

# FIRST DRAFT

The Journal of the Alabama Writers' Forum

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**From Obscurity  
to Oprah:  
Melinda Haynes & the  
Power of the Word**

**MELINDA HAYNES**    1

**LITERARY ARTS  
AWARDS WINNERS**    2

**ALABAMA WRITERS  
SYMPOSIUM**    3

**"WRITING (&  
PHOTOGRAPHING)  
OUR STORIES"**    5

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1998-99

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In this issue of *First Draft*, we salute a number of Alabama writers who have achieved excellence. Their age range is broad and they hail from every quarter of the state, and beyond.

Works by some of the young writers who were recently honored as winners in the **1999 High School Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition** begin on page 11. With a record number of entries this year, we increased the number of awards given. As a result of growing statewide interest in our contest, we are approaching corporate sponsors to make an expanded Literary Arts Awards possible.

Recently, we were encouraged to learn that Brooke Lowder, a 1998 scholarship recipient who now serves on her family's foundation, has requested that a gift be given to the Forum to fund a scholarship in the 2000 competition. What a wonderful thank-you, Brooke.

Even as we wrap up this year's Literary Arts Awards winners, we are compiling the anthologies for "Writing Our Stories," now in its second year at the Lurleen B. Wallace School in Mt. Meigs and in its first year at the Sequoia School in Chalkville. Following the encouraging popularity of *Open the Door*, these forthcoming books by young men and women in the Department of Youth Services system are bound to be best sellers among juvenile justice professionals, teachers and others working with young people to help them toward a productive life.

During the spring we also honored two Alabamians for their work in the literary arts and scholarship. Novelist **Madison Jones** received the second annual Harper Lee Award for the Distinguished Alabama Writer and American literature scholar **Philip Beidler** was named the Eugene Current-Garcia Distinguished Alabama Scholar. The Forum deeply appreciates the commitment of



Rodney Jones and Jeanie Thompson during the Alabama Writers Symposium.

Alabama Southern Community College to these prestigious awards and would like to thank this year's award funders, the Alabama Power Company Foundation for the Harper Lee Award and George Landegger of Parsons and Whettemore for the Current-Garcia Award. Please see the related story on page 3

Also in Monroeville we welcomed home an Alabama writer who has distinguished himself among his peers in ways that few can hope to in a lifetime. Hearing **Rodney Jones**, a native of Falkville, Alabama, read his poems reminded me that there are those of us who began writing as young people in Alabama, and by hook and crook managed to find our voices. Rodney now teaches in Carbondale, Illinois, a long way from the red dirt and cotton fields of his native Morgan County. But his ties here are deep, and his recent *Elegy for the Southern Drawl* (reviewed on page 19) recalls the farm country of his childhood where inexplicable things happened that he continues to mull in poems of humor and regret.

We are trying, row by row, to plow the field and plant the seed for our young writers in Alabama. We are trying, crop by crop, to harvest the best of Alabama's contemporary adult writers. The literary life in Alabama flourishes among its sister arts. May you be nourished by and grow within it as well.

*Jeanie Thompson*

# Oprah Picks a Summer Blockbuster—Melinda Haynes's *Mother of Pearl*

“There is a power in the written word,” said **Melinda Haynes**, quietly but fervently. “Words have the power to take me away from something, to lift me away from myself.” As a reader Haynes found strength and healing; as a writer she has been struck by a lightning bolt of good fortune that has amazed and overwhelmed her.

The story is legend, but told again with fresh wonder by Haynes and her husband Ray at a Montgomery book signing on June 29. Ray sent the first hundred pages of *Mother of Pearl* to agent Wendy Weil after reading about her in *Poets & Writers*. Weil's assistant, by chance, pulled the manuscript out of the middle of a stack, read some, and handed it to Weil with a strong recommendation. The process of immediate recognition and recommendation continued down the line through Weil, who called Haynes when she reached page 57 to take her on as a client, to Martha Levin, then an editor and now president of Hyperion, to Hyperion CEO Bob Miller, who hand delivered galleys to Oprah Winfrey. “Oprah read it and called Toni Morrison,” said Haynes, shaking her head in disbelief.

*Mother of Pearl* was named the summer selection for the Oprah Book Club in early June. A whirlwind trip to Chicago for an “Oprah” tv appearance followed. (A flight was already booked for the following day when Haynes got the call.) “It's all happened in a month. It hasn't really sunk in yet,” said Ray Haynes.

An initial press run of less than 10,000 copies was set to launch Haynes's first novel; a modest regional book signing tour was planned. But Oprah's imprimatur blew that plan out of the water. The June 21 *Publishers Weekly* reported that Hyperion had 710,000 copies in print. Haynes makes a return visit to the “Oprah” show



Melinda Haynes

around Labor Day, and there's talk of a 12-city national tour. The paperback rights have sold, also audio rights, Australian rights, and the large print edition. Negotiations are underway for the screen rights and names like Morgan Freeman and Kathy Bates are being tossed about.

It's hard to know what's reality and what's imagination and which is more unbelievable. “I look back and say ‘what if’ this or that hadn't happened. What if I hadn't gone to get my hair cut that day that Sue Walker (University of South Alabama English department head) sat next to me and told me

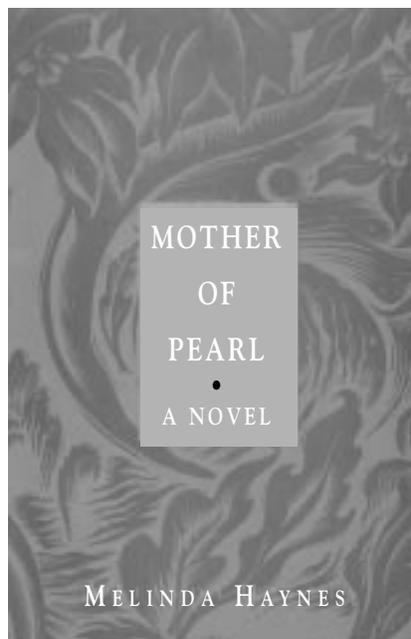
about *Poets & Writers*? What if...so many things,” Haynes voice trailed off.

What is real, unmistakably, for her is the writing. “When I'm inside myself writing the only rule is to be honest to my characters,” she said, and her voice rang with strength and deep love for the beings she conjured from the depths of her soul. “I tried to write with a dictionary by me, but that didn't work. I worried too much about the external world and I had to give that up. I had to write the story for me,” said Haynes, “whether or not anybody else ever read it.”

Many, many people will read *Mother of Pearl*. Haynes and her characters Even Grade, Valuable Korner, Joody Two Sun and the others have

burst on the scene like Fourth of July fireworks. But Haynes is a steady, resourceful woman who worked hard to write her first book, and started the second “totally different” novel when the first was two-thirds done. Maybe she hadn't been north of Atlanta before she flew to Chicago to talk to Oprah, but she's lived a rich life, much of it in books. First others', now her own.

“You're for real, aren't you,” Wendy Weil said to Haynes. And she is. 



## Fifth Annual Literary Arts Awards & Scholarship Competition

# Young Writers Recognized

In its fifth year AWF's **Literary Arts Awards and Scholarship Competition** for high school students received 900 entries, up from 500 the previous year. "The growth of our awards program coincides with an increased awareness in Alabama of the importance of writing skills and creative expression among students. Prizes, scholarships and recognition show that we value excellence in the literary arts," said **Jeanie Thompson**.

Creative Nonfiction was judged by **Michael Martone**, director of the Program in Creative Writing at the University of Alabama and author of *Seeing Eye, Pensees: The Thoughts of Dan Quayle*, and *Alive and Dead in Indiana*. Fiction entries were judged by novelist **Carolyn Haines**, author of *Touched*, *Summer of the Redeemers*, and *Shop Talk*. Haines was a 1998 recipient of a literature fellowship from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Drama entries were judged by **Barbara Lebow**, whose play *Lurleen* (page 8) is showing at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Poet **Peter Huggins**, Auburn University instructor of English and author of *Hard Facts*, judged poetry.

Five \$500 college scholarships were presented to seniors who submitted outstanding portfolios of work. **John Kingsbury**, professor of English at the University of North Alabama (UNA) judged the portfolio competition.

The winning poetry and several fiction pieces are printed in full in this issue of *First Draft* (page 11). Selected works show a wide variety of interests and styles. Look for more information on entering next year's competition in the fall *First Draft*.

### SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

**Blaire Rebecca Newhard**, student of Denise Trimm, Alabama School of Fine Arts (ASFA), Birmingham



Judge John Kingsbury (third from right) selected portfolios of the five scholarship winners (left to right) Blaire Newhard, Camille Henry, Charles Johnson, Shana Markham and Casey Moore.

**Casey Moore**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA

**Charles W. Johnson**, student of Mary Ann Rygiel, Auburn High School

**Shana Markham**, student of Susan Deas Reeves, Sidney Lanier High School (LAMP), Montgomery

**Camille Henry**, student of Denise Trimm, ASFA

### LITERARY ARTS AWARDS BY GENRE

First place winners received \$150; second place winners received \$75; "Judges Special Recognition" winners received a certificate. A plaque with the names of winners and teachers is presented to each winner's school. Winners also receive books by the judges.

