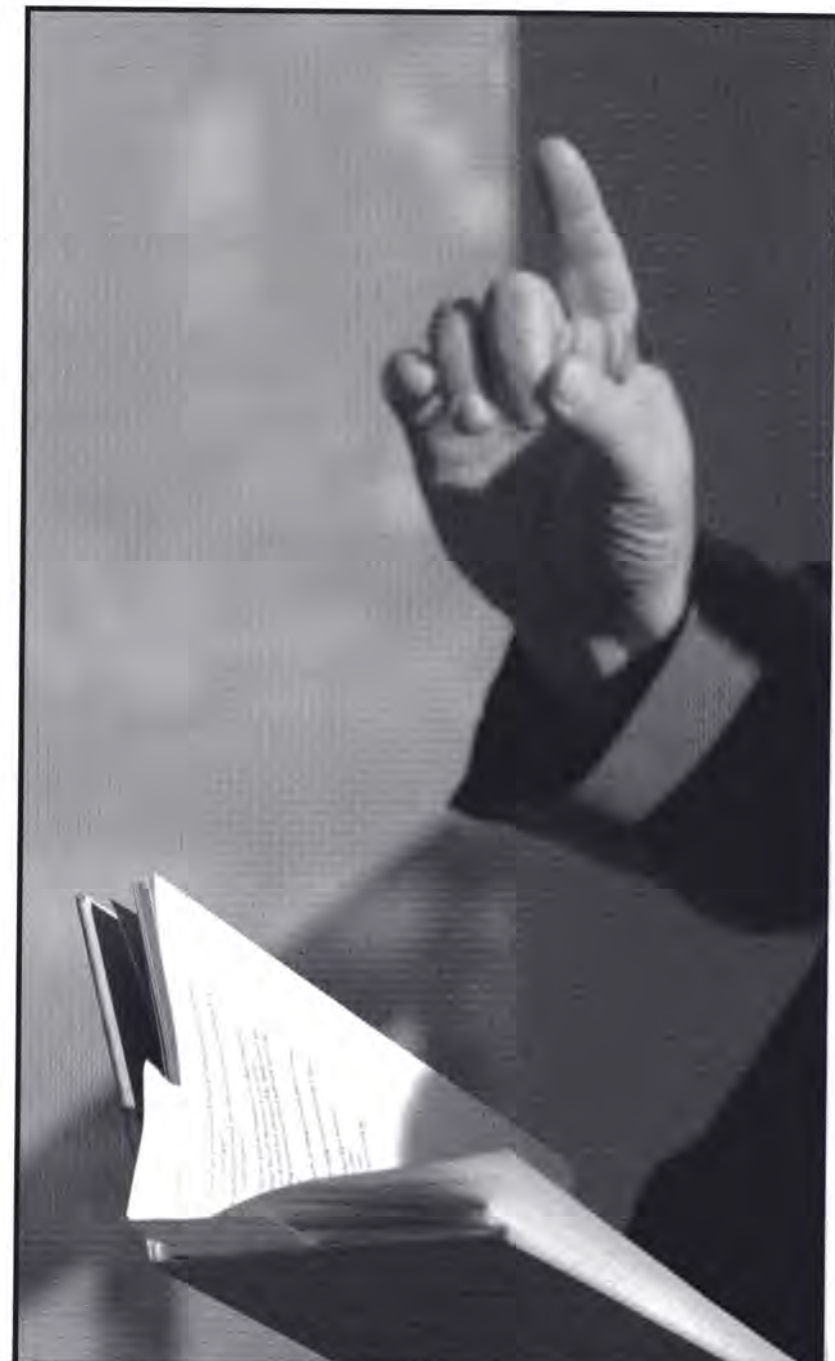
"God knows us better than we know ourselves. A man one time asked me if I could prove that. And since I've studied the Bible, I quoted Matthew 10 to him: 'But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'

"Do you know how many hairs are on your head?' I asked him.

"No, sir' he said.

"You see? *God* knows you *better* than you know *yourself*!"

The balding preacher continued.



“Now, for some of us, He don’t have to count very much. For some of us, he don’t have to count at all. But God knows us better than we know ourselves...”

“We have trouble turning over our cares to God. You wanna’ go to *Louisiana*, get yourself a *mojo* because your husband is runnin’ around. You wanna’ call up the psychic *hotline*. But what you need to do is cast all your cares on *Him*.”

Brother Leroy’s voice had been wavering up and down throughout, but as he approached this, the climax of his message, his voice became even more raspy. His speech was marked with shouts, deep breaths, and sing-song blues notes. The organist, a young, slender woman clad in winter white—the only woman there, besides myself, who was clothed in a color lighter than charcoal—joined in, mimicking his glissandos and slides. The saxophonist and drummer struck up, too, as Brother Leroy ducked under the lectern. A few seconds later, he emerged, standing at his full height of perhaps five-foot six, bursting into full song. With a pained, scratchy voice, amplified three times over by the microphone he held in his hand, he screamed, “I knooooow He cares!” and “I got religion!” over and over while mopping his dark brow with a white cloth.

For the next seven or eight minutes, Brother Leroy attempted to cut off the music with a quick wave of his hand, but each time the band continued. So Leroy returned over and over, repeating, “I know He cares!” just in case someone had missed his previous homily.

The minister of music, who had led the congregation in a sonorous version of the traditional hymn, “Lead Me, Guide Me” an hour before—truly the most moving expression of the hymn I have heard thus far in my short life—finally stepped in, seeing that it was five minutes till one. He managed to calm the service down, though I cannot remember exactly how he accomplished such a feat.

The service let out after an invitation to the altar, and I left the church, head spinning in disbelief and wonder. The sanctuary and foyer of the church were as hot as a furnace, heated by souls aflame with the spirit of God, a sharp contrast to the cold and windy streets of Oxford in winter, but I carried that warmth within me for the rest of the day.

A Preacher Who Takes Up Serpents Laments the Presence of Skeptics in His Church

by Ron Rash

Every sabbath they come,
gawk like I’m something
in a tent at a county fair.
In the vanity of their unbelief
they will cover an eye with a camera
and believe it will make them see.
They see nothing. I show them Mark 16
but they believe in the word of man.
They believe death is an end.

And would live like manure maggots,
wallow in the filth of man’s creation.
Less than a mile from here
the stench of sulphur rises
like fog off the Pigeon River.
They do not believe it is a sign
of their own wickedness.
They cannot see a river
is a vein in God’s arm.

When I open the wire cages
they back away like crayfish
and tell each other I am insane—
terrified I may not be.

Others, my own people, whisper
“He tempts God,” and will not join me.
They cannot understand surrender
is humility, not arrogance,
that a man afraid to die cannot live.

Only the serpents sense the truth.
The diamondback’s blunted tail is silent,
the moccasin’s pearl-white mouth closed.
The coral snake coils around
my wrist, a harmless bright bracelet,
in the presence of the Lord.

SATAN

by Larry McGehee

When I was fresh out of college, “Brother” Irion (we called all ministers “Brother” in those days), minister of First Methodist Church in my hometown, invited me to substitute for him at Sunday evening service.

I had studied a bit of history in college and had been struck by how many awful things had been done over the centuries by Christians claiming to be “fighting Satan.” Slaughters of countrysides of people in eastern Europe, the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, and episodes of the Crusades were all part of a long history of “defeating the Devil” that gave Christianity a bad name. Showing so much attention to Satan, it seemed to me had detracted from the central figure of Christinity, Jesus of Nazareth, and had elevated the Evil One to too exalted a status in the Church.

Satan is not mentioned often in the Bible at all: outside of the snake in the Garden, the tempters appearing to Job, and the temptations of Jesus, Satan is a minor biblical character. But Christians later inflated Satan to a standing almost equal to God and saw history as a perpetual war between Good and Evil, God and the Devil. I wanted to show in this modern age of science and facts that Satan is just a figment of the imagination and, at most, a literary symbol used to explain the presence of evil in the world.

Looking back later, I realized what I was really trying to do with a lot of references to books and quotes and scholars, was to show off my recent college education to hometown folks.

A sermon conceived in pride and youthful zeal isn’t likely to get very far, and that one certainly didn’t. About five minutes into this sermon demythologizing Satan, the sky outside grew enormously dark. The wind could be heard rising, and then hard rain pelted the stained-glass windows of the church. But I preached on.

Then suddenly a bolt of lightning turned the world outside light blue for a second, followed by an indescribably loud clap of thunder. The lights in the sanctuary went out. But I preached on.

My good friend, Mac Luckey, was presiding at the service, and he was resourceful enough to light the candles of a candelabrum on the altar and to hold it beside me so that I could see *my* notes. I preached on.

All had grown calm and silent and dark outside. Then, abruptly, a mighty roar of wind could be heard. The wind pushed open the heavy front doors of the church, filled

the vestibule, threw open the swinging doors into the darkened sanctuary, rushed down the center aisle...

And blew out the candles.

At this point, the weather finally had gotten my attention. I quickly announced that it was obvious that I needed to reconsider my views on the nonexistence of Satan and that perhaps we should all rapidly sing one verse of “Shall We Gather at the River” and get on home.

That autobiographical footnote has come to mind several times in recent months. During the rejoicing over the death of totalitarianism in the USSR, I have hesitated to celebrate either loudly or dogmatically because I know that strong winds can rise suddenly on calm nights. Strong-man rule can seem the answer to disoriented people

unaccustomed to new abundances of personal liberty amid shortages of food and work.

The same restraint nagged me during the national euphoria over the success of allied troops and American weaponry in Iraq. History shows the frequent and sudden sandstorms are natural to that region, and that Operation Desert Storm may not be the last word in Iraq.

And here on the home front, this story reminds me that all of the separated thousand Points of Light, each bright and wonderful in its own way, held up for public praise recently, really show us that we are in a darkness and wind of economic hard times and governmental deficits, suffering people and blighted hopes. The Points of Light help us keep on preaching, but sooner or later we are going to have to adjourn to reconsider our views on the black hole in which they flicker.



Snake Handling

by Larry McGehee

Before I got a car in my senior year of college, I rode the L&N trains and Greyhound buses a lot. Once, in the late 1950s, I was seated by a fellow from the mountains of Kentucky, homeward bound from working somewhere in Ohio or Louisville. Unlike most mountain folk, this man was talkative. I learned a great deal about mountain culture from him. Most of what he taught me has been confirmed since then by books and visits to the mountains. However, one thing made my fellow sojourner especially memorable.

He was a snake handler on his way to mountain services.

Once over the shock of him telling me that, I begin peeking around to see what baggage he had stowed under our seat or in the overhead rack. As it turned out, chatting with him was one of the most educational experiences I ever had. The man was civil, patient, rational, talkative, and—as near as I could tell—unaccompanied by any snakes. And although I didn't rush out to my hometown snake farm to start my own congregation, I did come away with far more understanding and appreciation for snake-handling religion than I ever would have had otherwise.

That memory has come back as I have read a couple of new books. One from Alabama, at the lower tip of Appalachia, is Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (Addison-Wesley). The other is David L. Kimbrough's *Taking Up Serpents: Snake Handlers of Eastern Kentucky* (University of North Carolina Press).

Kimbrough investigated snake-handling religion as an academic exercise working on his graduate history degree at Indiana University. He followed the Saylor family and George Hensley, famous around Harlan, Kentucky. Covington was a Birmingham-based stringer for the *New York Times*, drawn to exploring the religion after covering a trial in which a minister got ninety-nine years for trying to kill his wife with church snakes.

Both men became personally involved in the religion they were studying. Covington actually handled snakes and even took up preaching until he had second thoughts about the risks he ran and about the church's stand on women in the pulpit. Kimbrough was better able to maintain his objectivity, although he had an obvious fascination with the practitioners and a high degree of tolerance for what, to mainstream Protestantism, has to appear as Orthodox religion.

Although not mountain holiness folk, both Covington and Kimbrough had grandparents who were, thus easing their acceptance as reporters by the congregations.

Both point out that snake handling (and strychnine swallowing and fire handling) are religious phenomena of this century, started when mountain people were forced down off the mountains for economic reasons to work in the valleys and towns. Faced with the tempestuous temptations of urban and industrial life, they resorted to extremes of faith to protect them from the evil spirits roaming around them.

The clash of two cultures within the personal lives of mobile people is a theme all of us can appreciate. The contrasts between isolated and protected rural or mountain lifestyles and the hustle and complexity of the story and city life are widespread and obvious. Change has been an epidemic in this century now ending, and it brings with it mixed blessings: improved living conditions sometimes, but stresses on values and families as well. A society on the move, as America has been, comes to more crossroads than a fixed society where change is measured in centuries rather than seconds.

We resort to all sorts of ways for living precariously at the crossroads. Sometimes we adapt rapidly. Other times, we build fences around sacred certainties. The raging battles we have had over flying some flags and burning others is but one example of how we get caught at the crossroads and sometimes take up metaphorical serpents to hold on to something we fear we will lose. The list of other examples can be as long and big as a boa: medical care, abortion, school prayer, single-sex education, political correctness, and deficit spending are just the first page in a catalog of changes so thick it makes the Sears catalog look thin.

Changes abound in our times, and we are trying hard to find some grace abounding in them. Televised congressional hearings and afternoon and late-night talk shows bear remarkable similarities to snake-handling services to which our mountain kinfolk retreated in trying to come to grips with change and evil in the world.

All of us engage in some form or another of taking up serpents; highly emotional wrestling with faith and change is a sign of our times. We differ from each other mostly over choices of what changes most threaten us and over what methods are most appropriate for handling them.

Will the Real Southern Religion Please Stand Up? A Cultural Comparison of the Pentecostal and Southern Baptist Faiths

by Jason Rains

It is impossible to discuss southern culture without discussing the South. Southern literature is rife with religious characters and themes; appeals to the conservative religious population are the hallmarks of politics in the South; and many towns to us seem to have more churches than they do citizens. Even non-Christians in the South are guaranteed to live surrounded by Christian images and exposure to Christian ideas and messages. Without a doubt, Southern culture is inextricably tied to Southern religion.

What *is* Southern religion, though? While religion in the South may not seem as diverse as in other regions of the country (and there is certainly a great deal of truth to this observation), there is not, as many seem to believe, a single overriding mode of religious thought common to all Southerners. In fact, the two Protestant denominations that one could easily most characterize as being the “most Southern” are so different from one another that, if one were ignorant of the theological precepts that they have in common, one could easily mistake them for being two entirely different religions.

I am referring to the Pentecostal and Southern Baptist denominations, which I will be discussing in this paper. My goal here is not to evaluate the validity of either sect, or assert that one is somehow “better” than

A Baptist church on I-85

the other. Nor is it within the scope of this essay to discuss the theological similarities and differences between the two. My aim instead is to examine the relationship between these denominations and the culture of the American South. Each point and observation I will make be intended towards the answering of a simple question: which of these two denominations is truly the “most Southern”?

Clearly a question that arises is: what qualifies something as being more Southern than something else?

Formed in Augusta, Georgia in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention (a term which refers to both the denomination and the actual convention at which Southern churches meet annually) has since become the largest Protestant denomination in America. According to the SBC website (www.sbc.net), the denomination currently has over 16 million members worshipping in over 42,000 churches, as well as roughly 10,000 missionaries in 153 countries.

The Pentecostal movement is not actually a single denomination but a group of churches in a certain tradition. The range of smaller sects within it makes it very difficult to determine the number of its followers. The movement began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 with a small handful of students at a Bible school, but has since grown steadily. As of 1993, there were roughly 200,000,000 Pentecostals in the world. That means that if it were to be considered a single denomination, it would be second in size only to the Roman Catholic Church.

Simple observation shows that the beginnings of each group are reflected today in the types of places where each denomination can be found: Pentecostal churches are much more common in rural and wilderness areas, while Southern Baptist churches are more likely to appear in areas with more concentrated populations. In my hometown of Lagrange, Georgia, if someone goes to church in the city, odds are they attend one of two massive Baptist churches. If someone attends church outside the city, it is more than likely one of many small Pentecostal churches. The poetry of Ron Rash characterizes Pentecostalism as a distinctly Appalachian sect. While the verdict may still be out on which group is more Southern, Pentecostalism is without a doubt more rural.

Of course it is hard to discuss the SBC without discussing American politics.. The SBC may be one of the most politically vocal (and powerful) Christian denomination in America. Both praised and derided for its highly conservative beliefs, the SBC is inextricably intertwined with red-state politics. My purpose in mentioning this is not to evaluate these political views, but to address an observation of my own.

In preparing for this paper, I browsed a handful of Christian message boards to see how well each denomination was represented in online communities. Not surprisingly, I did not come across a single user claiming to be a Pentecostal, while the vast majority of users seemed to be Baptists from the South. What was most interesting, though, was that in reading posts about politics and current events, I observed two things from these same users: one, a prevailing belief that Christianity in America is under attack by an obsessively-PC bureaucracy; and, two, an intense opposition to any perceived anti-American sentiment.



Perhaps this isn't as paradoxical as it may appear, especially considering that many Southern Baptists (and other religious conservatives, to be fair) seem to have assigned strict good/evil values to conservatism and liberalism, and characterize American politics as a battle between the two. In this light, such attitudes are completely understandable. The SBC's website also reflects these attitudes, although typically in far less abrasive terms.

Southern Baptists are deeply engaged in American politics and patriotism. Pull into the parking lot of a Southern Baptist church and you are likely to see a multitude of cars adorned with "God Bless America" and "Support Our Troops" stickers; venture inside, and you are likely to hear a sermon about the dissolution of traditional American family values (this is based chiefly on my own anecdotal experiences).

Conversely, nowhere in my research did I find a Pentecostal website proclaiming a stance on a political issue. This is not to say that Pentecostals are entirely apolitical, or unpatriotic, as Southernness and patriotism are, for whatever reasons, virtually inseparable these days. In fact the number of vehicles in the rural areas of my hometown that are decorated with both American and Confederate flags is astonishing. However, thinking about this fact led me to ask: which sect is more typified of Southern independence and separatism: the aggressively political SBC that pushes for a more conservative sort of reform, or the Pentecostal churches that, as organizations, seem to typically choose to simply stay out of it? The SBC is not above secession: in 2003, it withdrew from the Baptist World Association in response to a perceived increase in liberalism and anti-American sentiment within that body. I would argue that the Pentecostal church is a better example of the Southern independent spirit, while the SBC is a prime example of Southern conservatism and nostalgia.

Another issue worth addressing is food. I have had experience attending both Southern Baptist and Pentecostal churches. I do not recall food being a major focus of any Pentecostal function. Conversely, the food is what I remember *most* about my Baptist experiences, and I do not recall a single Baptist function in which fried chicken, deviled eggs, green beans, and assorted casseroles were not available in abundance. While I have found no official statement from the SBC and no scholarly papers documenting this, I feel confident in saying that the Southern Baptist obsession with covered-dish meals is virtually unparalleled. I am not sure of the origins of this unbreakable bond between the SBC and traditional Southern foods, but this is one area in which the SBC exceeds the Pentecostal church in Southern-ness.

The nature of church services is another area where the two differ. Baptist sermons may be rigid or fairly lively, but I would wager that the most raucous Baptist service is about as intense as the most unenthusiastic Pentecostal service. The Pentecostal movement is distinctly charismatic and is legendary for its energetic sermons, which are very often open-ended and occasionally downright chaotic. Vocal participation of the congregants is the norm. Perhaps most famous (though not as common as many would believe) is the practice of handling live snakes as a demonstration of faith.

There is nothing about this form of worship that makes it inherently Southern.

What is unique about it is simply the fact that, for the most part, it does not happen elsewhere in the country. This is a mode of worship that is more prevalent in the South than in any part of the country, and I believe there are two reasons why it has not become more widespread. First of all, as addressed above, Pentecostal churches tend to be fairly isolated and not especially vocal on the national level, so their practices don't have much chance to be spread. Secondly, and probably more importantly, these practices are viewed nationally as distinctly Southern practices. A Northerner may not believe that this is how all Southerners worship, but he is quite likely to believe (and for the most part, rightly) that *only* Southerners worship like this.

Ultimately, it is exceedingly difficult to determine which tradition is more Southern than the other. Given the number of paradoxes and contradictions in modern Southern culture, it may well be impossible. I would submit, however, that these two religious traditions exemplify the division between Old and New South that exists today. The Pentecostal Church is distinctly Old South: an independent rural and regional tradition that makes no effort to extend its domain into other locales. The SBC is clearly New South: centered in developed areas and active on the national political scene, yet maintaining ties to traditional Southern-ness through conservative policies and Southern culture such as traditional foods. As the paradox of Old and New South continues to grow, it is certain that these two religious traditions will only grow further apart, while both remaining equally and distinctly Southern.



A Personal Perspective on Southern Funerals

by Leland Wood

I have only experienced two funeral services in my life, one eight months ago and one eight years ago, and the services were markedly different. One was more religious and elaborate, the other militaristic and austere. There is nothing remarkable about these experiences except the fact they were mine.

It is harder from a chronological standpoint to recall my grandmother's funeral service. Jeanne Wood passed away when I was in the middle of fifth grade, and I don't believe that a child's untrained mind can grasp the importance of the work required of a funeral at such a tender age. The responsibilities and finicky details were left to the capable hands of the adults to prepare a fitting memorial to the paragon of virtue and domesticity that my grandmother had been, and my grandfather and his children performed the task capably. Every detail was executed to the letter, and my grandmother's funeral reflected the Baptist church customs typical of my paternal family history.

In my grandmother's tiny backwoods hamlet of Raeford, North Carolina, her passing was a sad but publicized event. Grandmother was an active member of many local church organizations, charities and committees and in my child's mind one of the most enduring memories that attests to her importance in the community was the sheer number of people at her funeral. Every pew was filled and many more lined the walls at the chapel of Raeford First Baptist Church. The service itself was properly religious in content, with a moving sermon by the reverend meant to emphasize that life itself is unending and death serves only to take us to a new spiritual plane.

At Granddad's house there was a steady flow of well-wishers and friends that brought food, ferns and condolences, and a better display of Southern hospitality and generosity than this I cannot recall. The open-casket, public visitation at the Crumpler Funeral Home (a custom which itself is dying out but is a staple for my father's Baptist extended family) also brought a constant flow of family friends and acquaintances who came to pay their respects.

I remember at the visitation, as I touched Grandmother's cold hands I noticed how appropriate and tasteful the accoutrements of her casket and wardrobe were. The casket was painted pure white, made of a steel alloy that Granddad and Dad assured would last forever, and it was detailed with gold trimmings and borders of pink roses. Grandmother wore a pale lavender dress and jacket (her favorite color) that complemented the pinks and dusky rose of her makeup, and were it not for the stillness of her body, I could easily

have been persuaded that she was sleeping. Perhaps seeing a still and silent body would be unnerving to those that don't have open-casket ceremonies, but like most Southerners I found the experience to be an emotional event that drew our family together.

The aptly named Raeford Cemetery was the sight of Grandmother's interment. The funeral service itself had a very large turnout. I cannot give an exact number but there had to have been about two hundred people there. There were ten flower wreaths that flanked her casket, and the casket itself was covered in flowers of every kind. At my parents' house I still keep upon my dresser a dried rose from one of the floral arrangements, and all it takes is a small bit of that musky sweet scent to send me back eight years. Our family does not maintain a strict schedule when it comes to visiting Grandmother's grave at the family plot, but about once a year during Christmas or summer we will come to visit. Sometimes we pick away at errant weeds, uncover dirt-encrusted plot markers and perhaps replace the flower arrangements with a fresh offering. There is never much to say at occasions like this; instead I myself am simply content just to let a kiss pass from my lips to my hand as I touch that gray polished marker and let Grandmother know that I wait anxiously for the day when I'll see her again.

The passing of my Pawpaw was especially hard on me, since I was named for him and shared a connection with him greater than with my other grandparents. Pawpaw and Granny had lived with us for nearly a year before he succumbed to congestive heart failure. My Pawpaw had always had great foresight in matters of finance and personal affairs and had left us explicit instructions on how to handle his funeral arrangements. Having served with great valor as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force for many years, my Pawpaw wished for a simple dignified service that would focus on God, country and service. As arguably the most artistic of his grandchildren, I was charged along with my mother the task of selecting an appropriate vessel to hold his ashes, for Pawpaw wanted



to be cremated. We selected a simple gold cube with Pawpaw's name, Leland T. Williams, and the Air Force crest engraved on the front.

Hours later my family and I found ourselves at a private visitation at the Floyd Mortuary. There, in a small dim room, we said goodbye to Pawpaw, who lay on a gurney with a simple white sheet and serene expression on his face. There were no gentle notes from pipe organs and subtle hints of perfumed flowers to soften the severity of that experience as there had been at Grandmother's visitation. Many of us broke down in tears, gave Pawpaw a kiss and said one last prayer for his soul. That would be the last time we saw his body.

Pawpaw's funeral was a markedly different occasion from that of my grandmother's. My Pawpaw himself was not a Southerner and had been born and raised in New York and perhaps his origins played a part in the more austere ceremony at his burial at Salisbury National Historic Cemetery. Before Pawpaw's passing I had never attended a military funeral and I found his to be especially hard-hitting. In contrast to Grandmother's more traditional church service, Pawpaw's service drew only family members and about thirty close friends. There were few or no flowers but in their place there was a twenty-one gun salute by military officers. It was a noted departure from details and ritual, and perhaps this was what made the occasion all the more intense and somber. That atmosphere, combined with the lone trumpet playing "Taps," created such a serious, bittersweet flavor on that evening that for those few minutes I think it was impossible for my family and friends not to realize what it was that service would've meant to Pawpaw. As the music and the solemnity of the occasion washed over us, we understood the message about love, devotion and serving a purpose greater than one's self. The entire service was so poignantly patriotic that I do believe that it made everyone there reflect on what it meant to be not only a complete person but also an American. The burial may not have been characteristic of the Deep South but I myself certainly felt that the service spoke of duty to God, country and personal responsibility.

That burial was less than a year ago, and to date the family has not visited the cemetery yet. I suppose that it is a bit too soon to, with the memories still so fresh in our mind, although we have considered visiting the grave next time we pass by the area. The simple granite marker set in the ground is unremarkable and looks no different than its thousand brothers that comprise the rows and columns of stone that fill the graveyard.

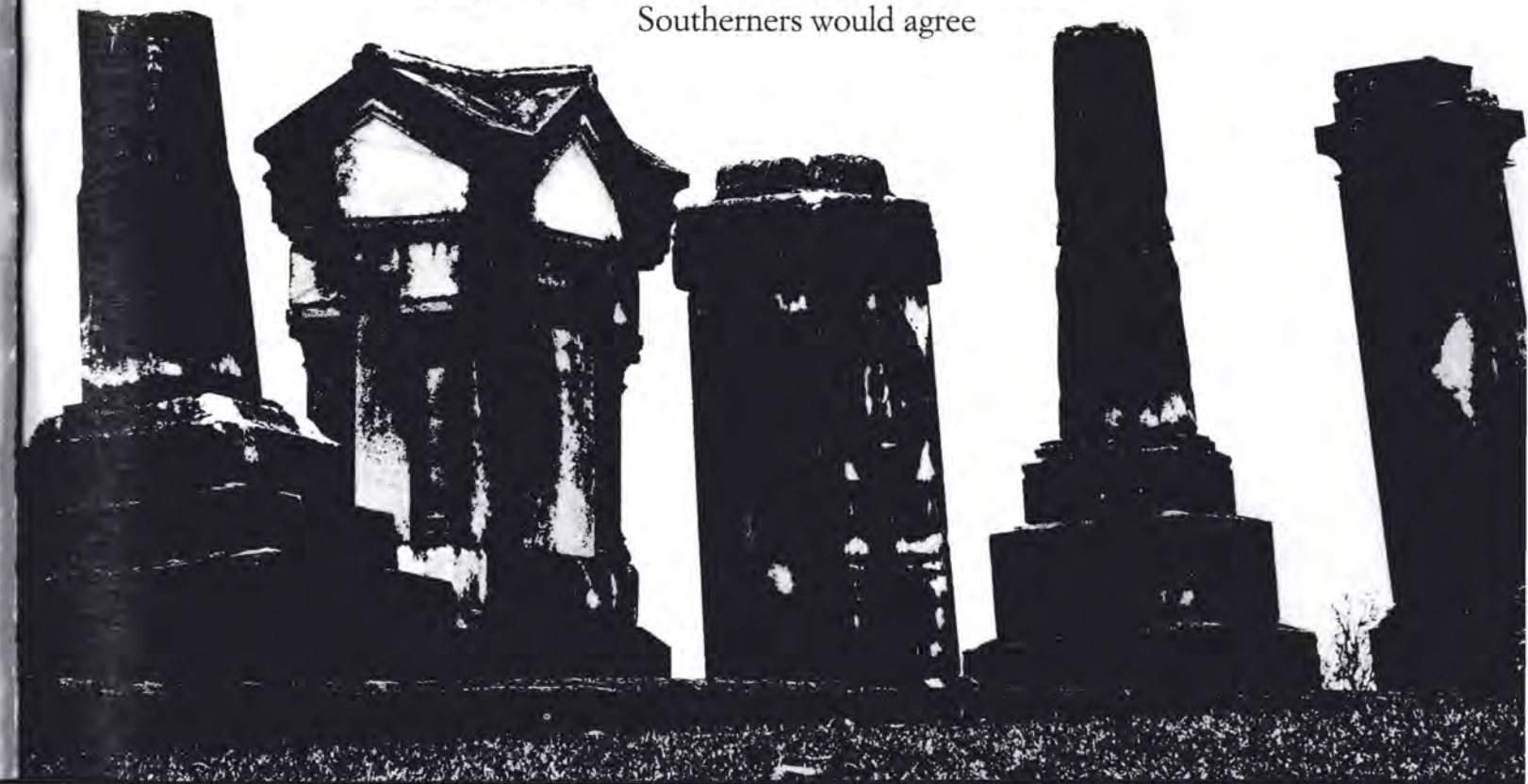
This is meant to be a testament to the emotions we all go through—fear, sadness, guilt, acceptance—no matter how simple or elaborate the ceremony because funerals remind us that death awaits us all.

Life, Death and Deviled Eggs

by Jim Morgan

My grandfather, whose stories I enjoy telling very much, died just this past year during my first semester as a sophomore at Wofford College. Prior to his funeral we held a viewing with an open casket at Sheppard's Funeral home. I remember sitting on the porch in rocking chairs with my brother and sister watching all the people wearing dark suits and dresses file into the funeral home to pay their respects and being amazed at how many visitors there were and how few of them we recognized. None of us particularly felt like spending a great deal of time inside. The funeral service itself was held at Middle Ground Southern Baptist Church, where my grandfather was a pastor for so many years. It took three ministers to perform the service, each delivering his own eulogy and sharing his own stories and memories about my grandfather and his life.

Unlike most Southern religious gatherings, this service concluded relatively quickly, leaving all of the family and friends who were in attendance no choice but to walk to the social hall for what was for all intents and purposes a covered-dish supper, complete with casserole dishes and Cool-Whip covered desserts. This certainly didn't seem like such a strange occurrence at the time, and I think that most Southerners would agree



that my grandfather's funeral would fit the description of an average funeral in the American South. Southern funerals are their own particular breed anyway that cannot quite be matched anywhere else. They are a strange combination, part religious memorial service, part social gathering, and part expression of grief.

I remember one time attending a funeral service that my mother, a newly ordained Methodist minister at the time, performed for one of the members of our church. Rather than being held in the sanctuary, the funeral service took place in the living room of the deceased's home, with friends and family in attendance on fold-out metal chairs. The casket was not your usual oak or walnut box, but rather was made of thick gauge sheet metal. Apparently the son of the recently departed woman was a welder and so, rather than spending a great deal of money on a new store-bought casket, he decided to make his own. After the service, which in my opinion was very nicely done, he pulled out a Black and Decker electric drill, and, as the guests were filing out, proceeded to attach the metal lid of the coffin by screwing it on. Then, in order to make sure no moisture would get into it, he produced a caulking gun and began to spread caulk around the edges. Needless to say this funeral ended too with a meal in our church social hall.

My grandfather on my mother's side, Lawson Styles, told me that when he was young, around the age of 15 or so, his great uncle Earl died. My grandfather, of course, attended his funeral. This particular funeral was typical in that it included a time for which mourners could walk by and view Earl's body. I'm not sure what kind of a person Earl was in life, but one thing that is clear from the story is that he was not the most loving or accommodating husband in the world, to the point that his wife Margaret refused to say anything at his funeral, claiming that she had nothing nice to say about him and so would remain silent. When most people walked by the casket they said some kind words concerning the deceased, straightened his tie or maybe placed a flower in the coffin with him, but when Margaret walked past his casket, she didn't say a word. She simply reached into her pocket and took out a bag of grass seed, which she poured over the body of her dead husband, evidently in an effort to encourage the earth to take him as fast as possible. Ashes to ashes and dust to dust...and dirt into grass.

