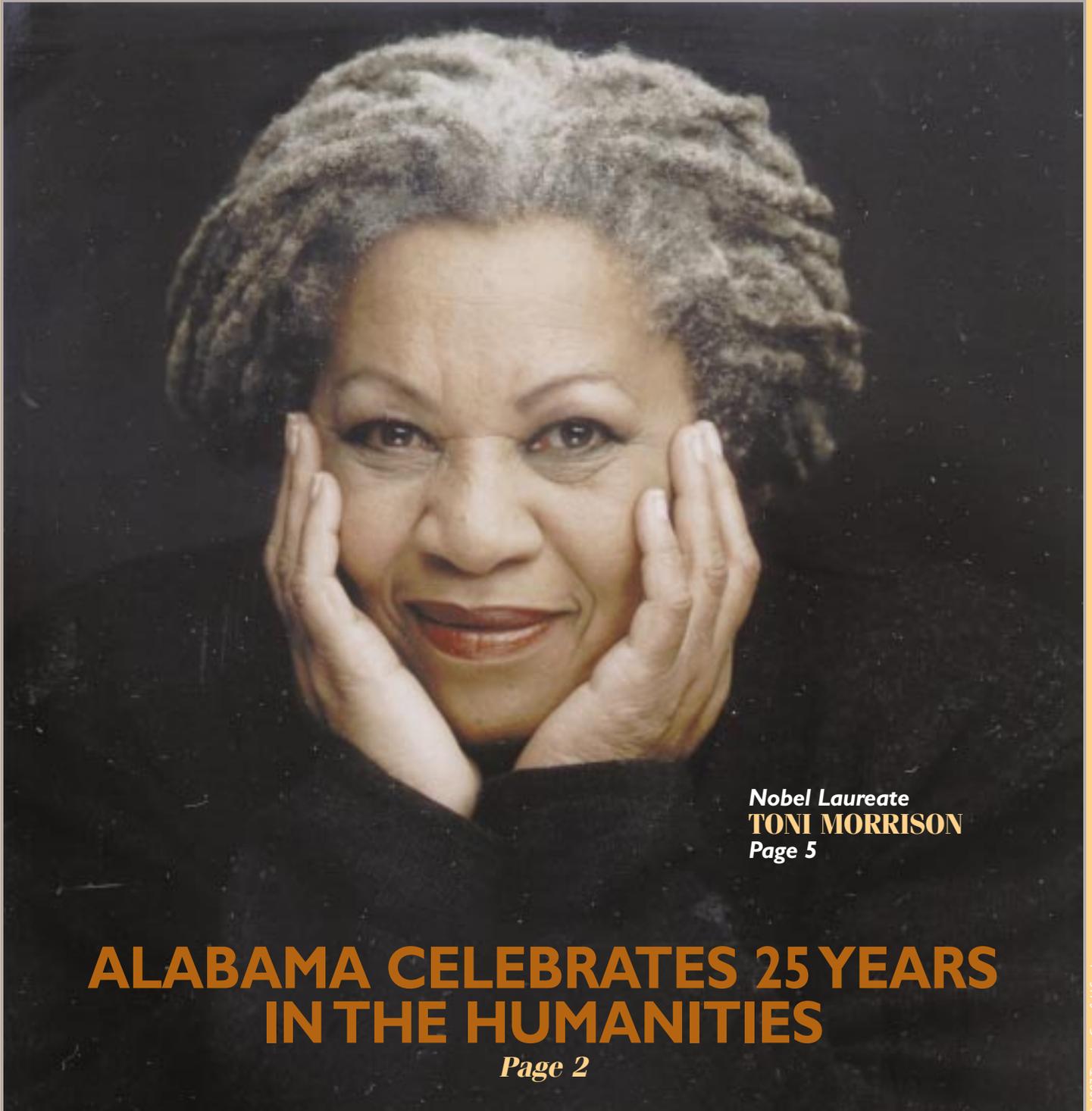


VOL. 6, NO. 3

FALL 1999

FIRST DRAFT

The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum



Nobel Laureate
TONI MORRISON
Page 5

**ALABAMA CELEBRATES 25 YEARS
IN THE HUMANITIES**

Page 2

ALABAMA WRITERS' FORUM

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's fall and the din is loud. Take your pick: football, elections, back-to-school woes for teenagers, and some tragically bad weather. But as writers other things should get our attention, too.

We have a Nobel Laureate in Literature visiting our state at the end of this month: novelist **Toni Morrison** will highlight the Alabama Humanities Foundation's 25th Anniversary festivities on October 30th at UAB's Alys Stephens Center. For details of this event and AHF's silver anniversary, see page 5.

Very soon we will celebrate the publication of two works from our "Writing Our Stories" anti-violence creative writing program. *Open the Door II* edited by **Marlin Barton** and *Let Me Talk to You* edited by **Priscilla Hancock Cooper** will feature the work of Alabama Department of Youth Services students who have worked with these gifted teaching writers at Mt. Meigs and Chalkville, respectively. Look for extensive coverage of these books in the Winter *First Draft*. We will post some of the work on our website at www.writersforum.org.

To all young writers and their teachers, it's not too early to begin preparing your entries for the **2000 High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition**. See pages 13-16 for our annual four-page insert on the contest, including entry form.

The Alabama Writers' Conclave recently selected Alabama's new poet laureate—**Helen Norris** of Montgomery awaits final appointment by Governor Don Siegelman to her post. Book review editor and AWF vice-president **Jay Lamar** interviewed Helen for



Jeanie Thompson

this issue. On behalf of the Alabama Writers' Forum, congratulations, Helen.

I'd like to close by quoting from "Wind" by Andrew Hudgins, a poem he read on a recent visit to Montgomery. Hudgins' personal take on a universal point of discovery helps us all push back the din that crowds the larger statistics of our lives:

...Soon the wind
would flood the air with golden dust, warm
perfume,
intoxicants of spring that tempt us, tempt us
to run up green hills, roll down them, and
forget
the near-percussive thrum, the deep
vibration,
half rattle, of brown leaves on brown
leaves, the rich
enveloping sound shimmer that haunts the
soul
their hymn has summoned, conjured, then
cast out,
and they were it, they were my soul because
for the wind we're all the same: already
gone,
already gone though we refuse to go —
the long wind sweeping us away, I longed
to be the wind, which is the deep,
untroubled
inhaling or exhaling of our god.
But I was not the wind, or the leaves wholly,
riding without knowing what it was,
the in-breath or out-breath of the Lord,
and as I stood beneath them, listening,
the leaves sang, Don't die, and I've obeyed
them.

From Andrew Hudgins's *Babylon in a Jar*,
1998, Houghton Mifflin Company

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOL. 6, NO. 3
FALL 1999

F E A T U R E S



Amore Advance

Alan Brown is one of nearly 40 speakers in the Alabama Humanities Foundation Speaker's Bureau.

MAJOR DONORS2

Celebrating 25 Years of the Alabama Humanities Foundation

BY SUNSHINE HUFF

POETIC LICENSE6

A Conversation with Helen Norris, Alabama Poet Laureate

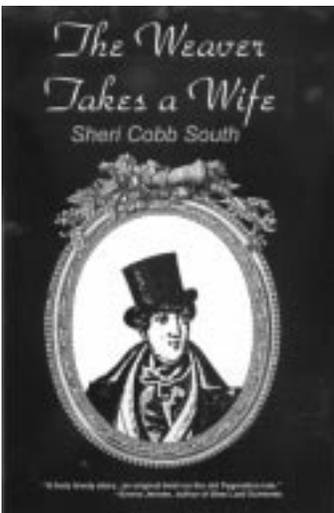
BY JAY LAMAR

Photos by Katie Lamar Smith



Katie Lamar Smith

Helen Norris



HAPPILY (SELF) PUBLISHED9

A Real-life Romance

BY SHERI COBB SOUTH

AWF PROGRAM NEWS

HIGH SCHOOL

LITERARY ARTS AWARDS ..10

Young Alabama writers excel. Includes guidelines and entry form for year 2000 competition.

LITERATURE IN

THE MANSION17

The Forum's gift of family reading for the Governor's Mansion.

YOUNG LIVES IN

BLACK AND WHITE17

In its second year, the "Writing Our Stories" program produces two anthologies and national exposure for the Forum.

DEPARTMENTS

LITERARY NEWS18

Including HOT OFF THE PRESS—news from Alabama publishers

BOOK REVIEWS19

Jay Lamar, Editor

ANNOUNCEMENTS24

CALENDAR25

First Draft is a vehicle for communication among writers and those interested in literature/publishing in Alabama and elsewhere. We encourage publication news, events information, and story suggestions. *First Draft* will grow as the needs of writers in Alabama are identified. Contact The Alabama Writers' Forum, Alabama State Council on the Arts, 201 Monroe St., Montgomery, AL 36130-1800. Phone: 334/242-4076, ext. 233; Fax: 334/240-3269; email:awf1@arts.state.al.us.

MAJOR DONORS

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

OF THE ALABAMA HUMANITIES FOUNDATION

BY SUNSHINE HUFF

History, literature, philosophy, languages, the law, religious studies, archaeology, ethics, linguistics, folklore—these are some of the disciplines included under the umbrella term *humanities*. The study of these subjects informs our understanding of what it means to be human in today's world. And the study of what it means to be human is lifelong and ongoing; each door that opens increases understanding, but it also leads to another door.

The Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF) has sustained the study of our *humanness* for twenty-five years. It has awarded federal grant moneys (funds that would not be available to the state otherwise), and gifts from private individuals and institutions to non-profit entities that study and promote learning about the humanities. Grants criteria include provision for public participation, involvement of humanities scholars, and strong humanities programming content.

Many AHF-sponsored programs and activities support literature and writing. There are myriad programs that nurture Alabama's writers, writers who are just beginning to stretch their wings as well as others that have flown far. Numerous projects that received financial aid from the AHF at the outset have become very well-known—and perhaps more generally known than the Foundation itself. The Foundation acts as a silent good Samaritan for many worthy endeavors.

"Support of the Humanities Foundation meant everything to the launching of Alabama Voices," commented **Jay Lamar**, associate director of the Center for Arts and Humanities and a board member of the Alabama Writers' Forum, which co-sponsors the series of readings. Now entering its fifth season, Alabama Voices presents nationally recognized Alabama authors in public forums held in libraries and educational institutions throughout the state. Among writers who have come home under the auspices of Alabama Voices are **John Henrick Clarke, C. Eric Lincoln, Nanci Kincaid, and Phyllis Alesia Perry**.



Phyllis Alesia Perry

Lamar marvels at the visionary quality of AHF's support. "I'm often impressed with the Foundation's ability to see to the heart of a project and understand its potential to enrich and expand the lives of Alabamians," she said.

Southern Voices is another program which has flourished under AHF support. The three-day conference held annually by the Hoover Public Library features contemporary Southern authors, artists, and scholars whose works vividly reflect different aspects of Southern culture. Last year Southern Voices included author **Lee Smith** on stage with **Karren Pell, Tommy Goldsmith** and **Tom House**, who composed the music for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's staging of *Fair and Tender Ladies*.



Author Pat Conroy discussed his life and work during the opening session of Southern Voices 1995.

Library director **Linda Andrews** said Southern Voices came about because the library's numerous small humanities programs were popular but difficult to adequately publicize. "When we decided to put it all together in one program, we asked the Humanities Foundation for support," she said. "Not only was the funding vital, but being able to say they helped us really validated what we were doing."

"A lot of back and forth" is one of Andrews' descriptions of the Hoover Library's relationship with AHE. "They offer great speakers and programs and we want to offer as many of them to our patrons as we can," she said. In Andrews' view, AHF participation signals to other potential individual and corporate donors that a project is worthwhile and its sponsors responsible. Humanities Foundation staff and board members often attend and participate in activities which receive funding. "The main part (of Southern Voices) they assist with is the Saturday session where people get to meet the authors," Andrews said. "Often we'll have **Marion (Carter, AHF**

associate director) or **Bob (Stewart)**, executive director) there; and board members come and introduce our speakers.”

The AHF also supports the annual Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville, the first full-scale writers’ conference devoted exclusively to Alabama authors. Presentations of scholarly papers and panel discussions about Alabama authors are offered as well as “how to” sessions for aspiring authors and programs specifically for teachers. The highpoint of the conference each year is the presentation of the Harper Lee Award for a Distinguished Alabama Writer, whose recipient is chosen by the Alabama Writers’ Forum, and the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Distinction in Literary Scholarship, which is given by the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama.

The oldest and largest writing conference in the state, Writing Today, held each spring at Birmingham-Southern College, also enjoys the support of the AHF. Writing Today offers a “great opportunity for a collective effort” to benefit writers said author **Fred Bonnie**, a founder of the event. Writing Today is guided by a committee of volunteers and supported by corporate and individual donors, state funding and assistance from the AHF. Its benefits extend to the many readers who discover Alabama writers through AHF programs.

“I confess to extreme bias where Writing Today is concerned,” Bonnie said. “After all, Writing Today has national significance. But each writing get-together around the state is so different, each has staked out its own mission. People don’t realize what a writers’ place Alabama is. The interest and number of writers are significant. The collective result of all these efforts is that Alabama is emerging as a highly literary state,” he said.

Myra Crawford, who has provided hands-on leadership to Writing Today since its early days, sees great benefits to AHF support, even beyond the monetary. “To have AHF on board affirms the work of people involved in literary programs,” she said, “and it shows the community saying, ‘Yes, this is where we need to spend our dollars on programming.’”



At the 1999 Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville, Philip Beidler (left) received the Eugene Current-Garcia Award and Madison Jones, the Harper Lee Award.

EDUCATING EDUCATORS

In 1991, the AHF devised its own program to teach writing to teachers. The vehicle is AHF’s SUPER program, a great anagram for its real name: School and University Partners for Educational Renewal. The program takes place on college campuses around the state during the summer and in one-day workshops during the school year. Led by noted scholars, it is aimed toward teachers at the secondary level whose specialty is one of the humanities. A teacher from Berry High School in Fayette County, **Elaine Renfro**, had the following evaluation of her experience:

Dr. James Raymond from the University of Alabama made an all-day presentation to a packed house of English teachers. As a matter of fact, the response from teachers in the region was so great that the workshop had to be presented twice, so that no teacher would have to be turned away. The teachers’ responses were unbelievable. Everyone was so pleased to have an entire day to talk just about how to teach writing. Such focused workshops are a rarity, and this one was greatly appreciated by all who attended.