### 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

**SEE CHAPBOOK  
BEGINNING ON  
PAGE 11**

FROM THE ALABAMA WRITERS SYMPOSIUM IN MONROEVILLE

# EDUCATION & THE POWER OF STORIES

*Bradley Byrne, State Board of Education member, addressed the Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville on May 8, 1999.*

*Following is the text of his remarks.*

This is a wonderful conference for our state and we are very proud that Alabama Southern Community College, one of the schools we govern, is hosting it. We on the Board are grateful for writers, storytellers, scholars, and writing instructors, and for what you add to our educational system.

The contemporary author Reynolds Price has said, "A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species Homo Sapiens, second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives."

From the earliest days of civilization, stories have defined who we are individually and as a culture. Homer, Sophocles, and Aeschylus defined ancient Greece with their stories, plays, and poems more than Pericles and Solon with their laws.

Jesus' preaching is unparalleled, His moral teaching is the greatest the world has ever known, but when He wanted to describe God's love or the concept of forgiveness, He told parables, simple but powerful short stories. He knew that stories contain the most profound truths.

Down through the years, Dante and Shakespeare, Milton and Cervantes, Dickens and Fielding, Melville and Twain, Tolstoy and Dostoevski, Yeats and Joyce, Hemingway and Faulkner, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou have done more than entertain us.

Plato and Rousseau were right. Stories help mold us and define who we are, deep inside our culture, deep inside each individual.

Therefore it is right that we should be very concerned and deliberate about the stories we tell. Our children are told trashy, violent, and ultimately empty stories every day by our modern so-called enlightened culture with its mindless sit-coms and soap operas, its

sensationalized news media, its blood and sex-drenched movies, and its popular music with lyrics that are just plain bad.

The antidote to this cultural emptiness and poison is the beauty of great literature. Deep, moving, and provoking stories built on the great truths of life are desperately needed to rescue our children from the darkness of our own age. And there is no institution better situated to tell

these stories than our schools.

Robert Coles, in his own book, *The Call of Stories*, said it well. "A compelling narrative, offering a storyteller's moral imagination vigorously at work, can enable any of us to learn by example, to take to heart what is really a gift of grace."

A state like Alabama, which has produced such great writers like many of you, and Winston Groom from my hometown of Mobile, Walker Percy and Fannie Flagg from Birmingham, and Nell Harper Lee from here in Monroeville—such a state owes great stories to its children.

So thank you for what you do. It's important to our children, and indeed, to all of us.



*(From left) Bradley Byrne, State Board of Education, Mary Tucker, Marva Collins, former State Senator Ann Bedsole, and Alabama Southern Community College President John A. Johnson.*

Katie Lamar Smith



FROM THE ALABAMA WRITERS SYMPOSIUM IN MONROEVILLE

# Excellence in Education is Marva Collins's Watchword

“Excellence and responsibility, taught through love, becomes a habit.” That’s the philosophy of **Marva Collins**, a native of Atmore, Alabama, who has taken her no-nonsense, respect-yourself approach to education around the world and who brought it back home in May when she spoke at the Alabama Writer’s Symposium.

Collins, who grew up in Monroe County, said she was blessed with a family that believed in the importance of education and literature. She recalled her Aunt Ruby at their dining room table reading *Macbeth* aloud, studying to complete her high school degree. “I really didn’t understand it at the time,” said Collins, “but it stuck.”

Collins credited her family’s commitment to personal achievement and education and the firm loving support of her teachers as the reason she thrived despite being educated in a segregated school system that limited the access of African-American students to books and even the public library. She attended Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia, (“It never occurred to me that I wouldn’t attend college,” she said). After graduation she taught in Alabama, then in Chicago’s public school system for 14 years.

Frustrated with the quality of education that her children and others were receiving, she opened Westside Preparatory School in her home in 1975. The initial enrollment of six children included her own son and daughter. Collins’s methods produced great success with difficult-to-teach students including learning disabled,

problem children and even one child who had been labeled “border-line retarded.”

Collins was featured in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, on *60 Minutes* and *Good Morning America*, and was the topic of a CBS movie. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush both asked her to be Secretary of Education, but Collins declined because she wanted to remain at the forefront of education—in the classroom and in schools. Today she lectures and gives seminars around the United States and the world. She has received many honors including some 44 honorary doctoral degrees. Her experiences and methods are contained in two books, *Values* and *Lighting the Candle of Excellence: A Practical Guide for the Family*.

## TEACHING EXCELLENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE

Collins contends that effective teaching requires making daily “deposits” so that every child can become a lifetime achiever and will not go through life faced with “insufficient funds.” She also believes that investments in children must come from many sources, including parents, educators and their community at large.

Teaching children to take control of the small things in their lives, such as keeping a neat desk, will help them control the bigger things, Collins says. She noted that the tragic shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado were symptomatic of the lack of expectations that adults have for children, and the lack of adult involvement in their lives.

Collins is a firm believer in personal accountability and believes “there is a great difference between discipline and punishment.” Instead, her philosophy promotes setting guidelines for children, teaching them to make their own decisions and showing them that they must face the consequences of those decisions.

Collins noted that literature has always been a huge part of her life, and should be an integral part of the lives of children. Incorporating literature into family life has made a lasting impression on her children and grandchildren, she said. 



Katie Lamar Smith

Association of College English Teachers of Alabama president Harry Moore, Alabama Humanities Foundation Executive Director Bob Stewart, Phillip Beidler, winner of the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for Distinction in Literary Scholarship, Alabama Southern Community College President John A. Johnson.

Katie Lamar Smith, a freelance writer from Auburn, wrote this article and shot photographs for First Draft at the Symposium.

**MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE 26**

# YOUNG LIVES IN WORDS AND PICTURES

“Make a picture of who you are without showing your face” was an assignment Priscilla Hancock Cooper and Suzy Harris gave the young women in the AWF “Writing Our Stories” program at the Chalkville Department of Youth Services (DYS) facility. The girls’ black and white photos and accompanying text panels were exhibited at the Birmingham Museum of Art’s Sonat Gallery during May.

Harris, the museum’s assistant curator for art education, has worked on similar projects in Birmingham-area schools since 1996. “Usually we give students the camera and they shoot on their own, but the (Chalkville) girls had to stay in a group and take pictures during class, all within the security perimeter,” she said. Often several girls stood side-by-side and photographed the same object from slightly different angles. Yet the individuality and originality of the work is striking, according to Harris.

The girls chose the images they wanted to write about from contact sheets. “At first we got descriptions like ‘this is the pond by the pool.’ But soon they were able to make up interesting stories about their images,” Harris said. In “Wondering,” which Harris called



Shown in the Birmingham Museum of Art gallery during a reception for Chalkville girls are (left to right) Gail Trechsel, museum director; Jane Baker, principal of Minor Junior High School, Priscilla Hancock Cooper, poet and creative writing teacher; and Mary Ann Culotta, director of arts education for the Jefferson County School System.

“powerful and disturbing,” a student is pictured lying in the grass. Her writing explores death and concern for her future. Other work expressed the loneliness and isolation of girls separated from family and friends. A pregnant girl exposed her swollen belly in a photo made by a classmate.

After several months in Cooper’s creative writing classes, the girls had learned to use writing as a positive outlet for their troubling emotions. “It’s tough enough being a teenager, and many of

these girls are dealing with issues of abuse, neglect, sexuality, and some of them with caring for and rearing their own children,” said Cooper. Harris commented, “They wrote on a deeper level than the other students I’ve worked with, and during class they sat right down and worked and produced a lot.”

The girls and their families were guests at a reception at the museum on May 2. None of the students had been there before, they said, and they were amazed by the art, the building, and the fact that their work was displayed prominently. The experience gave them a new perspective on the meaning and importance of art. “So much of life is on a pass/fail basis and these girls have known their share of failure, but this was an opportunity to express their uniqueness and be accepted for it,” Harris said.

The 22 photographs and narratives in the exhibit will be including in an anthology that Cooper is editing from the student work produced during her nine months of teaching. “Writing Our Stories” is funded by DYS through a contract with the Alabama Writers’ Forum.



(Left to right) Chalkville Superintendent James Caldwell, AWF Board Member Bettye Forbus, and Chalkville Principal Jerrell J. Barbee view photographs by the “Writing Our Stories” students.



## FROM THE FIELD

## Twelve Good Men and True

by Bill Perkins

I got tapped for jury duty recently under unusual circumstances and, surprisingly, I welcomed the experience. I was attending the Alabama Writers Symposium in Monroeville, and was sitting with other participants on the lawn of the old Monroe County Courthouse waiting for the first act of the town's annual production of Monroeville native Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* when a gentleman dressed as a 1930s Southern sheriff walked toward me and my friends.

"I'm Heck Tate, and I'm the sheriff here in Maycomb," he said. "I'd like to ask you to serve on the jury in the Robinson trial."

What an invitation. Anyone familiar with Harper Lee's story knows Tom Robinson didn't "have his way" with trashy Mayella Ewell, and that he got railroaded. The opportunity to change history—or Southern literature—or at least to hear the story with a juror's ear—was too good to pass up. I leapt at the chance, and old Heck filled out my summons.

After Act I, John Hafner, Larry Allums, Peter Huggins and I joined the rest of the jury for an instructional meeting beside the gnarled roots of a centuries-old live oak. Sheriff Tate outlined the rules of the *voir dire*. "Be attentive and follow directions," he counseled. "Don't lean back too far in the chairs or you'll be thrown out into the floor," he added. He repeated this a time or two.