Something for Everyone: Finding Religion at the Pickens County Flea Market

by Ivy Farr

"The best deals will be to the left," author George Singleton told us. "Those are where the most desperate people set up. They don't pay to rent those tables; they just get here real early in the morning and start putting their stuff out."

I had been very excited about this trip. What could be better than a half-day tour/shopping extravaganza at Pickens County Flea Market, led by good ole George, who had become one of my favorite authors after his visit to Wofford last fall. He had agreed to meet with our class once again and insisted that we visit his former stomping ground.

Enormous signs announced the entrance to a vast field of wooden tables and covered sheds that would make Spartanburg's tiny market look like a single-family garage sale. The squatters who had been able to claim booths filled the tabletops with every kind of junk imaginable.

As usual, the shopping experience was slow to start. My mood has a tendency to wallow at rock bottom as a shopping trip begins; it is not until I find that perfect purchase that I really get excited about my role as consumer. But reaching the first covered building, I found what was meant for me: sequined purses. I approached the table in awe.

As I was deep in thought, trying to decide between silver, red, or multi-, I spoke with a man who was contemplating purchasing the same for his sister.

"Do you think she'd like something like that?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know anything about your sister, but I would think so."

Our conversation continued for a few more minutes as I told him about my preferences in fashion, then explained our purpose of coming to the flea market—that we were a group of students from Wofford College who were studying contemporary literature by interviewing authors throughout the South.

"What are you studying at Wofford?" he asked.

"History and Psychology."

"Oh, you're taking psychology. You know where you can find a lot of that?"

"No, where?" I replied excitedly, thinking that he was going to refer me to some far-removed civilization. They would be settled deep in the furthest heights of the Appalachian Mountains, desperately in need of an ethno-biological field study. I had visions of books in print.

"Proverbs."

"Oh," I said, unable to disguise my surprise and disappointment. Fumbling for words, I added, "Yeah. I guess there is a good bit of psychology in Proverbs." I racked my brain to recall even one verse that would apply.

"Have you read it?" he asked.

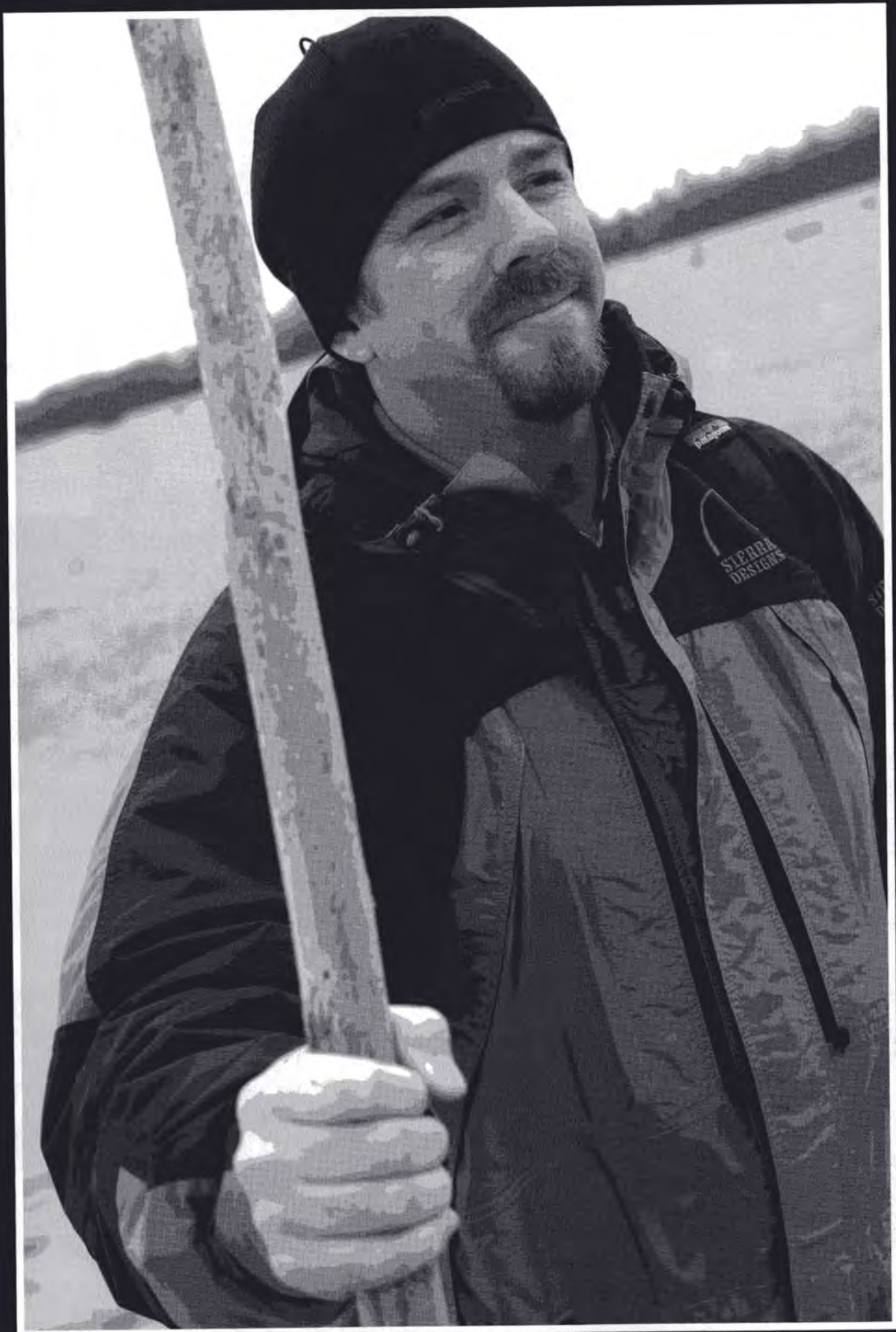
"As a matter of fact, I have." But it wasn't for any of my psych classes. Proverbs had definitely been left off all of our syllabi.

"Oh. Well, you ought to read it again. And then, when I see you here some other time, you can tell me what all you learned."

"Okay," I said, feeling simultaneous disappointment, confusion, and anger. I turned back to the bags, which had lost much of their allure after such a sermon. *How in the world did we get from flashy accessories to the Word of God?* I thought. *Either shopping is an activity specifically blessed by God, or I just experienced something really bizarre.*

Who would have thought to look for religion at the Pickens County Flea Market? Certainly not I. Then again, as the good book of Proverbs says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." And I guess that includes a booth of sparkly handbags, too.





In which we traveled into the Mississippi Delta with teacher and author Dixon Bynum. The mood in our two

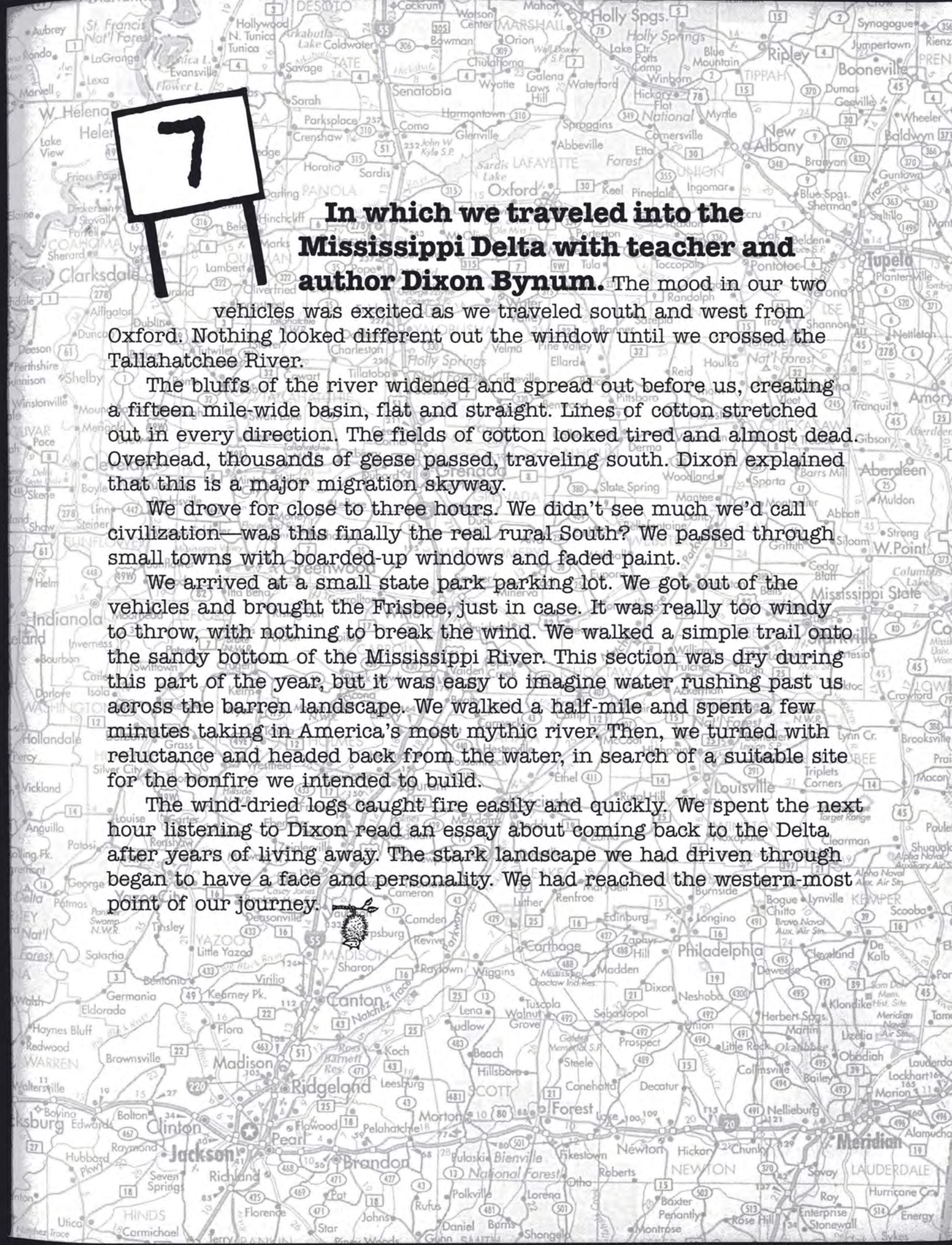
vehicles was excited as we traveled south and west from Oxford. Nothing looked different out the window until we crossed the Tallahatchee River.

The bluffs of the river widened and spread out before us, creating a fifteen mile-wide basin, flat and straight. Lines of cotton stretched out in every direction. The fields of cotton looked tired and almost dead. Overhead, thousands of geese passed, traveling south. Dixon explained that this is a major migration skyway.

We drove for close to three hours. We didn't see much we'd call civilization—was this finally the real rural South? We passed through small towns with boarded-up windows and faded paint.

We arrived at a small state park parking lot. We got out of the vehicles and brought the Frisbee, just in case. It was really too windy to throw, with nothing to break the wind. We walked a simple trail onto the sandy bottom of the Mississippi River. This section was dry during this part of the year, but it was easy to imagine water rushing past us across the barren landscape. We walked a half-mile and spent a few minutes taking in America's most mythic river. Then, we turned with reluctance and headed back from the water, in search of a suitable site for the bonfire we intended to build.

The wind-dried logs caught fire easily and quickly. We spent the next hour listening to Dixon read an essay about coming back to the Delta after years of living away. The stark landscape we had driven through began to have a face and personality. We had reached the western-most point of our journey.



What a Garden It Was

by Dixon Bynum

But have I now seen Death? Is this the way I must return to native dust?

—Paradise Lost

My truck tops another of the North Mississippi hills, I tell myself that I'm simply going home to do some fishing, write if I get the chance, and watch the birds, migrating through the valley this month. I've driven through the flatland, from the hill country across the foothills of the Ozarks, many times since I left, but now, for the first time in years I've got a place all to myself. My friend Rushing, long gone from the valley, has loaned me his cabin by the river for a few days. And besides, it's the beginning of spring, time to shake off winter and get outdoors.

My truck is loaded with gear, really just a couple of poles, bedroll, cooler, a little food, but snug in the backseat and the bed. It's a promising Friday—an early spring lightness in the sky, blue backed by pale yellow or sometimes silver. A few cirrus clouds, feather thin to the west, gather, streaking and exuding light. Off in the distance a red-tailed hawk launches from the bare treeline, angles its wings in the wind, and crosses the highway.

It's a good feeling, driving in the spring weather, the windows down, a crisp breeze ballooning my flannel shirt, but I can't quit thinking about winter. The last few months (especially the dark sleeting days of January and February) I've been reading about my birthplace and pouring over my state topographical atlases, revisiting mentally the towns, creeks, and when I can remember them, the people I haven't seen for a while.

Whether all this late night dreaming in my study this past winter prepared me or not in thirty minutes or so, I'll be confronted again with my homeland—largest floodplain on the continent, the Lower Mississippi Valley. Represented topographically, it's a wide and winding blankness covering large parts of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana, with a few slips out of four other states. The map's near uniform whiteness signifies two undeniable characteristics: near level elevation and the absence of trees. One big field curving into the body of the continent. Yet the river is there, a muscular spine of green and blue, twisting through the emptiness. Past midnight in my study, eyes blurry with reading, the valley looked a little like a snake that had swallowed something and just turned its head to leave.

More precisely, though, the valley is an embayment, first scoured by the Mississippi River between the higher elevations of the coastal plain during the Pleistocene. When the valley was created, one glacier after another expanded and then contracted over the

landmass of upper North America, an icy breathing from the pole. Pregnant with meltwaters and their load of sediment, the river drowned each valley floor in a flood of soil. Swelling and shrinking with the ice sheets, oscillating across its creation, the river twisted like a god in a fit of making.

But other forces were at work, altering all that the river had shaped. The continents rose, sea levels fell, and because of this, every valley created between the glaciations was fated. Destroyed and born again, the ghosts of old valleys hover in the sky above the flatland.

Since the end of the last glaciation, things have been comparatively calm. The boreal spruce and pine which had pushed ahead of the glaciers withdrew, and the bottomland hardwoods settled in: gum, cypress, and oak mainly, thick with canebrakes, mazes of swamplands, innumerable brown lakes and slow rivers, a forest land rich in soil and snakes. Occasionally, a gloriously blue and brief prairie would open itself to the sky. Every few years, the river crawled out of its banks to replenish its garden, pruning or planting, or drowning all in alluvial soil—rebuilding the lowland again. Already, when you stand on the plain today, you have climbed atop a hundred valleys.

Over all this, the river and the walled low world it created, is the Mississippi Flyway, one of the major waterfowl migration routes in the Americas. Older than our valley perhaps, it braids over five thousand miles of avian highway, fanning out eventually into South America, stretching even to the Arctic. Over the river's bottomland, it becomes a



Listening to a reading by Dixon Bynum on a Mississippi Delta sand bar

loose funnel of migration patterns with countless branches and elevations. Winter mornings in the valley, you can wake up to a far-flung visitor, gracefully wading in the merest spot of water, a migrant comfortable as a resident. On early spring days like today, it's easy to look up and lose thought over hawks or herons or small bright songbirds, a patch of wing-color glinting in the sun, making landless flights over the Gulf of Mexico. Marking the coast and entering the valley must be a sort of deliverance. Descending into the bottomland, resting and feeding in the riverflats, the islands, the oxbows, dabbling in fresh water once again, they return.

I'm on Highway 32 and only a few miles from the Yazoo Bluffs, the eastern rim of the bowl that contains the floodplain. Mantled with loess soil, silky and yellow, these low hills hardly deserve the name escarpment. Yet something happens here; some quiet drama always unfolds when the final hill is crested. Ahead: the valley, stretching out to the Mississippi and beyond, narrowing north back toward the river, unrolling southward to the Gulf. Maybe it's that small change in elevation—only a hundred feet or so from the highest bluff—which produces such a strange bodily sensation those first moments, those surreal first miles down in the flatland. It happens the same way from almost any direction you approach. The only feeling that compares with it is being submerged in water. You are enveloped. Immersed. Some thick indefinable presence washes over you, and yet there is a calm, hanging stillness of it. Whatever it is, you know it was there before you, unseen as atmosphere, and you sink under it, accepted, like an insect losing surface tension, dropping beneath the skin of a tranquil lake. The horizon spreads itself. Things move slowly. Prostrate, the fields extend, running out to a windbreak and the next open and endless field, which reflects in its way the long blue stream of sky. A vulture soars, or maybe two, ritually encircling the dead. It is no different today.

Springtime awakens the valley. Some of the fields are already turned; others still lie undisturbed for the season. I scan the rows for the thin green shoots of this year's crops breaking through the ground. Peering at the bare fields, the silent earth, is itself a strange sensation: you know that soon the earth and air will warm and the ground will be full. The crops will roar and ripen.

Today, the creeks are brimming with fresh rain, a brown whirl with white foam, cans, and a few boards. The woodlots and windbreaks are just returning to leaf, covered in a haze several shades of green. In the odd corners of fields, the remnants of the valley forest, those low unyielding swampy places, quietly struggle into season again. I think I see the vermilion bloom of the red maple and the new cypress leaves, like pale lime fern fronds, despite the distance.

There are broken branches in the crowns of most oaks, hickories, gums—evidence of an ice storm that came sweeping across the valley six or seven years ago. Usual occurrences during late winters and early springs here, they usually strike the same areas only once in twenty or thirty years. Most recently, what started as a typical winter rainstorm ended with four inches of ice encasing the landscape overnight. The cracking limbs echoed like artillery; power lines snapped from the weight. The land was locked down, some places without power for three or four weeks. But enough time has passed,

and some of the most twisted and broken trees are healing now, hiding their scars with another spring. Today, it seems as if the promise of renewal is everywhere.

Then this thought, one which has grazed me all winter: Who would want to come here? Much less return.

This is, after all, the Delta. It is for most an infamous place, known mainly through headlines or news stories. Illiteracy, poverty, sub-standard public health and education—we lead the nation perennially in these categories. Our staple crops you could say. The boon of our rich fields. I may have missed the worst of my region's sins, too young to remember or born too late to know, but the shadows fade slowly. When I meet people and say *I am from the Delta*, I can only guess at what materializes in their minds. Even in my own head, the conjured images of this land's history are frightening: the rain of DDT over row houses; a sewage canal at the edge of town used for drinking water; the chain gangs of Angola or Parchman Penitentiary; the heatless winter room of the sharecropper's shack; the strained and grisly smile of the field worker. The lynching.

Yet things were bad from the beginning here, it seems, the Delta's reputation accruing from a long history of hazards. Even though some of the first promotional tracts presented the Delta as an Eden, other reporters were more honest. They saw Death nearby. When the first settlers entered the valley, they were greeted by yellow jack, swamp fever, constant floods, or just the threat of one. They saw houses broken loose from their foundations, floating south toward the Gulf; poisonous snakes with heads the size of a farmer's fist; panthers materialize from the swamp. Occasionally an alligator, when least expected. And always, incessantly, the mosquito.

There was a time when I did not know these facts, that there were things to fear out in the fields. Even after I left, as many have, I was unsure of the reason or force which drove me from there. Now, almost fifteen years later, I still don't know. The motive wasn't simply college, and in many ways the choice wasn't individual. At eighteen, we all had been urged to leave at one time, by family and friends who couldn't or those who were leaving too. Young with an education, we would be stupid not to, we were told. We were the lucky ones. Upon leaving, most of my class hoped we would never be back—at least not to live. The Delta, we agreed, was a good place to be from.

I was in such a hurry when I left that I forgot to solidify such reasons, to question myself, and it seems now that I'm even forgetting the land from which I came, needing books and maps to refresh my memory.

All of my friends are gone now. Some escaped to the gothams of the East, some to the new metropolitan cities of the South. When they returned to Mississippi for a visit, they appeared as if from the future. More often though, the mountains of the West lured them away. The phone calls or letters from Colorado, Montana, Utah came sporadically. At first, my friends gone to the Rockies or farther wanted news of home, but later conversations would always veer from that dangerous ground. The magnificence of nature out West would dominate our talks then: the sheer inhuman mountains clean of everything that was the valley.

My family left as well, slowly scattering out of the flatland. My father retreated to

the hills, my sister to Memphis, now a modern city with its suburbs gleaming into the countryside. Innumerable cousins, aunts, and uncles have absented. Only Newton Franklin, my father's older brother, remains, and he is eighty-two this year. He still works the family land, a couple of hundred acres in the Arkansas bottomland, and every morning his boot tracks in dew spell out a constant refusal to depart. There are many other men and women like him in the Delta; it is a country of old people clutching the place in which they have spent their lives, their sons and daughters and grandchildren vanished from them. They sit on porches and watch their world decline around them, no heirs to lifetimes of knowledge on the land.

In the past few years I have come back only for funerals, sad reunions in dowdy church basements. For many of us they are the only reason to return. The most recent was just a year ago. Sipping punch in a cinder-blocked rec room, we perched awkwardly in cold gray folding chairs. While I scanned the crowd of old faces and the few younger ones here for the afternoon, my father whispered to me, in a tone somber yet wry, that people leave the Delta any way they can.

College for me was not the escape I'd anticipated, however. It took a few years but soon I discovered that my childhood had quietly passed in a place with many different names. The South's South. The Most Southern Place on Earth. The Cotton Kingdom. America's Ethiopia. The Nations' #1 Economic Problem. The Valley of Death. I was overwhelmed by how much had been written about the Delta. It seems that every professor has a theory, every politician an initiative, every economist a plan. People damn it outright and others search desperately for what will save it. Researchers visit. So many official reports and commissions and symposia. A flood of words to control or commodify one small place in the world. I have become wary of these, like so many flags pinned to a map, or more accurately, like the banners of the conquistadors, flapping a little in the middle of a wilderness.

I would like to leave these theories behind for a while; there are many ideas I'd like to forget. I wish I could turn my back and enter the valley, wild with canebrakes and cypress and brown, fecund rivers. I wish I could hear the scream of a panther, the howl of a red wolf, the distant trundling of a bear in the undergrowth, even the winged swoosh of an ivorybill from deep in the forest. But it won't happen; there is little of that left here. You cannot separate man from the landscape of the Delta. It may well be the most heavily controlled, consciously manipulated, thoroughly rationalized place on earth.

This is the Corps of Engineers' playground; they have a long history in the Delta from the first national efforts at Mississippi River flood control to the continued draining of swamplands. Their vision of what the valley could be is everywhere manifest: the slow streams channelled and ditchbanked; the black land cleared, the vast fields newly leveled for row crops or ponded for catfish; the river wingdammed, leveed, untangled. It seems to never stop—this scheme of improvement—a terrarium under lights on a display shelf or a diorama on a conference table somewhere in our capital.

Yet there's something amiss in the analysis, something wrong in the garden. I'm not sure I'll find the answer, or even know the name of what I fled. And I can't be assured

that anything I write will be closer to the truth than anything said before. The least I can do is go back and look, try to catch a glimpse of what escapes theories and sifts through reports. Maybe I can forget the mountains and their lure of escape. Harder to behold is the valley, its sense of verticality not easy but masked in subterranean space. This dark earth, a distillation of ice and stone, the concentration of a continent's fertility, a black speck of it mad and wild in potential and fulfillment. If I'm lucky and if I listen long enough, I hope to hear still in the soil the muted ghosts of glaciers. This face-to-face meeting, this contact, I wonder if that's what frightens us, drives us to leave, or wills us to conquer. A spirit too strong even for the native.

I exit the highway and pull into my hometown, population six thousand and falling. Its self-proclaimed motto in my childhood, if I remember right, was "Beauty Spot of the Delta." But its name is unimportant; it's the same as all the other slowly dying towns of the Delta. I cruise down Deer Creek, slowing and turn by the drive-thru bank, which is closed and boarded. The whole of Main Street has a look of abandonment. Only Yee's is hopping the single grocery left in town. It's after five and just a few cars and trucks punctuate the empty parking spaces. Every third business is gone: the butcher shop, the drug store, the florist, even Western Auto. Broken shop windows, like closed eyes, are sealed with long sheets of pressboard. Glass on the sidewalk. For sale signs. Or just "For Sale" painted badly, quickly, on plywood. The lumber business, as my buddy Rushing's father says, is the only game left in town.

Back out on the highway. Low on the horizon, the sun cuts through the clouds, and I squint at the glowing border of field and sky. I haven't viewed my home like this, with the eyes of intimacy, in a long time. Maybe it's possible to see this place for what it is, without the blinders of inexperience. But it's also possible that I fear this place—not the people, for I like to think I am in some way one of those, but the land itself. Or rather what we have made of it. Fear is not the precise word, not exact at all, yet I'm unsure of a proper replacement. Maybe my long absence has changed everything; the memories of my twenty years here don't come back easily. Maybe what I feel means I'm no longer a native. I do know this place is different now, and I am different. At least

Laura Vaughn warms herself by the fire on the Mississippi



I'll have time this weekend not to know the answers but to ask the questions.

Rushing's house isn't far away. I stayed there years ago. It sits on long steel legs because it's inside the levee, on that strip of land still given to the Mississippi River. No one has lived there for three years since Rushing moved away to Colorado. He can't unload it, no interested buyers. The water works, he said on the phone, but there's no furniture on either floor. Dead insects in the sink and bathtub are a sure thing and possibly a cottonmouth curled up in the bottom floor. A broom works best, he told me, but I'll probably just stay upstairs.

The last turn—onto the road which will take me to the other side of the levee. A straight road, as most of the roads in the Delta are, pocked with potholes filled with rainwater. A few shotgun shacks on the right, porches or sides askew, tilt toward the earth with groundrot. Trailers too, quietly rusting. A field full of used tires.

I stop the truck at the top of the levee. Last light. A loose group of blackbirds cascades in the sky, finally settling in a leafless tree. They scatter and converge again, heading toward the river. Above them, in the deep, fading colors of the sunset, formations of geese wedge their way through the coming night, assured by a force that I cannot know. I'll sleep tonight like them, once more in the valley, huddling close to the river.

An Interview with Dixon Bynum

Most of the homes we've passed on our drive through the Delta look abandoned. What happened to the people living in those homes?

DB: It's a typical sharecropper's shack. Most of them are abandoned now. Small farmers found success in the Delta eighty years ago. Many farmers left in the great migration north in the 1920's and 1930's. Many more left with the increase of mechanized farming in the 1950's. Nowadays, tractors are driverless. They are controlled by GPS down each individual row. Small farming is not extinct in the South, but it is on the way out. The towns are dead now too. Stores simply can't stay open with so little business.

Why else have so many people left?

DB: There is practically no economic opportunity. Each town may have one doctor and one lawyer. There is no room to move up in that world. The Delta region has higher rates of every bad category you can imagine, from heart disease and baby death to illiteracy and tobacco consumption. There are a lot of implicit connections between these problems and the water quality, and some studies have shown direct relations to some types of cancer.

Why did you leave?

DB: I, like everyone I knew, was encouraged to leave as soon as I could from a young age. Parents here aren't naive about the possibility for opportunity in the Delta. Everyone I knew told me to leave.

Why do you keep coming back?

DB: The Delta is still my land. There is something powerful here, which I discover a little more of every time I come back. The land has no will of its own, yet bows to the will of no other.

Would you want to raise your kids in the Mississippi Delta?

DB: I definitely want my children to experience the Delta. I can't, however, in good conscience subject my son to some of the problems inherent with growing up in the Delta. I know that living near Oxford, MS, he will be statistically safer, healthier, and better educated. Maybe we will come back someday, but for now we are away from the Delta, for him.

Return to the Garden: Southern Landscape in the Literature of Eudora Welty

by Ivy Farr and Laura Vaughn

The botanical world has often been used subtly in literature to compose a setting with which the reader can associate himself or herself. Without some knowledge of native flowers, plants, trees, and grasses, the reader may find it very difficult to completely grasp the author's intentions. An author must work diligently to subtly reveal the features of his imagined landscape to the reader without overwhelming him with laborious amounts of scientific information. One of the masters of such subtlety is Eudora Welty. A gardener herself, Welty combines the cultivars that grew in her own garden with the natural landscapes and distinctive flora of the South to create a setting that would make any native Southerner feel at home. She uses her vast knowledge of the plants of the South to reveal their importance in the culture in which they are found, as well as to create precise images by comparing particular plants with seemingly unrelated objects.

To fully understand Eudora Welty's use of the botanical in her works, one must first understand her personal relationship with plants. Her mother, Chestina Welty, first planted a garden at their home in 1925. Eudora tended the garden for many years while her mother lived and continued it even after her mother died in the 1960s. Daylilies, camellias, and roses—a few of Eudora's favorites—filled the garden with sweet fragrances and beautiful blossoms, and Welty captured many of them with her camera. An avid photographer as well, many of her photographs aided in the recent restoration of her garden for all to see.

Eudora Welty's house in Jackson, MS



Welty's interest in gardening is revealed in her literature as well, for she incorporates the South's native flowers and plants into almost all of her works. This task is by no means an effortless one. It is very difficult to be familiar with the thousands of species that may exist in one square acre of land. It would be impossible for the reader to fully grasp the entire landscape in which a writer may place his or her character. However, with some knowledge of the most common plants in an area, the reader can obtain a much fuller, richer understanding of the setting the author is trying to produce.

To make matters worse, the common names that exist in one part of the country may be completely obsolete or non-existent even in nearby regions. For example, in the mountains of North Carolina a species that locals call "ivy" is known only sixty miles away in the Piedmont of South Carolina as mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*). If either name is used in the other setting, its meaning may be completely lost. This presents a very real problem for authors attempting to develop outdoor settings.

One means of eliminating the confusion over common names and regional differences would be to refer only to the scientific nomenclature of the plant, but excessive scientific jargon runs the risk of appearing ostentatious—a snobbish show of scientific information that the reader will neither be familiar with, nor want to know. Willa Cather once criticized a botany classmate for "call[ing] everything by its longest and most Latin name" and for being "a scholarly bore able to 'browbeat' [his listeners], argue them down, Latin them into a corner, and botany them into a shapeless mass." Such a technical lashing is unnecessary and would mean instant failure to a budding author.

Welty avoids using scientific nomenclature in her works, with only a few exceptions, choosing instead to combine the worlds of classical botany and new ecology. Swift and Swift referred to classical botany as being for "identification, naming, and cataloguing" and that the sole use of classical botany in literature would produce works that "resemble field guides" instead of literary masterpieces. The "new ecology," according to the Swifts, is "predictive in intention" and creates "complex interactions of individuals, communities, and environments." Botanical nomenclature, familiar only to a limited audience, severely impairs the quality of such interactions. The regional name of a plant reflects the culture of its people. For example, any one of the thirty or more plants of South Carolina that contain "rattlesnake" in their common names were once used as treatments for rattlesnake bites—a particular nuisance to settlers, backwoodsmen and others in the rural South. Though few, if any, of these plants actually reversed the effects of a rattlesnake bite, the two did have an observable, though spurious, correlation: rattlesnake bites are rarely fatal, so each of the herbal remedies seemed to be successful. The uses of "rattlesnake plants" are revealed in their common names, though that name may not be used in other parts of the country.

As the Old South becomes the New, connections to the land are being lost. Younger generations are experiencing a lack of knowledge of native and cultivated plants, making it difficult to relate to the literature of their own region. Also, as time goes on, common names change. Welty recognizes both the danger and the value of referring to common plants in her works. She chooses only the most familiar and distinguishing plants for her

settings, usually in the rural South—plants that she assumes her readers will recognize and picture without needing a wealth of botanical knowledge to do so. It is essential for a reader to be familiar with these plants if he or she is to understand the environment in which Welty places her characters.

The author employs her extensive knowledge of flora in several different ways. Of these, the most fundamental is the referencing of plants in order to establish setting or background. Mentioning a specific plant name recalls a very concrete image permitting an immediate and definitive establishment of “place,” without cluttering the narrative with frivolous adjectives. In a mere five lines of *The Robber Bridegroom*, Welty manages to refer to a significant proportion of Southern species that would immediately orient a savvy lector:

How beautiful it was in the wild woods! Black willow, green willow, cypress, pecan, katalpa, magnolia, persimmon, peach, dogwood, wild plum, wild cherry, pomegranate, palmetto, mimosa, and tulip trees were growing on every side, golden-green in the deep last days of the Summer.

For the slightly less erudite, blank upon reading this passage, a pass-over a few of these species might be helpful in evoking an image. A cypress tree (*Taxodium*) generally grows in swampy areas; has sloughing, scaly bark; and is supported by a wide buttress at the base sometimes referred to as a “cypress knee.” In *Delta Wedding*, Welty describes these giants as standing “like towers with doors at their roots.” A persimmon (*Diospyros*) can be a large shrub or undersized tree with small, ovate leaves splotched with dark spots. Its yellowish-orange fruit is consumable. In the past, its wood was used in manufacturing golf clubs. The wild plum (*Prunus*) is a weedy shrub with white flowers, and small, red to yellow fruits which are used in pies, jams, sauces and preserves. The tree was also once used by Native Americans to treat skin abrasions.