Results from the SUPER institutes will “trickle down” through many generations of teachers and students who will learn not only to recognize and love good writing, but how to do it themselves.

“The Figure of the Romantic Hero in Literature” was the subject of a SUPER institute in the summer of 1999. Comments from the teachers-as-students like **Libby Shaw** of Clay Chalkville High, Trussville, say a lot about the program: “Thank you for a challenging, but wonderful, SUPER education in Mobile. I learned so much that I can translate into positive classroom experiences for my students... Many of us look forward to SUPER summer experiences.”

Another subject explored in depth through the SUPER institute was “America Between the Wars.” **Ronda Lee** of Ramsey High School in Birmingham said what many people probably thought: “I still don’t understand how such a wonderful offering can be without cost... To go for free is unbelievable...”



Readings by Alabama writers delighted the audience at the Alabama Writers Symposium.

Dan Richard of Southeastern School in Oneonta was overjoyed with his experience:

Never did I guess that so much could be included in a two-week session. **Rich (Megraw, lead scholar)** was just the best, as was every speaker we had. The entire program was planned perfectly, and there was little or no wasted time. . . . While I was there I remembered just how much I loved to learn, and that is why I took up teaching in the first place. I left there a much better person. Images of burnout and fatigue just fell by the wayside, and you can ask my students just how “pumped up” I am. Not in a long, long time have I enjoyed something as much as I enjoyed this program.

SUPER is just one of the outreach programs that are run directly from the AHF office. Two others are the Speaker’s Bureau and Motherhead.

FORTY SUBJECTS FOR FREE SPEAKERS

The Speaker’s Bureau is responsible, no doubt, for many Alabamians’ awareness of the Alabama Humanities Foundation. With nearly forty different topics and almost as many speakers, the Bureau has something to interest everyone. Subjects range from the origins of Mardi Gras, through Chinese Impressionism, Tallulah Bankhead, the effect of Alabama on the literary works of the Fitzgeralds, to gandy dancers and the blues.

The full extent of the AHF influence can never be known, but it runs deep, said **Ruth Beaumont Cook**, author and AWF board member. “When you bring in a speaker who gets AHF support, then they must talk about humanities-related topics, not just their latest book.” In that way, the AHF has contributed to the agenda for community groups throughout the state and “broadened Alabamians’ perspective on the humanities” which, Cook said, “is worth a lot more than the dollars.”

A new lecture by **Pam Kingsbury**, English professor at the University of North Alabama, is “Writing Autobiography/Biography: The Art of Telling Your Story.” Kingsbury also offers a lecture on “Books to Die For: The Mysteries of Anne George.” One of her audience members was prompted to remark, “The speaker’s love of literature spilled out with each word she spoke.”

MOTHERS READING TO THEIR CHILDREN: A NATIONAL LITERACY PROGRAM

The assumption that parents will often do for their children what they will not do for themselves is a guiding principle behind Motherhead, a national family reading and literacy program begun in North Carolina. In 1998 the Alabama Humanities Foundation became the state affiliate for this program, which already operates in schools, prisons, and community settings in eighteen states and the Virgin Islands. The objective of the program is to teach adults to read daily with their children and, in the process, strengthen themselves and their families.

Classes bring parents together with specially trained teachers to read and talk about the images and ideas conveyed in children’s stories. After these classes, parents are prepared to read the books to

their children and discuss with them the issues they raised. Parents become better role models, and children become better readers. In this way, Motherhead provides comprehensive literacy development for the entire family. Parents set out to improve the lives of their children and invariably end up improving their own lives in the process.

The effectiveness of this approach was acknowledged publicly by President Clinton in November 1998 when he awarded Motherhead founder Nancye Gaj with a National Humanities Award and declared, “Motherhead has unleashed the power of family reading in schools and homes all across America.”

LITERATURE TRANSFORMED TO LIVE ACTION

The Alabama Humanities Foundation has also helped translate great writing into other forms. **Brent Davis** at the University of Alabama Center for Public Television co-produced, with **Don Noble**, University of Alabama

English professor, *I’m in the Truth Business*, a documentary about William Bradford Huie, one of the premier investigative reporters of the American Civil Rights movement. AHF provided funding.

“Their support was absolutely critical in the production of the program. Their money gave us the opportunity to buy archive film and theatrical film excerpts and allowed us to travel for research and production. It transformed the piece from a local television documentary to one that was of interest to a national audience,” said Davis, former president of the Alabama Writers’ Forum.

A mini-grant from the AHF got project directors **Bruce Kuerten** and **John DiJulio** started on transforming Alabama author **Helen Norris’s** story *The Cracker Man* into an hour-long film that has attracted Hollywood notables plus found national funding and a prestigious broadcasting venue.



A clip from archival footage of William Bradford Huie.



Filming *The Cracker Man* on location in Lafayette.

Faced with the challenge of commuting *The Cracker Man* into film, the producers drew on their talents as screenwriters. The next logical step was the Southern Writers' Project at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, where they worked with actors, directors, and dramaturgs to eventually produce a staged reading of their proposed script. After critiques and re-writes, the script was submitted to the Independent Television Service, an arm of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, where it was one of three scripts chosen for production in the innovative new PBS series "American Stories." The Alabama Humanities Foundation continued to provide funding at each of the crucial steps so that this film could be adapted and directed by Alabamians and filmed exclusively in Opelika, Lafayette, and Loachapoka. Check the website at www.crackerman.com for more information on when *The Cracker Man* is scheduled for viewing.

The Alabama Humanities Foundation co-sponsors the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Theatre in the Mind, a free lecture and discussion series that informs audiences about the humanities context of each season's plays. TIM includes presentations by scholars, directors, actors, and "behind the scenes" personnel such as costume and set designers. In the upcoming season, Theatre in the Mind programs will include a demonstration of physical comedy techniques by **Colleen Kelly**, ASF movement coach, and sessions on politics and morality and "More on More," which will enhance the audience understanding of *A Man for All Seasons*. Theatre in the Mind is hosted by **Susan Willis**, ASF dramaturg.

THANK YOU, AHF!

Although it is not always the most visible presence in the many events that make up the cultural life of our state, for the past twenty-five years there has been no more influential supporter of those activities that affect human concerns than the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

One of AHF's most popular and well-attended events each year is the awards luncheon. **Ruth Beaumont Cook** was one writer who attended a memorable luncheon in October 1996, when along with a talk by *On the Road* author and television host Charles Kuralt, each guest received a journal and encouragement to write about their experiences "on the road" in Alabama. "Because of that, my husband and I made a trip we otherwise would not have made through Southwest Alabama. We got off the highway, stopped at the old cemeteries, and used the diary to jot down our experiences. It took us four times as long to get home, but what a rich experience," she said.

Thank you, Alabama Humanities Foundation, for twenty-five years of rich experiences of humanness. 

Sunshine Huff (Mary Elizabeth Johnson) has just finished a book on quilts inspired by African influences, to be published by Quilt Digest Press in August of 2000.

TONI MORRISON TO SPEAK AT AHF CELEBRATION

Nineteen ninety-nine marks the Alabama Humanities Foundation's Silver Anniversary. The theme chosen for this year of celebration is the "World of Stories in Your Own Backyard."

The AHF's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration will reach its highpoint on October 29 and 30 at a statewide conference on "Stories Alabama Tells." The conference will be held at the Wynfrey Hotel from noon on Friday until 1 p.m. Saturday, followed that evening by a lecture by writer **Toni Morrison**. The aim of the conference is to showcase a wide variety of Alabama stories through music, visual art, and the spoken word.

The conference keynote address on Friday will be presented by scholar **Bill Cook**, author of *His Story Next to Hers: Circling and Encircling Narrative in Morrison's "Beloved."* Cook is professor of English and African and Afro-American studies at Dartmouth College. He is also Israel Evans Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres. Alabama's most widely known storyteller, **Kathryn Tucker Windham**, will be the luncheon speaker. An open-microphone session on Friday evening will open the floor for conference participants to spin yarns.

The Reunion Luncheon will be on Saturday at noon. Historians **Michael Thomason**, University of South Alabama, **Frank Toland**, Tuskegee University, and literary scholar **Marilyn Kurata** will be among the speakers. Several other speakers, former Foundation staff members, and former Alabama Humanities Award recipients will be recognized.

Toni Morrison will make her first public appearance in Alabama for a lecture beginning at 8 p.m. at the Alys Stephens Center at UAB. After her talk there will be a VIP reception. Winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature, Morrison is one of today's most celebrated authors. Her novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *TarBaby*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz* have received critical acclaim and won numerous awards, including the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*. *Paradise* is her latest novel.

Conference registration is \$50 and reservations can be made through the AHF, 205/930-0540. Thirty-five dollar tickets for the lecture are available from Ticketlink, 205/975-ARTS. A limited number of \$20 student tickets are also available. For \$175 one may attend the lecture and reception, and receive an autographed book.

POETIC LICENSE

*A conversation with
Helen Norris,
Alabama Poet Laureate*

BY JAY LAMAR

Novelist, short fiction writer, and poet Helen Norris became Alabama's sixth poet laureate in September. In 1942, the Alabama Writers' Conclave was authorized by an act of the Alabama legislature to "designate a suitable person to hold the honorary office of Poet Laureate of Alabama." This person "shall be a poet who is generally recognized for excellence of work." It is this quality, says Ralph Hammond, past president of the Conclave and poet laureate emeritus, that brought Norris to the office. "For past decades," Hammond notes, Norris "has been a writer whose novels, short stories, and poems have all been vested with a remarkable degree of sustained excellence."

Norris's first novel, *Something More Than Earth*, was published in 1940. Since then she has written three more novels, including *Walk With the Sickle Moon* (1985), a PEN Women's biennial fiction prize winner. Her three collections of short stories—*The Christmas Wife* (1985), *Water Into Wine* (1988), and *The Burning Glass* (1992)—have included two stories that have been made into films. Her award-winning collections of poetry are *Whatever Is Round* (1994) and *Rain Pulse* (1997). In addition to the PEN Women's short fiction award, she has received four O. Henry Awards, a Pushcart Prize, two Andrew Lytle Awards, and a Hackney Short Story Award. Norris's fourth short fiction collection, *One Day in the Life of a Born-Again Loser and Other Stories*, will be published by the University of Alabama Press in spring 2000.

Norris will serve as poet laureate for five years. In this interview she talks about the office and her role at the edge



JL: Congratulations on your election as Alabama's poet laureate. You must have thought about what this will bring. What do you foresee?

HN: Poet laureate emeritus Ralph Hammond (1991-1995) told me that you can make of it just as much as you want to. I will certainly do some traveling and speaking. My first assignment so far is to sit on a panel at a spring conference with Tom Rabbitt and several other poets with a capital P. Being poet laureate gives me an opportunity and a good excuse to read poetry and to think about poetry for the next four years—maybe for the rest of my life. If I'm poet laureate some people are bound to listen to me. Whereas maybe—or I'm sure—without it no one would.

JL: What is it you want to say?

HN: Well, I would like to discuss poetry with people and maybe read some poetry. The way I envision it is that a lot of people don't know the difference between poetry and verse, that is, something that has a nice sentiment and lots and lots of rhyme. I don't know whether I could change their minds about that, but I think people should be given a chance to find out that there is more to poetry than they previously thought. I am sure they would enjoy it if they were introduced to good poetry in the right way. Once you have a key to enjoying poetry, it is like having a key to enjoying any of the fine arts. It enhances your life and it makes you happy. And I am all for happiness.

JL: Poetry is a unique key?

HN: A poem is like three interlocking circles: one circle is the physical world, the things you're dealing with in the poem; another cir-

cle is the world of the mind. The third circle, you have no idea what it is. Poetry deals with all three of these worlds, but that third world that you cannot define is what makes poetry lovers love poetry and people who don't like poetry hate it. Some people may say, "What is that poem talking about?" "Why doesn't he just come out and say what he means?" Whereas for the poetry lover that third level opens up all sorts of possibilities for him, makes him wonder what life is about. It enlarges life and makes him think that there are maybe things out there that we don't know. And that gives us a much larger universe to operate in.

The difference between a poetic line and a line of prose is this: You say "Pass the salt," and as soon as the salt gets passed to you the line drops out of existence. It has done its service. But a line of poetry is one that you want to hear over and over again because it pleases you, it does something for you, and you love it.

JL: So good poetry is...?

HN: I read some time ago that the way to distinguish good poetry from verse is that it must have images—visual, auditory, any of the five senses—and it must have intensity. Those two things are necessary for anything that's going to call itself poetry. Verse is something nice—the French *vers de société* or what we could call occasional verse, that is, verse that may be sweet or clever or witty but has no imagery and no real intensity. There is, for instance, a lot of religious verse, as opposed to religious poetry. It seems to comfort a lot of people, but I think the comfort it gives them comes from their own religious feelings or their own lives, rather than from the verse itself.

JL: You are known for your novels and short fiction, perhaps less well as a poet.

HN: I am just a beginner, not a poet of any stature. Of course, every teenager writes poetry, but I didn't really write poetry until I began teaching creative writing at Huntingdon College in Montgomery. I had been teaching literature for some time before I took on the creative writing classes. I had always encouraged my students to write sonnets. I wanted them to have a sonnet in their mouths. If you write a sonnet, it is never going to be the same for you. I told my students, "I will give you extra points if you will write a sonnet tonight. If it turns out to be an immortal sonnet, that is, deathless, you'll have three points. A regular sonnet gets two. If it is a no-good, worthless sonnet, I'll still give you one point."

In Milton's day it was something you just did, you learned to write



Jay Lamar and Helen Norris at the 1999 Alabama Writers' Colloquium.

Kate Lamar Smith

graceful verse. Lovers were expected to write to their beloveds, for instance. But now students are shamefaced about it unless you give them something for doing it. I thought my students would all groan, but the sonnets just poured in. Then they asked me if they could write another. I said that's fine but I can't give you any more points!

I felt good about teaching short stories. I am very good with that. But I felt awkward about teaching poetry because I hadn't written much of it myself. I thought, "Well, by golly, if I am going to teach these kids, I had better know how."

So I began to write some poems. Then I quit teaching to go back to writing. I am more in tune with the universe when I'm writing.

JL: How does poetry relate to your other work?