Then he pulled his wallet from his sheriff's britches and took out a tattered piece of paper. He looked us over and asked who our foreman was. Peter, Larry and I pointed at John, who wasn't quick enough to point to someone else. "Here's your verdict," the sheriff said, handing the paper to John. "Don't try to change it, because the judge is gonna go with the real verdict no matter what y'all say. They tried that in Israel and London. It didn't work."

It seemed the only danger in this jury box was the old oak chairs. Old Heck neglected to warn us that if you sat on the back row and leaned back too far, you'd be dumped out the second-story window.

I imagine the people of Monroeville who filled this jury box decades ago were accustomed to danger. Like other jurors, they walked a treacherous line between truth

and travesty. But the travesty here was that our jury was a shell, and that we had no choice but to return the predetermined verdict: Despite the indisputable evidence to the contrary presented by literature's most noble attorney, Atticus Finch, Tom Robinson would be found guilty. He would be sentenced to the state penitentiary, and he would die trying to regain his stolen freedom.

I've been exposed hundreds of times to Harper Lee's classic tale. I know the story as well as I know any story. But as I sat in the cavernous courtroom and watched these people of Monroeville play out their town's pageant, I had

the chilling realization that in the small-town South in the 1930s, a black man accused of "having his way" with a white woman would hear no verdict but guilty, even if the entire First Baptist Church choir stood up for him. That was Harper Lee's point, and time has not diminished it a bit. What those of us in the jury box that warm Friday really wanted was to change the social climate from which her story sprang.

In the years since Harper Lee pulled that famous story from her soul, *To Kill A Mockingbird* has become one of literature's most dissected stories,

and each examination reveals something new.

What would this work have offered had the jury seen Bob Ewell for what he really was, and had those 12 folks had the gumption to see justice through? Bob Ewell would have eventually been put on trial himself, and Tom Robinson would have gone on back to the poor section of town. Ewell may or may not have been convicted, and Robinson might have found himself spirited away by the lynch mob anyway. Scout, Jem and Dill would have missed a valuable lesson and Boo Radley would still be hidden away in the scariest house in the neighborhood. If the verdict had been different, Harper Lee's story would likely have been forgotten on history's dusty bottom shelf.

Harper Lee told a good yarn, and in the process created a work so richly textured and multifaceted that the millions who have read and re-read the story of the Finch family won't ever figure it all out.

The story tells us there is indeed a price to pay for living in our society, and that no one—not the fictional Tom



Part of the 1999 cast of *To Kill A Mockingbird* waiting to enter the Monroeville courthouse for the trial of Tom Robinson.

Kate Lamar Smith

## GOVERNOR HONES POETIC SKILLS FOR ASF GOVERNMENT APPRECIATION NIGHT

Because many of the programs at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival are made possible through the generous financial support of city, county and state government, ASF annually hosts an evening to thank officials from the City of Montgomery, Montgomery County, and state government. This year the event took place on March 24, and included a reception and a preview performance of the play *Lurleen*, by ASF playwright-in-residence **Barbara Lebow**. Guests were greeted by **Winton M. "Red" Blount**, theatre benefactor, and his wife **Carolyn**, for whom the theatre building is named, along with **Kent Thompson**, ASF Artistic Director, and **Jim Scott**, Chairman of the ASF Board.

In brief remarks before the performance, **Governor Don Siegleman** cleverly wove the evening's themes together and delivered his lines as if he had rehearsed them well:

Ladies and gentlemen, I bid you listen keen  
For I am just a Governor whose poetic skills lean.  
"I will gravitate my voice so that I will roar as gently  
as any suckling dove; I will roar you as 'twere any  
nightingale." [A *Midsummer Night's Dream*]  
We are about to witness a story of power and love:  
Lurleen and George Wallace and their historical tale.  
"The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the con-  
science of the King." [Hamlet]  
Not tonight, my dear audience, for tonight is the  
evening of the Queen.  
"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any  
other name would smell as sweet. So Romeo would  
were he not Romeo called." [Romeo & Juliet]  
A Wallace without the name would still be a victor  
of insurmountable feats. As was Lurleen, who made  
Alabama enthralled.  
"Here we will sit and let the sounds of music creep  
in our ears, soft stillness and the night become the  
touches of sweet harmony." [The Merchant of Venice]  
Tonight we will learn of Lurleen's courage, strengths  
and fears; tonight we will see a woman who served  
Alabama with pride and dignity.  
"Her life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in  
her, that Nature might stand up and say to all the  
world, 'This was a woman!'" [Hamlet]  
Lurleen's legacy is everlasting, such a soft-spoken  
winner, that all in this great state must recognize and  
hail her as a governor, wife, mother, and woman.  
"Let me tell the world. The time of life is short; to  
spend that shortness basely too long." [Henry IV]



(From left) State Senator Larry Dixon, Governor Don Siegleman, Montgomery County Commissioner Bill Joseph, Montgomery Mayor Emory Folmar, and Winton "Red" Blount at the pre-performance reception for *Lurleen* during Government Appreciation Night at the Carolyn Blount Theatre, home of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

She knew and lived and suffered with dangers of this  
sort, but her life must not be seen as a sad mournful  
song.

"Merrily, merrily shall I live now under the blossom  
that hangs on the bough. O brave new world, that has  
such people in it!" [The Tempest]

It's plain to see that those who made her merry love  
even now—love her every day, every hour, and still  
every single minute.

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women  
merely players. They have their exits and their  
entrances." [As You Like It]

She has not left the stage—this woman for whom we  
said our prayers, for her brief life impacted many  
historic instances.

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that  
struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is  
heard no more..." [Macbeth]

The Shakespeare Festival company of ladies and fel-  
lows will be heard more on this brief history page,  
for our memories of Lurleen will be hard to ignore.

"The text is old, the orator too green." [Two  
Gentlemen of Verona]

Please accept what I've told, for I'm just the  
Governor, my poetic skills lean.

The play opened to much acclaim on March 26, and  
is, in the playwright's words, "About the dynamics of a  
woman in her own evolution. It focuses on her struggles  
and personal triumphs. This is not a play about George  
Wallace." It runs through July 24.



# Lurleen: BARBARA LEBOW'S (RE)VISIONARY PLAY

by Chella Courington

“She was something else entirely,” comment the women friends of Lurleen after her death. “She was two people—a dream flyer and a wife/mother”—explains the Kabuki women’s chorus. And thus opens Barbara Lebow’s two-act play *Lurleen*, running at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery through July 24. The play spans the years from 1942 when Lurleen Burns, 15 and a recent high school graduate, meets George Wallace through 1968 when she at 41 is governor of Alabama and dies of breast cancer. Her story is typical in many ways of the male-defined, middle-class, white American woman from the 1950s who generally was viewed as inferior to the male. She married after high school, became mother and caretaker, and enabled the husband to pursue a profession, and other interests, outside the home. This sexist arrangement frequently resulted in the woman’s double consciousness—her split between public and private selves, between the obedient wife/mother and the outraged female.

Lebow’s (re)visionary treatment articulates the unspoken desires of the private Lurleen—the woman who wanted a college degree in nursing, who played the piano and sang, who identified with women across lines of nationality and color, who wanted to fly both literally and figuratively. One of the most telling scenes in the play comes when Lurleen, as the First Lady recovered from surgery, takes a flight lesson. Welcomed back on the ground by her women friends singing “Off We Go, Into the Wild Blue Yonder,” Lurleen responds: “We broke free, and I felt weightless like an astronaut....I wish I could have been the pilot.” The connected themes of freedom and flight characterize her hidden self as she yearns to walk outside the shadow of Mrs. George Wallace.

*Lurleen* is a memory play framed by the remembrances of female friends and embodying the thoughts and emotions of Lurleen as imagined by the playwright and based on research and interviews. Lebow dramatizes Lurleen’s subjectivity and interior life against the backdrop of her public life. The play’s most exquisite technique is the Kabuki women’s

chorus who give voice to Lurleen’s concealed desires and strength while signifying the social mask(s) imposed upon her. The Kabuki roles are assumed by the actresses who also play her friends and domestic employee as they slip in and out of Japanese masks and costume. In the beginning when Lurleen talks about becoming a nurse, the chorus tells her: “You won’t be a Japanese wife, walking ten steps behind your husband. You won’t be invisible.” With this remark they prophesy her emotional growth within the play. In the first act she moves from the sixteen-year old bride, afraid that her

husband is “going to swallow [her]” to the angry wife/mother who confronts him about family negligence and adulterous behavior. Realizing that she has turned into the invisible wife, Lurleen leaves him, takes the children, goes to her parents’ home, and considers divorce.

Soon after the second act opens, Gerald Wallace, her husband’s brother, entreats Lurleen to return. She agrees to do so only under certain conditions: her husband must treat her with the respect due a wife. During this act she begins to discover her own strength as she moves from First Lady to the Governor of Alabama. Describing her appearance before the state legislature, she discloses:

“I’m 40 and just finding out what I can do. We won’t be invisible anymore.” But an untimely death cuts short self discovery. She asks the Kabuki women: “What do you think of people dying in public? I want to tell everyone how angry I am.” Their advice: “Your job is to die like a lady.” And later the female friends, no longer masked and remembering Lurleen, observe: “She missed growing old and becoming herself.” The connection with Japanese women also reaches across time and genre. Lebow opens and closes the play with the 1906 song “Poor Butterfly,” recalling Puccini’s 1904 opera about a Japanese maiden who is married to and abandoned by a heartless American sailor. When he returns to Japan with an American wife, Butterfly stabs herself to death. The American rushes to her side, but his concern is too late.