In addition to painting plants into the backdrop, Welty converts them into props. The modest reference to the “specially fine goldenrod” that Dr. Doolittle picked or, Lily, who “put a zinnia in her mouth and held still” highlights the supporting role of plants in the transactions that permeate the everyday life of Welty’s characters. Goldenrod (*Solidago*) is a small, erect, herbaceous plant easily spotted in fields and along roadsides by its narrow, lanceolate leaves and tops of small, yellow blooms. Zinnia (*Zinnia*) is a flowering, bushy plant originally from Mexico. Its bright, many-petaled blooms that vary in color are common in Southern gardens. According to Welty, blowing on the stem of a Zinnia produces a sound “exactly like a jaybird”.

Welty’s plants take on an even more central role when described in their various and infinite practical applications. From construction material to hair rinses, humans depend on the many plants of the natural world. In *The Robber Bridegroom*, Welty describes “a little house made of cedar logs all neatly put together...looking and smelling like something good to eat.” The latter portion of this citation would delight those who have smelled the warm, minty spice of a cedar, but puzzle those who have not. The

evergreen cedar (*Juniperus*) has small, linear, prickly leaves, and bears cones and small, light blue berries. Its durable wood contains oil that resists insects and fungi making it ideal for chests, shingles, fence posts and more.

In addition to shelter, humans depend on food for sustenance. Welty ties food back to its source—not the local grocery store, but the land. A Welty character may drink blackberry wine, eat “the grapes from the muscadine vine in the radiant noon,” or “pull up the next persimmon tree by the roots” to satisfy his desire for its fruits. Blackberry wine is made from the fruits of a blackberry bush (*Rubus sp.*). This plant sticks in the mind of any Southerner unlucky enough to be caught in its thorny brambles or victim to its resident chigger population. Its vines boast white blooms, compound leaves in threes or fives, and, in the late summer, dark juicy fruits which cause any aficionado to easily forget the scratches and bites suffered for one taste. The less perilous muscadine vine (*Vitis rotundifolia*), is thorn-less but also good for getting tangled in. It bears a delicious, dark fruit; and its round leaves are consumed in Mediterranean traditions.

Welty’s descriptive precision is most clearly evident when she uses plants in similes and metaphors. As Welty describes with increasing specificity, her familiarity with plant characteristics becomes all-the-more imperative. For example, what would it mean to tumble over “in the ditch, like a little puff of milkweed”? Milkweed (*Asclepias*) stands about two to five feet tall, contains milky juice, with pink to dull purple flowers in ball-like clusters. It is speculated that these tiny flowers, at first upright, fill with rain water causing the cluster to bend or tumble over; which would explain the baffling simile. In another instance, Welty describes a vitrola standing “like a big morning glory.” It turns out that the angled, funnel-like appendage from which the music of a vitrola comes is almost identical in form to the petals of the very unique morning glory (*Ipomea*) which opens in the morning to allow pollination and dies in the afternoon. The seeds have laxative properties and the plant itself can be used as a hallucinogen.

Above all, Welty’s most intricate, subtle, and occasionally perplexing use of plants is in characterization. Deciphering these clauses requires a careful reading and deeper investigation in order to build a knowledge of the plants in their social context. In *Delta Wedding*, Welty introduces the main character’s great-grandmother Mary Shannon by describing her portrait that hangs over the mantle: “There was a white Christmas rose from the new doorstep in her severely dressed hair.” What does the rose say about the personality of Mary Shannon? What does it say about the painter’s attitude towards Mary? Judging by her “severely dressed hair,” it could be that Mary is a very uppity, aristocratic type with lots of money who only decorates her hair with the very best and most expensive. However, a white Christmas rose is not a rose at all but a more humble member of the *Helleborus* family. It is called a Christmas rose because it resembles a rose and grows deep into the winter, making it adept for use in Christmas arrangements and decorations. It is not a twelve-dollar floral shop splurge. Additionally, Welty says that the rose was from the “new doorstep” implying that Mary does not come from old money. In fact, the artist (Mary’s husband) had just completed building their new house himself.

What does Welty want to communicate about Mary Shannon? She goes on to relate

that, in the portrait, Mary had been painted with “circles under her eyes” because that was the year of the yellow fever, and Mary had spent many hours nursing friends and neighbors to health. Her husband, the painter, also gave her a “defiant pose” to match her “severely dressed hair” which alludes to the bolder side of her spirit. The rose contrasts or offsets the strong side of Mary’s personality. The painter of the portrait was Mary’s husband who loved her very much and wanted her to be remembered as being strong and defiant, but also as a woman who loved and saw many die in her arms.

In chapter two of *The Ponder Heart*, Welty, in another subtle characterization, briefly introduces the Peacock family as the “kind of people [who] keep the mirror outside on the front porch, and go out and pick railroad lilies to bring inside the house.” For those non-native to the deep South, this description probably does not reveal much about “the kind of people” the Peacocks are. Based on their name, the “Peacocks,” and the comment about the mirror on the front porch, perhaps they are beautiful but vain. But bringing railroad lilies inside? Fortunately, three chapters later, at the funeral of one of the Peacocks, Welty thoroughly fills in the holes. The Peacock’s yard has “not a snap of grass,” just “a tire with verbena growing inside it.” They have a “tin roof that you could just imagine the chinaberries falling on—ping!” The mother of the deceased “wore tennis shoes to her daughter’s funeral” and the decor consisted of “ferns hauled out of creek bottoms.” In this context, it becomes clear that the previously made comment about the railroad lilies serve to demote or belittle the Peacocks, who perhaps believe themselves royalty. Though, to the unscrupulous reader, bringing railroad lilies inside the house may sound like a very romantic gesture, Welty meant to imply that it is the social equivalent of putting weeds in a vase.

Welty is not the only author to utilize plants in the development of setting; however, her life as a gardener and her precision in description make her narratives an exceptional portal into the world of Southern flora. The intention of this paper was to provide a pass over of these fundamental plants and the ways in which they are used, thereby allowing the reader to understand the full potency of Eudora Welty’s works. Hopefully, by tasting the subtleties of the author’s ingenuity, the reader will be inspired to investigate the many other natural nuances present in Welty’s works and in other great works of literature.



Journal Entry

by Hallie Sessoms

We walked along the Mississippi River, and I didn’t feel the cold. Actually, we were walking in the Mississippi, where water had been just a few months before. Now we walked, leaving our own footprints in the thick dark sand where the water had worn down the rocks and left tree stumps and limbs like so many forgotten pieces of trash on the side of the road. Things that once had a purpose now lay rotting: two hundred year old tree stumps and faded Budweiser beer cans. Equal and alone in the cold.

I was tired of driving when we first reached Oxford. After a violent bout of carsickness in Greenville, thanks to an apple I bought at the flea market and didn’t wash, I was fairly uneasy about riding long distances in the large white van. There’s nothing more embarrassing than vomiting in front of people you’re still just getting to know. As we piled into the cars that morning, ready to head off to the Delta with Dixon Bynum, I was fully prepared to sleep most of the way, primarily because I was tired, but also because I knew if I was sleeping, that meant I couldn’t vomit. I took comfort in this knowledge. I climbed into the front seat and settled in, not too pleased with being crunched between two people, but fairly confident I could make it work out. We left Oxford slowly, passing the strip malls and Wal-Marts I’d begun to



associate with up-and-coming Southern towns and moved into the rural Delta of Mississippi. As I watched the landscape blur past my side windows, pangs of something familiar shot through my entire body and for a moment, I was fairly certain I was going to be sick.

It wasn't long before I realized the source of my discomfort. Mississippi wasn't actually Mississippi at all to me now. It looked like North Carolina, like eastern North Carolina, at this same time of year. I thought about all that had happened since I'd last been there in winter, and I began to realize that some images don't leave you easily, no matter how much time passes you by. The pangs in my stomach started to fade, and, for the first time on the whole road trip, I found myself feeling at home in a place so far from my actual home. One of my fellow students remarked from the back of the car how ugly it was, how depressed he was getting as he looked out the windows, and before I could catch myself,



I told him that I thought it was beautiful. And I did, I still do, looking back now and remembering. That desolate and gloomy landscape was Southern in its beauty.

When I think of the South as a concept, I cannot help but think of the landscape. It's there in every piece I write, in every memory I have. I always start a story with, "So we were all sitting in the back of the truck down by the riverbanks/rocking on Momma's front porch/standing in the middle of the pasture," etc, etc. While I believe that rural Northerners and Midwesterners and maybe even rural West Coast folk (if there is such a thing) might start their stories that same way too, the landscape isn't a character in their stories the way it is in mine or any other Southerner for that matter. You hear the land in the way we say our words, in our choice of food, in the way we laugh.

The fields were long and flat and the faraway trees were like charcoal lines against the horizon; dark and intimidating reminders of a place hundreds of miles away. The clapboard farmhouses surrounded by the only roadside trees in the landscape were dark as well. It was the middle of the day and I somehow just knew that the residents were off working somewhere tilling or planting or scouting. If I closed my eyes for a few moments and reopened them I could almost imagine myself back in eastern North Carolina. *This is what ties us together*, I couldn't help but think, *this is what makes us Southern, what makes me Southern*. Looking back and remembering the cold and empty landscape, I am reminded of the warmth I took away from finding something of home in faraway Mississippi. This warmth I carried with me, as I walked along the edge of the mighty river, remembering home almost too vividly and letting the wind beat my face to numbness.

By the time I stood on the dirty banks of Mark Twain's Mississippi, thinking about home and missing my high school years, I couldn't help but feel a fading ache in my stomach from the shooting pangs I'd thought was carsickness. *A landscape five hundred miles away from home made me physically hurt with memories*, I thought incredulously, and then I realized it. This entire trip, I'd been trying to figure out why I, as an individual, love the South like I do. I wanted to know what makes it different from all the other places I've lived, California, Rome, Colorado. Suddenly I knew. It was the land. It was this view, these fields, and houses, and the people I couldn't even see with their tractors and their dogs, and their children in school from community colleges to Ivy Leagues. Their sons born to drive tractors and drink beer to calm the nerves the weather puts in their bones. The daughters raised to be ladies and who turn out to be a hundred other things instead. But every time you look in their eyes in the aisle at Wal-Mart or in the fanciest restaurant Oxford has to offer, you see the same thing; the land. Southerners have something in their blood that takes them back to the land every time. We stood there, fourteen separate Southerners shivering and quiet, looking at the grand ole river full of awe and respect for the land that quietly surrounded us. We could not escape it and that brought us together in a way we would ever be able to deny, no matter where our futures would take us.



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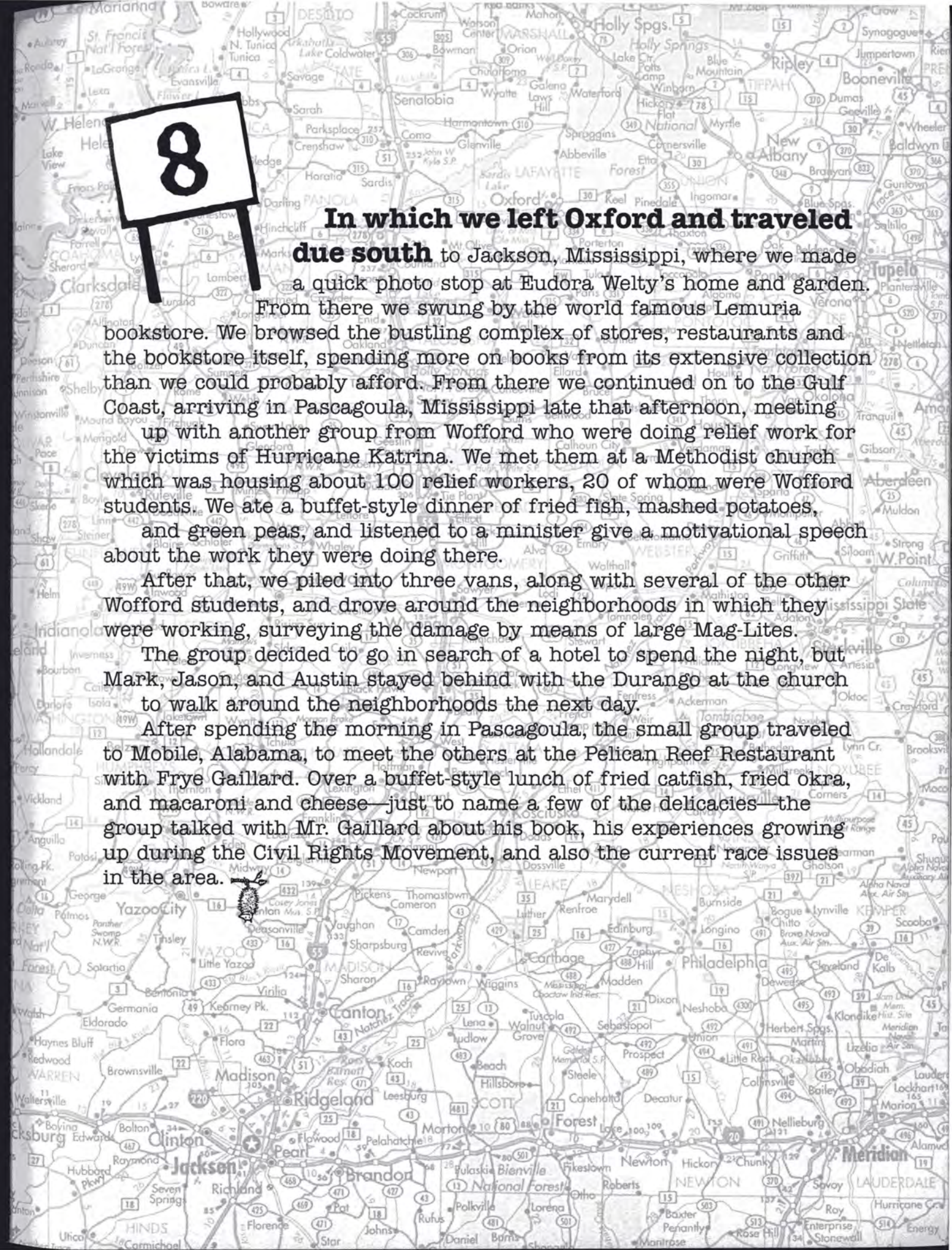
In which we left Oxford and traveled due south to Jackson, Mississippi, where we made

a quick photo stop at Eudora Welty's home and garden. From there we swung by the world famous Lemuria bookstore. We browsed the bustling complex of stores, restaurants and the bookstore itself, spending more on books from its extensive collection than we could probably afford. From there we continued on to the Gulf Coast, arriving in Pascagoula, Mississippi late that afternoon, meeting up with another group from Wofford who were doing relief work for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. We met them at a Methodist church which was housing about 100 relief workers, 20 of whom were Wofford students. We ate a buffet-style dinner of fried fish, mashed potatoes, and green peas, and listened to a minister give a motivational speech about the work they were doing there.

After that, we piled into three vans, along with several of the other Wofford students, and drove around the neighborhoods in which they were working, surveying the damage by means of large Mag-Lites.

The group decided to go in search of a hotel to spend the night, but Mark, Jason, and Austin stayed behind with the Durango at the church to walk around the neighborhoods the next day.

After spending the morning in Pascagoula, the small group traveled to Mobile, Alabama, to meet the others at the Pelican Reef Restaurant with Frye Gaillard. Over a buffet-style lunch of fried catfish, fried okra, and macaroni and cheese—just to name a few of the delicacies—the group talked with Mr. Gaillard about his book, his experiences growing up during the Civil Rights Movement, and also the current race issues in the area.



After the Deluge

by John Lane

It's been almost five months since Hurricane Katrina crawled slowly ashore and devastated the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Mobile. Katrina was one of the greatest natural disasters in the South's long history. Over 1,000 people lost their lives and thousands are still missing. Tens of thousands of homes were destroyed. The storm scrawled a Gothic narrative of destruction on every acre of the Deep South's coastline it crossed.

Last week my Cornbread and Sushi group met up with another Wofford interim camped out doing relief work for a Methodist church in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The other group had been working 8 hours a day hammering up sheet rock in houses damaged by the storm. We figured that the first law of creative writing is "Write what you know," so we stopped by for a brief glimpse into this historic storm zone the other students were now intimate with.

Headed south from Jackson, we hit I-10 outside of Gulfport (we were still ten miles from the Gulf) and drove east to Pascagoula. It was already dark by then, so it was hard to see the damage. Almost all the road signs had been bent, and there were some down trees, lots of trash, big piles. The biggest sign of the storm was that every billboard along I-10 has been replaced with one hawking roofing repair companies.

In Pascagoula we made our way to the Methodist church where Wofford professors Ron Robinson and Ab Abercrombie were housing their 26 students—all in two Sunday school rooms, one for the guys and one for the girls. There were 175 relief workers at the church, including a tribe of retired people living outside in Winnebago

Katrina's storm surge washed the walls away on the house nearly eight feet up



A FEMA trailer

campers. There were only two showers for everyone.

The other Wofford crew was overjoyed to see the Sushi crowd roll in and we joined them for a supper of fish sticks, boiled potatoes, green peas, and slaw. The church was six blocks from the Gulf in a densely settled neighborhood, strangely quiet and deserted, and the gravity of the situation only began to dawn on me when I noticed that the sheetrock in the church gym up six feet was fresh and unpainted.

"Is that where people were practicing their sheet rock installation?" I asked. "No," Ron said, "There was water in here 40 inches deep in here and all that had to be replaced."

After supper we all piled in four vans and drove toward the Gulf through Pascagoula neighborhoods where all the houses were abandoned. There were small travel trailers in many of the front yards—"FEMA trailers"—with little lights in them, but the houses behind them were dark. Inside of many you could shine the flashlight from the van and see there was nothing but studs for walls. All the sheetrock had been removed and piled in the street, ruined by the rising water. Ron explained how the town of Pascagoula alone had 1,000 houses destroyed and 12,000 damaged by flooding.

Strangely enough, there was little sign of wind damage. Here the hurricane was mostly what Ab called "a big water event." Pascagoula had flooding two miles inland. That was bad because no one outside the narrow coastal flood zone had flood insurance. Everyone would need sheetrock, which is now running at \$18 a sheet up from \$6 before the storm. Ron and Ab said that it's real easy to empty your bank accounts to help out, and the need is still so great.

It was cold that night in Pascagoula, and the Gulf looked so calm with moonlight on it. I'll never forget the devastation highlighted in the beam of Ron's flashlight. On the first row of houses off the water the destruction had been almost total. Half a million dollar "Gulf view" houses were now either flat gone (about half of them) or the whole bottom floor was washed through, as if they had been built on 2X4 stilts. Ron moved the flashlight beam around to show us the devastation.

There were clothes in the trees and mounds and mounds of belongings everywhere.

Occasionally there would be someone living in a little FEMA trailer on the foundation of a once palatial mansion. Once, Ron shined the light at a huge roof sitting flat on its foundation. The water had swept in, took the house, and sat the whole roof back down perfectly on the slab, and swept out again. "We call this the 'good new/bad news' house," Ron said. "The good news is that their roof is not damaged. The bad news is that their house has gone missing."

After our tour we took four vans and found an open Wendy's (everything closes at 6pm because there's no help to hire), and the Wofford kids ate cheeseburgers, and they laughed and talked like the college students they are.

Will stories, poems, and essays come out of this brief brush with history? There's no way to know, but we're sure now that at least some Wofford students who consider themselves writers have seen it. They now know something about the Great Hurricane of 2005, even if it's only what they could see in the beam of a flashlight as a van drove through Pascagoula.

Some of the Wofford volunteers



You Can Go Home

by Frye Gaillard

It was my first encounter with the great Southern sin. I remember it now as a warm, sunny day, though it must have been fall, for leaf piles were burning, and the sweet scent drifted through the neighborhood. Robert Croshon was there with his wheelbarrow, and I was five years old and ready for a ride. It was something of a ritual for us by now. Every Saturday on his way to work, Robert would stop to pick up his "helper." That was me—the youngest grandchild in a family for whom Robert had worked for thirty years.

Robert was a black man, a person of indestructible good humor, and then as now, the gentlest soul that I ever met. He was a gardener by trade, scratching out a living for himself and his family, and on the day I'm remembering he was working in my grandfather's vegetable patch, chopping at the weeds and tugging at the meanest clumps of wild onions. My own contributions were a little more random; I chased away the Indians in the bamboo hedges and practiced high-jumping across the collard greens.

It was, however, an exuberant partnership that we had forged, and when it was time for lunch, we headed for the Big House, as my grandfather's dwelling was known in those days. The extended family was beginning to gather, and it was an impressive spread on the dining room table—fried chicken, turnip greens, a platter of biscuits. But as we took our places around the great cluttered feast, Robert found a chair by himself in the kitchen.

To a five-year-old it made no sense. "Robert!" I called. "Come on in here."

I knew immediately that I had made a mistake, for my aunt quickly shot me a look that could kill. "Shame on you!" she said with a hiss. "Shame on you for hurting Robert's feelings."

I remembered that moment as the years went by and the civil rights movement descended on the South, raising the most fundamental of questions. I was a teenager when the movement hit its stride, and for me at least, those festering doubts that began when I was five—the secret suspicions that the world around me didn't make a lot of



Frye Gaillard

sense—finally erupted into full-blown rebellion. I don't mean that I was a bad teenager. The world seemed much too serious for that, particularly when I finally got away to college, and Martin Luther King paid a visit to the campus.

It is safe to say that in southern Alabama, where I had been raised, King was probably the ultimate pariah. My own family had first taken notice of him in the closing weeks of 1955, when he became the spokesman for the Montgomery bus boycott. He was only 26 years old at the time, but despite his youth and relative inexperience, he seemed to be so sure of himself.

"We are not wrong tonight," he declared at the first mass meeting of the Montgomery movement. "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."

Even down in Mobile, my family and friends were incensed at the impudence of this middle class Negro and his intimations of far-reaching change. They thought he was the most dangerous man in America. At Vanderbilt, however, where I was a student in the 1960s and first heard him speak, he seemed to be far less frightening than that. He was a smallish man with large, dark eyes that were shaded with sadness, and his manner in conversation was casual and relaxed—none of the pomp that we might have expected from a man who had recently won a Nobel Prize.

Only when King began to speak to the whole student body did the full implications of his presence become clear. It was true enough that he stood as an apostle of reconciliation, holding out the olive branch to white Americans. But he was also making his militant demands—not only for the laws that would end segregation, but for a change of heart and mind in the country that would enable us all to live up to our values.

As an aspiring journalist, working in the summers for my hometown paper, I knew immediately that this was a struggle I would have to write about. But I knew also that I could not do it from the state of Alabama. I tried it for a while. In 1968, as I limped out of college, newly endowed with a degree in history, I returned to Mobile and took a job with the morning newspaper. The paper, however, was not especially interested in the civil rights story, and family tensions were still on the rise—too many uncles and cousins and friends who were astonished and angry at the things I was writing.

Searching for a more hospitable climate, I soon moved on to the *Charlotte Observer*, one of the South's most distinguished newspapers, where my first assignment was the busing controversy. It was a landmark case that compelled the community to confront its legacy of segregation. For a while, the city was thrown into turmoil, with racial fighting closing down the schools, adults throwing rocks at children on the buses, a black lawyer's offices burned to the ground.

It was a spectacle you might have seen in Alabama.

But there were other people who stepped forward also, black and white, defending the schools and the idea of integration, appealing to the better instincts of their neighbors. As the community struggled with what it wanted to be, it was, for me, a lesson in the literature of the craft, in the notion that journalists, like their upscale cousins in the

world of fiction, could wrestle with the great Faulknerian themes: the human heart in conflict with itself.

All in all, for a writer in search of a place to ply his trade, it was as fine an opportunity as I could imagine. I stayed in Carolina for the next thirty years, never expecting to go home again. But then sometime in the year 2000, I was asked to do a book on the civil rights movement in Alabama, a state that had been at the heart of the struggle. Supported by Auburn University and the University of Alabama, I spent the first three years of the new millennium interviewing the veterans of that history—foot soldiers, mostly, those ordinary men and women who managed for a time to do extraordinary things.

There was Annie Cooper, an old woman now, who was beaten bloody during the Selma protests, but remembered the speech of Martin Luther King when the marchers finally made it to Montgomery. "His eyes were just a'twinklin'," she said. And there was Barbara Cross, who, as a Birmingham teenager, had survived the infamous bombing of her church, but lost four of her closest friends in the blast. J.D. Cammeron faced the cattle prods during a march in Gadsden, and Vivian Malone took her stand for dignity as the first black student at the University of Alabama.

When the book came out, telling these stories, people all across Alabama, white and black, seemed to be fascinated by the history, and the University of South Alabama asked me to teach a course on what I had learned. I was suddenly face to face with an unexpected irony: that the issue that had driven me out of the state was now on the verge of bringing me back.

I talked to my old friend Robert about it—Robert Croshon, my grandfather's gardener, with whom I had managed to keep in touch through the years. I would drop by to see him on visits to Mobile, talking about old times, and listening also to stories of his family. He was the proud descendant of runaway slaves, people who had fled from a Georgia plantation, but found themselves headed south instead of north when a thunderstorm blotted out the stars.

They decided to make their way to Mobile, where there was a small, but determined community of free Negroes, and I always knew that the great and unruffled dignity of Robert—his equanimity in the face of segregation—was rooted in part in the courage of his forebears.

"It's different today," he said near the end.

He was lying at the time in his hospital bed, a wispy, gray-haired man in his nineties, recently retired from his physical labors, as his heart was slowly giving up the ghost.

"It's better for all of us," I told him, handing him a copy of the book I had written.

Robert took the book and thumbed through the pages. I knew he was probably too sick to read it, but as his mind drifted back to the way it used to be, through the arc of history that all of us had lived through, he seemed to be pleased.

My own feeling, as the old man nodded and laid the book at his side, was that in a way I had never expected to know it, it was good to be home.

An Interview with Frye Gaillard

On a crisp January Sunday afternoon in Mobile, Alabama, Frye Gaillard sat down to lunch with us to discuss both himself and his work at one of his favorite seafood restaurants. The Pelican Reef, which sits on the shore of Mobile Bay, seemed to be a rather fitting place to meet with the author, because, just like the subjects the author wrote about, it too had overcome adversity. When hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast regions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, the ensuing flooding completely submerged the Pelican Reef. But amazingly the restaurant reopened after only four days of repairs. With that in mind, the author discussed topics ranging from himself to his works to the current situation in the Gulf Coast region.

What influenced you to pursue the career you have today?

FG: At age sixteen, I witnessed Martin Luther King being arrested. Even though the people I grew up around were good people, we still supported segregation. But seeing the look in the man's eyes, what I would later realize was hope, intrigued me. The turmoil of the times and of the region would influence me into journalism and to leave the state.

A phrase that often comes up in discussions about this topic is "being on the wrong side of history." Can you talk about how you and your family fit into this, especially in light of your encounter with Martin Luther King?

FG: Growing up seven miles from Mobile, close to the center of the movement, in an area still feeling the ravages of yellow fever, my family had lived there for a hundred years. Part of the status quo, we were prominent in the community because my father was a circuit court judge. We could sympathize with people like Governor John Patterson, who was a segregationist out of the necessity of the political climate. Although moderately progressive, to win in the environment he was in, he had to side with segregation, which he did. During my interviews with him in later years, he would admit this fact remorsefully, admit the fact that he, and we for that matter, were at least for a time, on the wrong side of history.

Why did you leave Alabama?

FG: In the late sixties, several years after I had come to embrace the civil rights movement, I couldn't stand the incredibly close-minded society and the residual bigotry

that was still all around us; it was difficult to live in, even hard to breathe in if you didn't agree with the close-minded majority.

How do you define a close-minded society, such as the society of Alabama in the sixties in which you lived?

FG: A society in which antipathy is shown towards anyone who "rocks the boat." Either that or belligerent resistance.

How did the civil rights movement occur so quickly in an area like Alabama, which was notorious for racism, especially when people thought it just couldn't be done?

FG: People with an eloquent ability to hope stepped forward; they gave those who needed it the possibility to imagine a different world, a different way of life, to draw a different picture of how it could be, people like Martin Luther King.



A home in Pascagoula, Mississippi destroyed by Katrina

Now that you're back in Alabama, what are some of the challenges you see facing the society today?

FG: First and foremost, the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina. The areas were already some of the poorest in the nation, so when the area was hit hard by the storm, the people who were already hurting were hurt worse. The area already had a high percentage of people living below the poverty line; after the storm, even more joined their ranks. After the storm surge pushed fishing boats into swamps, FEMA drained them of gas in an effort to protect the environment. These boats are in an extremely difficult position to move, and the costs of refueling them and retrieving them from the swamps can be in the thousands of dollars. Instead of helping these folks resume their livelihoods, FEMA has wanted to pass the cost on to them. For the owners of the boats, the people who depend on the income they earn from fishing, FEMA doesn't seem to have helped very much. Creoles, Blacks, Indians, and Vietnamese are some of the minority groups who are being hit hardest by these actions. [A couple of months later, Frye wrote to us to report that money raised by former Presidents Clinton and Bush would be used to retrieve the shrimp boats from the swamps.]

Aside from the natural disaster, have issues changed in the area?

FG: People who say no real progress has been made are wrong. The laws have changed, and, to a very great extent, they are being enforced. This is especially apparent in the interactions between the races; what goes on today would have never happened forty years ago. But, there are still lingering bigotries towards blacks, and more recently, homosexuals. Once again, being on the wrong side of history will play a factor, in that the churches that make this issue the litmus test of Christianity will one day look like the churches that advocated slavery. Segregation has taken a new form, in that the rich and poor becoming increasingly segregated. With more and more people being pushed below the poverty line as a result of Katrina, segregation between classes seems likely to increase.

Eating Rats at Vicksburg

by Hal Crowther

Race is like a big crazy cousin locked in the basement, a red-eyed giant who strangled a dog and crippled a policeman the last time he got loose. We never forget that he's down there. But it's amazing how long we can ignore him, no matter how much noise he makes moaning and banging on the pipes. Our denial's almost airtight, until one day he's out in the yard again swinging a pickax, and all we can do is blame each other and dial 911.

He's out. The Million Man March of Minister Farrakhan, the Simpson verdict, the ambitious black general who paralyzed both political parties with his popularity—where can you hide from race anymore? There's no safe place to position yourself, either. Sympathize with the Simpson jury and you're a misogynist; ridicule them and you're a racist. Criticize Farrakhan and you're a closet Klansman; praise him and you're an anti-Semite.

It's real hard to duck that last one, the anti-Semitism. On the day of the Million Man March, the Chicago Tribune quoted Quanell X, national youth minister for Farrakhan's Nation of Islam: "I say to Jewish America: Get ready...knuckle up, put your boots on, because we're ready and the war is going down."

"All you Jews can go straight to hell," suggested another Farrakhan aide, the virulent Khallid Muhammad.



Yet black columnists I respect compared the March to Woodstock and “the embrace of home.”

“African-American men who missed it missed more than they will ever know,” wrote Leonard Pitts, Jr., of the *Miami Herald*.

Where’s the middle ground for the moderate and well-meaning? Race is intellectual quicksand. All the wisdom I’ve ever heard on the subject was personal, provisional, subject to revision. And that ambiguity runs a little thicker here in the South.

While 400,000 black men converged on Washington, several thousand of the South’s best readers converged on Nashville for the Southern Festival of Books. Black readers were much in evidence. But so was the fact that even literature is segregated, unintentionally. I’m afraid I never saw a black person in line to get a book signed by a white author, or a white person in line to meet a black author. The only writer who seemed to straddle the color barrier comfortably was the inimitable Reverend Will Campbell, the last of a breed of unsentimental liberals the South will sorely miss when they’re gone.

Few white writers consciously target white readers. But a white novelist from Virginia, addressing a panel on Southern literature, exposed one good reason why whites are the only readers most of them find.

She confessed her lifelong indifference to the Civil War, and her wish that we might finally bury the Confederate dead. A large all-white audience was divided between applause and horror at this revelation. But among the mildly horrified was another novelist on the panel, one of her close personal friends.

It turned out that several of the poets and novelists at the Nashville gathering can discuss Shiloh or Chickamauga regiment by regiment, hour by hour, the way my friends and I discuss a classic World Series. Some readers are afflicted even more severely. An old man came up to the writer who was tired of *The War* and reproached her sorrowfully, with tears in his eyes: “My family lived on rats during the siege of Vicksburg,” he said, “and we’ve never gotten over it.”

What can you say to that? I’ve lived in the South half my life. In none of the places where I lived the other half—not even in England, land of defiant anachronism—did I encounter anything approaching this old man’s retro-fixation. Every year at the Festival of Books, historians and intellectuals gather to flog the official cult of Southern nostalgia, as articulated by the much-deconstructed Fugitives in *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930). Yet most Southern literature has been rooted in such a profound, clinging, pervasive nostalgia that’s it’s hard for us to imagine what could have been written without it.

“The South has been notorious for mythologizing itself,” writes poet James Applewhite of North Carolina. “That part of the mind of the South which does not know itself persistently wishes to see the Old South, before the war, as a kind of Eden.”