HN: I wanted to write short stories. I had written novels, but you can just spill all over the place in a novel. As long as you don't bore the reader. I decided that I was going to have to condense my prose for short stories and the way to do that was to write poetry. In a poem, as in a story, you have to be able to say something once. Well, I wrote some fifty poems and got myself all condensed down and could say things in a few words. It was very helpful to me, and I still use poetic devices when I write stories because you can get so much more said when you use rhythm, symbols, echo, prefiguration, images. I am always wanting to get more in my stories. I want the focus of the short story and at the same time I crave the depth of the novel. By using the poetic devices I can get

EVEN SWEETLY SCATTERED

Little girls together are always in a circle
 Even when they aren't.
 Even sweetly scattered
 Swinging from the willows, swimming in the grass
 Pressing their faces into green ground moss
 Storing blue feathers in the pocket of a sweater
 Even sweetly scattered
 In a deep down circle they are kneeling
 In the circle of a sky-filled pool that
 Holds the petaled cluster of their faces in the water
 With thoughts that are woven of the same green thread
 Gentling desires that are fawns of the morning
 Damp with milkweed, thistledown to touch.

Their eyes are gray squirrels
 Storing nuts for the winter.

HELEN NORRIS

Reprinted from *Ordinary and Sacred as Blood: Alabama Women Speak* (River's Edge, 1999)

both things. And by doing that you have a multilevel story, and I think that is the best kind.

JL: What about writing poetry as opposed to short fiction or novels?

HN: Short stories are more difficult to write than novels. I don't know how a poem gets written. I mean it either works or it doesn't. With a short story, you sit down and plan that thing. You may have a sort of inspiration, but with a poem, you may have only an opening line. You don't really have much. It is kind of mysterious. You start out with something and then you work around it. Well, you do that too in a story, but you are more dependent on it with a poem than with any other kind of writing. Now, you try to write an Italian sonnet. You sort of know what you want to say but you can't always say it and have it sound as though the rhymes just came. You don't want it to sound as though you sold your mother down the river for a rhyme. And you have to work on it, and sometimes necessarily the meaning changes. Sometimes it's a better meaning. What I look forward to as poet laureate is being able to go into this mysterious process even more by writing more poems and talking about them and reading them and trying to discover what is at work.

JL: Poet laureate is a time-honored position.

HN: They say poet laureates never write a decent poem again because they have to write for the public and for other purposes.

In England, the poet laureate was given a one-time payment of 70 pounds and a butt of sack or a barrel of wine. I would choose a barrel of wine. Think how many fruitcakes you could bring to life!

BAMBOO

A bamboo hedge is green ribbons,
Bird lime and sparrow chatter,
Shavings of sun, freckles of amber,
Patches of yellow pale
And restless as canaries,
Echoes of twilight, liquid shadow,
Sighs of rain and breathless waiting
To be thick and thicker.

It is a clutter of conversations
In a tangle of all hours.
The calls of crows are caught in it
And sifting down to nestle
Among the infant shoots.
The chuck of brown hens
Rises like vapor. At dew fall
It is sibilant and urgent with insects
Weaving a singing world for
Tender arrows newly born.
Its myriad poles are huddled
And haunted with memories
And intimate past knowing
And forthright to the common eye
But devious and ribbed with
Cold ambition to inherit earth.

HELEN NORRIS

Reprinted from

*Ordinary and Sacred as Blood:
Alabama Women Speak*
(River's Edge, 1999)

JL: Why is it important for us to recognize a poet laureate?

HN: It is important to have a community, other people who write with whom you don't feel so queer. They don't think you're crazy and you don't think they're crazy. It offers a whole foreground that doesn't have to be explained, and that's wonderful. I think a poet laureate suggests such a community. More important, the poet laureate represents the power of poetry in the state. Poetry has force. It's an underground river. In Poland, I love it that Poles honor their poets above their military heroes and are proud of the fact that the statues in public places are the statues of poets.

JL: You take office this fall and serve for four years. This means that you'll oversee the turning of the century as Alabama's poet laureate.

HN: All I can say is that that is a sobering thought. People get edgy at the end of a century. At the end of the first 500 years they thought the beast would rise up. At the end of a thousand it would surely happen. This is the second millennium and people are going to get really edgy about this. People are getting panicky, sure enough. I am not worried about it, but I think it might be very interesting and very sobering to be poet laureate at the beginning of a new century. What I dread is that people will ask me to write a poem for the new millennium!

*Jay Lamar is associate director of the
Center for the Arts & Humanities
at Auburn University and
book review editor of First Draft.*

HELEN NORRIS: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOVELS

Something More than Earth
Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1940
For the Glory of God
The Macmillan Co., 1958
More Than Seven Watchmen
Zondervan, 1985
A Walk with the Sickle Moon
Birch Lane Press, 1985

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

The Christmas Wife
University of Illinois Press, 1985
Water Into Wine
University of Illinois Press, 1988
The Burning Glass
Louisiana State University Press,
1992

POETRY

Whatever is Round
Curbow Publications, 1994
Rain Pulse
Timberline Press, 1997

SPRING 2000

*One Day in the Life of a Born-Again
Loser and Other Stories*
University of Alabama Press

Sheri Cobb South's self-published novel, The Weaver Takes a Wife, was reviewed in the Summer 1999 issue of First Draft. She is negotiating subsidiary rights for a large-print edition and looking forward to having the book exhibited at the World Book Fair in November. Her next novel, Miss Darby's Duenna, will be available in November from her own PrinnyWorld Press.

HAPPILY (Self) PUBLISHED

BY SHERI COBB SOUTH

"No woman could possibly fall in love with a man like that unless he was devastatingly handsome."

Although it wasn't the first rejection letter I'd ever received on my Regency novel *The Weaver Takes a Wife*, it was certainly one of the most galling. I had never thought of myself as an envelope-pusher; in fact, I consider myself something of a purist, clinging to the traditional Regency form created by Jane Austen and revived more than a century later by Georgette Heyer. It appeared that the New York publishing world was not ready for my character Ethan Brundy, the wealthy but unpolished mill owner who weds—and ultimately wins—the proud but penniless daughter of a duke. Granted, in a genre peopled with lords and ladies, Mr. Brundy was something of a misfit, but therein, I was convinced, lay his charm. Having authored five young adult novels (some of which are still in print in foreign-language editions, and for which I still receive the occasional fan letter), I was confident of my ability to please an audience.

Frustrated with the cookie-cutter mentality of the mass-market romance publishing houses, I formed my own publishing company and published the book myself. With the help of Aleta Boudreaux and Muireall Donald of Laughing Owl Press, along with Tom and Marilyn Ross's excellent book, *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing*, I learned to do typesetting, select paper stock, and write back cover copy. I'd seen self-published books that looked pretty cheesy, and was determined that mine would look equal to anything coming out of New York; unfortunately, I was on a very tight budget. I quickly determined that the book would be the larger trade paperback size, since its standard paper size made it less expensive to produce than the smaller mass-market size. Since I couldn't afford to hire a cover artist, I was limited to public domain or copyright-free artwork. I combed Regency-era costume books and, when I found a drawing that looked like my hero, I wrote to the publisher for permission to reproduce the picture on the cover of my book. I learned the intricacies of ISBN numbers and EAN bar codes.



Sheri Cobb South

FROM
THE
FIELD

There were other tasks not related to the book's production, but to marketing the finished product. I knew I would be fighting the stigma that a self-published book must not have been good enough for the major publishing houses. Beyond that was the problem of letting the public beyond my hometown know of the book's existence. By sending out advance copies for review, I decided, I could kill two birds with one stone. Here I had my first major setback: I was disappointed to discover that *Kirkus Reviews* does not consider self-published books, and the other major reviewers—*Library Journal* and *Booklist*—require that the book be submitted six months before publication. I chalked the lesson up to experience and examined my other options; here I discovered the Internet. Cyberspace is filled with book review sites, many of them devoted to the romance genre. I printed out copies of the typeset manuscript, spiral bound them at a local office supply store, and mailed them to the appropriate reviewers.

I then turned to the problem of distribution. I was realistic enough to know that few bookstores would carry the book in stock, but I did what I could to make sure they could order it, should any of their customers request it. I listed the book with the two largest wholesalers, Ingram and Baker & Taylor, as well as Internet giant Amazon.com and other online retailers. I then set up a web page (<http://members.aol.com/PrinnyWrlld/intro.html>) where potential buyers could see the cover art, read the back cover copy, and preview the first chapter of the book, as well as receive information on how to order. When the reviews began to come in, I added them to the web page.

And what reviews they were! Ironically, the thing that had been repeatedly cited by the New York houses as unacceptable—the hero with whom no woman could possibly fall in love—was the very thing the reviewers praised! *Under the Covers Book Reviews* called it “a magnificent debut,” declaring that “Ethan Brundy is definitely the

Continued on page 28

Creative Nonfiction from AWF High School Literary Arts Award Winners

In our second installment of work by winners from the 1999 High School Literary Arts awards, we present three essayists.

These creative nonfiction writers explore diverse subjects: family, obsessions, and fruitfulness.

If you would like to read other selections by the contest winners, please see the Summer 1999 issue of *First Draft* for works of poetry and fiction. You may request copies by contacting the Alabama Writers' Forum.

Or point your web browser to www.writersforum.org, click on *First Draft*, and read the issue online (look for Melinda Haynes on the cover).

Chris Lafakis, Second Place, Creative Nonfiction

GRANDMOTHER'S SOUTH

1999 Hoover High School tenth grader, student of Cindy Hudson

My grandmother came to America in 1947, from a small, southeastern European country called Greece. Her first look at America was the view of dark, smoky Ellis Island in New York. Frightened and petrified, she stepped away when the doctors tried to examine her. Unfortunately, the first feeling she remembers was pain when the doctors vaccinated her for smallpox. She had never seen a doctor nor had a shot in her life. Immediately, she screamed and thus began her lifelong fear of Americans.

Grandfather took his new war bride to a relative's house to live for a few days. Grandmother detested New York City for its rude people, narrow streets, cramped houses, cold climate, and no vegetable gardens. She had never seen a car or walked on a paved street, so she felt like the odd person out. Armed policemen in uniform reminded her of the Nazis who had occupied her island. Fearful and terror-filled with drab city sights, grandmother shed many tears. Then she decided not to leave the relative's house until grandfather was ready to board a train headed south. Down South, she had heard, were gentle people and a different type of life.

By now it was Thanksgiving week, something she knew nothing about. However, she was thankful to hear the news that she was leaving the northern United States. Happily, she boarded a night train, eagerly waiting to take her away to some place called Alabama. The journey took a long time, but her spirits began to rise as she got her first glimpse of a new world waiting for her below the Mason Dixon Line.

From her train window, she saw acres of beautiful land, crops, open spaces, trees, mountains, rivers, and the brilliant sunshine reflecting off the tin roofs of old farmhouses. Also, she began to notice that the weather was changing. It was beginning to feel warmer. At last she expressed thanks to her husband for bringing her to the South.

Grandfather brought her to a sleepy little steel-making town. He bought her what she thought was a huge house: two bedrooms, one bathroom, a sleep porch, and a big sunroom to hold her plants. Of course, a front porch with room for a glider and table was another huge selling point for the old house as well as a large, airy kitchen lined with a row of cabinets for plenty of canned goods.

The biggest thrill of all for her was that the house had a big fenced-in backyard where she could grow a vegetable garden. Grandfather gave her a hoe, a shovel, and a sunbonnet. Soon, she added pet chickens and goats, until the town officials made her get rid of the goats because they chased away churchgoers at First Presbyterian next door. Also, the goats wandered around the neighborhood and ate lots of a neighbor's laundry while it hung out to dry.

Nevertheless, grandmother won the respect of the offended townspeople by cooking and giving away her delicious food: pastries, preserves, and savory lamb stews. Although she could speak no English, she communicated through funny hand gesticulations. People laughed as if she were a stand-up comedienne. To this day, she has not learned much English and is still very funny.

Sadness hit her when she lost her first child. Her Southern neighbors came over with food. Then the house caught on fire. The Presbyterians brought her blankets and moved her into a neighbor's house until her home could be rebuilt. Then two daughters were born. Grandmother settled into a routine of walking around the park and raising her children.

Everybody in the town got used to seeing her walking everywhere with her children. She was afraid some American would try to kidnap them. Years later, she told her first daughter, my mother, that kidnapers lived up North and they might come South sometime. My mother was the only girl to be walked back and forth to high school every day for four years. When my mom got married, grandmother told her, "Don't go anywhere without your husband, and don't move up North."

Today my grandmother is eighty-seven years old and still lives in the sunny South. She became very sad when my grandfather died and her neighborhood became unsafe. Grandmother had to sell the old house. However, after many years in a strange land, grandmother was no longer a stranger. She had many friends, and they still visit her in a new house where she lives with my aunt.

Grandmother is a true Southerner. She has known pain and sadness, loneliness and fear, but she is strong, good, and kind. She takes a lot of time to cook for me, teaches me Greek, and always tells me great stories about gentle people who used to sit on their front porches. Grandmother is the remnant of a time when it was fun just to sit outside to talk, sing, and shell field peas. Thankfully, her kind of South lives on.

Lindsey K. Elmore, *Judge's Special Recognition, Creative Nonfiction*

OBSESSIONS: THE DANCER

1999 Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School tenth grader,
student of Diane R. Weber

Inspired by: Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Over and over again. Learn. Repeat. Try it again. Hold your head higher and pull up tight. Let's go over the *pas de deux*, and this time bring it up to full speed. *Frappe, tendu, plie, fouette, grand jeté a tourne, glissade, jeté. Châine, châine, châine.* Over and over again. Sweat, broken toes, bleeding feet, hair pulled back so tightly that anyone would cry.

This is my life. The other day I was turning and I lost my spot and fell. I had to stand up in front of the class and do the entire number totally alone; I felt really helpless. To make the situation worse, I got yelled at when I messed up. The worst part about the whole embarrassment was that I had just learned the dance, and I remembered only a few things. I think the forgetfulness was more from the embarrassment and fatigue than from not knowing the dance. You see, when this event took place I had been in rehearsal for six hours—or was it seven? I don't know—I lose count after two or three.