Monica Bell and Conan McCarty as Lurleen and George Wallace in the ASF world premiere production of *Lurleen*.

ASF/Scarsbrook

Continued on page 28

# NEWS

## AWARDS & HONORS

### HAFNER APPOINTED TO LITERATURE CHAIR

Spring Hill College has appointed **Dr. John H. Hafner**, professor of English, to the Altmayer Endowed Chair in Literature. He is the first to hold the position which was established in December by Mobilian Nan Altmayer to recognize someone who has fostered an understanding and appreciation of literature through teaching, scholarly contributions, and creation of literary works. Hafner will use the support to complete a study of Mobile novelist Mary McNeil Fenellosa, revise his own short stories for publication, and prepare a three-volume collection of readings for Mobile's tricentennial celebration.

### YOUNG POETS TO READ AT HANDY FESTIVAL

First and second place winners of the W.C. Handy Poetry Contest will read their works at the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library during this year's Handy Festival, August 1-7. High School Division winners included **Laura Landrum**, Muscle Shoals High School, first place; **Adam Bickhaus**, Bradshaw High School, second place. First place in the Middle School division went to **Kristin Smith**, Anderson Junior High School; second place was won by **Syrah Simon**, Riverhill School.

### HACKNEY WINNERS

During the **Writing Today** spring conference at Birmingham-Southern College, winners were announced in the Hackney Literary Awards. In the state short story contest **Wendy Reed Bruce** received first prize; **Lisa C. Bailey**, second; and **Jimmy Carl Harris**, third. All three are from Birmingham. In the poetry division, **Rosemary**



Tom Franklin, right, holds the Edgar Award he won for *Poachers* and accepts congratulations from Paul Bresnick, his editor at William Morrow.

**McMaha**, Huntsville, took first prize; **Amanda Murray**, second and **Barry S. Marks**, third.

Novel postmark deadline for this year's contest is September 30, 1999; deadline for short stories and poetry is December 31, 1999. For detailed guidelines, call 205/226-4921.

### YAKETY YAK

**Charles Ghigna's** latest book for children, *See the Yak Yak* (Random House), has been named a Book of the Month Club "Main Selection" for the fall.

### HAMILTON, RICHARDS WIN STATE LIBRARY AWARDS

**Virginia Van Der Veer** Hamilton is the recipient of the 1999 Alabama Library Association's Author Award in Nonfiction for her *Looking for Clark Gable and Other 20th Century Pursuits: Collected Writings* published by the University of Alabama Press. The collection of essays and articles is the sixth book by Hamilton, professor of history emerita and former chair of the history department at the University of Alabama Birmingham.

**Judith Richards**, Fairhope, received the Library Associations's annual award for literature for her fifth novel *Too Blue to Fly*. (Longstreet Press, 1997).

### TEACHERS WRITE

Three University of South Alabama students received awards at the Gulf Coast Association of Creative Writing Teachers Conference hosted by USA professors **Jim White** and **Sue Walker**. **Cody Roy** won second place in graduate fiction and **Sam Wilson** placed third in creative nonfiction. **Jeremy Maxwell** won second place in undergraduate fiction. More than 100 writers from 50 universities attended the conference. **Jim White** founded the organization seven years ago.

### ASFA WRITING PROGRAM FINDS A PARTNER IN OUTREACH

"Last year we started a writing contest, a reading series and our students began mentoring elementary kids," said **Denise Trimm**, creative writing program head at the Alabama School of Fine Arts (ASFA). Trimm recently completed her first writer's camp for seventh and eighth-graders, another new project. "We worried about putting our whole budget into outreach—but this year it has come back to us multiplied," she said. ASFA's "Write Now!" program has been awarded a three-year, \$75,000 educational development grant from CVS Pharmacies.

ASFA's work with elementary schools has drawn a great deal of praise and interest. "Writing assessment is one of the elements of the elementary Stanford Achievement Tests, so schools are looking for ways to improve in that area," said Trimm.

### JACKSON'S WORK RECEIVES HERITAGE AWARD

The Landmark Foundation of Dothan has chosen author and columnist **Barbara Ritch Jackson** as a recipient of its Heritage award, which is annually presented to a person, organization, or business that has made a significant contribution towards preserving the heritage of the Wiregrass region.

*Continued on page 10*

The award was given for Jackson's book, *For I Heard Them Say, An Alabama Odyssey*. More than a family history, the book combines recollections of family life with reflections on growing up in a small, post-World War Two southern town.

### THE ZORA NEALE HURSTON SYMPOSIUM

Chella Courington

"Zora Neale Hurston was an individual genius but also appreciated the collective genius of African-Americans," said Professor **Robert E. Hemenway**. He was a featured speaker at the Zora Neale Hurston Symposium at the Birmingham Public Library on Saturday, May 1, from 9 a.m. until noon. The brainchild of **Georgette Norman**, executive director of the Alabama African-American Arts Alliance it was sponsored by Auburn University Center for the Arts and Humanities, AWF and the Alabama Humanities Foundation. The Symposium brought together Hurston's three biographers and involved them in a conversation on the author's life as she lived it and imagined it in her novels and autobiography. The three biographers were Hemenway, who wrote the 1977 *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, recognized as the standard Hurston biography; **Lucy Ann Hurston**, Zora Neale Hurston's niece, who has written a forthcoming book drawing on family memories of her aunt; and **Valerie Boyd**, who is researching and writing *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, scheduled for publication in 2001.

The biographers raised the slippery issue of the connection between



(Left to right) Millie Anton Skinner, Janet Mauney and Loretta Cobb sign copies of *Belles Letters*, a recent publication from Livingston Press, at a reception and book signing at Highland Booksmith in Birmingham. The event was attended by more than 20 of the Alabama women writers whose work was featured in the book.

fact and fiction. To what extent is biography the product of a past, historic moment and a present, literary moment? To what extent is biography shaped by the kinds of questions asked at a given time? How does a particular moment in time affect interpretation of fact? When asked about the "facts" of Hurston's life, Lucy Hurston answered: "We don't look for Zora in her autobiography. She lies like a rug. We look for Zora in her literature." Boyd, on the other hand, said that *Dust Tracks on a Road* is a more reliable autobiography than given credit for being. She went on to say that Hurston, though born in Notasulga, Alabama, always considered the all-Black town of Eatonville, Florida, as home. Along with Hemenway, Boyd and Hurston

spoke candidly and passionately of their search for Zora, responding to questions from the audience.

More than seventy-five readers of Hurston were eager to learn more about the Alabama-born writer. They wanted to talk about her novels, particularly *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; her relationship with her patrons Mrs. Mason and Fannie Hurst; her opposition to integration; her anthropological work collecting the folktales of African-Americans; and her romantic life. The exchange between the biographers and the audience was lively as conversation about Hurston extended into the breaks.

*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 Street, Montgomery, AL 36130-1800. Phone: 334/242-4076, ext. 233; Fax: 334/240-3269 email:awf1@arts.state.al.us.

## 1999 LITERARY ARTS AWARDS WINNERS' CHAPBOOK



Poets present for the awards ceremony were Amethyst Vineyard, Kate Hazelrig, Peter Huggins (judge), Adele Austin, Meredith Johnson, Paige Poe, John Burkhardt, and Casey Moore.

*First Place, Poetry*

### MY FIRST AND LAST ARS POETICA

*Amethyst Vineyard*

It's like swimming at night.  
 At first, confidence  
 as you peel off shirts  
 and muddy socks,  
 pull pants from  
 long white legs,  
 leap in from sun-bleached  
 boards. And, for a moment,  
 under the surface,  
 the faces of mermaids  
 and slick seals' heads  
 swim up, the water  
 fills you in, the cool brush  
 of weeds folds over your  
 forehead. Breaking through  
 to oxygen, you remember  
 snakes, the clumps of  
 drowned grass ready to  
 hold you, the insects and  
 bodies that can be avoided  
 in daylight, your watery  
 nightmares of flippered  
 fish-babies. You swim  
 to the pier with stiff  
 arms, the boards splitting  
 into hairs under the dark,  
 and when you pull yourself  
 from the water, there is only  
 you, pale and naked,  
 with the moon staring  
 at your back.

*Second Place, Poetry*

### EXHALE

*Shiloh Booker*

My fingernails press into plastic curls  
 of the phone cord, making indentions.  
 My mother's voice falls through the receiver  
 like snow outside,  
 telling me she misses her little girl,  
 not asking if I'm holding myself together, now.

I close my eyes,  
 my sigh pushes against the phone,  
 and Momma asks if I'm okay.

The clouded breath reminds me of us  
 walking my brother to school,  
 careful not to fall on the ice.  
 We'd push air out, fast and hard.  
 "It's really smoke  
 from the dragons inside us.  
 The cold air brings them to life," she'd say.