Why Dixie? Nostalgia is a function not only of culture, but of aging. It’s a softening of perception few adults avoid. Just at the age when your hopes begin to lose variety and velocity, nostalgia comes to you as a friend, retouching your memories in brighter colors and airbrushing out most of the grief and humiliation.

Nostalgia is a mercy much like whiskey; it becomes a handicap when it intoxicates you and a curse when you can’t sober up. You’ve uncorked the bottle too many times when you begin to pine for some imaginary Eden. A perfect un-Southern illustration was the political development of Irving Kristol, one of the godfathers of the “neo-conservative” movement. In a devastating review of Kristol’s book, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, Theodore Draper demonstrates that Kristol’s philosophy hangs entirely upon his belief in a retro never-never land—a utopia where capitalism is the genial guarantor of a humane bourgeois patriarchy, one that values and protects Jews and other industrious, orderly minorities.

In your dreams, Irving—the only place a Jew can court right-wing Christians without surrendering the last tatters of his self-respect. But Kristol’s high-wire act—a blend of elaborate rationalization, selective perception, and daredevil denial—resembles tricks that intelligent Southerners have been performing all their lives.

Everyone’s entitled to the symbols of his history. I have no problem with the Confederate battle flag, if you convince me that it’s displayed in a nonconfrontational context. (I have no personal stake in *The War*; of my eight great-grandparents, only one, a woman, was living in the United States before 1870.)

But it would be a different matter, a different flag, if I were black. Novelist Jill McCorkle, a white North Carolinian, tells a story about a woman who was fawning over the Civil War historian Shelby Foote at a writer’s conference.

“Oh, don’t you just wish you’d been alive back in those days?” she gushed directly at a black writer, Tina McElroy Ansa, who answered simply, “No.”

Literary Southerners are entitled to Stonewall Jackson and the Lost Cause. Blacks are equally entitled to view the Civil War as blessed deliverance from a society where they were bought, sold, and bred like hunting dogs, and usually treated with less affection. Most black readers don’t care if Huckleberry Finn is great or even great-spirited literature. It embarrasses them. They don’t want to “valorize” Nigger Jim. They want to forget him.

Most Southern writers I know regard themselves as racial liberals. But memory is the primary raw material of their trade. It’s hard for them to see that the least blush of nostalgic longing, in a white Southerner’s story, will strike many black Americans as an outright insult.

You don’t have to go back 130 years, to the war and the great-grandfathers, to find the raw places. It wasn’t much more than thirty years ago that my liberal hometown of Chapel Hill, so despised by Jesse Helms, was still making its bows to Jim Crow. A black man couldn’t get a degree there, or a sandwich.

When Hodding Carter, Jr., entered Bowdoin College in Maine in 1923, he was such a racist that he’d get up and leave the room when the school’s lone black undergraduate entered, and he avoided the toilet he thought the man was using. Carter, who became an editorial crusader for racial justice, was nine years old when he saw his first lynching victim, a black woman, hanging from a bridge near his home in Hammond, Louisiana.

Hodding Carter is not ancient history; I ate supper with his widow in New Orleans

just last month. W. J. Cash, in *The Mind of the South* (1941), recalls a conversation with a night rider who had fond memories of burning a black man alive. John Egerton, in *Speak Now Against the Day* (1994), reports that it was such a public burning in Tennessee that forged the radical conscience of H. L. Mitchell, who organized the first biracial union of Southern sharecroppers.

The last racial murder officially recorded as a lynching occurred in 1951. In nursing homes somewhere in the South, a few of the dreadful old crocodiles who carried the nooses or lit the torches must still be breathing. It's no wonder that African Americans aren't a nostalgic people. Black writers like Toni Morrison and Randall Kenan may work wonders with memory, but never accuse them of nostalgia.

Current reality isn't especially pretty, for most black Americans. One black male in three will be incarcerated at some point in his life. But Colin Powell led the presidential preference polls for six months, and only seventeen bewildered Klansmen showed up for "a mass rally" in Raleigh. Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey control financial empires. Clarence Thomas sits on the Supreme Court, even if he had to submit to a surgical procedure to get the nomination. O. J. Simpson can not only sleep with a white woman, but beat her up and probably even murder her without fear of being hanged from a bridge.

Don't wax too nostalgic in front of black people. They'll take the present, any day, over their American past. They don't read *Gone With the Wind* or Walker Percy, and I've got my doubts about Faulkner. I'll bet they didn't watch *The Civil War* on PBS. Don't lecture them about the Siege of Vicksburg. They think those starving Confederates deserved to eat a few rats, or worse.

An Excerpt from **Clover**

by Dori Sanders

They dressed me in white for my daddy's funeral. White from my head to my toes. I had the black skirt I bought at the six-dollar store all laid out to wear. I'd even pulled the black grosgrain bows off my black patent leather shoes to wear in my hair. But they won't let me wear black.

I know deep down in my heart you're supposed to wear black to a funeral. I guess the reason my stepmother is not totally dressed in black is because she just plain doesn't know any better.

The sounds inside our house are hushed. A baby lets out a sharp birdlike cry. "Hush, hush, little baby," someone whispers, "don't you cry." There is the faint breathless purr of an electric fan plugged in to help out the air-conditioning, the hum of the refrigerator going on in the kitchen, a house filled with mourners giving up happy talk for the quiet noise of sorrow.

We take the silence outside to waiting shiny black cars, quietly lined behind a shiny black hearse. Drivers in worn black suits, shiny from wear, move and speak quietly, their voices barely above a whisper. It seems they are afraid they might wake the sleeping dead. It's like the winds have even been invited. The winds are still.

One of the neighbors, Miss Katie, is standing in the front yard, watching the blue light on top of a county police car flash round and round. She is shaking her head and fanning the hot air with her hand. Biting, chewing, and swallowing dry, empty air. Her lips folding close like sunflowers at sundown—opening, like morning glories at dawn.

They asked Miss Katie to stay at the house. Folks in Round Hill, South Carolina, never go to someone's funeral and not leave somebody in their home. They say the poor departed soul just might have to come back for something or another, and you wouldn't want to lock them out.

My breath is steaming up the window of the family car. It's really cold inside. Someone walks to our driver and whispers something. I see a cousin rush from a car with what Grandpa would have called a passel of chaps. They leave our front door wide open. A hummingbird flies to the open door and stands still in midair, trying to decide about entering, but quickly darts backward and away.

I press my face against the cold window. Only a few days back, my daddy, Gaten, walked out that very door, carrying a book. He headed toward the two big oak trees in the front yard and settled himself into the hammock that was stretched between them.

And after awhile, like always, he was sound asleep, with the open book face down across his chest.

My daddy looked small between those big trees. But then, he was small. Everybody says I'm small for a ten-year-old. I guess I'm going to be like my daddy. Funny, it's only the middle of the week, but it seems like it's Sunday.

They say I haven't shed a single tear since my daddy died. Not even when the doctor told me he was dead. I was just a scared, dry-eyed little girl gazing into the eyes of a doctor unable to hold back his own tears. I stood there, they said, humming some sad little tune. I don't remember all of that, but I sure do remember why I was down at the county hospital.

Things sure can happen fast. Just two days before yesterday, my aunt Everleen and I walked in and out of that door, too. Hurrying and trying to get everything in tip-top shape for Gaten's wedding supper.

Gaten didn't give Everleen much time. He just drove up with this woman, Sara Kate, just like he did the first time I met her. Then up and said flat-out, "Sara Kate and I are going to get married. She is going to be your new step-mother, Clover."

I almost burst out crying. I held it in, though. Gaten couldn't stand a crybaby. "A new stepmother," I thought, "like I had an old one." I guess Gaten had rubbed out his memory of my real mother like he would a wrong answer with a pencil eraser.

Everleen had been cooking at her house and our house all day long. My cousin Daniel and I have been running back and forth carrying stuff. I should have known something was up on account of all the new stuff we'd gotten. New curtains and dinette set for the kitchen. Everleen said, "The chair seats are covered in real patent-leather." Gaten's room was really pretty. New rug and bedspread with matching drapes.

In spite of all the hard work Everleen was doing, she had so much anger all tied up inside her it was pitiful. She was slinging pots and pans all over the place. I didn't know why she thought the newlyweds would want to eat all that stuff she was cooking in the first place. Everybody knows that people in love can't eat nothing.

Even Jim Ed tried to tell her she was overdoing it. "It didn't make any sense; her husband said, 'to cook so much you had to use two kitchens.'"

"I don't want the woman to say I wouldn't feed her," Everleen pouted.

"I think Sara Kate is the woman's name, Everleen," Jim Ed snapped.

Well, that set Everleen off like a lit firecracker. She planted her feet wide apart, like she was getting ready to fight. Beads of sweat poured down her back. The kitchen was so hot, it was hard to breathe.

Jim Ed gave his wife a hard look. "I hope you heard what I said."

Everleen put her hands on her hips and started shaking them from side to side so fast, she looked like she was cranking up to takeoff. "I heard what you said, Jim Ed. Heard you loud and clear. What I want to know is, what you signifying?"

Everleen was so mad, she looked like she was going to have a stroke. "Let me tell you one thing. Get this through your thick skull and get it straight. You are not going to get in your head that just because some fancy woman is marrying into this family you can start



Dori Sanders at her produce stand

talking down to me. You better pray to the Lord that you never, and I mean never, embarrass me in front of that woman. Because if you do, only the Lord will be able to help you." She waved a heavy soup spoon in his face. "Another thing, Jim Ed Hill, I am not going to burn myself to a crisp in that hot peach orchard getting my skin all rough and tore up. I'm sure all Miss Uppity-class will do is sit around, and play tennis or golf. One thing is the Lord's truth, she is not going to live off what our. . ." She stopped short. "I mean what your folks worked so hard to get. Everleen Boyd will not take anything off anybody no matter what color they may be. I've been in this family for a good many years, but I sure don't have to stay."

My uncle looked at me. I guess he could see I was hurting. He put his arm around me. "Oh, baby, we ought to be ashamed, carrying on like this. We can't run Gaten's life for him. And we sure don't need to go out of our way to hurt him. Gaten told me out of his own mouth, he truly loves the woman he's going to marry. My brother deserves some happiness. You are going to have to help him, also, Clover. Getting a stepmother will be something new for you to get used to."

Jim Ed turned to his wife. "You always say you put everything in the Lord's hands. I think you better put this there, too, and leave it there, Everleen." Well, that quieted Everleen down. She never bucks too much on advice about the Lord.

Right then I couldn't even think about the stepmother bit. All I could think about was what Everleen said. Maybe she was thinking of leaving Jim Ed and getting a divorce. She called herself Boyd. I didn't think she wanted to be a Hill anymore. If she took her son Daniel and left me all alone with that strange woman, I would die. I knew in my heart, I would surely die.

I was starting to not like my daddy very much. Not very much at all. Miss Katie says, "Women around Round Hill leave their husbands at the drop of a hat these days." If Everleen leaves it will all be Gaten's fault, I thought. All because of his marriage plans.

Everleen pulled me from Jim Ed to her side. I buried my face against her sweaty arm, glad there was the sweat so she couldn't feel the tears streaming down my face. Her hot, sweaty smell, coated with Avon talcum powder, filled my nose. It was her own special smell. I felt safe.

Finally she pushed me away. "Let me dry them tears," she said, dabbing at my eyes with the corner of her apron. I should have known, I couldn't fool her. I don't know if it was what Jim Ed said about Gaten or the Lord that turned Everleen around. Probably what he said about the Lord, but it sure turned her around. After a few minutes she was her old self again.

"Alright, little honey," she said, "we better get a move on. We got us a marriage feast to cook. Now I'm going to put together the best wedding supper that's ever been cooked. Then I'm going to dress you up in the prettiest dress your daddy has ever laid eyes on." She glanced at my hair. "Lord have mercy, Allie Nell's still got your hair to fix!"

Anyway, Everleen was still cooking and cleaning at the same time when the telephone rang. My daddy had been in a bad accident. Everleen snatched lemon meringue pies out of the oven and drove her pickup like crazy down to the hospital.

Preserving Culture through Art

by Elizabeth Bethea

Throughout this course, literature has provided a window to view the landscape of our Southern past. We have studied the cultural shift in the South from rural to urban by looking at the Southern perspective on the landscape, religion, politics, family, language, and death. The fine arts can also act as a device to understand the vibrant culture of the South. More specifically, the paintings of Jonathan Green reflect the unique heritage of the Gullah people, who reside on the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia. He paints bold scenes depicting the everyday life of the Gullah people, such as going to the beach, fishing, and even a funeral. Recently, a dance production by the Columbia City Ballet, titled "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage: The Art of Jonathan Green," has enabled his art to provide awareness to more people about Gullah culture.



The Gullah people came to the islands of South Carolina and Georgia as a workforce of African slaves to tend the flourishing rice, indigo, and cotton fields. In Bettye J. Parker Smith's "Jonathan Green in Motion," she states:

The geographical isolation which characterized the newly transplanted Africans, the state of South Carolina's insistence on importing Africans directly from the Gold Coast of West Africa, and the small numbers of whites able to survive the climate and conditions of the Sea Islands created a sort of Petri dish for preserving African cultural tenets and for the development of a unique African American culture.

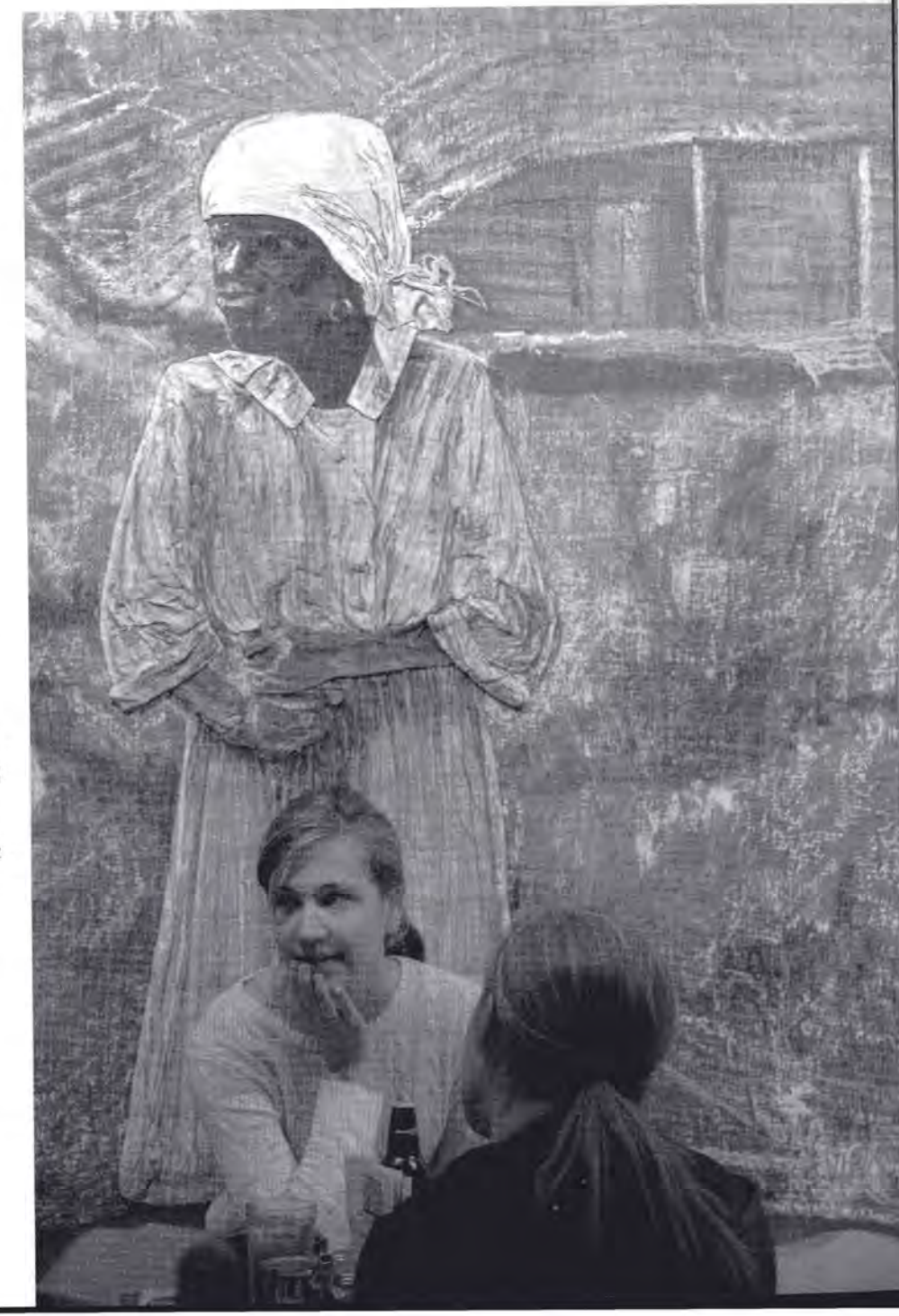
Due to the South Carolina slave owners' desire to create a pure slave race, they imposed high duties on slave imports from anywhere other than the west coast of Africa. This caused the slave population on the Sea Islands to have similar cultural backgrounds. After the Civil War, the slave owners abandoned the Sea Islands and left the Gullah people to flourish. The Gullah people remained isolated until after World War II because no roads were built to connect them to the mainland of South Carolina. The people developed a unique culture combining traditions from their African heritage and European influences from their white owners. Jonathan Green's artwork provides insight to the Gullah world that he grew up in because his canvases act as a tribute to the rich culture of Gullah society.

Jonathan Green is known as the first formally trained artist of the Gullah community. He uses bold colors to illustrate the Gullah life that he remembers from his childhood. He has created over 1,700 images that are displayed in galleries not only across the Southeast, but nationally and internationally as well. Green's paintings inspired William Starrett, the artistic director of the Columbia City Ballet, to create his eleventh full length production. Starrett has traveled the world working with the American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet before becoming artistic director at Columbia City Ballet and he also has spearheaded an outreach program to educate elementary children about classical dance. In order to transform Green's paintings into a production, Starrett enlisted the talents of musical consultant, Marlena Smalls. She founded a musical group called the Hallelujah Singers in order to preserve the musical traditions of the Gullah people. She composed original songs and reworked old ones to create the soundtrack for the production.

"Off the Wall and Onto the Stage: the Art of Jonathan Green" transforms the works of Jonathan Green into a contemporary ballet, which recalls classical ballet's blending of dance, music, and fine art. It consists of a series of scenes drawn directly from eleven of Green's energetic paintings, which reflect the culture he was raised in. The landscapes and figures in Green's art come to life in dance set to music rooted in the history of the region. "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage" is an ode to vibrant culture of the Gullah people and reflects the importance of the visual, oral, and spiritual traditions of the South, such as community, religion, and connection to the land. The commingling of the arts is an enlightening testament to the lively, multi-cultural reality of the South, and one with real significance for America and the world.

Jonathan Green's art truly imitates the life of the Gullah people. This concept carries over to "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage" through the scenery, which plays a central role in creating the tone and atmosphere for the production. In order for the dancers to appear as if they have stepped out of Green's work a scrim with an original painting and a muslin drop with the figures removed are used for each scene. The scrim hangs in front of the muslin drop and the dancers that resemble the figures in the painting stand in between the two drops. Depending on the lighting technique, the scrim can be translucent or opaque, therefore hiding or revealing the dancers. This causes the audience to be spectators as well because throughout the production there is a shift from painting to canvas. There is a sharp attention to detail throughout the production as the costumes, including hairstyles and shoes, reflect Green's work as if he painted the dancers himself.

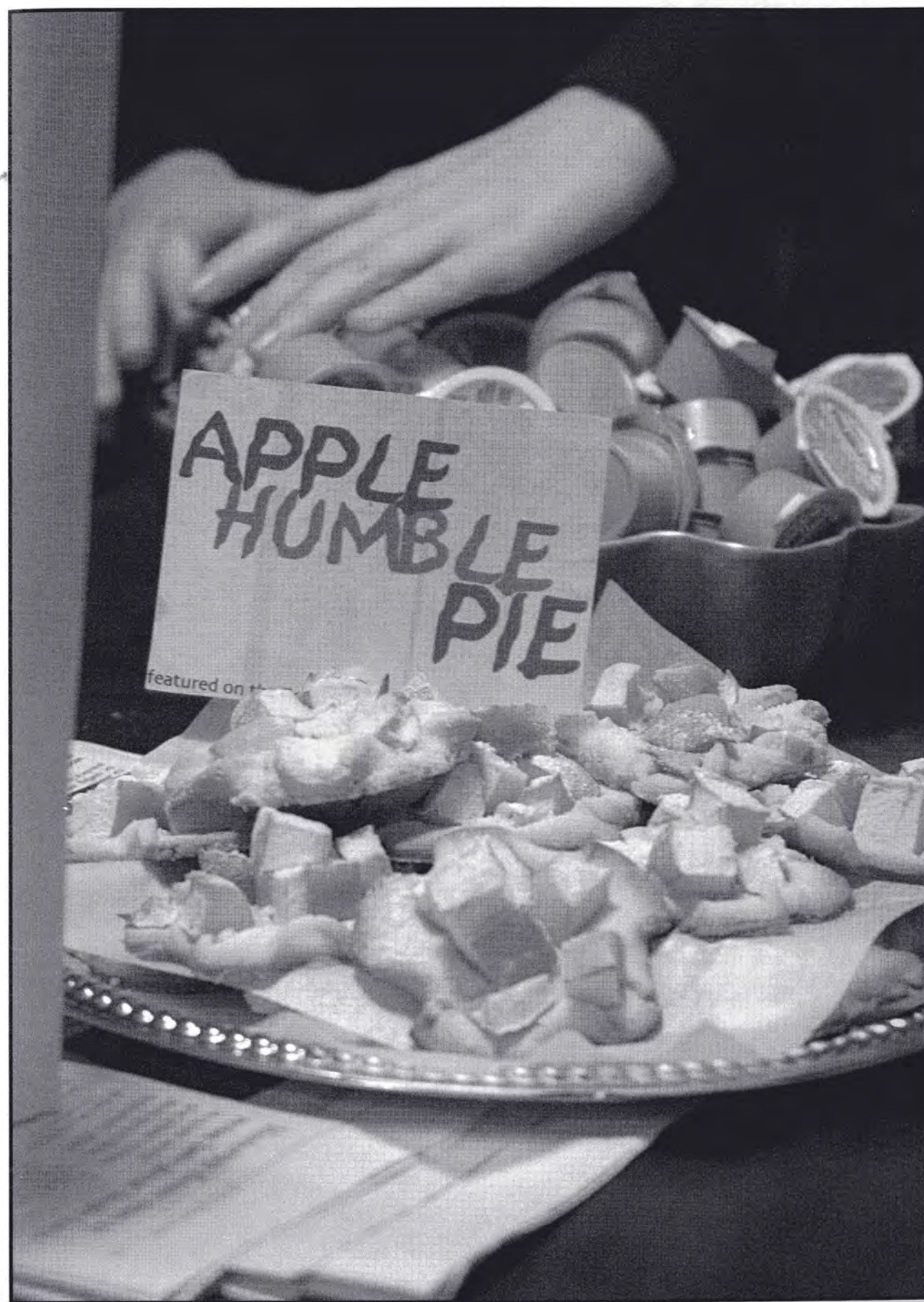
In the painting entitled "Daughters of the South," Green depicts two women standing in a rural landscape, one with light skin and one with dark skin. Both women are dressed in boldly colored dresses and they have their arms around one another. In "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage," Starrett uses his artistic license to transform the painting into a dance exploring the themes of racism, interracial love, and colorblind friendship. These themes are important to Southern culture due to the struggles that the South has had concerning racial equality. Green's painting and Starrett's interpretive dance show hope for the colorblind future of the south. Another scene that has strong connections to Southern culture is the scene in which Green's painting "Sand Dance" is depicted. The dance brings the sea to life by using billowing silk to represent the waves. The

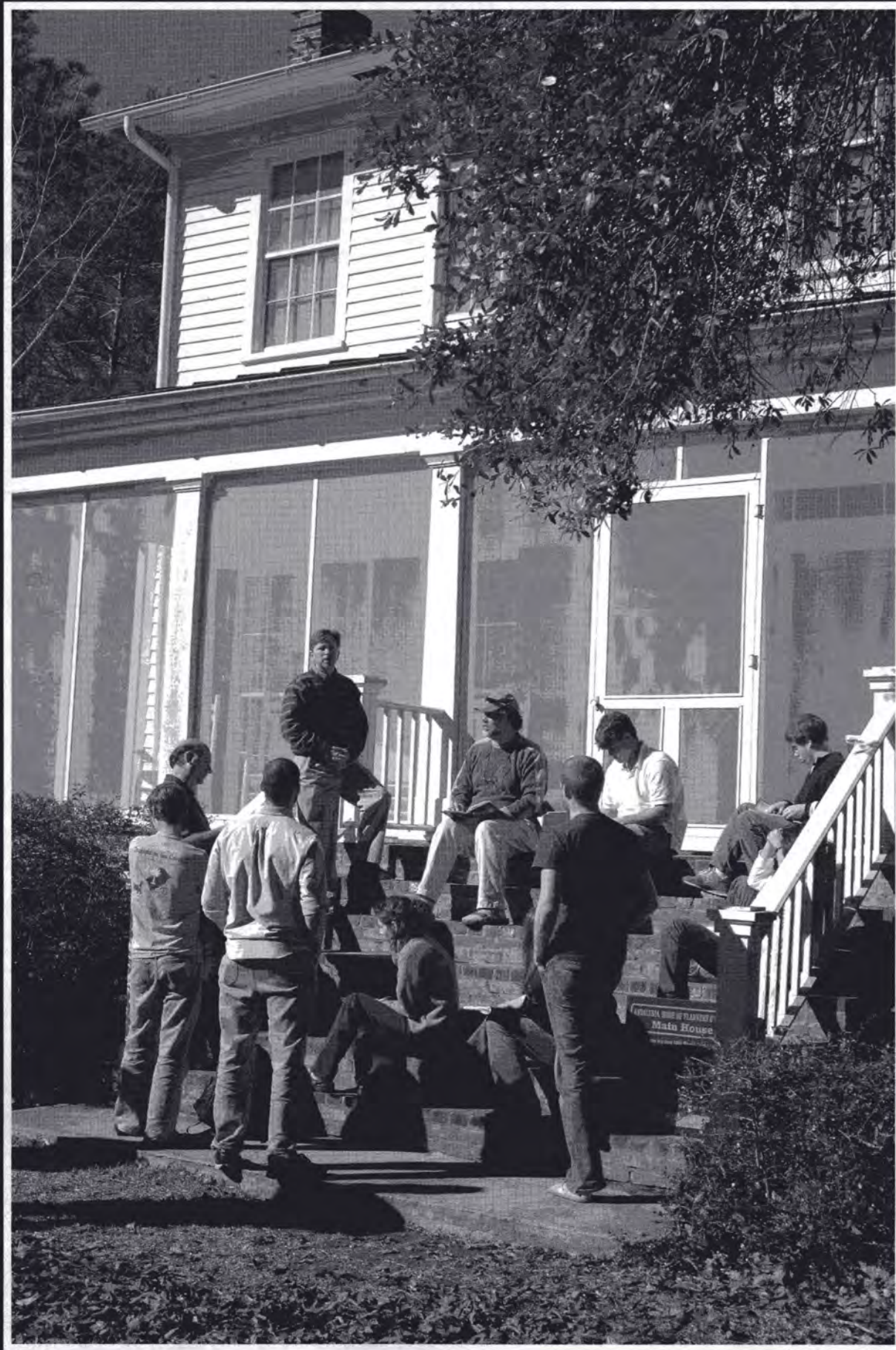


dancer is dressed in a white bikini as she fluidly moves across the stage controlling the motion of the large silk waves. This scene is a representation of Southern culture's tie to the land, as the dancer and the silk connect to create one series of movement throughout the scene.

"Off the Wall and Onto the Stage" has toured throughout South Carolina and the United States in order to raise awareness about the Gullah people. This year they are embarking on an international tour across Europe and then on to Japan. To further their influence, South Carolina has created an educational outreach program for South Carolina public schools. In classrooms and after-school programs, schools will use interpretive exercises to explore William Starrett's interpretation of Jonathan Green's work. There is an educational guide and CD that put the performance and paintings into historical context in order to create awareness for the Gullah way of life as a unique aspect of Southern culture with strong ties to African heritage. The program will also allow students to explore the process of creating interpretive images through dance and music.

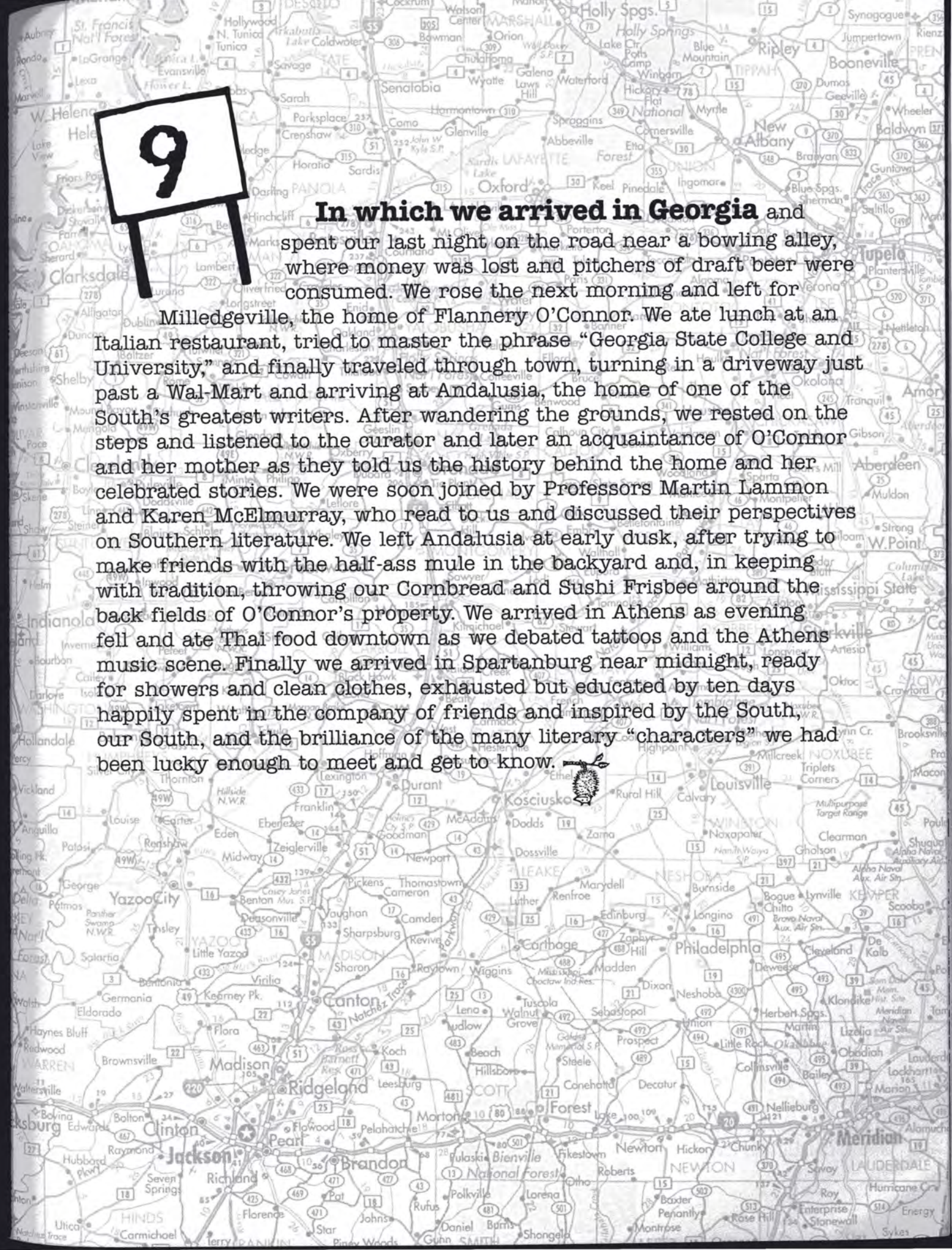
Jonathan Green and William Starrett's work has real significance as fine art rooted in Southern culture. There have been writers, filmmakers, and artists who have created a false "national image" of the south, but the truth lies with those who interact in the South everyday and continue to have ties to its past. Art from the past allows us to grasp an image of past that we can learn from and art in the present allows us to tell a story about the realities of Southern culture. The unique southern traditions will not be lost as long as artists continue to create works that capture the essence of Southern culture, as Jonathan Green said, "I know I can't save a whole culture, but I can help create greater awareness."