When we finally left rehearsal I had been in a studio with no air conditioning for twelve hours. I was really hungry and wanted to eat, but I couldn't because of the diet that the instructors put me on before opening night. I weigh 108, so they put everyone, including me, on diets. My target weight is 97. I normally can do it, but sometimes I get tired of not being able to eat. The diet itself consists of caffeine in any form without calories, and if you're lucky 300 calories. Most people I know substitute nicotine for calories, though. It is kind of funny to see the company go out to eat after closing night. We try to go to the all-you-can-eat food bar places, and most of the dancers stuff their faces like they will never see food again. But not me. I try really hard after every performance to keep my weight off, because I don't like not to eat. So, while all these emaciated bodies rush for rolls caked in butter, fried chicken, and apple pie, I simply shrug it off and eat only a salad and drink only water. I can usually keep an 850-calorie diet under control for about a week or two, but then I really get hungry. I cry and cry and cry when this moment in time gets here because I don't want to gain weight, but I have to eat. I finally give in and eat. Normally my body doesn't like this. It sometimes gets out of control and throws up all

of my food. Oh, that doesn't bother me, because I know that my body is doing what is best for itself. It knows that I take care of it and it takes care of me. My body knows how hard I work to stay thin and in shape, so it just helps me along in the fight.

Don't think I'm crazy for feeling this way. I enjoy my life and know that I am going to succeed in my dreams. I work really hard, and try as hard as I can to look the part and dance as hard as I can. I'm sixteen and I've been dancing for almost fifteen years. It's who I am. I decided to give my life to the dance. I'm not going to fall in love and certainly will never have children. That wouldn't be right. Kids would be a burden to me. They would feel it, too. Besides that, I will never have the money to support a child in the way I would want to. I spend too much money on dance. You understand. Don't you? I hope you do, because it makes perfect sense if you think about it.

You know, I look at people who don't dance and I wonder what is wrong with them. Seriously, why in the world would anyone want to do anything other than dance? I've put my entire life into dance, and I can't understand why anyone would do anything else. I know, I know. Variety is the spice of life, but who cares about that. Some people are just crazy in that sense, I guess. I truly believe that all people have a hidden desire to dance. Why else would everyone prance around their houses in their underwear with a broom? They also have clubs for people who can't dance and just want to get out and play around. Everybody wants to dance, but only a few do it professionally—they all wish they could. Professional dancers are one of the only truly beautiful things left in the world.

Also, dance will keep you really skinny. People should be skinny. That is natural. I look at people who need to lose weight, and all I can think about is how much they need to start dance. Can nobody but me understand that all people need to dance for no other reason than to be skinny? People who are fat should be taken to a camp and forced to dance. They would be happier. That should be required by the law or just by humanity or something. I know that now you think that I have something against all fat people, but I do think that they should dance and be skinny. Truly, who looks at a fat person and finds them aesthetically pleasing? Not me, and genuinely neither does anyone else; they just refuse to admit it.

Oh, well this is my life and I have views about everything. But I'm really hungry and going to try find something in this house that I can eat.

Betsy Childs, First Place, Creative Nonfiction

HARVEST OF YEARS

1999 Briarwood Christian School twelfth grader, student of Jon Carter

The first time I heard the screen door slam I knew the pressure was on. I was sharing a folding sofa bed with my sister, who can sleep through anything. The early-riser might have been my brother or my father, but whoever it was, I knew he would soon be heading to the blueberry patch.

I felt like rolling over and going back to sleep, but the fear of being left out of the first trip of the summer irked me. I dressed and gently opened the door. My father sat on the porch swing pulling on his socks. He greeted me as he slipped his feet back into his bedroom slippers.

Every year, my extended family gathers on this farm for a reunion. It was the birthplace of my grandfather and his seven siblings. Now, he and his parents are dead, and only his older sister, my great-aunt, lives on the farm.

The walk to the blueberry patch was long, but not nearly as long as I remembered. This walk is the part of the blueberry picking experience that I hate because the tall grass is still covered in dew and drenches my socks. Little burrs clung to my socks like autograph hounds around a country singer. I commented on the length of the grass and my father replied that it must have been a while since Hoyt Jr. had been on his tractor. I skirted an ant bed the size of Mt. Everest and shivered.

Once the blueberries were in sight, Daddy said, "My granddaddy had a philosophy about raising blueberries: plant enough for you and the birds."

This philosophy worked, for plenty of blueberries hung on the bushes, free of pesticides. I immediately began shoveling ladylike handfuls into my dainty mouth. Daddy looked around more carefully and tried to remember the best bush. I knew which one it was and took him there. It was on the far end of the middle row, but there weren't many berries on it.

"You can tell there hasn't been enough rain," Daddy said, "because the berries are so small."

"That's okay," I countered, "They taste better that way. All the flavor is concentrated."

Having a stomach full of blueberries before breakfast feels good. It is one of those forbidden pleasures for which it is better to ask forgiveness than permission.

I returned to the patch with my cousins later in the day when the dew was dried. We took Dixie plastic cups with us to save some berries for later, but only the disciplined among us had any in their

cup by the time we collapsed on the porch back at the house.

Blueberries are not the only bounty this farm affords. It is no longer a working farm, but there are gardens that sprout "Aunt Cleo's peas" and cucumbers that will become cinnamon pickles. The fences are overgrown with wild blackberries. The road to the pond is lined with peach trees, but these peaches are usually green and hard in June. If you walk out to the old barn around Thanksgiving, rotting pecans crunch under your feet because no one gathers them.

I have only been on the farm once during scuppernong season, but it is a sight to behold. Multiple arbors sag like pregnant women under the weight of the wine-colored fruit.

Every year, Daddy and I plan to dig up a blueberry bush to take home with us. We never have. It's just easier to look forward to this once-a-year harvest.

This place is accustomed to waiting for people to come back. I'm sure a few pecans were still loitering on trees when the news of Pearl Harbor's bombs came over the radio. The garden kept producing while my grandfather was far away in France fighting Germans. Bright berries greeted him when he returned home yellowed with malaria. The scuppernong vines shook with the world's cheers and Japan's wails.

This farm has missed happier days. In the jubilation after the war, no one picked the blackberries along the fence because my grandfather and his brothers went to college on G.I. benefits.

The peach trees were left behind when he ran off to Florida to get married. But they were ready and waiting when he brought his son, my father, home for two proud grandparents to see.

Great-granddaddy Childs stayed on the farm while his sons traveled the globe. His house burned down and he rebuilt it himself, this time with indoor plumbing. There was lots of work to do on the farm, but blueberry bushes weren't any trouble, and they were good for pies.

I never met my great-grandfather, or my grandfather, but I have eaten the fruit they planted. I have seen traits that they instilled in my father: frugality, fidelity, responsibility, and a keen sense of humor.

"I think fruit trees are about the best thing in the world," I tell Daddy. "You don't have to do anything to them, and they keep sending you all this free food that doesn't have to be peeled or cooked."

The Bible says that we will be known by our fruit. My great-granddaddy didn't leave me a lot of money or a famous name. I never sat in his lap or walked the land with him. He never told me about providing for eight children during the depression. But I know him, because I know his fruit.

HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY ARTS AWARDS 2000

“Everybody understands that you must have a ball field... if you want to develop athletes. We also need a field where student writers can discover their literary talents...”

Anita Garner, founding board member, The Alabama Writers' Forum, and Chair, High School Literary Arts Awards

As Alabama high school students work on writing assignments for their teachers or explore literary ideas on their own, they may have other plans in mind beyond a good grade in an English course. More and more creative writing contests are giving young authors the opportunity to earn recognition, prizes, and in the case of the AWF's High School Literary Arts Awards, the assessment of a nationally published writer.

“Teachers are picking up on the fact that there are contests available; there's something to do with those writing assignments,” said **Anita Garner**, teacher, writer, and chairperson for the AWF High School Literary Arts Awards. “It's great for a teacher to have contests to use for incentives.”

Jon Carter, teacher of British literature and creative writing at Briarwood Christian School in Birmingham, said students are more willing to revise their work when it is to be entered in a contest. “A contest creates the opportunity for students to work through the comments and suggestions the teacher has made on a paper. Without that added incentive to make the writing better, the student would be unlikely to try to polish the work,” said Carter.

Carter posts information on writing contests for the whole school, not just his class. “My class has to send three of their pieces somewhere to a competition. We try to get other students to believe in themselves and what they write, too. After all, someone's going to win,” he said. Last year, in addition to a winning nonfiction entry in the AWF Literary Arts Awards, Carter's student **Betsy Childs** won poetry and fiction categories in other contests.

Entering their writing in a contest gives students a greater stake in the quality of their work. “Writing is not just about pleasing the teacher and making a grade,” Garner said. “There is a lot of personal satisfaction to be gained from participating in a contest. Students can get excited about writing like they do about scholar's bowl or playing on the football team.”

“Writing is a key to success in other subjects,” said **Rebecca Gregory**, a teacher of creative writing and history at Baldwin Junior High School in Montgomery, an arts and academics magnet. Gregory posts information on writing contests on her bulletin board and encourages her students to enter them. “I remind them a few days before the deadline and make sure the entries are mailed,” she said.

Gregory's student **Adele Austin** received judge's special recognition in poetry in the 1999 High School Literary Arts Awards. “It was a real honor, and she was especially proud of the plaque that went to the school,” said Gregory. In another contest, two Baldwin Junior High students were chosen among the “top ten young poets of the South.”

“Everybody understands that you must have a ball field and give young people the opportunity to play if you want to develop athletes. We also need a field where student writers can discover their literary talents. That's what writing contests can do,” Garner said.

Once kids have a chance to enter—and nowadays there are even contests for the very young—you never know who's going to really get excited and motivated to write.

READY, SET, WRITE!

“We think of ours as one of the best promoted and publicized of Alabama's high school literary contests. We hope teachers will see to it that their students' work that wins in local and regional contests is automatically entered in ours,” Garner said.

More than 900 entries were received in the 1999 AWF High School Literary Arts Awards and 25 students received books and monetary prizes or certificates. Five seniors received \$500 scholarships based on the quality of their portfolios. Portfolios must show a quantity of work in at least two forms.

Poetry is by far the largest category each year in the AWF High School Literary Arts Awards. “As a poet I'm thrilled that so many students are being recognized for writing poetry,” said **Jeanie Thompson**, AWF executive director. Carter's students particularly enjoy working with rhythm and language. “Rhythm is exciting and students relate to poetry because it's like their favorite songs,” he said. Rebecca Gregory commented that “writing poetry gives students a new way to use words. Some of them really enjoy looking for that very best word to express themselves. Adele (Austin, a 1999 winner) would go through ten drafts sometimes.”

Creative nonfiction entries are increasing. “This year my students are really turned on to the personal narrative, maybe because of Betsy,” said Carter. Briarwood student Betsy Childs's creative nonfiction entry, “A Harvest of Years,” won first prize in the 1999 contest (see page 12 for the full text). An essay assignment may draw



Betsy Childs, Briarwood Christian School, won first place in Creative Nonfiction in 1999.

HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY ARTS AWARDS 2000

groans from students, said Carter, until they realize that the teacher is not looking for a dull, purely factual report.

Michael Martone, director of The University of Alabama creative writing program judged the 1999 creative nonfiction entries. "The entries that impressed me the most were strong on content and written with honesty and passion," said Martone. "The nonfiction that attracts me deals with very personal things." Writing highly personal creative nonfiction gives students the chance to respond to what Martone called the "many voices and venues in our society that tell you your words, your experience, your vision, your life is not important."

Entries—and winners—come from small and large schools all over the state. "The judging is all anonymous; judges don't know who wrote pieces they are given to read or even the community and school they're from," Garner said. She encourages teachers to work with students throughout the school year to collect their work and consider submitting it to the competition. The experience of preparing and judging his or her own work can help a student become more focused and conscious of his or her development as a writer. "The benefits are great, even when students don't win the prize," Thompson remarked.

THE WRITE STUFF

Anita Miller Garner is pleased that there are increasing numbers of writing contests available for students throughout the state. Two she knows well are the contests associated with major northwest Alabama events, the W.C. Handy Festival and the Renaissance Faire. Winners in the Handy Festival poetry contest have the opportunity to read for an audience during the festival. Students in area English classes are asked to write a Shakespearean sonnet and every student's sonnet is entered in the Renaissance Faire competition. During the Renaissance Faire the costumed "king and queen" hand out prizes to the winners.

On the statewide level, two other contests that regularly attract scores of young Alabama writers are the Alabama Penman Creative Writing Contest, sponsored by the Alabama State Department of Education and the Alabama School of Fine Arts Young Writers' Literary Awards. ASFA creative writing director Denise Trimm (who also serves on the AWF board of directors) saw a successful model in the AWF awards and expanded ASFA's to include grades seven through twelve. "We were astounded to receive more than 3000 entries from all over the state in our first year of the contest," Trimm said.



Michael Martone, director of the creative writing program at The University of Alabama, judged the 1999 creative nonfiction entries.

For further information about the Penman Contest, contact Steve McAliley at stevemc@sdenet.alsde.edu or call 334/242-8059. McAliley expects the contest deadline to be in March. As details are available they will be posted on the department's website at alsde.edu. A January 15 deadline has been announced for ASFA's contest. To obtain guidelines, contact Trimm at 205/252-9241 or email dtrimm@asfa.k12.al.us.

Are there high school writing contests where you live? The Alabama Writers' Forum would like to know about them. Please email information to jeanie@arts.state.al.us or mail details to Jeanie Thompson, Alabama Writers' Forum, 201 Monroe St., Montgomery, AL 36130-1800.



1999 LITERARY ARTS AWARDS WINNERS BY GENRE CREATIVE NONFICTION

First: **Betsy Childs**, student of Jon Carter, Briarwood Christian School, Birmingham; Second: **Chris Lafakis**, Cindy Hudson, Hoover High School; Judge's Special Recognition: **Joyce Selina Momberger**; student of Diane Frucci, Sidney Lanier High School (LAMP); **Josh Bradford**, student of Sue Ann Rushton, Stanhope Elmore High School, Millbrook; **Lindsey K. Elmore**, student of Diane R. Weber, Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School, Birmingham; **Lucinda Marie Hill**, student of Susan Lancaster, Hokes Bluff High School

DRAMA

First: **Joseph Halli**, student of Martina Holt, Central High School-West, Tuscaloosa

FICTION

First: **Casey Moore**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA; Second: **Blaire Rebecca Newhard**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA; Judge's Special Recognition: **Casey Moore**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA; **John Seay**, student of Melinda Cammarata, Mountain Brook High School, Birmingham; **Matt Barron**, student of Martin Hames, The Altamont School, Birmingham; **Peter Davenport**, student of Kristi Byrd, Homewood High School; **Joy Fields**, student of Amanda Beason, Clay-Chalkville High School, Pinson

POETRY

First: **Amethyst Vineyard**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA; Second: **Shiloh Booker**, student of Anne-Wyman Black, ASFA; Judge's Special Recognition: **Casey Moore**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA; **Adele Austin**, student of Rebecca Gregory, Baldwin Junior High School, Montgomery; **Kate Hazelrig**, student of Melinda Cammarata, Mountain Brook High School; **Josh Lovvorn**, student of Tracy Peterson, Hoover High School; **Meredith Johnson**, student of Anne-Wyman Black, ASFA; John Burkhart, student of Mary Ann Rygiel, Auburn High School; Paige Poe, student of Anne-Wyman Black, ASFA

GUIDELINES

LITERARY ARTS AWARDS 2000

DEADLINES

The deadline for **receiving** both the 2000 Literary Awards entries and the Scholarship entries is **February 11, 2000**. Complete entry guidelines are given below. **Entries not conforming to complete guidelines will be disqualified.**

Mail all entries, each with an entry form, to:

Anita Miller Garner
c/o Department of English
Box 5050
University of North Alabama
Florence, AL 35632-0001

For more information contact Garner at 256/765-4889 or email at agarner@unanov.una.edu.