Her voice in the phone drifts away  
 like the mist from our mouths.  
 I lay the phone on the cradle  
 and walk outside.  
 Winter air shocks my lungs,  
 waking my dragon,  
 then curls around my neck  
 and folds my arms against each other.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

### A TRIP ON THE ST. MARX

*John Burkhardt*

Sound of metal against gravelly soil-  
 the canoe slips into the glassy water.  
 I scramble madly,  
 the canoe shakes, rattles, rolls.  
 I sit down suddenly, and the canoe settles itself.  
 My brother jumps into the front.  
 We paddle out, avoiding the green in the water,  
 which is 68 degrees all-year round.  
 We paddle furiously upstream,  
 to gain ground against the gushing river.  
 On closer inspection, the green is grass.  
 Flowing, waving, blue-green;  
 grabbing the canoe with vegetable fingers.  
 Cormorants, fiery red bills, black and gangly,  
 explode from weeds under a moss-saturated Live oak.  
 Our backs and wrists ache from exertion:  
 about face and drifting downstream.  
 The surroundings make my eyes clearer,  
 clarity and definition are appreciated with  
 Beauty as rich as this.  
 Cypress knees protect the banks with jagged rigidity.  
 A huge bird swoops from above,  
 flaps and then glides overhead.  
 "Was that what I thought it was?"  
 I stand in awe,  
 and the king of all birds flies overhead.  
 The bald eagle swoops up and lands,

grasping a branch with its golden talons.  
 We begin to approach it,  
 and it swivels his gleaming bald head towards us.  
 He pierces us with his eagle eye,  
 and crashes off the branch.  
 He follows the flow of the river,  
 and fades into the dusk of north Florida.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

### ARRIVING—A GHAZAL

*Paige Poe*

Through the skin they read the signal.  
 Intricate web, the parts of their body.  
 I see you swim, breathing water like  
 a heavy perfume full of dense roses.  
 A blind child traces her face.  
 He smears her lips in scarlet.  
 Fingers rising like mercury.  
 Irises the blue of new flames.  
 Leaves are the color of blood,  
 of pulsing consciousness.  
 Dilated by new rain, cells  
 of dew begin to slip from leaves.  
 Between the mouth and the glass  
 a breath escapes, a survival.  
 We are red. Like servants' clothes,  
 we press rough against each other.  
 Winter spreads against the trees,  
 dry as skin. He searches for cardinals.  
 Hands are frozen against me.  
 The water stills and dies like marble.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

### LACE AND MARY JANES

*Meredith Johnson*

I.  
 Her fingers weave red lace around roses,  
 arthritis spreading through unsteady hands  
 as she places plastic stems in baskets.  
 I watch from across the room  
 where I make flower jungles out of lilies.  
 Old records crackle in the background,  
 and I tap my black Mary Janes against table legs.

II.  
 She sits on the floor  
 with flowers spread around her in a circle.  
 The phone rings and she leaves the room.,  
 complaining about the noise.  
 She then hums quietly to herself  
 because the record player won't work.  
 She doesn't notice it isn't plugged in.

I stoop to pick up roses thrown across the floor,  
 hoping she won't notice my hands  
 trembling more than her own.  
 We steady each other  
 as I lead her to her chair.  
 I teach her how to  
 weave red lace around roses.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

### feeling with E's (an ode to e.e. cummings)

*Josh Lovvorn*

the E and the E are feeling, only  
 since feeling comes with E's  
 and breaks apart the world  
 into shapes, colors, and feels  
 kisses are better than knowing  
 for a kiss is just a kiss  
 enjoy life for the feeling  
 cuz knowing with just confuse  
 wisdom tries to arrange  
 knowing becomes much E'sier  
 but what's the point in knowing  
 if you can never feel  
 wisdom tries to explain  
 the feels are only axons  
 why would i want to know  
 much less understand  
 wisdom knows all the knows  
 but it's E'sier just to feel  
 syntax would make it E'sy  
 and where's the fun in that

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

### BLUE LINES

*Kate Hazelrig*

I have a pink bow on my mailbox,  
 Because of my grandmother,  
 Who went to work  
 In a time when mothers stayed home.  
 Because of my mother,  
 Who served my father  
 In a time when women went to work.  
 Because of the thousands of Chinese and Turkish girls  
 Never brought into the world.

I have a pink bow on my mailbox.  
 For the flush our bodies held  
 After making love.  
 For the sorrow your eyes held  
 When I couldn't make you love me.  
 For the looks I received of disgrace  
 From people no better than I.  
 For the pain and the blood,  
 The screams that caught in my head  
 And burst like fireworks  
 Creating so many tears.  
 For the loneliness I felt in that cold room,  
 And it was only my baby  
 Who came to comfort me.

I have a pink bow on my mailbox.  
 For the rosy lips, like tulip petals  
 That encircle my breasts for their  
 Primitive meal.  
 For the tearing of the flesh  
 And the pouch my stomach has become.  
 For all those who told me not to  
 And for those who said there was no other way.

I have a pink bow on my mailbox.  
 Not so much that I want others to see  
 But that you'll see it and stop by.  
 For the father that my daughter will never know.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

## COMING HOME TO MAMA'S BISCUITS

*Casey Moore*

We don't need another  
 Batch of tomato gravy.  
 There aren't biscuits enough  
 For the first pot.  
 But mama's got the thin juice  
 Trickling down her wrists,  
 Working the red pulp like  
 Raw cow udders.

Something's happened on the TV.  
 Daddy just  
 Wiped dust off his glasses and  
 Let the recliner up.

Mama juices faster and  
 Faster and the  
 Ham turns smoking-black  
 In the oven—nobody  
 To watch it.  
 Tomato water  
 Streams down her apron creases,  
 Puddles next to  
 Batter crumbs on the floor,  
 Seeps under cracked linoleum.

The war ended  
 Two years ago,  
 Just after my big brother  
 Came home dead,  
 Face full of Cowboys and Indians.  
 I shot him once  
 With a wood pistol,  
 He lay twisted in the mud,  
 Jaw sagging.  
 I screamed.  
 He sat up and held me  
 In his hard, freckled arms,  
 Laughing,  
 Until I felt the  
 Heat of his pulse again.

His coffin shone blacker than  
 Our Chevy, cleaner than  
 Mama's polished porcelain  
 On the coffee table.  
 I touched the surface and  
 My fingerprints disappeared.  
 They lowered it down  
 With white carnations,  
 Too delicate for a boy  
 So tough. I threw in my  
 Wood pistol and it  
 Made a sound on the metal  
 Like the gook gun that killed him.

The TV's full of  
 Government preachers again,  
 Break-ins and documents.  
 Nixon's promises fall  
 Like communion crackers  
 In our living room, and  
 I try to pick them up.  
 I want to hand them all  
 Back to mama, tell her  
 Jimmy's not dead,  
 It's just another scandal,  
 But Daddy sounds off the verdict

From the den:  
 "Nixon's a crook  
 And our boy's dead  
 For nothing but a bloody wad of cash."

*Judge's Special Recognition, Poetry*

## THE AIR-WHALE

*Adele Austin*

There is a whirring behind me.  
 Turning, it is the purring  
 of a little air-whale  
 nuzzling about the walls  
 and ceiling.

A silver balloon with motor and propellers—  
 tails with three fins.  
 It is smooth as black pianos  
 and as bare.  
 No place for eyes  
 staring through water  
 at slowly swimming divers.

Placid rover, a whale.  
 bred miniature and airborne  
 but a whale, still,  
 with the ocean's vast serenity.

In the barn-shaped kitchen  
 it nestles at the high ceiling  
 and is silent.

The boys scowl upward, shake the control,  
 growl about ladders and batteries.

As they move away, I see  
 a rubber-gloved hand stroking rubber-like skin,  
 divers riding a flipper as a silent glider,  
 a darkness heavy as curled-up sleep,  
 long flukes vanishing into deep blue caverns.

*First Place, Fiction*

## ONE FLEW NORTH

*Casey Moore*

Clarence cried once when his hygiene products were lost in Niagara Falls. He'd been leaning over the rail a bit, with his Naugahyde travel bag clutched to his chest, thinking how he wished his sink faucet had that kind of powerful, Godly pressure, when his younger sister Georgia, who brushed only once a day, bumped him from behind. All of his personal items spilled out into the bubbly distance.

"Georgia," he screamed, but could not speak after that, for he envisioned the stand-up tube of extra-strength pearly-whitening baking-soda formula with its flip-top as it found its new home beneath the violent pounding of water. Pounding and pounding and molding its soft plastic sides into hideous shapes, the water would come and never stop, but eventually the tube would, *Oh Jesus*, the tube would burst and that sensuous minty nectar would spread like the ashes of an important man through the dark, silent water.

He was distraught in a most profound way. And to boot, his parents suggested he might skip brushing for a day.

"Clarence, my boy," his father boomed, pastrami hands caressing his own breasts, "you might just skip brushing for a day. Marigold, tell your son he's being obstinate."

"Yes, Clarence," his mother offered, I never see you without that bag of toilet goodies. It might do you good, psychologically I mean, if you'd learn to relax. Skip brushing just this once. We'll go to Piggly Wiggly when we get home, and buy you a brand new toothbrush."

*Clarence knows that there is something really stupid-looking about toothbrushes. The little clusters of bristles, make him feel like he's brushing*



In the fiction category, AWF Executive Director Jeanie Thompson (second from left) presented prizes to (left to right) Joy Fields, Casey Moore, Blaire Newhard, and Matt Barron.

his teeth with the head of a baby doll. And he's never liked baby dolls, anyhow, especially when his anus-of-a-little-sister cuts the hair off to the base, leaving the peach plastic underneath. But he brushes his teeth anyhow, no matter how the doll's skull bumps around inside his mouth. He brushes them thoroughly.