9

In which we arrived in Georgia and spent our last night on the road near a bowling alley, where money was lost and pitchers of draft beer were consumed. We rose the next morning and left for Milledgeville, the home of Flannery O'Connor. We ate lunch at an Italian restaurant, tried to master the phrase "Georgia State College and University," and finally traveled through town, turning in a driveway just past a Wal-Mart and arriving at Andalusia, the home of one of the South's greatest writers. After wandering the grounds, we rested on the steps and listened to the curator and later an acquaintance of O'Connor and her mother as they told us the history behind the home and her celebrated stories. We were soon joined by Professors Martin Lammon and Karen McElmurray, who read to us and discussed their perspectives on Southern literature. We left Andalusia at early dusk, after trying to make friends with the half-ass mule in the backyard and, in keeping with tradition, throwing our Cornbread and Sushi Frisbee around the back fields of O'Connor's property. We arrived in Athens as evening fell and ate Thai food downtown as we debated tattoos and the Athens music scene. Finally we arrived in Spartanburg near midnight, ready for showers and clean clothes, exhausted but educated by ten days happily spent in the company of friends and inspired by the South, our South, and the brilliance of the many literary "characters" we had been lucky enough to meet and get to know.



“Maria Milagrosa”
An Excerpt from **Surrendered Child:**
A Birth Mother’s Journey

by Karen Sayler McElmurray

Home. At the holidays, 1998, I am in one, a house I call home. It’s a house of two dogs and a festive tree and a kitchen sink, although holidays take me elsewhere. At Christmas, sometimes at Thanksgiving, and for a week in summers, I take Interstate 64 through West Virginia, via Beckley and Charleston and Huntington, then on from there to Eastern Kentucky, to the little town where my mother lives, to my mother’s house and to the house of her sister. Both their houses I have by this time come to call *places of secrets*.

I, too, inhabit a house of secrets, lead a life my mother only suspects. I am by 1998 a writer and a reader, of books she vaguely calls novels, a category that for her includes romances and old movies and one long letter she reads to me again and again, one my father wrote her before their divorce. *Long enough to be a novel*, she says of these ten pages, itemized reasons my father wanted out. I am a college teacher, and she imagines me in a schoolyard with a bell, ringing in classes for children after recess. My growth, this body turned from girl to woman, is a mystery to her, its breasts and desires.

This winter, this Christmas of 1998, I am determined to shed my greatest secret, shed it like a snakeskin, like an undesirable and heavy coat. *I’ll tell the truth*, I say. *I’ll come as clean as spring water*. I’ll go forth, I tell myself, having sinned and confessed. I will be absolved forever at the feet of the Mother. I will tell her I have a son and that hidden piece of myself, that fragment sharp as a sliver of glass, will be plucked out and I will then, I tell myself, be whole at last.

I hit the West Virginia Turnpike by mid-afternoon, a time at which everything seems rhetorical. Bare wires and bulbs from Christmas lights drape over everything. Houses and churches and barns advertising Mail Pouch Tobacco, transformed by night, are now nothing but dispirited Santa’s workshops and unresplendent roofs. Every roadside diner and gas station is a testament to those of us who are part of this holiday, and not.

I stop at a BP in Marmet for a bear claw and coffee and talk for awhile to the man at the counter. He has small, red eyes and a nervous way of sucking at his lower lip. He offers me free soft peppermints and tells me he’s worked every Christmas, New Year’s and Fourth of July for the past fourteen years. He smells like sweet wine and winks as I pay for my coffee and a pack of cigarettes. I’m not a smoker, and he’s maybe not a drinker, but we’re celebratory, high energy, and it’s nearing the zenith of this holiday—one o’clock, time for turkey and dressing and reruns of *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

I’m late, and I know it. But I drive slowly, thinking of my mother and her sisters. Of Ruby,

who died in an auto accident a number of years ago. Ruby had secrets, the greatest of which was the exact nature of her illness. Seizures? Manic depression? She was on her way home, the night she died. I imagine her in the car on her way back to her apartment in that concrete block building with a guardrail along the halls and a persistent smell of something medicinal and sanitary. My grandfather was driving. I imagine how they came to stop sign. Ruby might have looked off to the right, to a field and sign with praying hands and a promise, Jesus Saves. Or she maybe she closed her eyes, in those last seconds before the other car crashed through, striking just as they pulled ahead. It was she who died, not my grandfather. Was that death like her dreams of a Holy Ghost with her own face?

Ruthie, the youngest sister, lives up Mining Hollow, outside of town. She also leaves home less and less, since she lost her son, gun shot in the back room. She spends her days tending house and the grave of her son, which she can see from the trailer’s kitchen window. When I went to visit there one August, Ruth’s husband was leaving to go squirrel hunting. Just joking, he waved his rifle in the air, pointed it at us. From the couch, Ruth said, I can’t stand it when you do that. She didn’t get up. I remain uncertain of the nature of that last night of my cousin’s life. Suicide? Another mysterious illness? Depression, they all hint darkly. And drugs, too, ones that sent him once to an unnamed hospital, *one of those places*, they called it. The night of the shooting is called *when that happened to him, or the night that happened*, and no mention is made of death itself. It is at Ruth’s house that there’ll be Christmas dinner, if I’m in time.

I reach eastern Kentucky, and my Aunt Ruth’s, by four o’clock, having missed this traditional dinner. My lateness has thrown everything off, their twelve-thirty dinnertime. They have waited, a half hour, an hour, before giving in, feasting without me. Now, my dead cousin’s daughter sits in the post-ice storm warmth of the patio, rocking on the porch glider, her patent leathered feet scooting up and back. The rest of them are inside the trailer, where there are still pots of green beans and sweet potatoes on the stove, and the refrigerator is packed with foiled pans of turkey and ham. But I can see that it’s over. My uncle has already stripped the Christmas tree, an artificial one, and I can see it lying naked in the living room, a few icicles straggling on its branches. Dishes have been washed. Pa, my grandfather, sits in his usual spot by the door.

“Hello stranger,” he says, his whitish bird-eyes looking me up and down.

The television is blaring football and the mother of my dead cousin’s child and her now husband are lounging, sock-footed, with their other three kids, one of whom is short-necked and cripple-footed, son of his own grandfather. My uncle, who is loud and white-haired and a former radio rock’n’roll performer, welcomes me.

“Well,” he says, “look who the cat drug in. Were the roads bad?”

I tell him the ice was still around, a little, back in Virginia, but that here, the roads were good. My mother is at the table in the adjoining dining room, with my aunt. They’re talking blood sugar levels and hairdos, but they stop and my aunt gets up, hugs me against her soft, negligee chest.

“Were you careful on those roads?” she asks.

I’ve brought her a flavored coffee selection for Christmas, but I can smell Maxwell House

from the kitchen, and my gift suddenly seems off, the hazelnut and cinnamon dwarfed by the plethora of things in this trailer. To the side, along the floor of the dining room, are plaster statues—angels, Dalmatians, chickens, rabbits, a wind-up monkey that plays reggae. Most of these are gifts from my uncle to my aunt, who seldom leaves the trailer to buy herself things. A table by the back wall displays a bible, open, and photos—my long-dead cousin, the aunt killed in the auto accident, my grandmother, dead a few years ago from pneumonia complications.

“Were the roads bad?” my mother asks.

“Them roads weren’t a bit bad,” my uncle calls from the other room.

I mention the ice and Virginia and the warm spell and as always, I am struck when I first see my mother, by her smallness. She has a delicate face, large green eyes with the same darkness beneath I’m getting, at forty-two, and her small hands have knuckles swollen with arthritis and housework.

While I take my place at the dining room table, my aunt offers me leftovers. Ruthie, my mother says, has been up since two-thirty a.m., basting the turkey and peeling ten pounds of potatoes for her potato salad and I wouldn’t, she says, believe the dishes they’ve washed. But soon I’m sitting with a paper plate of turkey dressing, the potato salad, and cranberry sauce I like from childhood, sliced, garnet-colored jelly, with tiny ridges from the can on the edges.

While I eat, my mother has a second helping of dessert, her favorite. She piles her own paper plate with vanilla cream pie and chocolate cake, cheesecake with strawberry sauce on top, all the while telling me she’s lost some, that she was at one hundred one when she weighed this morning, as she does every morning.

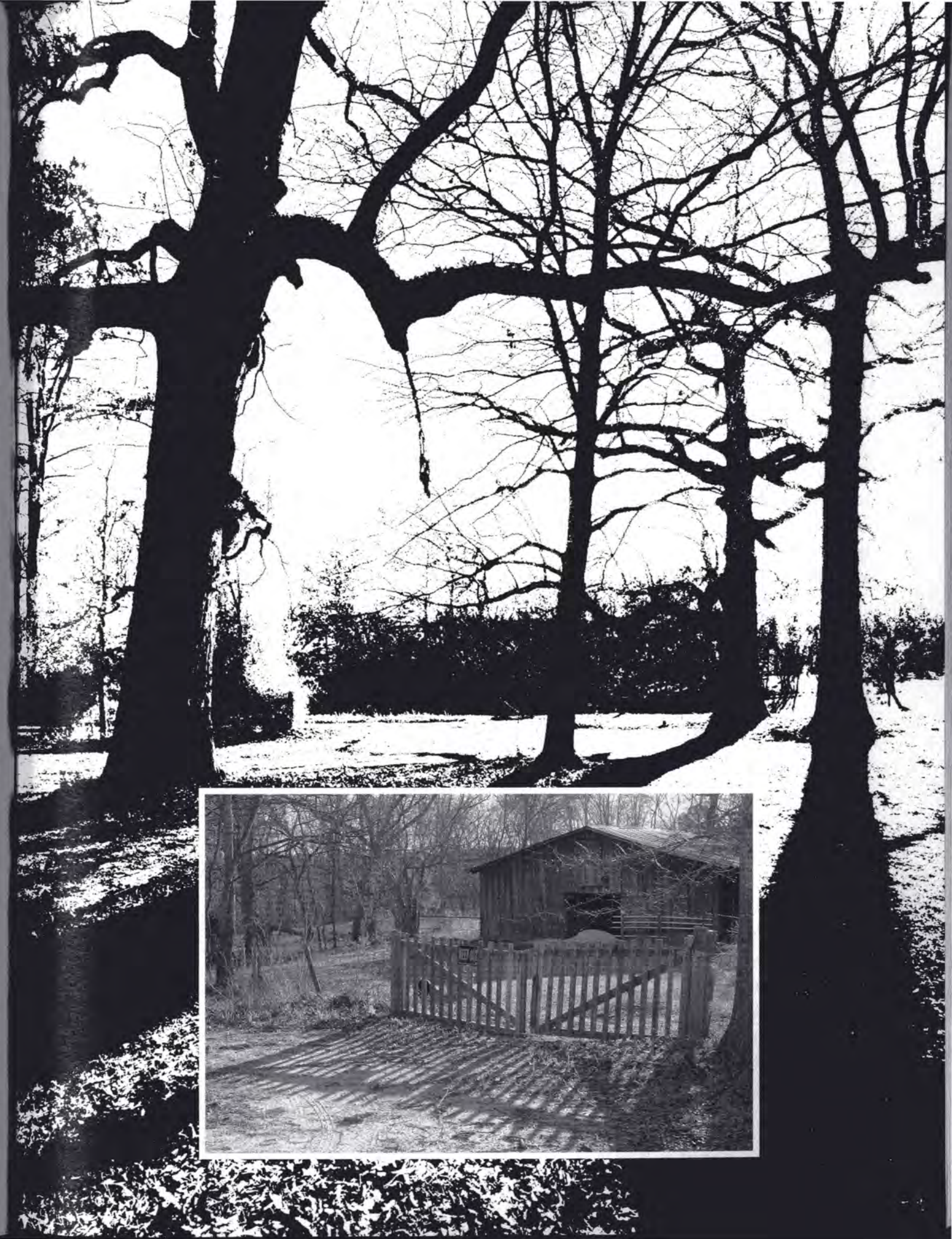
“I believe you’ve gained a little,” she says. She looks at me speculatively, takes a bite of pie, her mouth open wide, to save her lipstick. “How were the roads?” she asks. “They looked good over this way.”

I tell her about the ice storm and how I chiseled open my truck and the warming trend, since yesterday. I eat slowly, tasting fat back in the green beans, viscous marshmallow in the sweet potatoes, pickle, mustard, and Miracle Whip in the potato salad. I feel my stomach widening, my hips expanding, the untimeliness, ungainliness of me, eating, late.

“Now, she ain’t fat,” my uncle says. He bends behind my chair. “Just getting some of that middle age spread,” he says, nuzzling my cheek with his beard.

He whispers into my ear. “Don’t you have a little sugar for your uncle?”

This is the way of this afternoon, five o’clock now, Christmas ebbing. We talk of lipstick brands and permanent waves and innovative eye creams and after my mother finishes her cake, my aunt goes to get her blood sugar test kit. I decline, but they solemnly poke each other’s fingers, testing the rightness of their blood. Soon it will be dark outside, and I will drive my mother and Pa home along the winding stretch of asphalt called Mining Hollow, then along Highway 23, home. I think of roads, iceless roads, connecting house to house, aunt’s, mother’s, my own, my own house now devoid of blue tree lights, softly dark, waiting for the certainty of my return.



Interview with Karen McElmurray

On the porch of Flannery O'Connor's beloved *Andalusia* in Milledgeville, Georgia, novelist and writer Karen Saylor McElmurray entertained us with discussions and readings of her memoir *Surrendered Child* and her newest work, *Strange Birds* In the Tree of Heaven. Wearing white and black with delicate jewelry and studded boots, McElmurray looked like an intellectual flower-child.



Karen McElmurray on
Flannery O'Connor's porch.

It's kind of interesting that although you've lived in the South for a while, you tell us you don't see yourself as Southern?

KM: It's really kind of funny. When I came from Kentucky to, say, Virginia, I had been living in the Appalachian Mountains and everything in Virginia seemed so foreign; the food, the people and the accents all seemed kind of alien. But what's really hilarious is the fact that I didn't know the locals thought my family and I were "foreign" too. If you're from Appalachia, you're viewed to be about as backwards as you can get. I eventually got settled in, but even now I don't know if I could say I'm Southern.

You write books in the South with Southern characters—one might think that your works would only appeal to Southerners, but their appeal is much broader. Why?

KM: Obviously in *Surrendered Child* I tell a story of adoption, which is a nation-wide issue I think women can relate to. The book may be my personal journey, but I also hope every birth mother goes through the same experiences of knowing that you're bringing life into the world and that ultimately you may give it up because you want the best for it. What mother, what parent for that matter, wouldn't want that?

Does *Strange Birds* have that same universal appeal?

KM: Perhaps not to the same degree, but I think the appeal is still there. The character of Andrew is a character stuck in an unfortunate position: he loves an older man and obviously he doesn't live in an area that is comfortable with the feelings he has or the situation he's in. In our current political climate, homosexuality is still a very controversial topic, more controversial than adoption probably. No one deserves to face ridicule or discrimination for their views or beliefs, no matter what they may be.

Was the actual writing process for *Surrendered Child* difficult for you? Did your research have any effects on you?

KM: Oh yeah, definitely. The absence of my son was a big part of my life even before I began to write my memoir. I remember waking up in the middle of the night and feeling my womb contract, my stomach shuddering with these phantom pains like some sort of reflex. My body was making me conscious of my son's existence (or lack thereof) and forcing me to remember him even when I had tried to push the memories into the cobwebs of my mind.

You were in denial of the experience then?

KM: Your mind can never forget the truly important events in your life. We can always insist to ourselves that something didn't happen or we can pretend that something doesn't exist but on some level the human mind can't be cheated. I was in denial about the entire experience. I had tried to repress it but it bubbled back to the surface on both a conscious and physical level.

So this forced "womb-gazing" was a motivator to start your book. Did the actual process of digging up old memories and searching for your son make writing your book a painful experience?

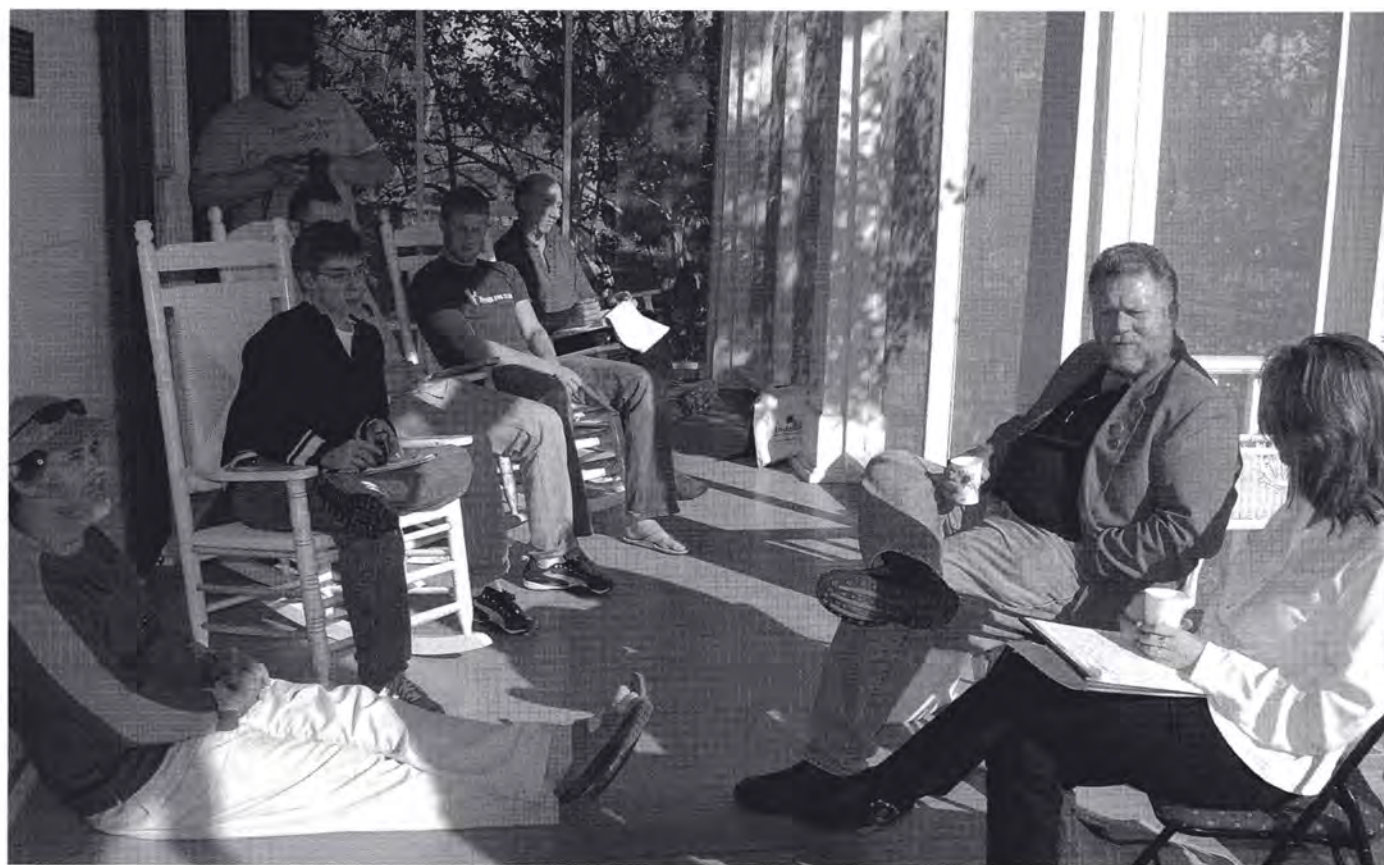
KM: That's exactly why repressed memories are repressed—we put them out of reach on a high shelf where they can't hurt us. Once I really got into the writing process and began sifting through records and papers from adoption agencies and archives, I had to learn to let myself be vulnerable. If you want your words to have emotion and actually mean something, then you have to experience those emotions so your writing has credibility. And, of course, there was the actual correspondence and meeting for the first time with my son. That was indescribable. I mean, you go through so many emotions: excitement, fear, nervousness, happiness, the list goes on and on. I had to evaluate myself very carefully. In the midst of all those swirling emotions, you begin to wonder about yourself. Are you ready for such a big step? Will he meet your expectations? Will you meet his expectations? You are meeting your own flesh and blood and you have to evaluate every possibility.

Has there been any catharsis in the last couple years now that you've found your son and finished the book?

KM: Yes. When you commit thought and memories to paper it becomes so much easier to handle them because you've already processed and sifted through your feelings. I think that is probably the hardest thing to do for any writer—knowing what to put down on paper so that everyone can know what you're trying to say and see your point of view. And of course there was the actual meeting with my son, and if you want to know about that you should read my memoir!

It sounds like writing is a growing process for you. Do you have any advice for young writers?

KM: I write because it gives me a voice. If you feel that you've had something happen to you that you think others can learn from or want to hear, then write about it. *Surrendered Child* was written because the experience for me taught me so much and I thought that my experience could guide others. That's really what writing at its core is, a guide, a written guide, a way to communicate to others and also to yourself. It's a foolproof way to vocalize your feelings and your life lessons.



Students and authors discuss literature on Flannery O'Connor's porch

An Interview with Martin Lammon

Martin Lammon is a professor at the Georgia College and State University who has published several works of poetry and poetics, such as *News from Where I Live* and *Written in Water, Written in Stone: Twenty Years of Poets on Poetry*. Professor Lammon moved from book to book and from line to line as if he had waited his whole life to share his stories with us.



Martin Lammon

One of the issues we have addressed in our class is the strong tie we Southerners seem to have to our land. Having moved around as much as you have, do you agree? Do feel that ties to the land are important to being Southern?

ML: I have up and sold my house and all of my belongings in order to go to Costa Rica for only 4 months, so on the surface I'd say that I appear to be a contradiction to that theory. However, for me, where I am is my home. I am strongly attached to Milledgeville, my current residence, and I feel as if I have lived here my whole life. I like to think of myself as a turtle—my shell is my home; it travels with me wherever I go. I am not the kind of professor or writer who follows money; you know, I lived in Costa Rica where there was hardly any money. When I move somewhere, I like to think that each place I live is the place I plan to stay for the rest of my life.

So, if I were to offer you a million dollar contract for one year somewhere in Idaho, you wouldn't take it?

ML: Of course not. I don't like potatoes. However, I hear the weather is nice this time of year in Montana.

Do you feel like being from outside of the South has given you perspective on the South?

ML: I am at home here. However, my mother-in-law does not feel the same way, as she

still refers to me as a 'Yankee.' If she's not calling me 'Yankee,' she's mistakenly calling me the dog's name, so I guess you take your pick. I do feel that being from outside of the South has helped me in my writing. I like to think that I don't overlook the small beauties of the South, the way locals who are used to them might. I respect the South and don't take anything about it lightly.

Do you think Southern literature is often stereotyped by the rest of the nation?

ML: Yes and no. There have been so many good writers from the South like O'Connor, Faulkner, Welty, that many non-Southerners will hold Southern writers to these standards. Being from the South can bring a positive approach from your reader but the downside to that is it can also put added pressure on your work. If your work is above average, but not up to these high standards, then it runs the risk of being wrongfully viewed as a lesser work.

Living in Milledgeville, Ga., the hometown of Flannery O'Connor, have you run into O'Connor fanatics?

ML: I have met many people who love her work, but fanatic? I am not sure how many fanatics I have met. However, I did meet a lady with a very interesting O'Connor story. I had just arrived in Milledgeville to interview for my current job. Seeing as I'm a writer, I naturally figured the appropriate thing to do would be to go to a bar and have a drink or six. As I sat at the bar, it became pretty clear to the locals that I was an out-of-towner when I asked them the question that they had all been asked a hundred times before; 'So did any of you all know Flannery?' Notice I said 'you all' instead of my new favorite Southern slang 'ya'll' because I was still new to the South. I've since gotten comfortable with that contraction. Well, the nice woman behind the bar came up and told me that she 'kind of' knew Flannery. She had sparked my interest so I had to ask, "what do you mean by kind of?" Then she politely informed me that she had done Flannery O'Connor's hair in the funeral parlor on the day of her funeral.

One of your poems is in response to an e-mail, another about your father, and you've written an entire book on your experiences in Costa Rica. Are all of your poems based on your own life or do you sometimes write fictionally in your poetry?

ML: The majority of my poems are based on my own experiences. However, I don't really feel that they are completely autobiographical. I take a true experience, like chasing a cow in my yard, and add my own fiction to it. I let my imagination play with what could have happened in certain situations. I'm often asked if my poems are "true stories" or not, and I usually answer, "Yes, almost all the time, because I just don't have enough imagination to make up these stories." But what I don't say is how much I work on the form and structure of my poems and even lately, working in forms such as a villanelle and sestina. So yes, my poems are almost always about true stories, but poems have their own demands—on both craft and story—and so I am certainly *not* beholden to "facts" when I'm writing poems! Lord knows, a good fact can ruin the *truth* more often than not!

Backroads

by Martin Lammon

Near Wauseon, Ohio, my father drives
his father from Ottokee to Tedrow, northwest
across Bean Creek to Fayette, that town
where my mother was born. These flat lands

fool my father. The gridwork of roads, plowed
fields, and abandoned railroad crossings
crisscross the county. He hasn't lived here
since 1956. Now his father has forgotten

how keys work, how this one starts the car,
how another slides open the deadbolt. The old
man has forgotten his son's name. But if a body,
mind, and soul are one and knit together one life,

what thread unravels when a man can't tie his shoelaces
or button his shirt? Where's the soul gone when honey,
salt, and dill taste the same? My father's
father stares out the car window. Forty years ago,

he and his son sold eggs in Wauseon and Maumee,
raised hogs, planted corn. They built the Ohio
Turnpike, a road that emptied the land west
of Toledo. Now my father is lost, steers

by instinct. He knows that, soon, he'll have to
give up, pull over and ask some stranger for help.

* * *

After my grandfather has died, my father
tells me this story, about backroads

I'd never find on a map. He tells me
how his father said "Turn here," pointing
east, then said "turn," and again, "turn,"
past old barns, cottonwoods, all the way home.

My father goes silent, and I know
 he tells me this story because he cannot say
 how he is proud, how he's waited sixty years
 for this saga about his father, that last
 crisis where adrenalin rises and the heart's
 ventricle squeezes blood to the brain, and fathers
 shed fear and shame like an old skin, tell their lost
 sons "here, turn here." And if my father and I
 cannot say where the soul goes when we die, or if
 we have souls, what we have is enough. I have
 his nose, his big thighs. My body, older now,
 will make a good fit for his discarded skin.

Killing Pigs

by Martin Lammon

Donna Deason is having a problem with wild hogs digging up her yard. She has spoken with the game warden and he has approved having them killed. If you are interested in killing these pigs, please get in touch with Donna at Baskin Robbins. These pigs range in size from baby pigs to grown pigs.

—University e-mail

One woman wonders out loud which of these pigs
 works in our department. One man warns, beware
 October's special flavor-of-the-month.
 How can we resist? We are trained in irony.
 We eye each other sidewise, wonder ourselves
 who secretly longs to cross over the semantic gap
 between having them killed and killing these pigs.

*

China domesticated hogs
 nine thousand years ago. Columbus
 and *conquistadores* brought pigs
 to the Americas—today's feral razorback,
 cloven-hooved, enlarged canines
 curling out each jaw. "Tusks," we say,
 just one gene we tinker with. We breed

Berkshire, Yorkshire, Chester White,
 Duroc, Hampshire, Poland China,
 Landrace and Spotted hogs, fine names
 for tusk-less, thin-skinned swine.

In Middle Georgia, one hundred thirty years ago, lost
 pigs scavenged the Oconee River's flood plain and forests
 for yams, grubs, plump black raspberries. Burned
 or abandoned, no barn or sty was fit for them,
 no smokehouse, no penned wallow, these hogs engendering
 their wild progeny, come now to root up a woman's yard.

*

Donna Deason, I understand. In Ohio, fifteen years ago, I watched infant marmots gnaw on the grass outside my kitchen door. The mother had made a winter den below the porch. Each pup was harmless, the size of my hand, all nine together nothing so fierce as a feral hog. Yet when I threw open the door, hooted and hollered, all but one scattered. Years later I read in a book how a brood's oldest sibling will stand guard. But I learned firsthand how even a marmot pup's teeth and hiss are fearsome to a bare-legged man standing near-naked in his morning robe.

In Ohio and Georgia, we call them groundhogs or woodchucks. The name does not matter. Gardens are ravaged. A den once settled will not be abandoned.

I could not kill them, Deason, but had it done. My landlord farmer and his son lay down in tall grass thirty yards off, rifles ready, took aim and one-by-one, each pup exploded. I didn't see it, these groundhogs dying, these two men killing half-pigs without malice, wit, or irony.

Adventures at Uncle Dubb's: A Perspective on a Southern Farm and a Southern Character

by Casey Lambert

My Uncle Dubb has been called a "character" by many. He loved to tell a good story (most of which were not true or stretched to the point where most of the truth fell straight through the story), thought that farm life—on a *Southern* farm—was heaven on earth, never failed to practice "Southern hospitality," opening his home to anyone, was extremely stubborn and, in being too proud to ask anyone for anything, attempted to be self-sufficient. Furthermore, he owned livestock that he did not need, farm equipment that he did not use, and refused to wear anything but his standard work clothes all because of his fond memories of the old, Southern ways and out of his love for them. To me, he seems the perfect Southern "character," though, in Uncle Dubb's case, the "character" was a reality.

Uncle Dubb was married to Mamaw's sister Mary Nell, and though Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell eventually divorced, my dad and I both referred to him as Uncle Dubb for the duration of his life. He was just about Dad's favorite relative when my father was growing up because Dad was an only child and having no one to play with, found Uncle Dubb's place to be a haven, as Uncle Dubb had a lot of property, animals, and five children. Furthermore, Uncle Dubb practically treated my father like one of his own children, so his house was one of Dad's favorite places to go when he was little and as he was growing up. So, as was appropriate, it was Dad who introduced me to Uncle Dubb and the wonders of his farm.

Just like Dad, when I was little, my favorite place to go was Uncle Dubb's house. Daddy would tell me, at random times, to load up in the truck and would act like we were just going for a ride with the windows down and the music up. Then, to my absolute elation, he would take the meandering road—the one road I recognized as a young child—that passed through hills and countryside and, as I knew, led to Uncle Dubb's place. I loved Uncle Dubb for his slow speech and the way he would pass his chewing tobacco from side to side in his mouth when he was thinking hard, but I loved him more for where he lived and the constant flow of animals that he kept.

In addition to the livestock—which, with the exception of two Belgian draft horses, typically could not call Uncle Dubb's place a permanent home—there were a variety of critters that, of their own accord, took permanent residency at Uncle Dubb's place. In the barn—a grey, weathered structure that looked just like what a barn *should* look like—there were always a number of "barn cats"—wild, feral felines. The hay bales were

stacked almost to the ceiling of the barn, and the cats and kittens would hide in the hay and shelter there in the winter. They hung out there in warm weather because it was a good place to find mice and, though he would never admit it, because Uncle Dubb put out food for them. I loved jumping in the haystacks—and felt like I was on top of the world when standing atop them—and looking for kittens and cats among the yellowed grass. Dad and Uncle Dubb always warned me about the black snakes that, like the cats and kittens, took refuge in the hay; but Uncle Dubb and Dad did not realize that I liked trying to catch snakes in addition to felines, so the possibility of running into a black snake did not trouble me.

I took particular interest in one group of kittens, for a member of the litter was a long-haired, orange male kitten that looked much like my cat, Sunny. I was so taken with that kitten that, in joking, Uncle Dubb told me that if I could “ketch ‘eem,” I could “keep ‘eem.” Dad did not hear this comment; otherwise, knowing that I would take such a comment literally, he would have told Uncle Dubb to revoke it. Since Dad did not step in, however, I spent that entire day trying to catch the little, orange kitten, having little to no success (I think I managed to grab a bit of tail at one point). About nine months later, however, when the orange “kitten” was almost fully grown, I, figuring that Uncle Dubb’s offer still stood, decided to try a new tactic with the wild cat: the art of persuasion. I did not try to grab the animal at first. Rather, I found Uncle Dubb’s hiding spot for the cat food and placed a large amount on the ground for the cat. He and some of his brothers and sisters (also aunts, uncles, grandmothers, and mother-in-law, for all I know) came out of the hay to chow down, and I waited patiently for my chance. Making wide circles around the cats, I stopped when I was directly behind the orange cat. Then, slowly and methodically, I worked my way up behind him. He was so busy eating that he never knew what hit him. I grabbed him up and held onto him with



every bit of strength that I had; he was howling and yowling so loudly that it echoed across the valley and flailing and hissing and spitting and scratching me so deeply that he had to have thought that his very life depended on it. Still, I did not let go; I was determined to bring Sunny’s twin home.