ELIGIBILITY

The **Literary Arts Awards** are open to Alabama high school students grades 9-12, and the **Scholarships** are available to seniors in Alabama high schools.

LITERARY ARTS AWARDS

Creative Nonfiction: 1st place (\$150), 2nd place (\$75), "Judge's Special Recognition"

Poetry: 1st place (\$150), 2nd place (\$75), "Judge's Special Recognition"

Short Fiction: 1st place (\$150), 2nd place (\$75), "Judge's Special Recognition"

Drama: 1st place (\$150), 2nd place (\$75), "Judge's Special Recognition"

Each winner receives a certificate and a book signed by the author. Each school receives a plaque listing winners and their teachers.

JUDGING

Writers of national recognition in the fields of creative nonfiction, drama, poetry, and fiction will choose the winning entries. The names of the judges will be announced when the awards announcement is made.

FORMAT FOR ENTRIES

Submit entries in a 9" x 12" envelope. Submit clear photocopies only; students should retain originals. No manuscripts can be returned. Do not attempt to send entries via fax. Students' names should appear only on the entry form since all works are judged anonymously.

All short fiction, drama, and creative nonfiction entries should be typed and double-spaced. Poetry entries may be

typed single-spaced or double-spaced. **Students must designate on the entry form the category for which they wish the work to be considered.**

SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS IN LITERARY ARTS

The scholarship awards in literary arts are open to seniors in **good standing in Alabama high schools**. Five cash awards of \$500 each are given. Portfolios placed in consideration of the scholarship awards in literary arts will be judged anonymously by a panel of judges from the fields of literature and creative writing. Awards are based solely on merit of works submitted. A portfolio of no less than 20 pages and no more than 50 pages of work from at least two categories is required.

All entries should be typed and double-spaced, one side only. Poetry may be single-spaced.

CATEGORIES FOR PORTFOLIO WORK

- Poetry (three shorter poems, or longer works totaling no more than 10 pages)
- Short fiction (20-page limit)
- Creative nonfiction (15-page limit)
- Chapter(s) from a novel accompanied by a one-page synopsis of the novel (25-page limit)
- Short drama/screenplay (25-page limit)
- Scholarly essay or research paper with a creative focus (10-page limit)

FORMAT FOR PORTFOLIOS

Portfolios should be submitted in duplicate.

Students should retain originals. No manuscripts can be returned. Make clear photocopies. Do not attempt to send entries via fax. Students' names should appear only on the entry form. The title page should also list the names of the individual works that make up the portfolio with each work's category designated.

HOW TO MAIL ENTRIES

Mail entries in envelopes clearly marked "Literary Arts Awards" or "Scholarship Entry" in the lower left corner. Please do not send works in binders, folders or any type of cover. Paper clip or staple pages together. Mail to Anita Miller Garner at the address above.

Official announcement of the Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Awards will be made in April 2000 at the Literary Arts Award reception in Montgomery.

FIRST DRAFT

2000 LITERARY ARTS AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION

THIS FORM TAKES THE PLACE OF A COVER SHEET. You may duplicate it as often as necessary. Please type or print. All entries must have an entry form attached. Do not put student's name on work submitted.

NOTE: Read the entire form before completing.

Student's name _____

Student's address _____

Student's home phone _____ Student's grade _____

Teacher's name _____ Teacher's daytime phone _____

Principal _____ School phone _____

School _____

School address _____

THIS SUBMISSION IS FOR LITERARY ARTS AWARDS.

Grades 9-12 eligible.

Check one: CREATIVE NONFICTION DRAMA/SCREENPLAY FICTION POETRY

Title(s) of work submitted:

THIS SUBMISSION IS FOR THE PORTFOLIO SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION.

SENIORS ONLY. Submit between 20-50 pages in at least two categories.

LIST CATEGORIES AND TITLES OF WORK SUBMITTED:

Eligible categories are CREATIVE NONFICTION (15-page limit), DRAMA/SCREENPLAY (25-page limit), NOVEL (25-page limit), POETRY (10-page limit), SCHOLARLY ESSAY (10-page limit), and SHORT FICTION (20-page limit).

Mail to: Anita Miller Garner, c/o Department of English, Box 5050, University of North Alabama, Florence, AL 35632-0001

Literature in the Mansion

This summer Alabama First Lady **Lori Allen Siegelman** was presented 36 books by Alabama authors, a gift from the Alabama Writers' Forum. The books of fiction, poetry, children's stories, and nonfiction make up the first installment of the Governor's Family Library of Alabama Writers. Executive Director **Jeanie Thompson** and AWF board members made the presentation in Montgomery at the offices of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

"We thought that the Governor and his family might enjoy having their own personal library of autographed books by Alabama authors to read and share with visitors to the Mansion," said Thompson. The Governor's Family Library of Alabama Writers will acquaint the Siegelman family with the best of Alabama's literary talent.

Among the books are works by fiction writers Tom Franklin, Melinda Haynes, and Judith Richards, storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham, poets Rodney Jones and Peter Huggins, and young adult writer Aileen Henderson. Nora Ezell's book chronicling her quilt-making and journalist Rick Bragg's memoir about growing up poor in Alabama are also included, said Thompson.

Each book is personally inscribed to Governor and Mrs. Siegelman with further comments by the author. "I think the Siegelmans will be very encouraged when they read what these Alabama authors have written to them," Thompson said.

Continued on page 26



Lori Allen Siegelman and Al Head

Young Lives in Black and White

"What has impressed me most in my students' work is the level of honesty with which they look at themselves and their world. . . . A student said to me one day, 'I try to write something happy, but it always comes out dark.' I told him that was all right. 'Just write what's inside you that needs to get out. And do it honestly.' I believe all the students included in this volume have done just that."

With these words **Marlin "Bart" Barton**, writing teacher for "Writing Our Stories," introduces the work of his 1999 creative writing class of incarcerated boys. Barton taught for the second year of the violence prevention creative writing program at the Mt. Meigs campus of the Alabama Department of Youth Services (DYS). *Open the Door II*, a 120-page anthology of the boys' poetry and prose, will be available in November from the AWF.

Barton is just as pleased with the quality of the writing in the second volume as he was with the first *Open the Door* which drew national attention to the "Writing Our Stories" program, a joint effort of the Alabama Writers' Forum and DYS. Barton and AWF Executive Director **Jeanie Thompson** took the program's message and methods—and its anthology—to the 1999 Summer Congress of the American Correctional Association in Denver during August. "Through this work we have made a humanizing connection to children who have been dehumanized," Thompson told an audience of juvenile justice professionals. "Through writing, we are making a difference in these children's lives."

GIRLS IN WORDS AND PICTURES

Let Me Talk to You, a collection of writings and photographs by the girls of the Chalkville DYS facility, expresses the feelings of girls "who have so much to say and so few to listen," according to **Priscilla Hancock Cooper**. *Let Me Talk to You* is in production and will be available later this fall from the Forum.

As the teaching writer for the nine-month program, Cooper worked with more than 20 girls. "Some came with notebooks filled with their own creative writing. Others had to be coaxed into putting their first thoughts on paper. Among them were talented writers who used the class to further develop their remarkable gifts. Others were challenged by a lack of skill and experience with the written word. . . . Watching each young woman grow from her own starting point to become a more competent and confident writer was perhaps my greatest reward," Cooper commented.

This fall "Writing Our Stories" is being expanded to another boys' youth facility and will continue at the Mt. Meigs and Chalkville campuses.

See a photo from *Let Me Talk to You* on page 26.

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

BOOK MOBILE

Highland Booksmith, soon to be **Alabama Booksmith**, is moving to **Homewood**. The boxes may already be unpacked by the time you read this. Owner **Jake Reiss** is anticipating increased traffic in the new location and via the World Wide Web through Booksense.

Booksense is an affiliation of "the top 10 to 20 percent" of independent book stores that belong to the American Booksellers Association, Reiss said. "Wonderful websites" which will go online in the next several weeks, will allow patrons to type in a zip code and locate the closest independent book store. Said Reiss, "This is just the sort of thing independents need in order to be competitive." A Booksense online program reminiscent of "flowers by wire" will allow a consumer to purchase a gift certificate in one book store which can be redeemed in another independent.

Reiss said regional books will gain exposure to a wider market through Booksense. The first list of titles recommended by Booksense affiliate members includes *Someone Will Go On Owing* by poet Andrew Glaze (Black Belt Press).

"This will be a great opportunity for books by regional authors and presses," Reiss said. Check the website at www.booksense.com. (It may take a while for all services of the site to be available.) Reiss's new location is 2626 19th Place, Homewood, AL 35209. The phone number is 205/870-4242.

NEW ARTS E-MAGAZINE DEBUTS

The American Center for Artists, a new electronic magazine at www.american-artists.org, aims to "tell others about the lives and works of outstanding artists," said editor **James White**. The site is a joint venture of White and his son Jules who is art editor and webmaster. Among the contributing editors are poets **Jeanie Thompson** and **Sue Walker** and reviewer **John Sledge**. "We plan several features about individual artists, such as poet **Robert Phillips** of the University of Houston," White said. "This issue we have an article about him and his work, a number of new poems, and a journal entry. In the next issue we will have another piece about him." The site also includes reviews and information about conferences.

STUDENTS RANK IN NATIONAL AWARDS

Two University of Alabama students placed in a national writing contest sponsored by *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine. **Matt Doherty** won first place and a \$1,000 cash prize in nonfiction.

Christopher Chambers, a recent graduate of the MFA program in creative writing, won second place and a \$500 award for his fiction. "UA was the only institution in the entire competition to place two students," said **Michael Martone**, director of the creative writing program.

ASF PROGRAM RECEIVES FUNDING BOOST

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival's **Southern Writers' Project** will receive \$400,000 over the next three years through a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The funds will allow the Project to commission two plays a year from leading African-American playwrights.

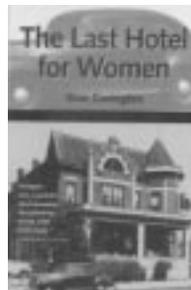
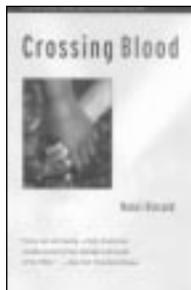


H O T O F F T H E P R E S S

DEEP ROOTS

The University of Alabama Press introduced its **Deep South Books** at South East Booksellers Association in early October. Authors **Nanci Kincaid** (*Crossing Blood*) and **Vicki Covington** (*Gathering Home* and *The Last Hotel for Women*) signed copies of their books. *One Day in the Life of a Born-Again Loser*, a new collection of short stories by **Helen Norris**, will be out in 2000.

The new imprint will reissue contem-



porary fiction and memoir as well as publish new works by established southern authors, said Director **Nicole Mitchell**. "At

a time when the bigger publishing houses have refused to meet their responsibilities to some of their finest writers by keeping their books in print, I am delighted that The UA Press is presenting the best work of southern writers such as Vicki Covington, Nanci Kincaid, Helen Norris, Roy Hoffman, Paul Hemphill, and Patricia Foster," commented UA Professor **Don Noble**.

For more information, call 205/348-5180 or go to www.uapress.ua.edu.

Continued on page 28

BOOK REVIEWS

JAY LAMAR, EDITOR



Mother of Pearl

by Melinda Haynes

Hyperion, 1999

448 pp. Cloth, \$23.95

Melinda Haynes's *Mother of Pearl* has few of the flaws one might expect of a writer launching her first long work of fiction. With the precise detail of an experienced writer, Haynes anchors her reader in a southern setting: Petal, Mississippi, 1956. Though she retains the idioms, habits, and regional flavor that define the southern novel, she transcends surface peculiarities to tell a powerful story about the search for connection.

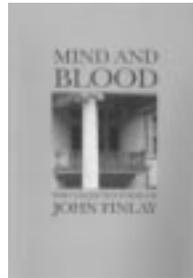
Her characters—most of them—are folks we've met from both sides of the racial divide. Even Grade, the black protagonist who feels inconsequential, and his best friend, Canaan Mosley who, Moses-like, recognizes the predicament of his race, live in the Quarter ("pronounced 'niggertown' by the white folks"). Valuable Korner, 15 years old and white, lives on Hillcrest Loop with her prostitute mother. The novel is enriched by Grace, a black woman with "the best set of legs you ever seen in all your livelong days," who serves as wet nurse and maternal figure to Joleb Green, a white child whose mother, during childbirth, suffered a stroke that left her incapacitated. Joleb is bereft of milk and love until Grace made "Milk . . . personal." Despite the tragedies that link their various lives, these characters often retain the distance of strangers, too remote to guarantee our sympathy.

Her gift for simile, however, distinguishes Haynes's fiction. She describes how Grace,

Canaan, and Joleb crammed into a borrowed Ford truck "while the rain beat down and they headed home, [and] cried with a sound like the wails of the Holy Rollers. Cried in rhythm with the worthless wipers slapping on glass like floppy shoes going nowhere." Even more visual is a wake, with the coffin wedged onto the living room couch because Aunt Louise has refused to rent the portable viewing stand. Tired of the crowd in the parlor, Louise observes a room "full of crowlike women . . . Their hair done up high and Pentecostal. They hovered in a half circle . . . and clucked regular as fast-egging chickens."