"What about my damned toothpaste," Clarence asked. "My good toothpaste. And my dental floss, minty-wax, also the good kind. Hmm, and um, what else? Possibly my *fluoride*? You don't mess with my *fluoride*. Nope, not the fluoride." He stared down into the abysmal resting place of the tube, and molded an expression of acute agony onto his face. "It's gone. Down in Hell's watery canyon of death. Down with the bodies of the little children who leaned too far over the railing. Down with the—"

"Clarence!" his mother screamed. Her hands rested in a fold of hip fat and cotton shorts. Sweat trickled down from her armpit to her elbow. She turned toward the father and asserted her breasts at him. "Howard, your son is a maniac."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me, it was *your* genes that did it. Your little infantrymen marching along my uterus chanting their crazy war songs. My genome is just fine, Howard, and your son is a maniac."

"Your genome? My *infantrymen*? Whose mother, may I ask, served time in the Mississippi pen for exposing herself at a live stock auction during the crossbred pork special?"

"Howard, really—"

"And didn't she also strip down in the middle of a stockcar track just before the flag? I think they had to call the race—"

"Howard —"

"Mother, father, my canines are wilting. My molars are crumbling into gelatin."

*When he brushes he must keep the spearmint foam monster from escaping his lips and dripping down his chin, even when he's alone. He likes to have clean lips while the toothbrush is moving, so he seals them tightly around the handle. Tightly, tight, very, very tight, he hums to himself while the medium-flexibility bristles scratch against his enamel. It is a good scratch, and the bleeding gums are a good sign. Better too much than not enough, Clarence knows.*

"Mommy, all this water is making me have to pee," Georgia squealed as she jumped up and down with her legs crossed.

Marigold did not answer her children, but stared a hole through Howard's face. "My mother? I seem to recall a certain Easter brunch, Howard, with a certain Jell-O mold, Howard, shaped like a giant, erect—"

"She didn't know. She bought it from a traveling salesman."

"A traveling *Jell-O mold* salesman, father?" Clarence asked. He enjoyed listening to his parents argue, and wasn't above giving the discussion a slight push if it happened to slow down.

"Shut up, Clarence." Howard let his hands droop from his breasts. He felt around his waist for the tops of his pockets, but his gut hung over too far, and the slits were buried under it

"Howard, I don't think I like the tone you just used with my son." Marigold pulled her shorts out from her crotch and leaned over to massage a bulging varicose vein across her knee.

"Marigold, a few moments ago he was my son. My maniacal son." His nose let out a wet snoot.

"Howard, I don't think I appreciate the tone you just used with me."

"Bite me, bitch-head. Put that in your Valium bottle and swallow it."

*His father, Howard, has sweaty, wool-covered teeth, like a wrestler, and his mother Marigold's teeth were clean but as yellow as urine from a dysfunctional kidney. This is not acceptable.*

"Mommy, daddy, I just tinkled all over my shorts and it's getting down into my socks. It squashes when I walk—listen..." Georgia stomped around, leaving dribbles of yellow on the white concrete. A small crowd had formed during the genome discussion. This development quickly dispersed them.

"Georgia, honey, your good new Keds..." Marigold bent down and removed Georgia's shoes, then dumped each one and hit the sole with the back of her hand to get the extra liquid out.

"Well, you can't blame *that* on me, can you?" Howard said. "You're the one with the bladder problems. I'll never forget our wedding night, *Jesus*, and not because of the romance either. I've never heard of anyone having to get up to pee in the middle of—"

"Not in front of the children, Howard!" She slammed her hands against Georgia's ears, who rolled her eyes back and started to scream,

Howard yelled over her, "You make it sound like they don't know anything about sex. Why do you think we took the time to explain all of it? *Demonstrate* some of it even?"

Heads turned as if magnetized. Marigold whispered into Howard's ear, "It's too early in their development for a full primal scene. I just thought—Christ, Howard, what if they turn out gay? What if they strip naked every time they see an Indian in a baseball cap—?"

"Enough, already, mother, I am perfectly adjusted," Clarence said.

His mother turned on her heels. "Clarence, shut up."

Howard put his hands on his hips. "Hey, you told *me* not to tell him to—"

"Shut up, Howard. Shut up. *Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.* Nobody say another goshdanged word." Clarence stopped grinding his teeth. Georgia stopped squeezing her socks out. Howard put his hands back on his breasts and rubbed frantically. Marigold stood for a moment like a defiant turkey, her neck stretched up and backwards and her legs shifting back and forth without the knees bending.

Then something happened. Marigold held her hand to her heart and staggered back toward the railing.

*Brush, brush, brush your teeth! Brush, brush, brush your teeth! La la la la la la la la la la! This song comes on the television sometimes, and Clarence watches the man in the giant dental floss costume for hours. He has the whole thing on videotape.*

Marigold put one loafer on the bottom rail, then the other one, and curled her cowhide arms around the iron until she looked like she was tied there. Like she was a big, white sign that read "Do not stand too close to the edge."

Then she straightened out her body and stood, stomach pressed against the bar. The bottom button of her blouse went first, then the next one up. Slowly, she unfastened each one, while her family stood staring at the place where the failing water beat against the river.

"I am a good mother," she groaned, "I always point the pot handles to the back of the stove."

She lifted her arms, and showed the tourists her clean-shaven armpits and pretty brassiere, the off-white one with a tiny sunflower embroidered between the cups. She held her position like that, letting her fingers play with the thickness of the air, collecting beads of water in her palms. The wind dried her throat, and she swallowed again, and again.

"All I wanted was for someone to tell me, 'Marigold, you are my one and only. Love me Marigold, bear me a child.' Then I would, and the child would say, 'Mother, you've done damned good job of raising me.' That's all I wanted. I deserved that."

The men and women in their summer outfits turned away to look at the trees.

Howard did not try to cover her. He did not acknowledge her nakedness. He only took Georgia by her wrist to the park area to clean up. He looked at his wife across his shoulder as he walked.

Clarence turned his back, crossed his arms, and licked his teeth like a madman. He could feel the tiny rough spots forming across his smooth enamel. After a moment he uncrossed his arms and let them slip down to his thighs. He turned to look up at his mother, who stood crucified with Niagara falling across her chest.

"You know," Clarence said, "people have tried to ride the falls in all sorts of things. Barrels, crates, even plain rafts."

"Your father doesn't think I'm fit to raise the two of you."

Clarence paused. His teeth actually hurt. He couldn't stand this much longer. "We've gotten this far, haven't we? I mean, maybe we aren't completely together, but we're still alive, aren't we? You don't have to do everything."

"Look at me, I'm naked in a national park. My six-year-old daughter's just wet herself, my husband's just screamed about sex, loudly, and you, Clarence ... Clarence your tongue is moving like a piston. What the hell are you doing?"

Clarence brought the tongue motions back down to survival mode, just a few casual licks when she stopped looking. He puffed his chest up, cocked his head, and put his hand on Marigold's shoulder. "Mother, all I need is toothpaste. Good toothpaste. If you can get me some good toothpaste, I'll need nothing more from you. You will have accomplished your duty as my mother. Good toothpaste, that's all."

*Teeth must be squeaky when you rub them with your thumb. Teeth are the instruments of survival, the grinders and tearers of meat, the exposed bones of happiness. They aid enzymes in the breakdown of foodstuffs. Teeth are your little white friends all lined up in a row.*

She looked at him like a cow looks at a calf that's just fallen out of her body. She ran her finger along his jaw line and felt his teeth through his cheeks. Then she stood up and climbed over the rail. She hung on with one hand, and with the other, pointed down into the swirling water.

"I'll get your toothpaste, honey, if that's all you need." She let herself fall backwards.

As he watched her body sink into the mist Clarence whispered after her, "It's in a stand-up tube, the kind with a flip-top."

The mist rose to a level just below where the onlookers stood. It was like they were standing on top of a cloud that wasn't supposed to be there. They were angels surfing the heavens in Hawaiian print shirts.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Fiction*

## THE WAITING ROOM

Matt Barron

Raymond watched out of his window as the sun's broken rays flashed through the pine trees across his face. He thought about nothing in particular as he stared at the slowly passing countryside. He was playing a game inside his head; he tried to blink his eyes every time the sun came out of the shadows. For all outward appearances, he was bored. His mood this morning was beyond boredom. He was never bored on Sundays, because he felt an atmosphere of peace and unusual stillness. His usual mildness became silence that he was unwilling to break. He enjoyed the silent warmth of the sun on his face and the low rumble of his family's car as they drove over the broken and tarred road that led to their church. Raymond enjoyed the drive to church much more than church itself. In church he would have to wear his uncomfortable dress shoes, and sing with the rest of the children, though he hated to sing. Today he would have to listen to the sermon on some worldly sin for which the unsaved would burn in hell. About this topic he had mixed emotions. He had never been baptized; and he sensed that although he went to church almost every single week, he was still one of the unsaved. He could not believe that God would save the few hundred people of his church, and leave the rest of the world to bum in hell.

"What about all the children in China?" He thought.