Well, all the commotion had roused Uncle Dubb and Dad from the front porch (a good three hundred meters away), and, when they entered the barn, they found me still holding on to that wild cat—and it holding onto my head with all four of its paws, claws extended, just as enthusiastically. Dad managed to pry the cat off my head and then proceeded to ask me, “What the hell do you think you were doing?,” while Uncle Dubb just stood there and laughed, realizing that I had accepted his words from a few months before with absolute seriousness. I did not answer Dad’s question because I was so pissed at Dad for having let the cat get away; I feared that Uncle Dubb, now aware that I could actually catch one of his barn cats, would take his promise back so that I could not take the cat away once I caught him again. But Dad threatened to spank me until I could not sit down should I try it again, so that ended my cat-catching days at Uncle Dubb’s. Well, not really, but I was more discreet about it after that day.

Uncle Dubb managed to get the hay, in which I searched for wild cats, from people who lived nearby. After cutting their fields and raking up all the grass, Uncle Dubb was allowed to clear away what was cut down; in other words, Uncle Dubb would bale the freshly cut grass and take it home for his animals. Uncle Dubb managed to feed his animals, then, by doing work for people and receiving hay in payment. Whenever I came over, however, Uncle Dubb would bring out what he called the “special hay”—which was really not that “special” in most people’s terms but hay bought from the Co-op or some such place—so that I could feed it to the horses, mules, and cattle. Whether I fed them the “special hay” or the hay Uncle Dubb acquired from cutting people’s fields, the animals never acted particularly excited about either. I think Uncle Dubb realized that the idea of me being allowed to use the “special hay” had a placebo effect on me—not the animals—in that I felt I had received special treatment.

Just as wild cats found Uncle Dubb’s a place to call home, so did numerous strays of the canine sort. Each time I visited Uncle Dubb’s, there was a new dog. One of Uncle Dubb’s favorites was Hobo, a short, lively, little dog that had come wandering in and, despite his “ramblin’ man” nature, had taken a liking to Uncle Dubb, choosing to stay and grace Uncle Dubb with his presence as “his dog.” My favorite of Uncle Dubb’s dogs, however, was Babe, a purebred Border Collie which he had paid a good deal of money for, though he bought her primarily for show. She did actually herd whatever happened to be in the field at a given time—goats, chickens, cattle, horses, mules; Babe was not picky. But there was no point to Uncle Dubb teaching her how to herd the animals, for all Babe did was pester them when they were trying to graze (or peck, in the chickens’ cases) in the field or play with their animal comrades. To make matters even more humorous, Uncle Dubb would always have Babe bring the horses in for feeding time. The horses and mules, however, loving sweet feed and knowing, on their own, exactly when feeding time came around, were perfectly willing to run into the barn when

it was time for the grain to be distributed and had always dashed into the barn, nearly running over anything in their path even before Babe's arrival. With Babe's arrival and her chasing of the horses and mules when dinner time came around, the equines would be running so fast that, once they arrived at the barn, they could hardly keep from crashing into it. All Babe's efforts, then, only added up to broken boards on the barn and a mutual hatred of Babe on the part of every other animal on Uncle Dubb's property.

Just as he purchased Babe for the sheer sake of having a herding dog, Uncle Dubb primarily bought and kept horses, cattle, and mules—in addition to various other livestock—just for show, as he felt that any good Southerner ought to have a few “working” animals around. My Uncle Dubb's purchasing and handling of these havoc-wreaking horses and mules was, perhaps, the funniest thing about him. Most of the horses and mules never had names; rather, they were known by color and, those that looked alike, by special markings (“the one with the white pastern,” “the one with only half its tail, the other half hanging in the barbed wire fence,” etcetera). The animal that you especially had to watch out for was the bad-tempered bay mule that liked to chase people who stepped in her field, not to be confused with the bay mule that ran over to people in the field because she loved attention. Uncle Dubb also had two Belgian draft horses. These animals are typically used for intense plowing, hauling logs, or a related activity but only served to stand in Uncle Dubb's field and look like good working horses, though they did no work. They were identical but for the fact that one was slightly smaller than the other; and, in a certain burst of creativity, Uncle Dubb did name them: Big Foot and Little Foot.

In addition to having work horses that did not work, Uncle Dubb had horses typically used for pleasure riding, though few of his animals were ever ridden or, as stated before, worked in any way. I vividly remember the day, soon after I had returned from horseback camp in sixth grade (with a sense that I knew what I was doing atop a horse, though I still did not have a clue), that my dad took me to Uncle Dubb's, where, on this occasion, I saw for the first time a new horse that struck my fancy. She was too fat, too short, and knobby-kneed but had a sweet expression and came up to the fence readily, begging to be petted and acknowledged. Uncle Dubb, knowing that I had just returned from a week of horseback camp, told me that the mare had been ridden before and that I was welcome to ride her; “she's uh good ‘lil ole Quarter Horse mare,” he said (though he pronounced “mare” with two syllables, making it sound like “mayor”). Dad, guessing the extent to which the horse had been ridden, tried to object, but my enthusiasm was not to be curbed unless I tried to ride that horse. And I, of course, trusted Uncle Dubb's judgment entirely. He entered his makeshift tack room, brushing cobwebs aside as he went, and pulled out the remainders of a saddle, the girth strap broken in two and having no holes for the buckle to go through. Uncle Dubb took out his knife and punched a couple of holes into the leather, not without difficulty. Then, unable to locate a bridle, Uncle Dubb found a halter—matted and moldy—and searched for something to tie to this substitute bridle as reins; he wound up recovering the other half of the girth strap and secured—poorly—this detached piece of saddle to the halter, completing the shoddiest set of riding

equipment that I had (and have) ever seen in my life. Still, I remained all-too-happy to leap on that horse's back, despite my lacking riding gear.

When Uncle Dubb lifted the saddle on the horse's back, she turned and looked at him as if he was the craziest fool she had ever laid eyes upon. The saddle was so old that the stirrups were no longer adjustable, so I just had to let my feet hang. In addition, the “reins” were too short, so I had to lean forward as I rode. I walked the horse into the field and, within five minutes, she had reared, bucked, and run off with me. I held on for dear life, still happy to be on a horse but a little bit scared at the same time, and my father, in a huff, eventually managed to catch up to the animal and hold her still so I could get off. Uncle Dubb, slowly chewing his tobacco, looked at us both and said, “Well, she ain't been rode in three years, they said, but she's a sweet-natured ‘lil thang, and I'll sell her to yuh fer five hundred dollers.” Needless to say, Dad did not accept Uncle Dubb's offer, though Uncle Dubb did truly believe the animal to be worth keeping and riding (if one could)—and for only five hundred dollars! That horse would have bucked

me to the moon, and, though Uncle Dubb thought he was giving us a real deal, I was smart enough to know that “pleasure mount” was not one of that horse's character traits.

If a person got a twinkle in his or her eye over Uncle Dubb's equines, he or she *certainly* could not help but laugh at Uncle Dubb's cattle. Uncle Dubb's cows were the oddest-looking bunch'of bovines that I have ever seen; they looked like generic-brand Red Angus, with a bit of Jersey mixed in there somewhere. As Dad stated, “your Uncle Dubb liked to

‘experiment’ with different breeds of cows. At one point, he had some sort of misfit red-colored longhorns that were supposedly from Texas, though your uncle never could exactly trace them back to Texas.” I remember the longhorns in particular, for one of them was mean and liked to chase people in a very threatening manner. Of course, when any animal with horns that long chases a person, he or she is going to interpret the action as being a “threat.” I would always escape him (or her) by jumping into the circular structure in the field which held hay for the animals. The bovine would then stop short and look at me in disappointment, the animal's desire to gore my little butt, once again, failing to come to fruition. I do not think that Uncle Dubb could have sold the animals for meat if he had wanted to, and these animals were certainly not milk cows; their



purpose—for the time that they were owned by Uncle Dubb—was to stand out in the field and show, to the world, that Uncle Dubb had cattle.

It would seem that my Uncle Dubb categorized my mamaw with his bovines. True to the Southern tradition, Uncle Dubb absolutely loved to tell—and make up—stories. His favorite subject on which to tell or base a story was Mamaw—my Mamaw’s feet, in particular. It was common knowledge that Mamaw was very sensitive about the way she looked, and Uncle Dubb certainly had not failed to pick up on this fact. In turn, one of the pastimes that Uncle Dubb derived the most pleasure from was picking on Mamaw, whether or not she was present (he knew that whatever he said about her would get back around to her anyway). Since Mamaw was especially embarrassed by her feet—which were not abnormally large but just not dainty and pretty—Uncle Dubb loved to tell stretchers about how enormous Mamaw’s feet were. Every time he told me a story about Mamaw’s feet, they had gotten bigger than the previous time; he started telling stories about Mamaw’s feet when she was only a teenager, and her feet just kept growing throughout the years (when he was telling the stories to me, Mamaw was in her late fifties/early sixties). If Uncle Dubb’s stories were accurate, Mamaw, when standing, would now have feet that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In addition, Uncle Dubb liked to tell Mamaw that she reminded him of an old hound dog and constantly asked her, “Where’s ye flee collar at, Bessie? Don’t come in the house without yer flee collar.” Furthermore, he loved to make fun of Mamaw’s first name, Bessie, which sounded like the name of a cow to Uncle Dubb. So, Mamaw was likened to Sasquatch, a hound dog, and a bovine. To this day, Mamaw is self-conscious about her name—everyone, with the exception of Papaw, must address her as Lucille, her middle name—and her feet, as she always wears panty hose because she believes they make her feet appear more compact.

Despite the fact that Uncle Dubb picked on Mamaw mercilessly, Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell were perfect examples of Southerners who followed the creed of Southern hospitality. Absolutely anyone was allowed to come to Sunday dinner. As Mom put it, “People were coming in and out of there so much, the place might as well have had revolving doors.” Since Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell had three boys and two girls—all of whom had plenty of friends, not to mention boyfriends and girlfriends, who liked to come to dinner—there was always a huge crowd at the table for Sunday dinner. Often, there was not enough food. Mary Nell could guess how many people to cook for because it was impossible to predict how many would show up at the table. As Mom said of the few times that she and Dad went over to Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell’s for Sunday dinner, “They almost always had chicken, and it only went around once. If you didn’t grab your chicken the first time it went around, you usually didn’t get any. But you weren’t entitled to whine and cry if you didn’t get it that first time around because Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell warned everyone that they better grab it while they could because it went fast.” In the same vein, Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell would open their home and extend their help to any neighbor or family member who might need it. When my Dad’s father died, for example, Dad was too sad to return home and unable to do so for a few days, so Uncle

Dubb and Mary Nell let him stay at their place until he felt well enough to leave; they did not think twice about letting Dad stay with them.

Though there was never an abundance of food on the table, Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell always had enough to feed their family. Like many Southerners of the past, Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell—who liked to think of themselves as self-sufficient—did have ties to the soil itself, as some of their property was dedicated to planting. They had a very large vegetable garden, from which they picked foods like tomatoes and cucumbers to eat at meals. In addition, Uncle Dubb financed his farm with money earned from his tobacco crop; eventually, he paid for the entire farm (solely) with money from his tobacco crop.

After paying off the farm, Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell—who were a pretty popular couple on the local level—decided to try their hands at business. Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell opened their own version of a “Southern country store,” though they sold nothing other than food. The store was located on Maryville’s main street and had a “Mom and Pop restaurant” sort of feel, though nothing fancier than a hot dog could be found on the menu. Still, since so many people gathered there to see familiar faces—and to purchase the hot dogs, priced at three for a dollar and the hottest item on the menu—and chatter jovially or gossip, Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell did make a good bit of money from the proceeds of their little store in the time that they owned it.

Much of Uncle Dubb’s popularity could be attributed to the one “big” appearance he made on a yearly basis. Each holiday season, Uncle Dubb drove his wagon and mule—one of the few animals he owned that was mostly tame—in the Greenback Christmas parade. The wagon was all decked out with lights of many colors, and children—dressed in Santa hats and cute red, white, and green outfits (though Uncle Dubb refused to wear anything but his normal white shirt and overalls)—hung from every corner of it, as all of Uncle Dubb’s children (and, in later years, grandchildren) were allowed, even expected, to ride in or dangle from the wagon. Typically, Uncle Dubb’s wagon and mule were the only wagon and mule duo in the parade. Though I never rode on the wagon, I do remember the amazement I experienced when watching it go down Greenback’s “main street” and, on one occasion, Highway 411, a busy road down which Uncle Dubb had to drive his wagon and mule in order to get to Greenback from Friendsville. I do wish that I still saw wagons and mules going down 411, but I am afraid those days are passed—even in places like Friendsville and Greenback.

As much as he liked sitting in his wagon, showing it off, Uncle Dubb considered the front porch of his home his ultimate “favorite spot.” Uncle Dubb and Mary Nell’s house had a huge wraparound porch, much like the classic Southern farmhouse. As many Southerners have been portrayed doing, Uncle Dubb loved sitting on the front porch and looking out over the yard—and all of the “happenings” in it—and the mountains beyond. However, Uncle Dubb rarely sat in the rocking chairs on the porch; rather, he preferred to sit in what has to be the biggest chaise lounge that I had ever seen in my life. Though Uncle Dubb often fell asleep in that enormity of a chair, he always wore such thick, dark glasses that I could never tell whether he was watching me or sleeping



when he lay back in that thing. This was a bit of an annoyance to me, for I felt like I had to sneak about in doing my mischief any time Uncle Dubb was on the porch. However, I realized that Uncle Dubb got a “kick” out of me and my activities, so I did not worry about getting in trouble with him over much. Rather, I had to worry about Uncle Dubb being amused with my activities, telling my father about my mischievous ways as a result of his amusement, and my father not being amused but, instead, punishing me.

One of Uncle Dubb’s favorite activities to watch from the porch was children playing ball in the front yard. When Uncle Dubb’s children were little, my father often came over, ball and bat in hand, to play ball with them. Though my daddy was happy to have *anyone* to play with, he wanted to play by his own rules, and, if Uncle Dubb’s children were unwilling to play by Dad’s rules, Dad would threaten to take his ball and bat and go home (though he lived a good piece away, so the threat was not very realistic). One of the main reasons why Uncle Dubb so enjoyed watching this “ball playing”—and the arguing that ensued over it—is due to the fact that he admired what he found to be a strong Southern stubborn streak in my father, who refused to give an inch.

Dad and I talk about Uncle Dubb’s place often, as we share his farm, though it no longer exists, as our favorite place to go when we were little. As we think back about it, we are amazed at how little Uncle Dubb’s place changed from the time my father was a child to the time I was a child. I can see sadness in my father’s eyes when we speak of his farm, which was ideal to each of us, and my own heart feels heavy any time I think of what has become of Uncle Dubb’s place. When I was thirteen years old, Uncle Dubb died as a result of a massive heart attack. Uncle Dubb was sixty-seven at the time and walking along when the attack hit him; he fell back, cracking his head on the sidewalk. In his will, it was written that all of his land should be left to his children; he was always so caring towards them and, prior to his death, had even given one of his sons a good bit of property so that he could have a nice place for his new family. Unlike me—whom Uncle Dubb loved so because I so loved and appreciated his farm—Uncle Dubb’s children (all five of them) had never liked it, had never taken interest in the animals, the land, the spirit of the place. After his death, they sold all of the property to developers. All of his former farmland has now been developed, and I glare at the clone-like houses with seething anger—my emotions aimed not at the houses, but at Uncle Dubb’s children—though I can do nothing to bring back what will always be, to me, Uncle Dubb’s property. I can only wish it had been left to me or my family instead, so that we could have tried to preserve it; I could not have lived with myself otherwise. Though the farm itself has been transformed beyond recognition, Uncle Dubb’s farmhouse is still there, abandoned and dilapidated, but standing like a stubborn eyesore amongst all of the new houses and their cultivated lawns. Still, the memory of Uncle Dubb lives on. Every time I drive up the once familiar hill on Clendenen Road, I look to my right where Uncle Dubb’s place used to be and smile as an image of him with his tobacco-stained shirt, holding out bales of hay for me to try and carry, comes to mind, and I think of what a great, Southern man he was and all the happy memories I owe to Uncle Dubb and his place.

Genuine Hospitality?

by Laura Vaughn

For centuries, the South's wide front porches have gladly shifted under the weight of a tired traveler in the name of "Southern hospitality." Alabama lawyer Daniel R. Hundley testifies in his *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (1860) that the visitor to the home of a Southern gentleman would find "a much heartier welcome, a warmer shake of the hand, a greater desire to please, and less frigidity of deportment, than will be found in any walled town upon the earth's circumference." While Hundley makes a bold claim, he cannot be very far from the truth because this generalization, for better or worse, persists even today. There seems to be something special about hospitality in the South. The implicit question thereby becomes: what circumstances—historical, social, economical or otherwise—fostered this legendary hospitality? What does the custom reveal about Southern personality or character?

Many sources point to the European honor code of the Middle Ages, based on Greco-Roman literature and philosophy and Christianity, as a possible origin. The "English Gentleman" then transplanted these ideals, along with chivalry and courtly love, to the South during colonization. It was only natural that within this context, the English Gentleman—isolated in his agrarian palace with money and time for leisure served on the trays of his slaves—would heartily welcome a visit from a friend or worthy traveler. However, given that the entire Southern population did not consist of wealthy Virginia aristocrats clinging to an old English code with money to spend and bedrooms-a-plenty, the reality of hospitality in the South must have differed from the perception that exists today. Not every Southerner had the gates of Tara to throw open.

The overlooked reality is that although wealthy aristocrats from southern and middle England did have money and clout, the South was largely settled by peoples from northern England, southern Ireland, and Scotland. This group had their own, often unexpected, brand of hospitality. A northerner traveling through the South may have expected to see an estate, but more likely found a simple home or cabin. Hungry for delicate fillets, salads, and wheat bread, he sat down to salted pork and some sort of "crude bread made of ground corn." Although that which the typical Southerner could offer was often unrefined and humble, it was usually given with genuine heart. This type of hospitality is not of that stock which history remembers and writes of, but is probably a more accurate portrait of Southern hospitality.

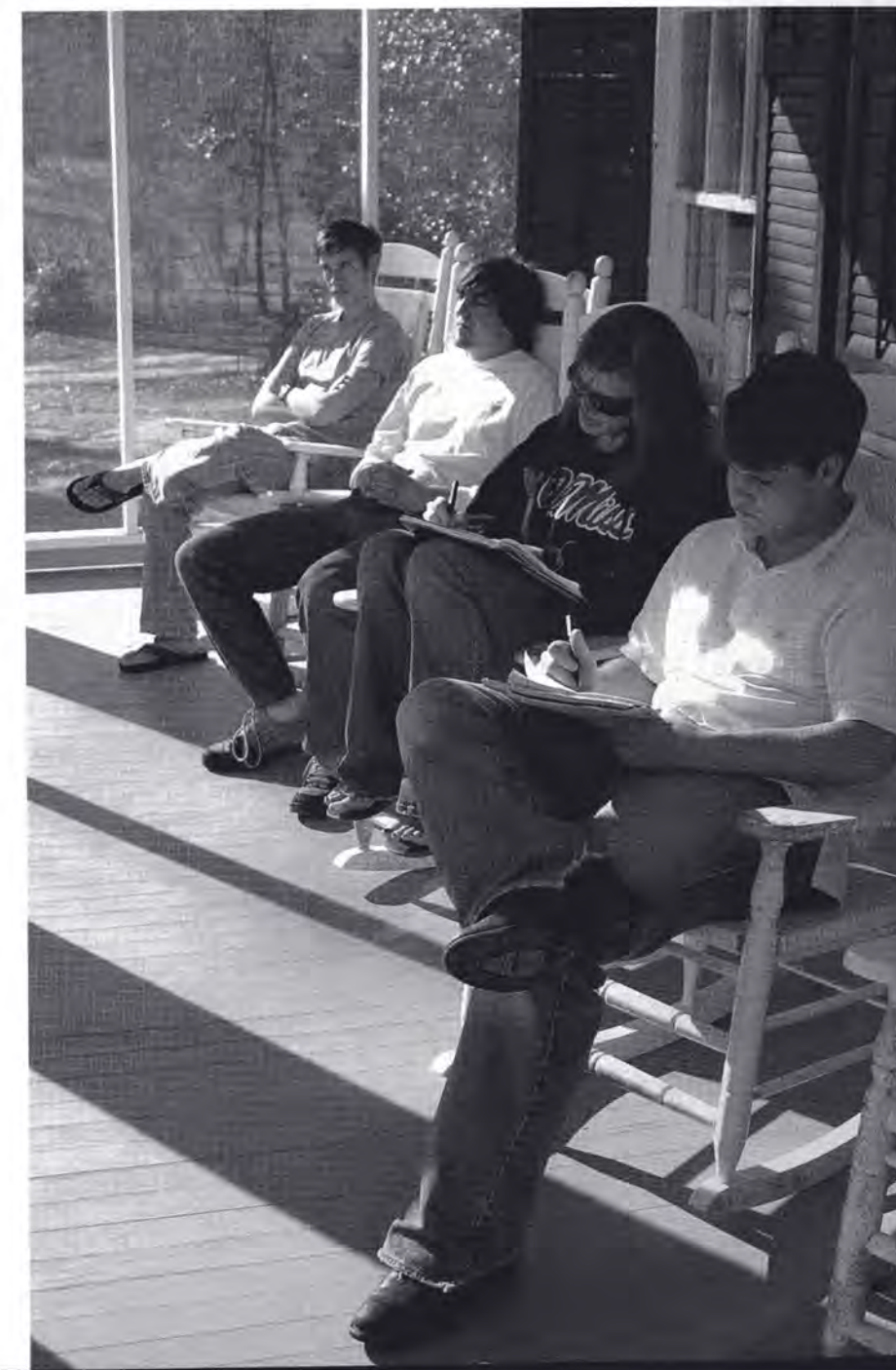
An array of factors have been suggested as contributors to the formation of this

second genre of hospitality. Historically, the Welsh and Irish who settled in the South *did* have a hearty tradition in hospitality back in Europe. One traveler charges that the Welsh / Irish tradition was even superior to that of southern England (the latter being the hospitality that made its way to Virginia and would later be deemed the quintessential hospitality of the South.) "To those farms of England which are so comfortable," testifies the traveler, "we can hardly see anything but the outside." The Welsh and Irish, however, carried with them their open door mentality when they settled in the South. Those from southern England settled in the northeast of the United States and continued to keep their gates shut.

Economically, the South's agrarian society also influenced the development of hospitality. The South, based in agriculture and not industry, was generally poorer than the North and so tended to celebrate the little they had. They also liked to see others partake in the enjoyment. In addition, though capital was often scarce, food was generally abundant. These factors, a celebratory spirit and an abundance of food, facilitated the tradition of hospitality. In the North, where industry was more prominent, emphasis was placed on saving cash. Additionally, because food cultivation was more difficult, the giving away of food was seen as a loss of capital, which discouraged the type of hospitality seen in the South.

Finally, the long distances implicit in the Southern rural and agricultural society caused a traveler to weary easily. This meant that hospitality was not just a frivolity, but rather a real necessity. Conversely, those same long distances also had an isolating effect on those who provided the hospitality, and so a new face was often seen as a welcome change.

The welcome extended by the humble couple of Eudora Welty's



“Death of a Traveling Salesman” is a literary depiction of a simple, yet sincere hospitality. They open their doors to Bowman, a lost traveling salesman, and give him a meal, a roof, a drink, and also pull his car out of a gorge. While all Bowman’s basic needs are fulfilled, he is not offered the couple’s bed. They do not put on a big production, yet Bowman is well taken care of. Welty celebrates their sincere gesture by emphasizing the blessings in the couple’s modest life and contrasting this with the emptiness in Bowman’s life.

However, further investigation reveals that not all motivations were so genuine and self-effacing. Historians Clement Eaton and William R. Taylor contend that the lower class whites took to the ideal not out of a generous spirit and tradition, but instead to become more like those of higher status. For example, many did open their doors but only in exchange for material compensation. Or, as first generation Georgia native Wyatt-Brown suggests, it also had to do with fear of social condemnation. He cites that if someone, “out of either covetousness or ill-nature, didn’t comply with this generous custom, he had a mark of infamy set upon him, and was abhor’d by all.” Continuing on the subject, he says: “There was an undercurrent of deep mistrust, anxiety, and personal competition.” Harvey K. Newman, expert on hospitality and its economic implications in Atlanta, defines hospitality as the “*claim* of graciousness before the public in order to appear hospitable and gracious towards others.” Where’s the generosity in that?

As a consequence, the sincerity or genuineness of Southerners who offer hospitality is called into question. Mrs. Hopewell of Flannery O’Connor’s *Good Country People* is a fitting character sketch of the personality called here into question. She is a basically silly woman, who, with her overwhelming collection of disingenuous epithets, is the epitome of insincerity. Her approach to hospitality is equally artificial. When a traveling Bible salesman—who, ironically, is equally insincere—arrives at the old lady’s door claiming to be just a “good country person,” Mrs. Hopewell sees through his farce and would like to throw him out. Instead, in testament to the obligatory nature of hospitality in the South, she lets him stay saying, “I can’t be rude to anybody.”

Mrs. Hopewell is not the first character in southern literature that has been sketched as silly, indirect, or insincere. These character traits that seem to be, if not distinctly Southern, then more prominently Southern, continually reappearing in female characters of Southern literature, (and if I may be so bold, in the Southern reality as well). A demonstrative anecdote of this is one told to me by a female professor who, leaving the north, ventures into the South to teach, unaware of Southern cultural norms. After asking a neighbor’s wife if she could borrow their lawnmower, she is met with only ambiguity. The neighbor responds saying that it would be, “Well, fine yes, that would be fine. The only thing is that, well, Charles said that he was havin’ some problems startin’ it up, and really, I mean you could give it a try I just don’t know it’s up to you.” The bewildered New York Jew could not figure out for the life of her if the woman was giving her permission to use the lawnmower or not. She decided not to borrow the lawnmower and instead sat wishing that she knew how to decode the mixture of vocal tones, patterned hesitations, and a million other subtleties. Poor lady, not even a month in the South and is already tangled in the kudzu.

In trying to find a root or historical circumstance that would explain the Southern woman’s tendency to be insincere, I bumped back into the previously referenced code of honor from the Middle Ages. Again, this code was based on Greco-Roman philosophy, Christianity, but, most notably, on stoicism. In *The Companion to Southern Literature*, Wendell Jones asserts that the ethics of Southerners are based in works such as Cicero’s *Duties*, Epictetus’s *Discourses and Manual*, Seneca’s *Moral Essays and Epistles*, and Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations*—all works that emphasize stoic philosophy.⁷ Therefore, suffering in silence instead of being direct and saying what one thinks becomes a thing of honor in the South. This moral tenet was also convenient in justifying slavery as part of a larger good; that we all must, each in his way, suffer in order to benefit mankind.

The most stoic of all stoics had to be the women of the Old South who were expected to be “good, kind, modest and self-effacing.” The poster girl is *Gone with the Wind*’s Melanie Wilkes. In Virginia by Glasgow, the self-effacing lady-mother type who devotes everything to her husband and children ends up alone and crushed. These are the good ladies of the Old South. In her article on the “Southern lady” in literature, Dorothy Scura contends that people like Mrs. Hopewell or Caroline Compson from *Faulkner’s Sound and the Fury*, are the “remnants of the ideal lady—only pretensions and empty rituals.” Scura concludes,

In her appearance in fiction before the Civil War, the lady was presented as an icon, a sacred necessity for patriarchal culture. In later fiction, she often did not survive that war. But in 20th century fiction, she is found in many incarnations.

Mrs. Hopewell is an example of the good Southern woman gone bad. O’Connor and other authors devote numerous pages to and even seem to affirm the Mrs. Hopewells by allowing them unpunished in their narratives. Contrarily, the ones like Mrs. Hopewell’s daughter Joy, who *do* voice their true feelings end up sad, alone, and legless—thanks to a conniving bible salesman who runs off with her prosthetic leg. Joy, in addition to having to tolerate her mother, was also victim to the conniving insincerity of dishonest Bible salesman Manly Pointer.¹¹ Both Manly Pointer, who escapes with Joy’s leg under his arm and a smile on his face, and Mrs. Hopewell, complacent in her garden, come out on top. As long as society and literature continue to affirm and even reward this type of personality, the Mrs. Hopewell’s of the world will thrive and prosper. Meanwhile enjoy the hospitality, whatever the motivation may be. The South’s expansive porches are still intact and begging one more wayfaring, weary traveler.

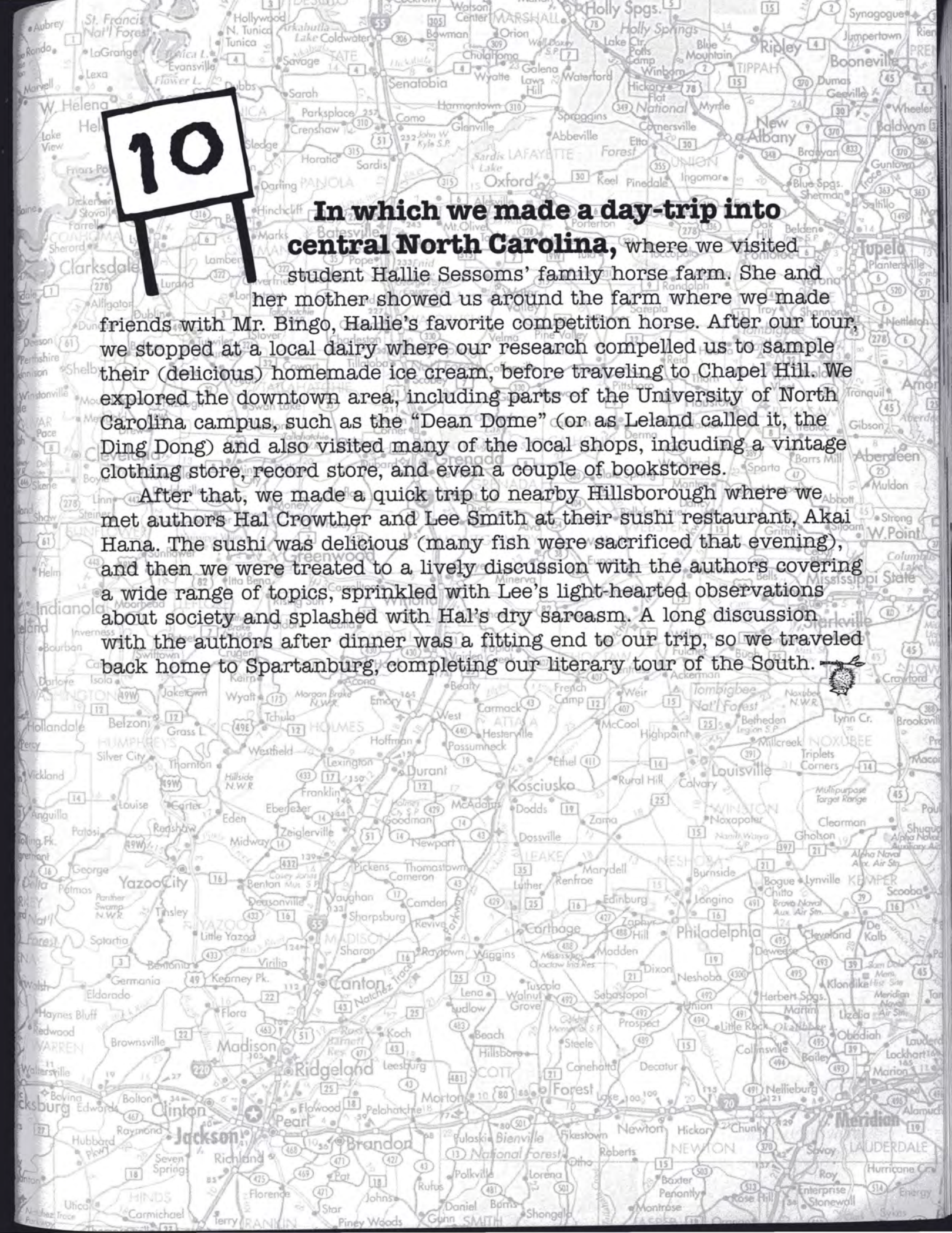


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In which we made a day-trip into central North Carolina, where we visited

student Hallie Sessoms' family horse farm. She and her mother showed us around the farm where we made friends with Mr. Bingo, Hallie's favorite competition horse. After our tour, we stopped at a local dairy where our research compelled us to sample their (delicious) homemade ice cream, before traveling to Chapel Hill. We explored the downtown area, including parts of the University of North Carolina campus, such as the "Dean Dome" (or as Leland called it, the Ding Dong) and also visited many of the local shops, including a vintage clothing store, record store, and even a couple of bookstores.

After that, we made a quick trip to nearby Hillsborough where we met authors Hal Crowther and Lee Smith at their sushi restaurant, Akai Hana. The sushi was delicious (many fish were sacrificed that evening), and then we were treated to a lively discussion with the authors covering a wide range of topics, sprinkled with Lee's light-hearted observations about society and splashed with Hal's dry sarcasm. A long discussion with the authors after dinner was a fitting end to our trip, so we traveled back home to Spartanburg, completing our literary tour of the South.