With narrative details that create opportunities for claiming justice and forgiveness, for overcoming hatred-reinforced boundaries of racism, for seeking restoration and redemption, Haynes has suggested that human beings can indeed find love and connection. Despite her under-developed characters, her prose has a flavor worth savoring; her fiction documents truths worth remembering.

Glenda Weathers is chair of the English Department at the University of Montevallo.



Mind and Blood: The Collected Poems of John Finlay

John Daniel & Co., 1992

124 pages, Cloth \$15

In Light Apart: The Achievement of John Finlay

Edited by David Middleton

The Aldine Press, 1999

190 pages, Paper \$18.95

John Finlay died in 1991 at age fifty, and his literary executor, David Middleton, was left to collect the poems and essays that comprised Finlay's life work. Middleton is to be commended for his efforts; we should all wish for such a dedicated and hard-working literary friend.

At the time of his death, Finlay had published three chapbooks, which make up the bulk of *Mind and Blood* along with two more sections of published and unpublished poems. The best of these, to my mind, are those poems rooted in Southern narrative and place, strongly evocative of the south Alabama landscape and people among whom Finlay

grew up and with whom he spent the last ten years of his life. "The Wide Porch," "A Few Things for Themselves," "The First Emblems," "The Dead and the Season," "The Road to the Gulf," "Salt from the Winter Sea," and the startling and darkly funny "The Judas Trees" are all worth reading. Likewise, Finlay wrote several successful historical poems, including one about John James Audubon ("Audubon at Oakley"), and others spanning the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, among them "Pioneers," "The Exiles," and "In the Time of the Civil War."

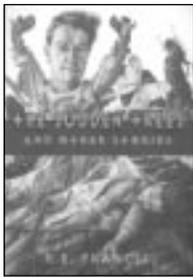
These poems, however, are not the ones for which Finlay is generally praised in the commemorative volume *In Light Apart* (which includes poems and essays both by and about Finlay). Finlay wrote almost exclusively in traditional forms, and critics, most of them formalist poets themselves, tend to emphasize, first, his commitment to fighting the good fight against free verse, and next, Finlay's intellectualism, his attention to such subjects as "Thomistic theology [and] philosophical subjectivism" (Middleton). Finlay, a devotee of Allen Tate, was apparently captivated by classical thought and literature, as the titles "Ovid in Exile," "Odysseus," "The Archaic Athena," and "The Defense of Solon" indicate. He also was drawn (for different reasons, I believe) to a number of French poets, including Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and wrote about them as well. But all of these poems seem more the product of scholarly mental processes than the creative impulse; they are learned but lack wisdom or any sense of surprise, and too often come to seem like literary exercises better left in the drawer.

And therein lies the problem of the noble attempt at establishing a posthumous literary reputation: the very fact of the attempt implies that the work is special. No one is going to write a commemorative essay saying, in effect, "This was a fair but not astonishing poet." Although Jeffrey Goodman's essay gives a somewhat balanced treatment of Finlay's work, others overvalue his place in American letters. This is not surprising, given the nature of the volume, but it remains for those less involved to make a more objective treatment of this poet's work. I would certainly argue that several of his poems deserve to be included in Alabama and regional anthologies, and I would hope that future critical treatments of his work pay less attention to what I suspect Finlay saw as his strength—his studies of metaphysics—and more to his very real poetic powers: to evoke the feel of the gulf coast on a hot day, to chronicle the hard and sometimes brutal life of a farm wife, to imagine his way into what it felt like for an Indian woman separated from her tribe by

massacre to wander the woods alone with her baby, searching to reconnect.

It is a sad thing that Finlay died of AIDS and at what we now consider a young age; one wishes he had lived to write himself deeper into the Alabama soil. He wrote, in "To a Friend on His First Book," "Poems get deathless, out of our control—/And see the man who started them consumed." Poems get deathless if you're lucky, and I think Finlay was—lucky enough to write a good handful, at least.

Jennifer Horne is a poet and essayist who lives in Tuscaloosa and works at the University of Alabama Press.



The Sudden Trees and Other Stories

by H. E. Francis

Frederic C. Beil Publisher, 1999
323 pp. Cloth, \$24.95

Readers familiar with the work of award-winning writer H.E. Francis know that his stories do not make for light reading. No beach books here. In fact, some of the stories in Francis' latest collection, *The Sudden Trees*, take place in institutions, in sick rooms, in remote mountain villages, in places where characters have come to take stock, to reconnect with life, to heal.

Most of his characters live out their hopes and their struggles in the physical territory Francis is familiar with: New England, Latin America, and Spain. He grew up in Bristol, Rhode Island, and has lived and traveled in Argentina, where he had three different Fulbright appointments. Francis currently divides his time between Huntsville, Alabama, where he is retired from teaching at the University of Alabama, and Madrid, Spain.

But the metaphorical setting of his stories is the territory of the heart, that place which longs for connection and intimacy, for a physical, spiritual, and emotional home. In this collection, some characters struggle hard to find such a place and others find it only to lose it.

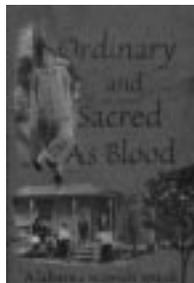
In the title story, a school teacher takes his dying student into his home. In tending to his small patient, he eventually finds both love and himself. After the child's death, he whispers to her, "You're me."

In three of the stories, "The Other Side of the Fire," "Out There," and "Mr. Balzano," Francis writes of young men searching for and discovering the identity of their fathers. Sometimes this discovery is disappointing, and sometimes exhilarating. In "Mr. Balzano," the main character (who lives on Hope Street) is filled with joy when he finally connects with his father and connects with his past in the process.

Many stories describe entrapment; characters struggle for release of one kind or another. In "The Impossible," the central character seeks relief in death; his caretakers are reluctant to give it. Two other stories, "Had" and "Wall," take place in institutions; these characters are trapped in hospital routine and behind double-glass panes.

In looking at the collection as a whole, we see the author's view that walls, both physical and symbolic, hold us in, apart from others and from our true, full lives. It is when the writer tears down the walls and frees his characters that we eventually see his vision—the possibility of hope and grace.

Beth Thames is a writer and teacher in Huntsville.



Ordinary and Sacred as Blood: Alabama Women Speak

Edited by Mary Carol Moran

River's Edge Publishing Company, 1999
242 pp. Paper, \$11.95

Ordinary and Sacred as Blood: Alabama Women Speak, edited by Mary Carol Moran, is simply a marvelous collection of works by authors that Alabama is fortunate to claim. Moran did a wonderful job of dividing the works of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction into eleven categories that somehow manage to cover most seasons of a woman's life.

Taken individually, many of the works are stunning. Alabama's Poet Laureate Emerita Helen Blackshear speaks in a cool, strong voice that reaches back into the past and far into the future. Auburn University's poet-in-residence Natasha Trethewey and Van Potter contribute moving and haunting verse that reflects their own experiences growing up in the South. Dramatic pieces, like Potter's "Experiment at Tuskegee," are offset by

light—yet still poignant—pieces such as Susan Murphy's "The Mom Look" and Jan Martin Harris's "Annie and L.G."

I read the collection from cover to cover, carried along by the emotions evoked by these talented writers. I found myself reflecting on my own experiences and wishing I had the power to capture them as skillfully as these women did.

The cover art is unique and appropriate, featuring a map of Alabama and pictures of the cover artist's and authors' families. With *Ordinary and Sacred as Blood: Alabama Women Speak*, Moran knitted together the memories, fears, hopes, and dreams of these authors into a volume that any woman—or man—would be proud to have or to pass on as a keepsake.

Julie Bouchard is a writer and editor who lives in Columbus, Georgia.



A Spring of Souls

by William Cobb

Crane Hill Publishers, 1999

305 pp. Cloth, \$24.95; paper, \$15.95

A master is at work here. A storyteller who has given us *A Walk Through Fire*, *The Hermit King*, *Harry Reunited*, and a collection of stories, *Somewhere in All This Green*, William Cobb has displayed his talent beautifully with his latest, *A Spring of Souls*.

Peopled with characters so real and true they crackle on the page like the sizzle of a fire, this novel reads like it has taken on a life of its own. It builds with the strength of a master's stroke, and other writers who have tried will recognize its brilliance.

Cobb works with a sure hand, creating his scene in the town of Piper in the county of Wemby in the coal-mining hills of north-central Alabama. It is a place and a people he knows deeply. Like van Gogh at his best, each brush stroke highlights a new person, a new direction, a mood, a sign, a shiver.

Playing his drama against a background of spiritual and racial unease, the novelist guides his reader through surprise and frightening reality. It is so real you push forward and hang on for dear life while barreling ahead into disturbing territory.

Even the small-town sounds, the echoes, the feeling of *deja vu*, the slant of light through the trees in autumn, the shivery feeling when clouds pass over, blocking out the sun momentarily, all of it is just right. William Cobb does it with his own special brand of magic, weaving a tapestry that is at once simple and elegant while fitting brilliantly into a larger, complicated pattern.

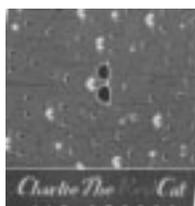
While on one hand I back away and gaze with intellectual wonder at the work, on the other I am entranced and hypnotized into the world of his creation. Read and experience and learn from one who does it better than any of us.

The only time he falters—and then only slightly—is when he introduces the teen-agers into the action. Their dialog slides occasionally into contrived phrases. Then, in the next paragraph, he is back to the real, taking us down a back street where we have not traveled, then we're blindsided, like a high school football player, and what we might expect we do not get: each twist and turn is new and different, and even most of the ghosts are believable.

Cobb balances his action on a fine narrow edge, teetering between sanity and craziness, peace and war, love and hate, sober and drunk, comedy and tragedy. It is as ancient as good versus evil and as current as CNN's latest breaking news.

Ultimately, there are too many ghosts for my literary taste. But *A Spring of Souls* is more than a celebration of spirits and miracles. It is an anthem to the glory, mystery, and madness of the human condition. It is a bomb poised just this side of destruction.

Wayne Greenhaw's thirteenth book, *Beyond the Night: A Remembrance*, was published by Black Belt Press this fall.



Charlie the RedCat

by Jim Tweedy

Crane Hill, 1999

134 pp. Cloth, \$59.95

87 pp. Paper, \$9.95

Cats are cool—always have been, always will be—and Charlie the RedCat is the coolest cat of all.

Jim Tweedy created Charlie in 1992 as “a spoof on the dog,” the famous blue dog whose face appears on paintings around New

Orleans' Jackson Square. Tweedy's success with Charlie has been phenomenal. He has sold over four hundred paintings, and now Crane Hill has published two Charlie books—*Charlie the RedCat* and *Charlie in a Nutshell*.

The illustrations and narrative in *Charlie the RedCat* are sidesplitting. Every painting is visual humor and every story is filled with puns and double entendres. *Charlie the RedCat*, the coffee table book, can be read at least two ways—as a narrative of Charlie's life and as a description of Jim Tweedy's paintings. The reproductions of the 120 illustrations are lush and colorful.

Charlie in a Nutshell, with 75 illustrations and less text, was designed to “fit in your car and take on trips to avoid Charlie deprivation.” Both books are suitable for all ages. And both books are exceptional and not to be missed by anyone who loves cats, humor, art, or wordplay. Buy more than one copy: these are books to share.

Pam Kingsbury lives, writes, and teaches in Florence.

A Fire You Can't Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham's Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth

by Andrew M. Manis

University of Alabama Press, 1999

672 pp. Cloth, \$29.95

Of the Civil Rights Movement's triumvirate—Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, and Fred Shuttlesworth—the one least nationally known is Shuttlesworth. This new biography will bring recognition to the Baptist minister and founder of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) whose role in securing civil rights for African-Americans has remained the least documented and appreciated of the leaders. Birmingham residents have long known that King's success in the Magic City, and thus the movement's success, came on the back of Shuttlesworth's years of work galvanizing the black community against the rule of Bull Conner. King came to Birmingham at the invitation of Shuttlesworth and under conditions he established which assured that his ACMHR would maintain a leadership role.

In Birmingham Shuttlesworth had to overcome divisions in the black community. African-American leaders in Birmingham from the professional and well-educated middle and upper class had difficulty relating to Shuttlesworth and were more comfortable with the polished and cultured King. Shuttlesworth, who had strong support from the laboring class, had a fiery style and rough manners that sometimes more than stressed his relations with wealthy blacks. But he was

a constant thorn in Bull Conner's side, plotting to embarrass and defeat Birmingham's segregationist police commissioner despite being thrown in jail, having his meetings monitored by the police department, bombings at his church, and threats on his life.

Understanding Shuttlesworth's religious beliefs is important to understanding his actions as a civil rights leader, and this new biography is sensitive to this. The author, Andrew Manis, who grew up in Birmingham and became an historian of southern and African-American religion, first met Shuttlesworth in Cincinnati when he was writing a paper on the reactions of white Southern Baptists to King. Gaining Shuttlesworth's trust and cooperation for this work did not preclude Manis from criticizing the man and his strategy when he believed such was deserved. Extensively researched and well written, this project took Manis twelve years to complete. Shuttlesworth's story is a good one, and Manis is worthy of the challenge of telling it.

Leah Rawls Atkins is an Alabama historian who lives in Birmingham.



Crossroad Blues

by Ace Atkins

St. Martin's Press, 1998

226 pp. Cloth, \$21.95

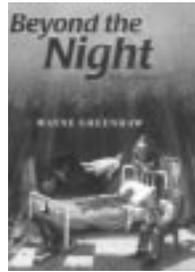
Sixty years after his hero, the great black blues guitarist and composer Robert Johnson, died an agonizing death at the age of 27, former Saints linebacker and part-time professor of blues history at Tulane Nick Travers sets out from New Orleans for the heart of the Mississippi Delta to find fellow blues historian Michael Baker, who has mysteriously disappeared while searching for previously unreleased, and now priceless, Robert Johnson recordings. Travers also hopes to uncover evidence that will prove decisively whether it was a jealous husband and honky-tonk proprietor or a cheated music producer who had laced Johnson's whiskey with the fatal poison. This first mystery by former Auburn University football player, newspaper journalist, and blues enthusiast Ace Atkins appears amidst a revived interest in Robert Johnson's life.