He knew they weren't all Christians, yet his mama prodded him into eating his squash and beans by telling him that children there were starving.

But what did it matter to them if they starve? They were all going to hell anyway. He did not see how eating his beans would ever, in the grand magical scheme of things, help them. But he ate his beans anyway, to please his mama. The only fun part of his day would be his Sunday School class. He had one or two friends there with whom he could talk if he did not mind being scolded by his teacher. In reality, he did not see the point in Sunday School either. He never learned anything about God, either in Sunday School or in sermons. He wondered what the point of church was if he didn't learn about God. He figured that the older, adult classes learned about God, and that he would too someday. But then, he thought, he would have to hear the sermon every Sunday.

Sometimes his family left because his father was tired. He hoped they would leave today. He did not want to sit through a sermon. He hated sermons. They were too long, and he wanted to fall asleep during worship, but his mother never let him.

Soon they arrived at the parking lot of their church, the Southern Baptist Church of Elmwood. Raymond put on his shoes, and got out of the car with the rest of his family. His mother was in a hurry, as usual. She was always complaining that they would be late to church, but Raymond assumed it was normal because they were always late. He gazed over the parking lot at all of the shiny new cars of the rest of the congregation. He watched a few other families, who were late also, walk through the parking lot. As they entered the church, his mother and father left him to go to their classroom. Raymond never knew where his class was being held. So he waited for someone he recognized from his class to walk through the lobby.

Finally, he saw his parents' Sunday School teacher walk across the lobby toward the halls where the classrooms were, and he ran to catch up with him.

"Hello, Mr. Nebermeyer," Raymond called out to the briskly walking figure in the black suit.

"Why hello there Ray, how've ya been?"

"Pretty good. Do you know where my Sunday school class is today?"

"The rest of your class is in room 240, downstairs, I believe. You better hurry up and get on down there."

"Thank you, Mr. Nebermeyer."

Mr. Nebermeyer was nice. After Sunday School Raymond went to his parent's classroom and Mr. Nebermeyer let him have a leftover doughnut.

As Raymond walked into his class, they were talking about people they knew who needed the congregation to pray for them. Jimmy said that his aunt had cancer, and that she needed everyone to pray for her. No one else knew anyone who needed a prayer, so Andy stood up and said that his brother had broken his arm on a fourwheeler the other day, and so they ought to pray for him to get well. Raymond sat down next to Jimmy. Jimmy was a kid from his school although he never talked to Raymond outside of Sunday School.

After Sunday school, he went to his parent's classroom as he always did. Today they were waiting outside for him.

"Are we going to sermon now?" Raymond asked.

"No, son," his father said, "We are going to visit your grandmother."

His grandmother lived in a nursing home: St. Mary's in the Cedars. Ray did not like to visit his grandmother. She scared him, and the smell of the nursing home made him sick. His grandmother's face never moved. Her eyes just followed him around the room. She could not talk, but she tried to. She grunted when she was trying to talk. It made Ray cringe to think about it. But he could not tell his mother that he did not want to go. He felt ashamed of his disgust. He knew that he had no choice in the matter.

"Ok, let's go," he said.

They left the parking lot in silence and drove the thirty minutes to his grandmother's nursing home. He hated talking on Sundays, when the air felt still. He wanted everything to be quiet.

They arrived at the nursing home before church service for the elderly had ended. He did not like the waiting room either; it was painted a nasty yellow, and the paint was cracking and stained near the ceilings, as if the roof leaked all around. There was an empty, dingy aquarium in the middle of the far wall, and underneath it the linoleum was peeling. Raymond fell asleep after a few minutes, since nothing held his attention. His parents woke him as the service ended.

They stood up as the patients exited the chapel. Inside he could glimpse the old pews, and the preacher walking off the dais. Raymond's father walked in and rolled his mother out. She stared straight forward with a stony expression. That face bothered Ray. He knew that, as a result of her disease, she could no longer move her face. Still, he loathed that unchanging expression. Soon they took his grandmother down the yellow hallway to her cloister-like room.

"Hi Mary," Mr. Hornsby said, "Are you feeling alright?"

"I know you can hear us. Say hello, Raymond," his mother chided.

"Hello Grandma. How are you?"

He gave his grandmother a kiss on the forehead and a short hug. He looked into her eyes, and saw her blank expression. But he knew she had heard him, and he knew that she could understand. It was as if she was trapped behind a wall. Her immobile face was like stone, she could not force it to talk. But he was scared. He was scared because of the closeness of death. It waited behind her wrinkled face. It lurked in her silence. Her room smelled of death. Its previous occupant had died of a liver disease last fall.

"Would you like to watch television?" his father asked.

She grunted.

"Ok," his father said as he turned on the thirteen-inch television that was on top of the dresser. It received forty channels, but only one worked. *Wheel Of Fortune* was playing right then. Everything beyond that was static.

"Mama," he asked quietly, "Mama, can I go outside?" He did not have any interest in anything outside; he merely wanted to get away from that stony face.

His mother sighed, "Yes, you can go outside, don't wander away."

He walked out of the room, and shuffled down the hallway to the room where all of the people whose families did not come to see them sat and waited, talked, or gibbered at each other. A few of them even played solitaire. He was afraid of them too. Forlorn and forgotten, they reminded him of animals at the pound; no one cared about them in their senility. They reminded him of the kitten he had seen playing between the wheels of cars at a stoplight. He pushed the thought out of his mind.

He walked past the attendant, who was reading a magazine, and out the glass door. He took a seat on one of the green iron benches. The cars on the freeway interrupted the peaceful songbirds chirping, but it did not matter to him. He was pensive and still. He let his thoughts wander lethargically through his head. His thoughts turned again to the little kitten. It had been a pathetic thing, with dirty orange fur. It had been playing in traffic like his aunt's cats played in her livingroom. It rubbed its tail up against the tires of a car, as if it wanted to be friends and play. The cat didn't know that the car wasn't a toy or a new person. It could not even comprehend the fact that the car might kill it. Its innocent mind had no concept of its own death. The thought of the kitten made him uneasy, so he pushed it out of his mind.

Raymond soon grew bored. He went to the car to see if he had left a book or something with which to busy him. There was nothing but a cheap paperback New Testament. So he returned to the iron bench and sat down. An old man came outside, and sat down beside Ray. The old man's palsied hand cradled his dark walnut cane that was crooked and wavy, and pulled up his trousers as he sat down. He looked like the World War Two veterans Ray had seen on the local news, watching T.V. in the home for veterans. He took out a crumpled pack of Camel cigarettes, and held a cigarette between his thin, tightly stretched lips as his shaking hand attempted to light his yellow tarnished silver lighter.

He said to Ray, "Son, when I was your age, I woulda been scared to come to this place. It's ugly, an's got all these old people."

"Excuse me?" Ray said. The old man paid no attention to him.

"My Louise is in there. She doesn't think right, she doesn't recognize me anymore, thanks to the Sickness."

"The Sickness?" asked Ray.

"My Louise has the Alzheimer's disease. I reckon I'm gonna have it too, one of these days. By then there ain't gonna be no one to come visit me, anyway. So, what brings you here? Got a Grandmaw in there?"

"Yes. My Grandmama has Parkinson's," Ray answered.

"Mighty sad to hear that, son. I bet she was a fine lady in her day. My Louise weren't never very fine. But I loved her, and that was enough." He paused and gazed sadly at the brown leather contour of his shoe, "Son, I'll

tell you a secret. I hate this place. It has the smell of death. It's just like in the hospital. Good people sit in here, waiting to die, while no one comes to see them, not even their own families. Their loved ones just forget about 'em, stuck here in this place. Their grandmaw's and grandpaw's is just old, sometimes they can't move very well, but they appreciate the love of their sons and daughters and husbands and wives. Meanwhile they're stuck in there like a hospital waiting room, only all's they're waiting for is admission into that next place. It's a waiting room all right, a waiting room for death."

Raymond thought again about his grandmother, and about all of the people inside sitting alone. He suddenly felt a wave of intense sadness and pain come over him. He felt sorry and guilty for all of the people inside, just as he had felt for the little kitten. The feeling washed over him. It was the same feeling that always made him uneasy when he thought of the kitten. It was anguish and helplessness mixed together and tossing him around like the sea did at the beach when Raymond was only four years old. It caught him in the throat and in the stomach, and he couldn't move for the pain of it all. He realized that his grandmother, that smiling face that had always been there, was going to die. Then the thought that he had dreaded came, the thought that hovered around the edge of his mind when he thought about the kitten, that always made him push the subject away. Someday, he would die too. He felt afraid, and helpless again.

"Well," said the old man, "I guess I had better go back inside. I just came out here to have a smoke. Nice chattin with ya." With that, the old man was gone. Raymond sat, unable to move. He barely whispered a goodbye to the old man.

A few minutes later his father and mother appeared at the door.

"Come on Ray, its time to go home," his father called.

Ray stood up, walked with them, quiet as usual, and sat in the back seat of his family's car. As they drove home, Raymond listened to his parents talk. He followed the low tones of his father's baritone, and the thin clarity of his mother's alto. He listened, and he was glad for the break in the silence. He asked his mother what was for lunch.

"Oh, we're having rice and gravy, roast beef, corn . . ."