Driving Miss Daisy Crazy or Losing the Mind of the South

by Lee Smith

I want to start by introducing you to Miss Daisy. Chances are, you already know her. She may be your mother. She may be your aunt. Or you may have your own private Miss Daisy, as I do: a prim, well-educated maiden lady of a certain age who has taken up permanent residence in a neat little room in the frontal lobe of my brain. I wish she'd move, but as she points out to me constantly, she's just no trouble at all. She lives on angel food cake and she-crab soup, which she heats up on a little ring right there in her room.

Miss Daisy was an English teacher at a private girls school for forty-three years, back in the days when English was English before it became Language Arts. She was famous for her ability to diagram sentences, any sentence at all, even sentences so complex that their diagrams on the board looked like blueprints for a cathedral. Her favorite poet is Sidney Lanier. She likes to be elevated. She is still in a book club, but it is not Oprah's book club. In fact, Miss Daisy is not quite sure who Oprah is, believing that her name is *Okra* Winfrey, and asking me repeatedly what all the fuss is about. Miss Daisy's book club can find scarcely a thing to elevate them these days, so they have taken to reading *Gone with the Wind* over and over again.

Miss Daisy's favorite word is *ought*—as in, “You ought to go to church this morning.” She often punctuates her sentences with “you know: as in, “Lee Marshall, you *know* you don't believe that!” or, “Lee Marshall, you *know* you don't mean it!” She believes it is *true* about the two ladies who got kicked out of the Nashville Junior League: one for having an orgasm, and the other for having a job.

In fact, Miss Daisy reminds me of another lady I encountered many years ago, when I moved down to Alabama to become a reporter for the *Tuscaloosa News*. The former editor of the ladies page of the paper had just retired. “Thank God!” everybody said, since for many years she had ceased to write up events in the paper the way they actually happened, preferring instead to write them up the way she thought they *should* have happened.

Pat Conroy has said that the South runs on denial. I think this is true. We learn denial in the cradle and carry it to the grave. It is absolutely essential to being a lady, for instance. I myself was sent from the mountains of southwest Virginia, where I was growing up, down to Birmingham every summer to stay with my Aunt Gay Gay, whose

task was to turn me into a lady. Gay Gay's two specialities were *Rising to the Occasion* and *Rising Above It All*, whatever “it” happened to be. Gay Gay believed that if you can't say something nice, say nothing at all. If you don't discuss something, it doesn't exist. She drank a lot of gin and tonics and sometimes she'd start in on them early, winking at my Uncle Bob and saying, “Pour me one, honey, it's already dark underneath the house.” Until she died, I never knew that another of my aunts had had a previous marriage. It had been edited right out of the family, in the same way all pictures of that husband had been removed from the family albums.

Denial affects not only our personal lives, but also our political lives, our culture, and our literature. In her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison talks about a kind of denial she sees operating in American literature and criticism; she chides liberal critics for what she calls their “neglect of darkness.” She says that “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture...but excising the political from the life of the mind is a sacrifice that has proven costly.... A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only ‘universal’ but also ‘race-free’ risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist.” Morrison suggests that Black characters in classic American novels have been as marginalized as their real-life counterparts.

But back to Miss Daisy. I'm taking her out to lunch today. Miss Daisy claims she “just eats like a bird,” not deigning to confess to anything as base as hunger or even appetite, but she *does* like to go out to lunch. And while she's making her final preparations—that is, clean underwear in case we are in a wreck, gloves, money safely tucked in her bra in case her purse is stolen—let me tell you about this restaurant we're going to.

You may be surprised to learn that I actually *own* this restaurant, and that it is actually a sushi bar. But, hey! It's the New South, remember? And actually, my sushi bar (named Akai Hana and located in Carrboro, North Carolina) presents a little case study in the New South.

The land Akai Hana stands on today, at 313 N. Main St, was farmland not so very long ago, when Carrboro was a dusty, sleepy little farm village on the old road from Chapel Hill to Greensboro. This was an open field, with a tenant house at the end of it. Then Carr Mill came in, and mill houses sprouted up in neat little rows, like beans, to house the families that worked at Carr Mill. As the university grew, Chapel Hill grew, too, spreading outward toward Carrboro, which gradually became a service adjunct of Chapel Hill. This was the place you came to buy your grass seed or to get your tires fixed at the Chapel Hill Tire Company, right across the street from us. Carrboro was mostly black then, and all poor. Miss Daisy never came here except to pick up her cook. Every business in Carrboro closed at noon on Wednesday, because everybody went to church on Wednesday night. And nothing was open on Sunday.

The first restaurant to occupy our brick building here, constructed in the early fifties, was a popular, locally owned cafe named the Elite Lunch, which featured Southern cooking and lots of it. It had two dining rooms, one for white and one for colored. In the early sixties it was superseded by Pizza Villa, whose name alone testifies to Chapel

Hill's—and Carrboro's—increasing sophistication. By now, plenty of graduate students and even some professors lived in Carrboro. The mill had closed, and those mill houses were affordable.

By the mid-seventies, when an outrageously colorful chef took over and turned it into Avanti, Carrboro was coming of age. The mill became Carr Mill Mall, filled with trendy boutiques. A cooperative health-food grocery named Weaver Street opened up. Artists moved in. Carrboro started calling itself “The Paris of the Piedmont.”

Avanti's chef hung paintings by his artist friends. He stuck candles in wine bottles on each of his artfully mismatched tables. He opened the patio for outdoor dining. He made soup with forty cloves of garlic. Then, even Avanti was superseded by the truly gourmet Martini's. The owner's wife's mother came from Italy to run the kitchen, while her homemade pasta dried on broomsticks upstairs. My husband remembers that he was eating polenta in this very gazebo when a former girlfriend gave him the gate. Ah, what sweet revenge it is now to own that gazebo, which we have (of course) transformed into a pagoda.

But back to our narrative. The owner died in a wreck, Martini's closed, and the restaurant underwent a total transformation before opening again, for breakfast and lunch only, as a bakery and cafe, very French, with a marble floor and lace curtains at the windows. Pre-Starbucks, it served muffins accompanied by the first good coffee in Carrboro.

We bought the place from the muffin ladies. Why? You might well ask. Have I always had a burning desire to go into the sushi business? No, actually, my own attitude toward raw fish is closer to Roy Blount's poem about oysters: I prefer my oysters fried. Then I know my oyster's died.

It was my husband's idea. He calls my son the “Samurai stepson;” and their favorite thing to do together has always been to go out for sushi. The closing of the only sushi bar in town coincided with this son's partial recovery from schizophrenia. New medications made it possible for him to have a regular life, and what better job could a Samurai stepson get than in a sushi bar? (I can hear Miss Daisy saying in my ear, “Now Lee Marshall, *you know* you shouldn't have told that!” But I am telling it anyway.) We held long conferences with Bob, the sushi chef. We met with the muffin ladies and with the bank. We hired a designer and a construction firm. We were under way, even though nobody except us thought this was a good idea. Our accountant was horrified. The guys from the tire shop across the street kept coming over to ask, “How's the bait shop coming along?”

Now we've been open for a little over eight years. Let me introduce you around.

Bob, manager and head chef, hails from the coastal North Carolina town of Swansboro. At college in Chapel Hill, he wrote poetry and played guitar until his wanderlust led him to California, where he eventually became an ardent convert of the Reverend Moon and joined the Unification Church. He married his Japanese wife, Ryoko, in a ceremony of twenty-five thousand couples in Madison Square Garden. They are still happily married, with six beautiful children.

Under Bob's direction, Akai Hana employs people from diverse backgrounds, including Hispanic, Burmese, Thai, Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, African American, and African. Meet Rick, for instance, who heads the kitchen in back (yes, *we do* have cooked food, for people like Miss Daisy, who is enjoying some grilled teriyaki chicken right now). Anyway, both Rick and his wife, a beautician, are Chinese Filipinos who have been in this country for eighteen years, sending for their siblings one by one. Their son, a physician, is now completing his residency in Seattle. Their daughter, who recently earned her doctorate in public health, works for a world health organization in L.A. Rick's nephew Brian, one of our wait staff, plays saxophone in the UNC jazz band.

Ye-tun, a cook and a former Burmese freedom fighter whose nickname is “Yel,” proudly showed me a picture of himself coming through the jungle dressed in camo, carrying an AK-47. Now my husband calls him the “Rebel Yell,” but nobody gets it.

Okay: Bob, Ryoko, Brian, Helen Choi, Ye-tun, Miguel, Jose, Genita, Mister Chiba, and Mister Choi—these people are Southerners. We are all Southerners. Akai Hana is a Southern restaurant, just like Miss Pittypat's or Hardee's.

Judging merely from our lunch at Akai Hana, we are going to have to seriously overhaul our image of the South, and of Southerners, for this millennium.

My little piece of land in Carrboro is typical. The South was two-thirds rural in the 1930s. Now it is over two-thirds urban. One half of all Southerners were farmworkers in the thirties; now that figure is at 2 percent. And out of those farmworkers in the thirties, one half were tenant farmers. Now we have no tenant farmers, but migrant workers instead.

As the largest metro areas continue to attract people and jobs, the viability of rural life comes increasingly into question. One half of all the new jobs in this country are being created in the South, with nine out of ten of them in Texas, Florida, and a dozen metropolitan areas, including the Research Triangle here in North Carolina, where Carrboro is located.

Our Southern birth rate, which used to be famously *above* the national average, is now below it. This means that immigration is defining the South's population. Ten years from now, Texas will have a 57 percent nonwhite population. Florida will have a 54 percent nonwhite population. Some of the “big nine” states that now contain half the U.S. population will be eclipsed by the “New South”: Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. Among African Americans, there was a great migration out of the South in the twenties, the thirties, and on into the fifties. But in the 1970s more blacks started moving *to* the South—in many instances, back to the South—than leaving it. That trend has now accelerated.

Well, all these statistics have given Miss Daisy a headache. She just doesn't have a head for figures, anyway. She'd like some dessert, but Akai Hana serves only green tea ice cream, which is too weird to even think about, in Miss Daisy's opinion. So we pay up and drive around the block to Dip's Country Kitchen, where Dip Council, Miss Daisy's former cook, has opened her big, fancy new restaurant. She's published a cookbook, too. She's been written up by Calvin Trillin and Craig Claiborne; she's been on TV: she's an

entrepreneur now. Miss Daisy orders the lemon chess pie. I go for the peach cobbler myself.

Some things never change. Some Southern food will never go out of style, no matter how much it may get *nouveaued*.

And large parts of the South still look a lot like they used to—the Appalachian coal country where I'm from, for instance, and the old Cotton Belt. As a whole, we Southerners are still religious, and we are still violent. We'll bring you a casserole, but we'll kill you, too. Southern women, both black and white, have always been more likely than Northern women to work outside the home, despite the image projected by such country lyrics as "Get your biscuits in the oven and your buns in the bed, this women's liberation is a-going to your head." It was not because we were so liberated; it's because we were so poor. This, too, is changing: now our per capita income is at 92 percent of the national average.

With all these changes, what should I tell my student, one of my very favorite students, who burst into tears after we attended a reading together at which Elizabeth Spencer read her fine short story entitled "Cousins." "I'll *never* be a Southern writer!" my student wailed. "I don't even *know* my cousins!" Raised in a military household, relocated many times, she had absolutely no sense of place, no sense of the past, no sense of family. How did she spend her childhood? I asked. In the mall in Fayetteville, North Carolina, she tearfully confessed, sneaking cigarettes and drinking Cokes.

I told her she was lucky.

But she was also right. For a writer cannot pick her material any more than she can pick her parents; her material is given to her by the circumstances of her birth, by how she first hears language. And if she happens to be Southern, these given factors may already be trite, even before she sits down at her computer to begin. Her neurasthenic, fragile Aunt Lena is already trite, her mean, scary cousin Bobby Lee is already trite, her columned, shuttered house in Natchez is already trite. Far better to start out from the mall in Fayetteville, illicit cigarette in hand, with no cousins to hold her back, and venture forth fearlessly into the New South.

I once heard George Garrett say that the House of Fiction has many rooms. Well, the House of Southern Fiction is in the process of remodeling. It needs so many more rooms that we've got brand-new wings shooting out from the main house in every direction. It looks like one of those pictures of the sun as drawn by a second-grader. In fact, that's the name of it—the House of the Rising Sun—which is right over here by the interstate. I'll run you by it as we drive Miss Daisy home.

Look—there's my student right now, knocking on the door, suitcase in hand. She doesn't know yet that once she takes a room in there, she can never come out again. She doesn't understand that she's giving up her family and her home forever, that as soon as she writes about these things she will lose them, in a way, though she will mythologize them in her work, the way we all do, with all our little hometowns of the heart.

Allan Gurganus has called ours "the literature of nostalgia," pointing out that many of the great anthems of the South are written from a position of exile such as "Way down

upon the Suwannee River"; "I wish I was in the land of cotton"; James Taylor's "going to Carolina in my mind"; or "Country roads, take me home."

The writer puts herself in exile by the very act of writing. She will feel guilty about leaving, and for the rest of her life, she will write, in part, to expunge this guilt. Back home, they will be embarrassed by what she's become, wishing that she'd married a surgeon and joined the Country Club instead. Mostly, they just won't mention it, sticking to safer subjects.

Miss Daisy and I sit in the car watching my student, who keeps banging on the door, trying to get in there. "Honey, don't do it!" Miss Daisy rolls down her window and cries across the grass, "Go back home! It's not too late to stop!" But of course it is. Now my student is trying to peer in a window, shading her eyes with her hand.

Oh, I remember when I was that age myself, desperate for a room in the House of the Rising Sun. You think you'll pay for it out of your day job, and maybe you will for a while, but you'll whore out, too, eventually. We all do. The House of the Rising Sun is full of desperate characters. Some of us are drinking ourselves to death quietly, in our rooms, or loudly, at MLA. A lot of us are involved in secret affairs and unseemly couplings—we'd be real embarrassed if everybody knew who we're sleeping with. Some of us just can't do it anymore, but we put on our makeup anyway, and sit at the window all dressed up, and *talk* about doing it.

Look! The door is opening, just a crack. It's the Madam herself, but she stands just far enough back in the shadows so you can't really see who she is—maybe it's Shannon Ravenel, or maybe it's Okra.

My student slips inside. She does not look back.

"Well, I *never*!" Miss Daisy announces before falling over into a dead faint on the seat beside me. But I know she'll be all right. I know she'll be herself again by the time I get her back to her room, and she'll be talking about what's happened to my student, and she'll make a big story out of it, and *she will never, ever, shut up*.

This is the main thing that has not changed about the South, in my opinion—that will never change. We Southerners love a story, and will tell you *anything*. Narrative is as necessary to us as air. We use the story to transmit information as well as to while away the time. In periods of stress and change, the story becomes even more important. In the telling of it we discover or affirm who we are, why we exist, what we should do. The story brings order and delight. Its form is inherently pleasing, and deeply satisfying to us. Because it has a beginning, middle, and end, it gives a recognizable shape to the muddle and chaos of our lives.

Just look at Miss Daisy now. She's already sitting back up on the seat fanning herself and going on and on about what happened to that poor girl, which reminds her of another awful thing that happened to her niece Margaret's daughter, not the Margaret I know that lives in Atlanta, but the other one that lives in middle Tennessee who was never quite right in the head after that terrible automobile accident that happened when she was not but six, when Cousin Dan was driving in that open car, you know he was such an alcoholic. . . .

“The Tao of Dixie:
A Stubborn People”
from **Gather at the River**

by Hal Crowther

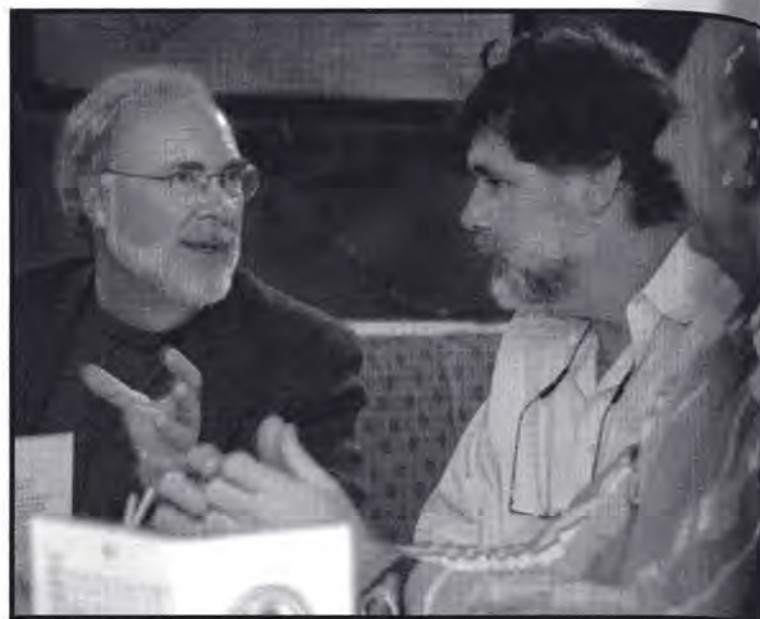
A foreigner from Scotland or California will visit a large Southern city—usually Atlanta—and complain that he could never find the South of song and story. Just another Minneapolis, as far as he could see, with the heat turned up and a few magnolias. Maybe our visitor stayed at the Ritz Carlton, where businessmen parting company at the bar say, “Hit ‘em straight, fella,” instead of “My best to June and the kids.” He was never invited to the Piedmont Driving Club and never ventured more than a few miles from Buckhead.

Nevertheless he has a point. The vital, urban South, where unemployment is low and ringworm unheard of, has long since built museums for its myths and moved on. Even in the unimproved countryside, where kudzu still creeps and gnats still swarm among the pecan trees, a visitor listens long and hard to catch the faintest echo of Margaret Mitchell or Erskine Caldwell either. Assimilation, once the great fear, is now the great fact of most Southern lives.

Why, then, are libraries bursting with dissertations on the metaphysics of Southernness, why are panels convened, sages summoned, centers dedicated to study the Tao of Dixie? Why is Southern separateness—among the reflective class no less than the belligerent—an enduring strain of separateness no other American region can approach or comprehend?

These are questions people ask me, more often since I published a book subtitled *A Personal Landscape of the South*. Radio personalities have trapped me and compelled me to answer. Sometimes the pitiless microphone betrays my hesitation, my confusion. And then there are moments when it all seems crystal clear.

There’s a musical entertainment called *Good Ol’ Girls*, a collaboration between novelists Lee Smith and Jill McCorkle and Nashville songwriters Matraca Berg and Marshall Chapman. It’s a show for seven women, who sing and play various female characters from the fiction of Smith and McCorkle. *Girls* is a revue with an attitude, one I characterized inadequately as redneck feminism. In spite of its burden of intelligence, it played to raucous sellout crowds in North Carolina and Virginia and



Hal talking to John and Deno

attracted the attention of a New York producer.

Mr. Big took the whole cast to Manhattan for what’s called a showcase production, to seduce investors for a run in an off-Broadway theater. The “Girls” gave one of their best performances for an audience that included many of the New York theater’s prominent rainmakers. Several days later the producer called in director/adaptor Paul Ferguson and gave him Broadway’s verdict: Nice try, nice music, but not half “Southern” enough. The women were too pretty, too smart, too normal, too middle-class. And all those words between the songs? The Broadway big shots offered their own version of *Good Ol’ Girls*—three or four grits-eating grannies with big hair, bad teeth and banjos.

New York’s idea of a good old girl is Mammy Yokum. Since the whole point of the show was to exterminate Hee Haw stereotypes of Southern women, the collaborators were amazed and appalled. They faced a limited menu of conclusions about the creative geniuses who dominate the New York theater: Are they low-grade morons with the cultural IQs of root vegetables, cynical mercenaries who operate on the threshold of pure evil, or uncritical consumers of Southern stereotypes that haven’t been updated since the Second World War? From that menu my responses are (1) “possibly” (2) “very likely;” and (3) “definitely.” The South has changed rapidly, but it doesn’t take many trips to New York to convince you that its image has not.

Faulkner’s Gavin Stevens complains that Northerners suffer from “a gullibility, a volitionless, almost helpless capacity and eagerness to believe anything about the South not even provided it be derogatory but merely bizarre enough and strange enough.”

“Fundamentalism, Ku Kluxry, revivals, lynchings, hog wallow politics—these are the things that always occur to a Northerner when he thinks of the South,” wrote H. L. Mencken, whose disparaging satires helped keep the South in its unenviable place. What little Mencken left untarnished was soiled forever by the Broadway production of Erskine Caldwell’s *Tobacco Road*, which logged a record 3,180 performances during the Great Depression.



Lee talking to
Austin and Leland

“What sets Southerners apart?” asks *Time* magazine in a 1964 cover story. Its first hypothesis, courtesy of Caldwell’s Jeeter Lester: “Is poverty too prevalent? Is sex too obsessive?”

This nagging Yankee suspicion that the sex is hotter somewhere else—Harlem, Paris, Latin America, Savannah—has been a curse for the sons of the Puritans since the days of Jonathan Edwards. But 7 million Americans saw *Tobacco Road*, and the South has never recovered from Caldwell’s sordid caricatures. The play closed in 1941; *Time* proved that New York’s mind was still closed in 1964, and *Good Ol’ Girls* proved that it hasn’t opened much in the past half century.

Why search any further to account for the South’s stubborn tribal attitude, its adamant embrace of a separate identity even as the floodwaters of mass culture wash away its monuments and shrines? Tribal consciousness—the chip on the shoulder underdogs wear as a fraternal badge—persists as long as the tribe suffers misrepresentation, misunderstanding, prejudice and contempt. The “pride” of these pride marches—gay, black, feminist—is nothing more than defiance, the beleaguered defiance of tribes who feel excluded, slandered, and oppressed.

Bigotry, which never varies, measures a whole tribe by its most offensive and ridiculous representatives. If we accept witless stereotypes as the common coin of oppression, what group has a more legitimate grievance than Southerners? In a prescient speech titled “The Idea of the South,” delivered in Houston in 1963, North Carolina historian George B. Tindall traced the pedigree of our toxic mythology—from Caldwell and Mencken back to Harriet Beecher Stowe and A. B. Longstreet—and quoted what must be the classic lament of the Southerner misunderstood:

“Even the fumes of progress are in his nose and the bright steel of industry towers before his eyes, but his heart is away in Yoknapatawpha county with razorback hogs and night riders. . . . He wants, above all else, to sniff the effluvium of backwoods-and-sandhill subhumanity and to see at least one barn burn at midnight. So he looks at me with crafty misgivings, as if to say, ‘Well, you do talk rather glibly about Kierkegaard and Sartre. . . . but after all, you’re only fooling, aren’t you? Don’t you, sometimes, go out secretly by owl-light to drink swampwater and feed on sowbelly and collard greens?’”

Northerners are so besotted with these myths, Professor Tindall suggested, they take Faulkner for a realist.

As long as popular culture persists in presenting them as incestuous hillbillies, church-burners, mule-beaters and randy evangelists, Southerners will dip snuff and fly Confederate battle flags just to make New Yorkers wince. This unlikely mixture of defiant



Jason and Lewis in serious sushi contemplation

pride and self-mockery is a joke Northern liberals never grasp. I think it helps to explain why North Carolina kept Jesse Helms in the U.S. Senate for thirty years. He’s a monstrous mascot, a gross pet we harbored in the same spirit as people who keep pythons and ferrets. Tar Heels re-elected him as long as he was capable of throwing the Eastern media into apoplexy.

Irony is a secret pleasure, an idiom that eludes the media and tends

to multiply misunderstandings. Sly and impertinent, the South has preserved its self-respect at the expense of its public relations. But this cultural impasse was a serious handicap for Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, two of the most intelligent and able men elected president in the twentieth century. The media and the Washington establishment—talk about incest—saw Carter and Clinton through a distorting lens of cornpone stereotype: Carter the peanut farmer, a sort of guileless Sunday school Baptist in starched overalls; Clinton the leering fornicator, at best a dirt-roads drummer with an itch for farm girls, at worst Jeeter Lester with a Yale education.

Are we paranoid? I don’t think so. A few weeks ago I was trying to convince a friend, a brilliant, benevolent scholar from the Northeast, that sympathy for defenders of the Confederate battle flag was not beyond all rational consideration.

In 1956 a British reporter famously quoted William Faulkner: “If it came to fighting I’d fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the street, and shooting Negroes.” Of course this was recorded out of context while the author was adrift on a two-day drunk. In the same interview he repeatedly said “The Negroes are right” and the white racists “wrong, and their position untenable.” It wasn’t Faulkner’s politics but his fierce, beleaguered tribal spirit the Englishman captured, the spirit that wrote (of Chick Mallison, hero of *Intruder in the Dust*): “He wanted no more save to stand with them unalterable and impregnable: one shame if shame must be, one expiation must surely be but above all one unalterable durable impregnable one: one people one heart one land.”

He wasn’t just whistling Dixie.



Lee, Hal and the clan at Akai Hana

Store Wars: The Last Hope

by Austin Baker

Nearing the end of our Cornbread and Sushi course during the fall, the question of whether or not country stores still exist in our transitioning South remained unanswered. I had previously searched for these stores and had found something similar in Greer, South Carolina. But even though the two stores I found were somewhat authentic, they lacked the atmosphere that seemed to be a key aspect of a true country store. But then I saw an article in the local newspaper announcing the re-opening of Potter's Old Store, a 100-year old country store in Cowpens, South Carolina, that directed me to a relic of bygone days.

On a cold Friday afternoon I made the quick trip from Spartanburg to Cowpens, a small town located only ten miles from a massive Wal-Mart Supercenter, to find out if the real thing existed. For those unfamiliar with Cowpens, it seems to be only an indiscriminate speck on the map. But to those familiar with Revolutionary War history, Cowpens was the site of one of the most brilliant and pivotal American military victories of the Revolutionary War. Daniel Morgan, after whom Spartanburg's Morgan Square is named, led a colonial militia that crushed Banastre "Bloody" Tarleton and his "Black Legion" at what is now Cowpens National Battlefield. Tarleton, due to his ruthless military tactics, was possibly the most hated British commander; the battle cry "Tarleton's Quarter" became common among Southern militiamen after Tarleton's men slaughtered defeated colonial militiamen at Buford's Massacre.

With this history in mind, it only makes sense that Cowpens seems to be, once again, a pivotal battlefield in yet another revolutionary war. But this time, the rag-tag American forces consist of small business owners facing massive retail behemoths such as Wal-Mart. Steve Mathis is one of these entrepreneurial rebels of the changing South, and he wages his war of ideals from his new business in downtown Cowpens. Like his father, the late Steve Mathis, a successful contractor, he follows in both successful business skills as well as preserving his heritage. His father built his business from scratch, and worked to preserve several historical sites in Cowpens; in similar fashion, Mathis started his own recycling business, and has restored several historical buildings in Cowpens as well. Now he's once again saving a piece of history by restoring the old country store. One of the oldest buildings in Cowpens, Potter's Old Store was operated by the Potter family for nearly a century. Ned Potter, the last of three Potters before him, ran the store until eight years ago. His grandfather started working at the store around 1910, and purchased it

later on in the 1920's. After that, his father owned and operated it until he took over the business. He sold the business to a man who claimed he would renovate and re-open the business, but he failed to do so. Ned reclaimed the building and sold it to Mathis only a few months ago, because of Mathis' reputation for preserving local heritage. Since then, he has worked to renovate the store, which re-opened after its eight-year hiatus on November 27, 2005.

From the moment I walked through the double doors, one set made of screen wire and the other of wood, I knew I had found something special. The 100+ year-old wooden floors creaked with my every step. Bare incandescent bulbs hanging from the high ceilings lit the first floor of the 14,000 square foot building. The walls were lined with shelves holding all sorts of goods: toys, camouflaged clothing, cooking ware, hardware, antiques, and also jars of candy, pecans, produce, and bottled soda. The sales counter, complete with an old-fashioned cash register, was lined with pickles, pickled sausage, and pickled eggs. Behind the sales counter was a cold case containing various dairy products, including the hoop cheese the store was famous for selling in years gone by, as well as cold Nehi grape soda, the favorite drink of Radar, a character from the old television show "M*A*S*H."

I was fortunate enough to spend a Saturday afternoon with Steve, Ned, Steve's youngest brother Clay, his mother Anne, and Grady, a former high school classmate of the Mathis brothers. They were sitting around an old pot-bellied stove, talking and eating venison—from a 12-point buck Steve had killed about a month ago—which they had been smoking since six that morning, eating that famous hoop cheese, and drinking Nehi grape soda. I introduced myself. Steve asked if I "was one of them book-writers that had been coming to the store a lot lately." I explained to them my mission: to determine if the fabled country store still existed. I was invited to have a seat, sample the smoked venison and cheese, and discuss it with them.

Steve began with the brief historical significance of Cowpens, which I discussed above, and then began to describe his views on how the South has changed from an agrarian society into the society of big money, big business, outsourcing of labor, and the urbanization that has transformed the South today:

In opening this store back up, I don't see myself as an anti-Wal-Mart, but I do see myself as a person who is able to sense and see what's going on in this country. And whether you like it or not, the American people have to realize they're getting sold out by big money: OPEC, your big banks, especially foreign banks that hold a lot of interest in Wall Street. But HMO's, big insurance companies, it's all a conglomeration; add Wal-Mart, and you've got it where big money takes control of the market and starts turning the screws on the working man; it's a situation where the working man is being exploited.

These are all lofty claims; many people say similar things, but they often lack the knowledge to back them up. But I found Steve to be very informed; he was familiar with past and current trends in economic legislation, and had evidently done a lot of research

on the subjects he spoke of. He talked about how the government basically forced farmers off the land through the outsourcing of labor to foreign countries, favored trade nation agreements, and ruthless and efficient large corporate entities. He cites Wal-Mart as a large part of the problem, yet he does not blame them as much as he blames the government, who has allowed large corporate entities to influence them into creating legislation that favors big corporations over the small business owner or farmer. I also discovered that not only is Steve attentive to all of these factors, but his work experiences have shown him first hand the economic changes that are shaping the South:

I was involved in scrap metal and machine moving, doing a tremendous amount of work for Milliken, and other large textile people. I saw hundreds and thousands of people in this area [upstate South Carolina], all these little textile towns, just completely wiped off the map by these trade agreements. But the things like family values, tradition, honesty, quality products, and all the things that made up little towns and country stores, are all disappearing from the face of the earth.

He went on to predict that these changes are going to further stratify our society into a rich class and a poor class. "It takes money to make money." He feels that the country, on the whole, is becoming increasingly more service-oriented. For example, he is also involved in warehousing, and he feels that in most areas, especially areas such as ours, distribution centers are going to become the main source of employment for Americans. All major corporations are manufacturing their goods overseas, but they still have to be shipped back over here, stored, and then delivered to retail centers. Distribution and services, such as fast food and restaurants, are what he feels are going to become the job market in our country. After all of this background, he talked about what he sees as the current trend in retail sales:

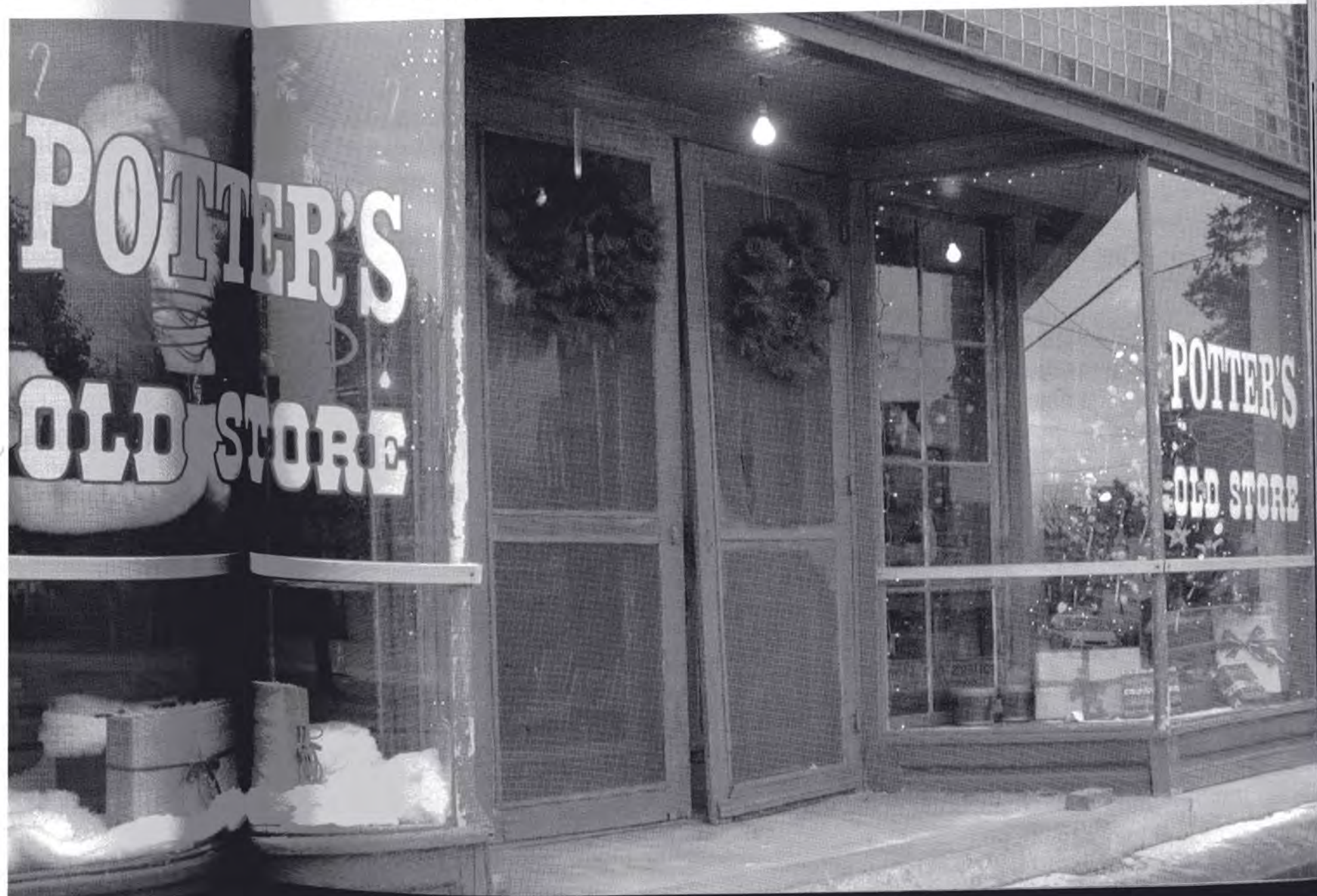
Since 9/11, I realized, and a lot of big companies have done research on this too, that the trend in marketing today is trying to get back to nostalgic, traditional-type atmospheres, like your Cracker Barrels and old country stores, and to make money they're even trying to make their products, like ice cream and such, like it was back in the good old days, back before we had to worry about WMD's, Al-Qaeda and our troops fighting over there in the desert, fighting over who knows what? That's where the trend is going, back to the way things were before everything got all to hell.