Nick Travers's search for Baker, the missing blues "tracker," takes him to Greenwood, Mississippi, where Johnson is buried. There he learns that Cracker, a black albino recluse, is a key to solving both the mysterious disappearance of Baker and the violent death of Johnson, which Cracker had witnessed as a boy. Cracker confirms the existence of the unreleased recordings, claiming that Johnson, on his deathbed, had given him several discs for safekeeping. Travers learns that Baker, whose search had already led him to Cracker, inveigled the old man to show him several old discs which he later stole. Baker, however, was kidnaped and murdered before discovering that Cracker had duped him with some warped recordings of worthless hillbilly tunes.

The rumored existence of original discs attracts the envy of a sinister and decadent New Orleans blues promoter, Pascal Cruz, who conspires to turn his faux New Orleans Blues Shack into the "Robert's world" of Delta music by getting his hands on the long-concealed recordings. The hit men Pascal sends into the Delta to purloin the Johnson recordings are an unsavory lot. Although the unscrupulous Cruz and his thugs are foiled in their efforts to steal the Johnson recordings, Travers also fails to become a modern-day Alan Lomax. He does, however, earn the trust of Cracker and Earl Snooks, another contemporary of Johnson, who reveal the truth about the murder of the Delta's greatest blues musician. Nick Travers will at least earn a footnote in blues history.

Atkins's Nick Travers joins a long parade of fictional New Orleans-based investigators. Fortunately for mystery writers, crimes are as abundant in New Orleans as muffalettas and Zapp's potato chips. Unlike James Lee Burke's David Robicheaux, however, Travers's life has not yet reached the level of dissipation that will lead to redemption through a twelve-step program. Nor is he enough of a misfit, like Julie Smith's tough female investigator, Skip Langdon, to possess a sense of self-irony. Nick Travers also lacks the finesse of D.J. Donaldson's likable Crescent City forensic expert, portly Andy Broussard, and his pert assistant, the criminal psychologist Kit Franklyn. Travers's sexual recklessness and gratuitously coarse dialogue, more appropriate to the locker-room, does not recommend *Crossroad Blues* to junior high school libraries. Nonetheless, if Nick Travers survives and mellows a bit, he has the potential to become a more interesting, subtle, and likable character in another novel or two.

Allen Cronenberg is director of the Auburn University Center for the Arts & Humanities.



Beyond the Night: A Remembrance

By Wayne Greenhaw
Black Belt Press, 1999
96 pp. Paper, \$15.95

I've read many of Wayne Greenhaw's books and plays and admire his writing. No one knows more about Alabama than this native son and few can match the elegant and honest way he writes about this state. As enthusiastic as I am about his writing, however, I would never have described his prose as "angelic." At least not until *Beyond The Night: A Remembrance*.

Angels—or an angel, at least—figure prominently in this story set in Alabama in the late forties. The protagonist is a boy who takes an imaginative, mystical journey somewhere between this world and the next. The most literal of readers will say that we are privy to the boy's fevered delirium dream after he's thrown from a car in an accident. Other readers will be enchanted as the boy's travels into a lush, pristine natural world culminate in a life-or-death battle.

In previous books Greenhaw has written lovingly about Alabama's past. This remembrance is also a pleasing and poignant record of things that have passed from our landscape. The boy's father, a salesman, tells about his life on the road and recounts the stories his colleagues share at the end of the day as they gather in the lobby of Greenville's Waller Hotel, or any other small town stop. He tells the neighborhood boys fanciful yarns about his alleged encounters with Hopalong Cassidy in Enterprise and Lash LaRue in Dozier, and the boys have thousands of questions about their matinee idols. These scenes work well because Greenhaw writes about Alabama's past with authority and fondness.

This is more than a book of nostalgia, however. The protagonist is forced on a difficult, painful journey, and the reader is never sure how it will end. In this book Greenhaw has created two compelling settings for the reader: in one he looks back to a gentler world; in the other he looks beyond to the next world.

Brent Davis is immediate past president of the Alabama Writers' Forum.



From the Black Hills

by Judy Troy
Random House, New York, 1999
284 pp. \$23.95

The summer between high school graduation and one's freshman year of college is almost inevitably stressful. There is the hometown girlfriend or boyfriend to be left, at least literally, behind. Michael Newlin, the protagonist of Judy Troy's new novel, is also leaving behind an older woman, Lee-Ann Schofield, with whom he is infatuated, and a mother in a state of high anxiety. All the regular difficulties are compounded when Mike's father, an unsuccessful life insurance agent, on June 18 shoots and kills his receptionist, Mary Hise, with whom he is having an affair, and then becomes a fugitive.

Mike is torn. The detective on the case wants him to report if his father calls, and he surely, eventually, will. Not only does Mike not want to inform on his father, he fears that the detective, Tom DeWitt, has designs on his mother. It suddenly seems to Mike that there is nothing he understands, and in this coming-of-age-novel *cum* murder mystery, Mike cannot get on with his own life until he knows whether and why his father committed murder.

From the Black Hills, Judy Troy's third volume of fiction, has some impressive strengths. The low-grade insanity that is being seventeen is convincingly done. "Donetta put her arms around Mike. 'You're the only good part of my life,' she whispered. 'You're the only happy thing that I have!'" Donetta is, sadly, telling the truth. Her family is a mess, a nest of hostility that would be called poor white trash if they lived in Mississippi. Likewise, Mike's father's affair, homicidal behavior, and flight cause Mike to examine his parents' marriage as he had never before and he realizes his mother is not a saint either. On top of all that, Mike, a very masculine young man, is overcome by lust for Lee-Ann, the older woman, and the pressure of having a fugitive murderer father causes him to cry as teen-age boys seldom do.

Troy is at her best when exploring the psyches of these teens. The Black Hills are symbolic, a beautiful and natural place of peace and refuge. In fact, the small town, the people, the outdoor world of *From the Black*

Hills remind me of the stark world of the Coen brothers and a movie like *Fargo*. Although I come to care about Mike and his future, I don't feel really optimistic about anybody's future in those culturally and socially bleak hills.

Don Noble is host of *Alabama Public Television's BookMark*.

BOOK NOTES

Any journal that includes Culinary Support staff on its masthead is worth a second look. *Lonzie's Fried Chicken* is serious about cooking, perhaps, but editor E. H. Goree is also serious about publishing "accessible southern fiction and poetry" that her



"mom, aunts, best friend," and she would like to read. Works by Alabama writers Marian Carcache, Peter Huggins, Claire T. Feild, C. S. Fuqua, and Raven were featured in its second number, published in February. A third number is due out this fall, and editor Goree,

who publishes from Lynn, North Carolina, promises that it will include other state writers as well. Information about subscribing and submitting can be found at the journal's website—www.lonziesfriedchicken.com. Check it out and you'll also find an explanation of the journal's intriguing name.

Aleta Boudreaux's *Song of the White Swan*, published last year by Grand Bay, Alabama-based Laughing Owl Press, is a multilayered historical romance/adventure book. Set in the late 1400s in Brittany and Nova Scotia, it follows the fortunes of Antoinette, a member of a Druidic sisterhood threatened by the political and cultural implications of Brittany's Queen Anne's marriage to Charles of France. Laughing Owl has its own website—at www.laughingowl.com—that offers information about *Song of the White Swan* and its other titles.



Fairhope native and now Kentucky resident Perry C. Bramlett has pursued a fascination with C. S. Lewis into a remarkable writing and speaking career. Author of *C. S. Lewis: Life at the Center*, contributor to the *C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia*, and acclaimed lecturer on Lewis, Bramlett has recently

focused his scholarship on the places and people central to Lewis' life. His *Touring C. S. Lewis' Ireland and England* (Smyth & Helwys, 1998) is an exhaustive compendium of historical and biographical data, as well as maps, pictures, and bibliographies. Bramlett frequently leads tours based on the book, but even if you can't make the trip, his guidebook is a rich and entertaining resource of information about Lewis and his life and work.



Journalist and photographer Robert Wilbanks sets his first collection of short stories, *Through the Eyes of a Parrot, Travel*



Vignettes: A View From the Tropics (University Editions, 1998), in the Caribbean. There he explores the less-well-known corners of a lively, various culture that includes "pirates, poets . . . Rastafarians, burned-out Peace Corps volunteers . . .

and prophets." A native of Gadsden, he has written for *The Birmingham News*, *The Gadsden Times*, *The Cool Traveler*, and other newspapers and magazines.

According to Dr. Jesse J. Lewis, Vanessa Davis Griggs' new book, *Destiny Unlimited* (Free to Soar, 1999), is based on the idea that "self-concept can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies." Involving a young girl, an old woman, and the pursuit of happiness and success, the book's explicit aim is "empowering people."

Lewis's own book concerns empowerment. Co-authored with John Hayman (author of the Coley Award-winning *Bitter Harvest: Richmond Flowers and the Civil Rights*



Revolution), *Empowerment of a Race: The Revitalization of Black Institutions* (Black Belt Press, 1999) considers that the civil rights movement achieved sweeping change but at the expense of undermin-

ing the historical institutions of church, business, and education so critical to African-American culture in America, an idea that has certainly gained currency recently. In their book, Hayman and Lewis address the economic and political conditions affecting African-Americans and suggest ways in which full participation might be achieved.

James Buford's first collection of essays, *The Kindness of Strangers*, introduced readers to a world experienced in vivid, memorable detail—a place where the kindness of strangers was noted and the responsibility to pass it along honored. In his second collec-



tion, *The Best of Times* (Black Belt Press, 1999), Buford, a native of east Alabama and literary columnist for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, takes us down the road to small schools and close communities where children learn the value of

personal effort, of family, of integrity, of faith. These are places where the great southern obsession with sports—baseball, football, basketball—is played out. And places where fathers and sons carve out their acceptance, if not always understanding, of each other. Destinations are slippery, though, and even as he urges us on, Buford believes that in fundamental ways we are "already there."

Coming in the winter issue of *First Draft*, reviews of

Kennette Harrison's
Dowsing for Light

Kelly Cherry's
The Society of Friends

Sena Jeter Naslund's
Abab's Wife

Michael Knight's
Divining Rod

Wade Hall's
Conecub People

Lowell Harrelson's
Rainbow Junction

Kathryn Tucker Windham's
The Bridal Wreath Bush

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BOOK REVIEWERS CIRCLE FORMING

First Draft book review editor **Jay Lamar**, along with University of Alabama English professor **Don Noble** and **John Sledge**, Mobile Historic Development Commission, are interested in organizing an association of book reviewers and would like to hear from other reviewers. Anyone who has published a minimum of two book reviews in the recent past should feel eligible to join. Send a postcard, letter, or email to **Jay Lamar** at the Center for the Arts and Humanities, Pebble Hill, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849; lamarja@mail.auburn.edu. Prospective members will be notified of an initial meeting—probably on a Saturday and with lunch—to discuss the shape the organization might take.

CALL FOR NEW PLAYS FALL 1999

The **New Playwright's Program** (NPP) at the University of Alabama invites Alabama playwrights to submit scripts to be considered for readings, workshops, and productions. The NPP will pay a stipend and expenses to accepted writers. Plays that can be performed by college-age actors are a plus. Work that has been through several drafts is preferred. Contact **Paul Castagno**, director, New Playwrights Program, Department of Theatre and Dance, College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Alabama, Box 870239, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0239, 205/348-9032, fax 205/348-9048, email: pcastagn@rojo.as.ua.edu.

RANDALL JARRELL POETRY PRIZE POSTMARK DEADLINE NOVEMBER 1

The **North Carolina Writers' Network** is accepting entries for the tenth annual Randall Jarrell Poetry Prize. **Mark Strand** will be the final judge. The winner will receive a \$1,000 prize and publication in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*.

Submit two copies of one to three unpublished poems, not to exceed 10 pages

total, and a cover sheet with name, address, phone numbers, and poem titles. Names should not appear on the manuscript. No manuscripts will be returned. The entry fee is \$7. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope if you would like to be notified of winners. Submit to N.C. Writers' Network, 3501 Hwy. 54 West, Studio C, Chapel Hill, NC 27516.

NEW LITERARY MAGAZINE DEADLINE NOVEMBER 15

Sophie's Wind has issued a call for "daring, experimental, and high-quality fiction, poetry, and literary nonfiction" to be published in its premiere Winter/Spring 2000 issue, "Windy Borders, Bordering Winds." Poetry may be up to eight pages per entry. All other submissions must be double-spaced and no more than 5,000 words. Submissions without a self-addressed stamped envelope will not be considered. For more details, contact sophieswind@hotmail.com or <http://sites.netscape.net/sophieswind>. Submit to **Lori Anne Parker**, Editor, *Sophie's Wind*, c/o Philosophy Department, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY 13902.

CALL FOR PAPERS, FICTION, AND POETRY DECEMBER 15

"Remembrance" is the theme for the **Southern Women Writers Conference**, to be held April 13-15, 2000, at Berry College in Rome, Georgia. Speakers include **Peggy Prenshaw**, **Lee Smith** and **Jill McCorkle**. Papers are sought about the ways in which individual and collective memory is expressed in the work of southern women writers. Prizes of \$500 will be given for the best works of fiction and poetry by emerging writers. Contact **Emily Wright**, English Department, Berry College, P.O. Box 495010, Mount Berry, GA 30149. Phone 706/233-4081, fax 706/238-7827 and email: ewright@berry.edu.

HACKNEY AWARDS

ENTRIES DEADLINE DECEMBER 31, 1999

Postmark deadline for short story and poetry categories of the **Hackney Literary Awards** competition is December 31, 1999. First place winners receive \$600, second place \$400, and third place \$250 for both national and state categories. Only original, unpublished manuscripts may be entered. Poetry and short story entries from Alabama will be entered in the state contest unless specified for the national competition. Entries will only be judged in state or national, not both. Short stories are accepted with a \$10 entry fee and should not exceed 5,000 words. More than one poem may be entered, but all poems together must not exceed the 50-line limit per entry.

Entries should be typed, and short stories should be double-spaced. Each entry must have two copies of the cover sheet listing the title of the work, author's name, address and telephone number, and the category of the work. The author's name must not appear on the actual pages of the manuscript. Manuscripts cannot be returned. A self-addressed stamped envelope must be enclosed if you wish to receive a list of the winners which will be announced at the Writing Today Conference. Make checks payable to Hackney Literary Awards and mail to Birmingham-Southern College, Box 549003, Birmingham, AL 35254. For more information, call 205/226-4921.

PENN LITERARY JOURNAL JANUARY 31, 2000

Tempus, A Journal of Literature and the Arts is the campus literary magazine of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. The editors are looking for "fresh voices with sharp language" for the upcoming issue. Submit original, previously unpublished works of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Submissions will be read between November 1 and January 31.