Then Steve got to the heart of the matter, describing both his perspective of himself and his contemporary country store:

All the big money is just raping the American consumer, even the fuel, that we need so we can get to the stores to buy the stuff, has got out of hand. So I believe

that this general store will stand here like a rebel. The more stuff in here that I don't have to go to Wal-Mart and buy, the better. But don't get me wrong, if Wal-Mart puts something on clearance, and cuts it to the bone—they're such a wasteful company—they'll get to the point where they need store space and they'll pretty much give it away to get you to take it out of the store, I'll buy it and bring it right over here and let the people benefit.

This is what I had been looking for, the rebel with a cause, who is not afraid, clinging to good old fashioned American values, to stare Wal-Marts and the like right in the face and shout "No Quarter!" Steve's comments sum up what a country store really is. As I sat around the roaring wood fire in the pot-bellied stove, their friend Grady threw another log in and recounted stories of their days playing school football and basketball. To me, a few of the details seemed a bit exaggerated, but that was okay. In fact, that was great, because it coincided directly with The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture's definition of a country store, one in which during "the winter scene men and boys and sometimes a



few women sat around the pot-bellied stove swapping yarns, arguing politics or religion, and recounting details of farming operations. There was a philosophy present in the assumptions underlying this talk, which would now be called “cracker-barrel philosophy.” It was December, about forty degrees and raining outside, and I sat with these men and women debating politics. Perfect!

I finished my hoop cheese and swapped a few yarns of my own with them before thanking them for their generosity. I took a few pictures of the store, said goodbye once again, and headed back to Spartanburg with a sense of satisfaction. My previous journey had brought me close to finding the elusive country store; J.D. Lynn’s Country Store and the Unique Boutique in Greer both had many of the qualities I had been searching for. No contemporary store will ever be able to replicate the atmosphere of a true country store of the past, because the common man has no need for “store-bought” goods, as they were referred to then, because in our society everything is “store-bought.” The true country store catered to the small farmer, and today that market is gone. But in spite of all this, Potter’s Old Store still had everything needed to be considered a read country store: history and tradition, true Southerners displaying true hospitality, and a building and equipment seeped in nearly 100 years of operation as a traditional country store. It was a store that transcended the other two in that it was an integral part of the town; the entire time I was there, local residents stopped in to pick up a snack or a necessity, or just to talk with the people there. Although in no way does Potter’s Old Store provide any retail competition to Wal-Marts or other corporate behemoths, the store not only competes with, but also wins the battle of ideals and morals. Wal-Mart is a sell-out; it may have been started as a retail operation with a heart for the workingman, but it sold its soul to the almighty dollar long ago in exchange for international labor law violations, the outsourcing of American jobs to foreign countries, and massive profits. Steven Mathis and his store stand like an Alamo of retail business; he may ultimately lose the war economically, but the values he and his store perpetuate will never die in the heart of true Southern Americans rallying to the battle cry of “Walton’s Quarter!”

The Cracker Barrel Phenomenon: Compromising our Heritage

by Wilson Peden

In the onslaught of market-driven capital expansion, our rural heritage seems destined to fall to the forces of modernity. After all, the American population is growing everyday, demanding new jobs. Before anyone can be employed, there must be somewhere for them to work. Even in the South, the historical last holdout against urbanity, it’s hard to get half an hour away from a Wal-Mart. Further expansion into the last of the hinterlands seems inevitable.

That’s not to say it’s a hopeless case; the South certainly has its share of historic sentimentality, and there are few other regions where the words “rural” and “culture” are still closely tied together in the collective mind. Rebellion, as well, has always been a proud part of Southern history—if there was ever fertile ground for a grassroots movement, for a compromise between economic stagnation and urban sprawl, surely it is here in the South. Unfortunately, some of the compromises that have taken place may be more harmful to heritage preservation than unfettered expansion. A prime

example: Cracker Barrel.

At first glance, a Cracker Barrel restaurant and general store might look like a thoughtful nod in the direction of cultural preservation. There’s a cozy front porch with old fashioned checker boards and rocking chairs, a place where folks can sit down and think about things while they wait. The food inside is rich and fried, with country delicacies like catfish and okra that no one cooks at home anymore. And to cap it all, the general store features all the rural nostalgia your American Express can buy. Taken out of context, the place could seem almost quaint.

The problem is the context. Cracker Barrel stores have spread across the U.S. through a symbiotic relationship with a development that has destroyed and bastardized the South like few others: the Interstate Highway System.



It's a familiar pattern. As population rises in an area, traffic increases, and eventually, it becomes too much for the current road network to handle. The roads must be expanded to accommodate more lanes; bypasses must be built around the busiest urban areas. Traffic leading out of the area will increase as well. If two such areas build up together, a highway, will have to be built to handle the heavier traffic flow between the burgeoning new cities. And, of course, all those new drivers are going to need somewhere to fill both their gas tanks and their stomachs. Restaurants and gas stations spring up at every exit, like so many toadstools after the rain of asphalt. Someone has to man the new stores, and they need somewhere to live, and shop, and so on. Pretty soon they're going to need some more roads leading out of there.

Cracker Barrel is not the only chain to capitalize on highway traffic; they are, however, one of the more effective companies to do so. Cracker Barrel offers what other restaurants and pit stops cannot: a feeling of home while on the road. The food may or may not be authentic, and the merchandise certainly isn't, but after eight hours on the road, the place certainly looks a lot better than McDonalds. If all you have been exposed to is urban culture, then Cracker Barrel capitalizes on your inexperience, subjecting you to its blitz of nostalgic merchandise as soon as you step foot in the door.

This is why Cracker Barrel is dangerous: it's a false compromise. If unregulated commercial expansion into rural areas and zero expansion in rural areas are the two extremes, a compromise would be a limited degree of expansion. But Cracker Barrel has nothing to do with limited expansion. As far as urban expansion goes, Cracker Barrel is just a chain like any other. And the illusion of a nostalgic past that this particular chain cultivates is dangerous because it numbs us to the facts of the matter and assuages our guilt while we continue to pave over more land. This is the Cracker Barrel phenomenon.

I don't think there is anything particularly evil or bad about Cracker Barrel in and of itself as a restaurant and store. I don't particularly like the food, and the merchandize in the store just seems like tourist junk, but that's my opinion about a lot of stores and restaurants. The danger is the feeling of rural nostalgia we get from Cracker Barrel. If this is urbanization, is urbanization so bad? After all, isn't this a way of preserving our heritage while still keeping with the times?

The answer is no. And the problem is not limited to Cracker Barrel. A&W Root Beer has created a chain of fast-food restaurants that attract diners with a mythology loosely based on the nineteen fifties. In the consumer goods sector, Mast General Store and others like it have made a fortune selling designer plaid and straw hats to nostalgic folks with an undiscerning eye and money to burn. These stores and restaurants convince us that the rural south is not gone, and that we can enjoy it for a reasonable price.

The problem is not one of aesthetics, but of numbers: our country, and the whole world population, is growing too fast and using too many resources. The demise of rural lands and customs is only one example of what happens with unregulated growth. If we are going to stop expansion while there is still an inch of unpaved earth, we will have to strip off the blinders imposed on us by places like Cracker Barrel and start thinking about how we can actually change our lifestyles.

The Developer's Daughter on Urban Sprawl

by Mary Mungo

Urban sprawl, the spread of developments into rural areas, has been a major issue for years now, especially as it continues to grow more and more rapidly each year. The rural areas near cities in the South are quickly becoming suburbs as more and more people seek to live the "American Dream" in friendly neighborhoods which offer larger and more affordable homes free from the dangers and noise of the larger cities. Many people in the South are having a hard time dealing with the growth of developments near their homes in rural areas where they have previously enjoyed the privacy and serenity of nature. My father, Stewart Mungo, owns a development company in Columbia, South Carolina with his brother Steve. The Mungo Company, which was started by my grandfather, has been building in the South Carolina midlands for over fifty years. The company is often criticized for building large subdivisions in rural areas, and although it has been successful throughout the years, it has met much public criticism and has heard many complaints from residents who lived in these rural areas prior to development. The most common complaints are about the developments bringing too many people to the new area and making the roads crowded.

The Mungo Company started out building large subdivisions in the Columbia/Irmo area of South Carolina, and has recently started developments in Charleston and some community housing projects in Spartanburg. When my grandfather first started the company, he moved out to Irmo, which was very rural at the time, and planned to start developing neighborhoods there. Everyone thought he was crazy for thinking that people were actually going to move out there into the middle of the woods so far away from town. He proved everyone wrong and created a very successful business and was an important figure in the development of Irmo.

Irmo is just one of the many small rural towns in the South to have been urbanized over the years. The South as a region has seen an astounding 59.6% increase in urbanized land between 1982 and 1997, with only a 22.2% increase in the population of the South (according to the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy.) The "change" in the area is mostly the result of growth of developments and diminishing rural areas.

My father told me that the main issue at hand is that some Southerners who live in rural areas get angry when he plans to develop land near their homes. He said that one thing he has noticed is that he has more problems with people who own smaller pieces of



land in rural areas than with people who own larger tracts. A reason for this is that the people who own a hundred or more acres of land see their property ownership as more of an investment and are not as bothered by the developments, whereas the people who have moved out into the rural area and bought two acres are the ones who get the most angry because they want to feel like they own a hundred acres, and then they object when the people who own the land around them sell their land to developers. They do not want other people moving out into the area they live in because they like the seclusion. He said it was like the “ladder on the lifeboat,” implying that those people not wanting anyone else to move out there are like people escaping a sinking ship and climbing the ladder on the lifeboat to safety and then pulling up the ladder so that no one else can get on the lifeboat.

Developers have been criticized by conservationists as well as other citizens for not making better use of abandoned areas in the cities instead of moving out into the countryside to develop large areas of land into a new suburbia. Many people think that they should just focus on fixing up old and abandoned buildings in cities which already exist. My father said that the problem is that sometimes there is not enough land or resources in the city to create a development and that another common problem is that sometimes even if there were enough land in these more developed places, there would be one or two people who refuse to sell their property which would be in the middle of the area they need. It is also very expensive to redo a part of town and would end up costing the city more money than it would to just build in an area where there are not as many issues. If you want to build a neighborhood with 200 houses with a half acre per lot, you have to go where that much land is available. He said that they are often criticized for not having “mixed” developments which have commercial buildings mixed with residential neighborhoods and are said to be the ideal community. The problem with this is that it is hard to build a neighborhood around stores or schools or businesses and it is difficult to determine what should be put in that neighborhood or if there are even enough children in the area to build a new school.

When developments are built around schools or businesses, people often see it as some sort of conspiracy. I have seen firsthand the strange people my dad has had to deal with in his business, as people come up with crazy conspiracy theories about everything from the houses, to politics, or even the schools! At one point, when my high school’s principal asked my father to sponsor a billboard showing off the fact that we had the highest SAT scores in the state, people were accusing him of conspiring with the principal to get people to come to Dutch Fork and buy one of his houses near the school, when, really, he just did it because it was my school and he thought it was reasonable to acknowledge the school’s accomplishments in academics. I have also seen letters from people in the town that my father has forwarded to me, one in particular which criticized a man who was running for Richland County Council because of some ridiculous conspiracy theory that the Mungo Company was behind all of this because the man’s wife had worked for the company and that they were trying to dilute the vote by running several candidates and then getting his “block vote.” I could not help but laugh when

I read the note Dad had attached to the letter saying “Curses, our evil plans are out in the open. I guess that we should rethink our scheme of intergalactic conquest. I was hoping that our hordes of flesh-eating henchmen could attack on Christmas Eve and kidnap Santa Claus.”

From reading some of these letters and seeing signs that people have put up making “slandorous comments about the company, I have realized how crazy and childish some people can be when it comes to property. There was a sign that someone put up outside of his Ascot development which read “Asscot,” and then different groups are constantly putting signs on their property telling people of the evils of urban sprawl; but my personal favorite is the sign war between my father and the farmer who lives in front of his Farming Creek subdivision in Lexington. Hoping to scare off potential new neighbors, this man put a very large sign up on his property staring at my father’s new development which read “WARNING! Agricultural Farmland; BEWARE OF: smells, chemicals used, rats/snakes, and other wild animals!” This would have to be every real estate agent’s worst nightmare, according to The State Newspaper, but my dad took a different approach. In response to this sign, my father put up a sign exactly like it on the Mungo side of the street with a huge smiley face which read “WARNING! Home-grown homes; BEWARE OF: Happy kids, bicycles, dogs and cats, and splashing in the pool!” Dad was quoted in The State Newspaper saying that he put the sign up to “keep things on the lighter side. We all tend to take ourselves too seriously.” Dad told the newspaper that the home sales have not been off because of the farmer’s sign, but that he had never run across anything like this. “I don’t think we’ve lost customers from the message. We might have lost customers because somebody doesn’t want to live around a bunch of nuts.”

As I looked at these pictures and read some of the letters and articles which have criticized The Mungo Company for urban sprawl, I had to ask, “What are you criticizing for the most with your new developments?” He said, “Well, we receive a lot of criticism about everything as you can see, but I guess that we are criticized the most about new neighborhoods bringing in more traffic and making the roads more crowded. So the problem lies in needing effective transportation



systems. The issue is not about houses, it is about cars because these days everyone seems to take their own car everywhere and never carpool with anyone else.” Dad then got into one of his historical lectures, telling me about how traffic has been an issue for thousands of years and told me about how Julius Caesar even made a law against carriages being driven through the streets during the daytime, so they could only use the roads at night; but then that did not work because all the noise of the carriages kept the residents of the city up all night and there was too much crowding at night. So I guess the moral of that story was that whenever you have a problem, you can try to change it, but then there will always be another conflict with the change. These people want urban sprawl to stop, but too many people still want to live the “American Dream” and have that nuclear family with a house and a fenced-in yard. It would be nice to come up with a solution to make everyone happy, but the demands of society are too great and there will always be some conflict with anything that is done.

The issue with traffic crowding the roads in rural areas because of all the new developments is a problem with not having enough effective transportation systems because in the suburbs the residents are too far away to walk to many places that they need to go and everyone insists on driving their own cars. Urban sprawl developed

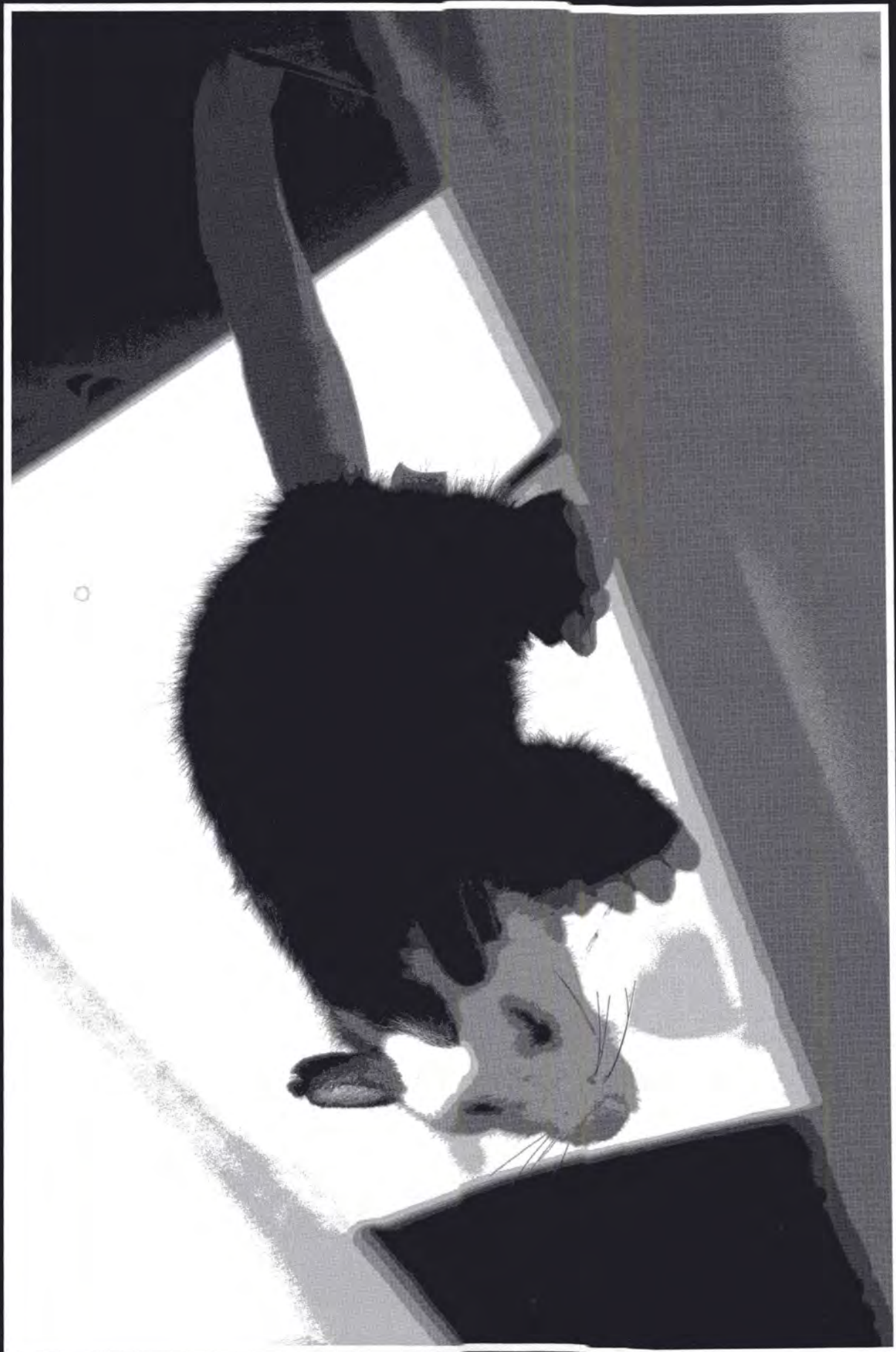


A new development where there used to be a farm

because people do not want to live in apartments over stores; they want to have a detached house and a yard and they choose to have a suburban house over a place in the city because they do not mind having to drive if they are happy with their homes.

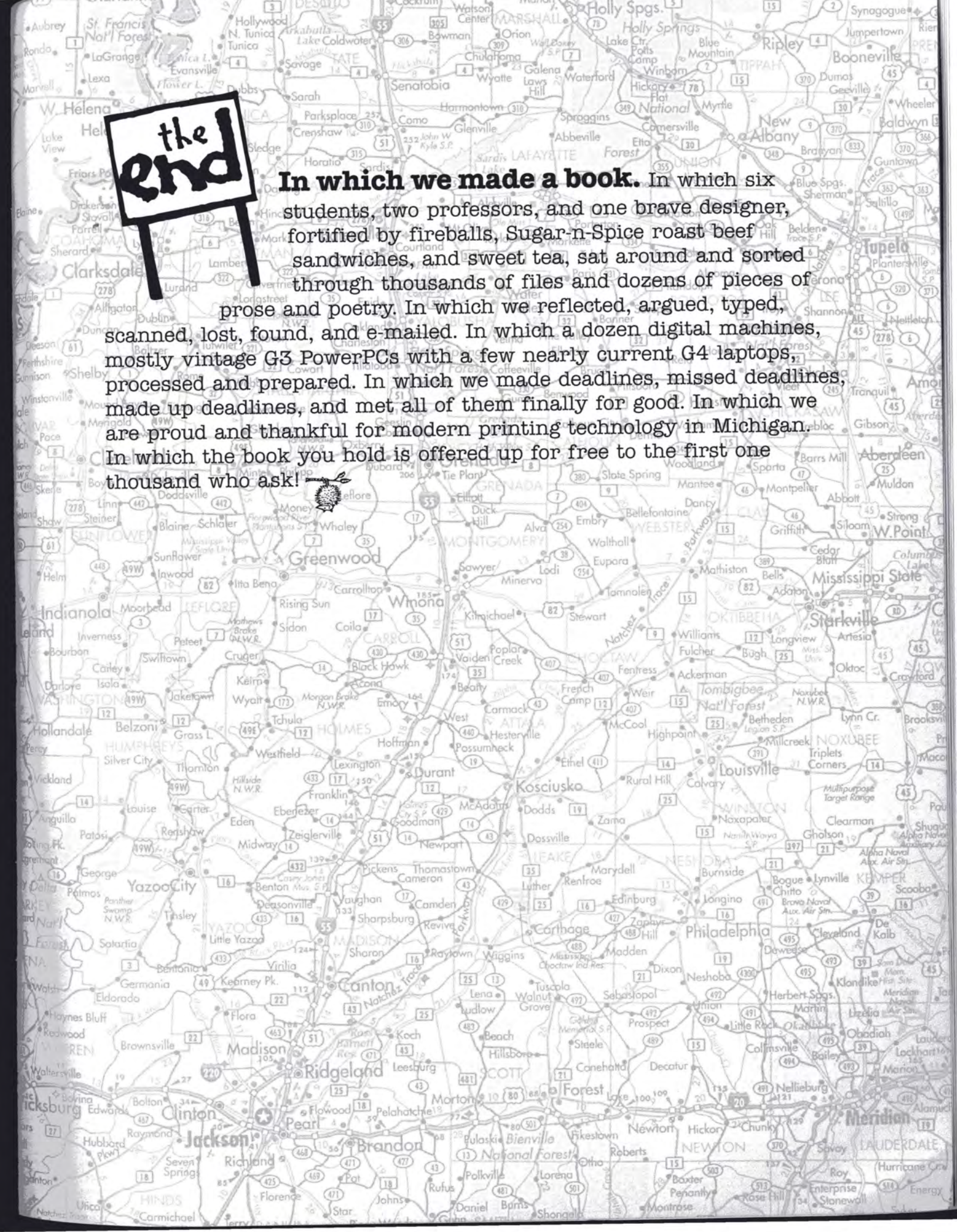
Another issue my father pointed out is that many people that are from really small towns do not want to keep living there. There are not enough jobs—agriculture does not generate jobs like it used to. Many people had to move to suburbs and cities so that they could find jobs in order to make a living. For example, Dad told me that when he was at Wofford, there were five guys in his class from the rural southern town Estill, which was a lot considering how small the town was. He said that now not one of them lives in that town because either they could not find jobs there, or they simply did not want to live in a small town like that anymore. He said that he still knows these men and that all of them live within twenty miles of a big city. It was a choice they made, like the millions of others, which results in urban sprawl. If they are in a larger town or suburbia then there is a much better chance that they will make more money and receive more recognition. One of them became a teacher in Leesville, another became a priest in Irmo, and two of them became doctors in Greenville and Chapin. Dad said that they probably felt that they would never make much progress in their careers in the really small rural towns. There is not enough of a market for them to work in Estill since there are already a priest, and a doctor, and teachers there.

I learned a lot about urban sprawl in the South from doing this research, and after thinking about it afterwards, I see how it does affect the Southern rural lifestyle. With more people moving into the rural areas, the old pastimes of residents decrease and start to die out as more diverse groups of people move in. There will be less and less hunting and fishing on their property. When the country stores are put out of business as the larger corporations like Wal-Mart move in, urban sprawl is not necessarily to blame because it is more of an issue of globalization. The main cause is the people who all want to live in houses but then complain about urban sprawl when they have new neighbors moving into the new developments. My father said that everyone wants to complain about it and critics of urban sprawl think everyone should live in apartments on top of each other in the cities, but the crazy thing is that many of them live in houses out in the suburbs! Many people want to live the American Dream, with their detached houses with yards and two car garages and a pool. Many people want to have that house and family that is constantly presented in the media, and everyone wants to have friendly neighbors with attractive houses as well. A lot of people want to live in places like Wisteria Lane (*Desperate Housewives*) because that is what the media tells people their lives are supposed to be like, and sprawl is the result.



the
end

In which we made a book. In which six students, two professors, and one brave designer, fortified by fireballs, Sugar-n-Spice roast beef sandwiches, and sweet tea, sat around and sorted through thousands of files and dozens of pieces of prose and poetry. In which we reflected, argued, typed, scanned, lost, found, and e-mailed. In which a dozen digital machines, mostly vintage G3 PowerPCs with a few nearly current G4 laptops, processed and prepared. In which we made deadlines, missed deadlines, made up deadlines, and met all of them finally for good. In which we are proud and thankful for modern printing technology in Michigan. In which the book you hold is offered up for free to the first one thousand who ask!



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Contributors

Austin Baker is a sophomore English major and freelance photographer. His claim to fame is that Laura Vaughn called him the redneck who asked all the good questions. He spent the summer of 2006 as a photojournalism intern in Juneau, Alaska.

Elizabeth Bethea spent the summer indulging in all things Southern, especially fried chicken, tomato sandwiches, and corn on the cob, after spending the spring semester in Milan, Italy. Now she is a senior English major and plans to pursue a Master's in Communications after graduation.

Butch Clay is an environmentalist devoted to saving what little bit of wilderness the South still has left. He's the author of *A Guide to the Chatooga River*.

Hal Crowther has written for *Time*, *Newsweek*, other magazines, and several newspapers. His latest collection of essays is *Gather at the River: Notes from the Post-Millennial South*.

Ivy Farr, a Cornbread Southerner since birth, is a senior and plans to major in History and Psychology. She will spend her senior year studying in over ten countries as one of Wofford's Presidential International Scholars. After graduation, she plans to attend the University of Mississippi, earn a Master's degree in Southern Studies, and then complete a doctoral program in Psychology.

Tom Franklin grew up in south Alabama but now lives in Oxford, MS with his wife, poet Beth Ann Fennelly, and their daughter. He's the author of *Poachers*, a collection of stories, and *Hell at the Breech*, a novel.

William Gay has lived most of his life in Hohenwald, TN. He's the author of two novels, the most recent of which is *Provinces of Night*, and a collection of short stories.

Frye Gaillard was a fiction writer and journalist in NC for many years, but he has moved back to his home state and is writer-in-residence at the University of South Alabama. His latest book, *Cradle of Freedom*, won the 2005 Lillian Smith Award for non-fiction.

Steve Harvey is a professor and musician at Young Harris College in Young Harris, Georgia. He's the author of *Bound for Shady Grove*, a book of essays.

Casey Lambert graduated from Wofford College in May of 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She hopes to be an environmental journalist, so if you ever see her on the television hugging a tree, know that she is content. Casey loves horses and hiking...and has even ridden a mule or two. She likes cornbread, but she's had her share of sushi as well.

Martin Lammon holds the Fuller Callaway/Flannery O'Connor Chair in Creative Writing at Georgia College and State University. He's the author of a collection of poems, *News From Where I Live*, and has recently finished a memoir, *Nine Degrees North*.

John Lane is equal parts cornbread and sushi. On this journey he was the official keeper of the roadkill count. When he paddles the wild rivers of the South, which he writes about often, he hears banjo music whether he wants to or not.

Lewis Lovett is a junior English major who articulates the language loudly. This, paired with his frisbee handling, makes him a conqueror of the South.

Trish Makres is from Bristol, TN and received a B.A. in English at Wofford. After completing her Master's degree in Elementary Education at the University of Tennessee, she hopes to teach kindergarten or first grade so she can inform her students how NASCAR has been shaped by the South and how important Dale, Jr. is.

Karen Sayler McElmurray is an associate professor of English at Georgia College and State University. She is the author of *Surrendered Child*, a memoir of her experience as a mother giving up her child for adoption.

Larry McGehee is Professor Emeritus of Religion at Wofford College. He's the author of a weekly column and a collection of essays, *Southern Seen: Meditations on Past and Present*.

Jim Morgan is a senior at Wofford, studying religion (God's major). He grew up as a staunch Southern Baptist Republican in rural Sylvania, GA before he attended Wofford and started playing frisbee. From there his life has slid downhill at an alarming rate.

Mary Mungo, the developer's daughter, was a member of the fall Cornbread & Sushi seminar.

Mark Olencki is a chauffeur, mulcher, good neighbor, photographer, graphic designer, connoisseur of B-grade science fiction thrillers, Lyle Lovett (*no relation to Lewis Lovett*), and graduate of Wofford College. He has worked with the Hub City Writers Project since 1995, designing over twenty-five books about Spartanburg's arts, culture, history, and literature.

Wilson Peden has lived in upstate South Carolina for twelve years now, though he still prefers North Carolina Public Radio. Wilson will graduate from Wofford in the spring of 2007 with a degree in English, after which he will pursue an amazing series of adventures that will eventually land him wealth, fame, and a permanent position in the canon of American literature, because that's what English majors do.

Jason Rains is a senior English major and self-described intellectual elitist. He is best known for his unhealthy obsession with artsy rock bands that nobody listens to, but he also enjoys writing and watching *Animal Planet*. He is deathly afraid of sea monsters.

Hallie Sessoms is a recent Wofford graduate from Chapel Hill, who currently resides just outside of Atlanta. She spends her days writing, reading, and playing in the city and supports her pseudo-literary lifestyle by tending bar in the evenings. She is passionate about UNC basketball, the writings of Hemingway and Eliot, red wine, and *The Sopranos*. She hopes to break into sports broadcasting and aspires to be an anchor on ESPN's SportsCenter.

Ron Rash divides his time between Clemson, SC and Cullowhee, NC, where he is the Parris Distinguished Professor in Appalachian Cultural Studies at Western Carolina University. He's the author of three novels and several books of poetry based in the Appalachian mountains and foothills, the most recent of which is the novel *The World Made Straight*.

Dori Sanders is the author of the bestselling novel *Clover*. She also lives on and operates her family peach and produce farm in Filbert, SC.

Bettie Sellers was a professor of English at Young Harris College in Young Harris, Georgia until 1996. She was named Poet Laureate of Georgia in 1997. Her many collections of poems include *Morning of the Red Tailed Hawk*, *Spring Onions and Cornbread*, and *Liza's Monday and Other Poems*.

George Singleton, the dog whisperer of Dacusville, teaches at the S.C. Governor's School for the Arts and writes fiction. His latest books are *Novel*, a novel, and *Drowning in Gruel*, a collection of stories.

Lee Smith is the author of three collections of short stories and nine novels, the most recent of which is *On Agate Hill*. She lives in Carrboro, NC with her husband Hal Crowther; they're owners of Akai Hana, which serves Southern sushi at its best.

Deno Trakas writes poetry and fiction, professes English and directs the Writing Center at Wofford; he also drives the van and pinches the pennies for Cornbread and Sushi. His current project is a book on the Greeks of the Upstate of SC.

Laura Vaughn is a recent graduate of Wofford College, where she majored in Spanish and Latin American Studies. In Cornbread and Sushi she made a name for herself as the only person on the trip capable of wearing four pairs of pants at once. She apologizes for any mishaps she may have perpetrated at the Faulkner house. She now lives in Athens, GA, where she works with immigrants, rides her bike (always with a helmet), and enjoys the smell of coffee.

Leland Wood is a rising junior at Wofford, a double major in English and Art History. Cornbread brought out the best in him, including his one-of-a-kind, high-pitched laugh that filled the van and the valleys of the South.

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