Continued on page 26

C A L E N D A R

Oct. 22—Reading, Birmingham

Pat Cunningham Devoto, author of *My Last Days as Roy Rogers*, will read at 7 p.m. at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, 1800 Eighth Avenue. Call 205/252-9241.

Oct. 23—"Writing and Illustrating for Kids," Birmingham

Genre-specific workshops on craft and publishing information will be available. An annual regional event of the Southern Breeze Region of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. SASE to **Joan Broerman**, Regional Advisor, P.O. Box 26282, Birmingham, AL 35260 or www.hometown.aol.com/southbrez/

Oct. 23—Signings, Birmingham

Crosshaven Books, 3916 Crosshaven Drive, will host **Ruth B. Cook** signing *North Across the River* from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Poet **Charles Ghigna** will sign his *Love Poems*, *Plastic Soup*, *Animal Trunk*, and other titles from 2 to 4 p.m. Call 205/972-8778.

Oct. 27—UAB Writers' Series, Birmingham

Poet **Heather McHugh** will read at 7 p.m. at the UAB Honors House as part of a BACHE (Birmingham Area Consortium for Higher Education) residency. Call **Robert Collins**, 205/934-4250.

Oct. 29 & 30—AHF 25th Anniversary Celebration, Birmingham

The Alabama Humanities Foundation is sponsoring a statewide conference on "Stories Alabama Tells," including a reunion luncheon with **Kathryn Tucker Windham**, as well as a lecture on Saturday evening by Nobel Prize-winner **Toni Morrison**. An Evening with Toni Morrison begins at 8 p.m. at the Alys Stephens Center. Admission \$35; \$175 includes performance, autographed book, and reception. For more information on the conference or luncheon, call 205/930-0540. For tickets to the Toni Morrison lecture and reception, call 205/975-ARTS.

Oct. 30—Signings, Birmingham

At Crosshaven Books, 3916 Crosshaven Rd., **Carolyn Sherer** will sign *Just As I Am* from 11 to 1 p.m.; **Donna Booth** will sign *Alabama Cemeteries* from 2 to 4 p.m. Call 205/972-8778.

Oct. 30—ASPS Fall Poetry Luncheon, Montevallo

"Poets Score Big" is the theme of the Alabama State Poetry Society fall awards luncheon at the University of Montevallo. Persons interested in joining are welcome to attend. Call **Dianna Murphree** for reservations, 205/663-4909.

Nov. 3—Signing, Birmingham

At Crosshaven Books, 3916 Crosshaven Road, **Ellen Rolfes** will sign *A Gracious Plenty* from 3 to 5 p.m. Call 205/972-8778.

Nov. 3—Writers' Harvest, Huntsville

North Alabama writers will hold their fifth Share Our Strength Writers' Harvest reading at 7 p.m. at the Dawson Auditorium on the Alabama A & M University campus to benefit the Food Bank of North Alabama. Past Writers' Harvests have raised about \$1,500. Contact **Dr. Virginia Gilbert** at 256-851-5397.

Nov. 5 & 6—Pen Women Alabama State Association Conference, Huntsville

Poetry readings by members and presentations by **Jeanie Thompson**, **Helen Blackshear**, and national Pen Women president **Judith LaFourest**. Contact **Kay Cornelius**, state president, at 256/881-8865 or kaycorn@hiwaay.net.

Nov. 6—Signing, Birmingham

At Crosshaven Books, 3916 Crosshaven Road, **William Cobb** will sign *A Spring of Souls* from noon to 2 p.m. Call 205/972-8778.

Nov. 10—UAB Writers' Series, Birmingham

Poet **Gerald Stern**, retired from the University of Iowa Creative Writing Program, will read at 7 p.m. at the UAB

Honors House. Call **Robert Collins**, 205/934-4250.

Nov. 11—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

Poet **Gerald Stern** will read in Room 205, Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. 205/348-0766.

Nov. 12—Signing, Birmingham

At Crosshaven Books, 3916 Crosshaven Road, **J. Stephen Lang** will sign *Drawn to the Civil War* from 4 to 6 p.m. Call 205/972-8778.

Nov. 18—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

Readings by **Patricia Henley**, novelist and Purdue University professor, and **Susan Neville**, fiction and nonfiction writer, recent winner of the Notre Dame prize for her *House of Blue Lights*. Room 205, Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. Call 205/348-0766.

Nov. 19—Reading, Birmingham

Phyllis Alesia Perry, will read from her first novel, *Stigmata*, at 7 p.m. at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, 1800 Eighth Avenue. Call 205/252-9241.

Dec. 2—Reading, Montgomery

Poets **Natasha Tretheway** and **Jeanie Thompson** will read at Huntingdon College at 8 p.m. in Smith Recital Hall. Call 334/833-4451.

Dec. 11—Signing, Montgomery

Scott Bruner, *Due South*, **Wayne Greenhaw**, *Beyond the Night: A Remembrance*, and **Kathryn Tucker Windham**, *The Bridal Wreath Bush* will sign books from 1 to 3 p.m. at Capitol Book and News, 1140 E. Fairview Avenue. Call 334/265-1473.

LOOKING AHEAD

March 14, 2000 DEADLINE

The deadline for National Endowment for the Arts poetry and poetry translation fellowships is March 14. See the guidelines online at www.arts.endow.gov or contact the NEA at 202/682-5400.

LITERATURE IN THE MANSION

Continued from page 17

Thompson said that the books were gathered at writers' conferences and book events during the spring and that many other authors are being contacted to sign books for the Governor's Family Library of Alabama Authors. "We don't want any writers to feel left out. This will be an on-going process," she said.

PROGRAM GARNERS PRAISE AND THANKS

Said **Al Head**, executive director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, "The Alabama Writers' Forum is setting a good example for other arts constituencies by helping our elected officials know firsthand about Alabama artists. These books tell the story of Alabama's literary talent like nothing else can." The Forum is a good example of a successful partnership between the Council, a state agency, and statewide membership arts organizations, Head noted.

Thompson thanked Mrs. Siegelman for helping to focus attention on the arts. "As an arts administrator, I am comforted by the fact that our Governor and his wife have made the arts and arts in education part of their personal agenda," she said. "With Governor and Mrs. Siegelman's interest in Alabama arts and artists, I believe our state's arts community can hit its stride in terms of statewide recognition."

Mrs. Siegelman said she looked forward to reading the books and hoped to have opportunities to meet the authors. She has since requested bookshelves be built on the first floor of the mansion for the library. "The State of Alabama is rich with people who have the passion and desire to mold young minds and bodies to excel in the arts and help them reach their fullest potential," Mrs. Siegelman said. "Such talent is exemplified in these autographed books by Alabama authors."



"Wondering" will appear in *Let Me Talk to You*, an anthology from the "Writing Our Stories" program, available later this fall.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Continued from page 24

Prose must be double-spaced and no more than 15 pages. Poetry should be single-spaced, and no more than five poems per envelope. All work must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Simultaneous submissions are fine, as long as *Tempus* is promptly notified of prior publication elsewhere. Please address work to appropriate editor (Poetry, Fiction, Non-fiction) at *Tempus*, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, Station Road, Erie, PA 16563.

APPALACHIAN POETRY MARCH 1, 2000

Now & Then, *The Appalachian Magazine* is holding the Year 2000 Appalachian Poetry Competition. **Maggie Anderson** will serve as final judge. The competition is open to all poets, however entries must be original, unpublished, and relate to the Appalachian region. Winners will receive cash prizes and publication in the summer 2000 issue. For guidelines visit the website at <http://cass.etsu.edu/n&t/contest.htm>, email: woodsidj@etsu-tn.edu, call 423/439-5348 or write *Now & Then* Poetry Contest, CASS/ETSU, Box 70556, Johnson City, TN 37614-0556.

HEMINGWAY'S HAVANA

MAY, 2000

The **Hemingway Short Story Writers' Workshop** will be held near Havana, Cuba, at the Hemingway home, now a museum. Twenty professional and emerging writers, writing teachers, and Hemingway scholars will be able to write and gather material under the tutelage of author **Robert Olen Butler** and **Elizabeth Dewberry Vaughn**, playwright, novelist, and Hemingway scholar. The workshop will be from May 6 to 16 at a cost of \$1,095. Call 877-577-7700 or email questions to info@meworkshops.com. Periodic updates will be posted at www.meworkshops.com

SOUTHERN WAYS AND ESSAYS

Vance Bell of the University of Pennsylvania English department invites readers to log on to *WaySouth: A Journal of Southern Thought* at www.waysouth.com/ and to submit queries for essays. *WaySouth* is an online magazine of essays and commentary from a Southern perspective—actually numerous Southern perspectives—that represent the black/white, male/female, urban/rural diversity of modern Southern life.



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

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*The Forum greatly appreciates the more than 600 individuals, including students,
who have supported its programming since 1992.*

*Beyond
the
Night*

A Remembrance

by Wayne Greenhaw

"...blends the New Age with the age-old in a lyrical celebration of all life."

Harper Lee

To Kill a Mockingbird

"...a lovely, loving bitter-sweet tribute to the glory of youth. Wayne Greenhaw is the best writer to come out of Alabama since Harper Lee."

Winston Groom

Forrest Gump

"Wayne Greenhaw has written a remembrance of extraordinary tenderness. It captures all the awe and strangeness of being a boy in the South. It seems part tall-tale, front-porch reminiscence, ghost story and family saga—all the stuff the South does better than anyone else."

Pat Conroy

Prince of Tides

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Montgomery, Alabama

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or from the publisher,*

1-800-959-3245

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Continued from page 18

IN THE BLACK BELT

Publishers Weekly, in its August 16, 1999, issue, reported a “10th anniversary turnaround” for Montgomery’s **Black Belt Press** under **Susanne La Rosa**, whom president and editor-in-chief **Randall Williams** named to succeed him as publisher in June 1998. La Rosa, formerly a group publisher at Taunton Press, said, “This year’s first quarter net profit exceeded that for total 1998.”

Other Black Belt successes include awards from the Southeastern Booksellers Association (SEBA). *Someone Will Go On Owing* by Andrew Glaze won the poetry category and Kathryn Tucker Windham’s coffee table photo book *Encounters* was a nonfiction finalist. Among the new titles for fall are *Beyond the Night: A Reminiscence* by Wayne Greenhaw and *The Bridal Wreath Bush* by Kathryn Tucker Windham and illustrated by John Solomon Sandridge.

OVER THE TRANSONOM

The Pains of April, by attorney **Frank Turner Hollon**, is new from **Over the Transom Publishing Co.** of Fairhope. Over the Transom publishes two to four titles annually, fiction and nonfiction, hardcover and trade paperback, originals and some reprints. For more information, contact **Kyle Jennings**, publisher, 334/928-0049, or email at infor@overthetransombooks.com.

THE VIEW FROM CRANE HILL

Crane Hill Publishers’ newest release, *North Across the River*, by **Ruth Beaumont Cook**, traces the previously untold story of the mass arrest and deportation of Confederate civilians during the Civil War. With information drawn from interviews and archival records, Cook reveals an important chapter of Southern history. For more information, call 205/714-3007.

U of A

1/4 PAGE AD

PICK UP FROM
PAGE 28 OF
LAST ISSUE

HAPPILY (SELF) PUBLISHED

Continued from page 9

star of the novel . . . His accent and mannerisms are delightful.” *The Romance Reader* gave it a four-heart rating, describing it as “a well-written and entertaining romance whose unconventional hero is a great creation.” *The Fiction Forest* said, “What sets *The Weaver Takes a Wife* apart is the vastly different character of Mr. Brundy, [whose] accent with its dropped h’s, ghastly taste in tailoring, and unstylish manners are delightfully refreshing.” And, in direct contradiction to that New York editor, the *Writers’ Club Romance Group* on America Online predicted that “you, too, will fall in love with Mr. Brundy.”

Since my advertising dollars were limited, I targeted my efforts to groups of readers whom I knew to be interested in the Regency genre and/or the Regency period of British history. Incorporating quotations from the reviews—as well as a short excerpt from the book and a convenient ordering form—I designed a tri-fold brochure and sent it out to a mailing list comprised of Regency readers. A similar mailing to libraries soon followed, with positive results, as did an advertisement in *The Regency Plume* historical newsletter. All were timed to appear concurrently with the book’s January 1999 release date.

Shortly after the book’s release, I began to receive feedback from readers. While no single book will please everyone, the book’s reception was overwhelmingly positive. And while I had always had faith in my story—I would hardly have jeopardized my family’s finances for it otherwise—I was surprised to discover that some of the disadvantages of self-publishing turned out to work in the book’s favor. “It doesn’t look like a romance!” readers enthused again and again. “I can read it in the doctor’s office without embarrassment!” In addition to the women who are the backbone of the romance readership, several men have also read my book, a further testimony to its unromantic artwork. When *The Midwest Book Review* featured it on their television program in Madison, Wisconsin, I couldn’t help but wonder if the book would have been singled out, had it appeared as a mass-market Regency romance.

An unexpected result of my self-publishing venture has been the number of emails I’ve received from fellow writers who have heard about my experience and are considering publishing their own books. Invariably, they begin, “I’ve written a book I love, but my agent tells me it’s unmarketable. . . .” These are not new writers crushed by rejection, but experienced authors whose stories don’t “fit” within the current publishing climate. It is a tribute to their vision and their faith in the power of their own words that they are willing to take such risks to make their stories available to the world. 

READ ALL ABOUT THE ARTS IN ALABAMA

Grant Guidelines, published annually, provides comprehensive information on the programs and services of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. The publication includes funding guidelines and all forms necessary for a grant application.

Alabama Arts is a semi-annual publication about the arts and artists of Alabama.

The Touring Arts Directory lists Alabama's performing artists who are available for performances in local communities. Also listed are visual arts exhibitions available from Alabama art museums.

Alabama Arts Education Resources is a new publication which provides a detailed listing of educational resources and services available from more than 100 arts groups in Alabama.

The State Arts Council's Folklife Program works cooperatively with other organizations to produce a large number of publications, CDs, and tapes which focus on the traditional culture of Alabama. A recent publication, *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* is a book of essays with a CD recording documenting the history and current use of an historic hymn book.

The State Arts Council also publishes a weekly email newsletter, *AlabamaArts*, that contains recent arts news, grant lists, and other information about the arts and artists of Alabama. To subscribe, go to <http://www.onelist.com/subscribe/AlabamaArts>

Call the Alabama State Council on the Arts or check the website to find out how to order these publications.



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