*Judge's Special Recognition, Fiction*

## TODAY IS WEDNESDAY

*John Seay*

"I dream, therefore I exist."—J. August Strindberg

"Give me back my youth!"—Goethe

Today is Wednesday, my wall-mount calendar tells me from across the room. I would have known even if I had not thought to glance mechanically at the neat little white boxes with the dates and pictures of tropical islands which I will never visit stuck in the top left corner. The truth is that I have known for quite a few days now that today would be Wednesday. And tomorrow, barring any bizarre act of nature, will be Thursday. Or so my experience tells me.

I know also that tonight is meat-loaf and tapioca. I know that tomorrow is fried chicken, the next day is vegetable soup, and the day after . . . well, who wants to look so far into the future? I prefer instead to cross my wrinkled hands across my motionless legs and think of how things used to be, before the accident. Before my future was etched out in stone under pink meal menus, *TV Guides*, and the two braces which have encased my shattered legs for some forty years. I prefer to remember back to when I was young and vital. And unaware of what my future held for me—even then. . . .

I remember when we sat on Grandpa's cold cement steps well into the night. Until the moon was firmly planted directly above our heads and the hordes of crickets began their incessant chirping. He would talk for hours of Jellyroll Morton and Jackie Robinson and Alabama sharecropping. Listening intently, we would tuck our elbows by our sides and ring our hands around our bony knees, drawing them close to our chests for warmth.

The night was always so beautiful then, I thought. Before my accident. Grandpa would laugh as we would run across the yard catching fireflies in our hands, giggling with excitement as their magic illuminated our faces. In old pickle jars we would watch them for hours until the next day; when

morning would find them at the bottom of the jar, dead. I would cry, but soon forget the incident and look forward to the night when we would begin our game anew, not realizing that you kill something beautiful if you try to hold on to it all by yourself

As a boy I wished I had wings like the firefly. I would run as fast as I could across the yard with my arms held stiffly out, parallel to the ground. With eyes closed I would leap into the air and, in my mind, go sailing through the clouds. Feeling the wind lap against my cheeks. How beautiful it was then to be a young boy. How beautiful it was to believe that perhaps, if I ran hard enough, if I bit my lip tight enough, I could sail into the sky and live forever above cotton candy clouds.

But my dreams, as well as my brother's, would exceed our energy and we would stumble wearily back up to the concrete porch where Grandpa would laugh and pat our heads as we entered the modest house. Often, while laying in bed, I could hear him whistling and rocking in his favorite chair, under the stars. I would strain to keep my eyes open just to hear him rock gently back and forth, but each blink increased the difficulty in maintaining this endeavor. Finally, my tired lids would yield to sleep and I would surrender peacefully to the night.

Morning would bring Corn Flakes and hot bacon, made by Grandma. Sam, my oldest brother, would pour mounds of sugar into his bowl until Grandpa, with a wink, would tell him that so much sugar would turn him into a giant sugar cube. I remember that smell. That indescribable delectable smell which greeted us every morning. That smell of home. And family. I miss that smell, sometimes when I sit alone. I miss that house and my nights of freedom and companionship.

Now I spend my days staring out into the sky by my room, remembering those crickets and my foolish dreams. I wish I could dream now, sometimes. But experience has told me that my dreams will never come true. Not anymore. I have seen the fireflies. I know that I can never stretch my wings against the sky and feel the wind against my face. Not now. Not since the accident.

No longer do I dream of running across the yard and eating home-grown watermelon down to the flavorless white rind. Now, all I have are my magazines and my television, which gives me my stale dreams in neat thirty minute intervals. Now I have air conditioning and hot water and my nurse regulates my sugar from pink and blue paper packages. Now I am old.

I try sometimes to convince her to, just once, let me indulge my sweet tooth and drink that thick glucose paste that I remember at the bottom of my cereal bowl at Grandpa's house. She just smiles and wheels her cart away. She thinks that because I am old, I am infantile. She treats me like a child sometimes, but then that is her job. I only wish that she would sometimes let me tell her about my first baseball game, before there were grandstands and multi-million dollar contracts.

I tried once to tell one of my brothers, who came to visit me. But he only stared at my legs and the floor and never looked into my eyes. Not once. I cried when he was gone. I told him he did not have to come visit me. I told him I was doing fine. I told him the nurse treated me nice and the headaches never bothered me so much.

Sometimes I wish I could tell him the dreams I used to have, before I am too old to remember them. Sometimes I think that my dreams are suffocating inside my mind. Sometimes I believe that if I tell someone, I can grow stronger. That I can dream again. But I am old. Experience tells me that no one wants to come and sit and listen to a crippled old man try to recapture his dreams in a dusty pickle jar and watch them glow faintly before they all die out.

Who knows? Like I said before, today is Wednesday. Tonight is meat-loaf and tapioca. Tomorrow is fried chicken. And the next day and the next day and so on and so on, like clock work. But now I wish to think not of such things. Now, I want only to rest so that, visiting the corridors of my youth, I can build a thousand new dreams. One at a time.

*Judge's Special Recognition, Fiction*

## A CANDLE'S FLAME

*Joy Fields*

She stood in the center of the ring of candles, her face lit by the eerie glow of fire. She hugged her arms close to her body and shivered as gunfire sounded in the streets below. Sitting down, Mira reached for her worn and tattered prayer book and fingered the pages gently. She strained to read the tiny, black letters printed in Hebrew across its musty pages. The little room was small, without windows, and only lit by the candles glowing from their glass holders on the floor. It had been a while since its last use, and was now completely covered in a film of dust and dirt. The sounds of children laughing and adults telling stories and a mother rocking her baby to sleep with a soothing lullaby, had once filled it and gave it life. Then, with the threat of war in Poland, the little room had been turned into a secret place to hide, just in case it was one day needed.

Mira, the only one of her family still alive, was in hiding from the swarms of Nazis that ravished each town and captured each Jew they could find. When the Nazis had come to her town of Warsaw, Poland, they burned, destroyed, and claimed everything. All Polish Jews were rounded up and piled into big trucks. Others were killed on the spot from the bullets of Nazi guns and hauled away in the lorries. The earth was stained the crimson color of blood. Mira had watched as her older brothers were taken away on the trucks, while her parents and grandparents were shot. She had remembered the small room hidden behind the kitchen in their apartment, now made only accessible by a concealed, removable board. She had fled that day to it, and there she would stay and wait.

But, now the only connections she had to the outside world were the frequent rounds of gunfire, screams, and few traces of smoke from burning buildings that managed to crawl through the cracks in the walls and floor. Sometimes she even feared that the building would get burned beneath her. Every now and then, footsteps on the stairs below brought Mira into a state of complete fear as she held her breath, silently praying she wouldn't be found.

That night, she dreamed as she tossed and turned on the little spring mattress against the wall. Mira dreamed about the camps she had heard of and the thousands of Jews who were dying there at the bloodstained hands of the Germans.

*She was standing at the window of one of the women's barracks, holding a candle in one hand. The wind was cool and crisp, but brought the raw aroma of death and Mira had to grip the windowsill to steady herself. Inside a small girl walked to the window and stood there looking at Mira with glossy, brown eyes. Her face had no expression and no color left in it. Her eyes were big and round as she glanced down to the candle that Mira held in her trembling hand. The girl's mouth slowly formed a word and then went back to a thin line. Mira tried to understand her. Had she said "HOPE?" But, the girl had disappeared back into the shadows. A gust of wind came and stole the flame from the candle...and Mira was left in darkness.*

Mira awoke in a cold sweat and sat up straight. Three of the candles in the circle had gone out. Nine still glowed as wax trickled down their sides creating little ridges down to their base. She walked over to the three that had gone out and lit them with a match from her box. Momentarily all was silent and she realized it was still night outside. The Germans had stopped their terror until morning, when the next line of tanks would come through. She took a seat in the ring of candles and gazed at one of the flames that burned from the little wick, admiring its color as it danced in the air.

*Mira found herself standing at the edge of a giant dirt pit. To her left were SS guards with rifles pointed to the line of Jews winding up the hillside. To her right, was an old man, shivering and naked, hugging his body tightly with bony arms trying to stay warm. Mira stood frozen with the image of the man in front of her. She couldn't move...and couldn't speak. His mouth began to tremble as he struggled to speak.*

*"The candle...it represents our hope...the flame represents our life... please don't take away the flame...."*

*As he finished his last word, a bullet forced him to his knees and he fell into the vast pit behind him. Mira fell to her knees and screamed out. No one heard her. She sat there and her fingers clawed at the soil.*



AWF President Brent Davis (second from right) presented awards to creative nonfiction winners Joyce Selina Momberger, Chris Lafakis, and Betsy Childs.

*"Oh, Jehovah...why this, why...?"*

*Tears choked back her words. A little girl stepped up to the spot where the old man had stood. Mira closed her eyes.*

She came to, startled by the sound of footsteps approaching fast. How long had she been sitting there? Mira jumped to her feet and ran to where the board opening was. She put her ear against it and listened.

Someone had come up the stairs and had run down the hall. She could barely make out some Hebrew words. Whoever it was, was trying to hide. They were trying to escape for their life. Mira held her breath as sweat glued her brown hair to her forehead. Hopefully she wasn't in danger just yet.

She was exhausted and when sleep did come at night, it was disturbing and terribly vivid. How many days had it been since the raid swept through the ghetto? How long ago was it that her family was killed and she had to hide in the little room? Every day was an eternity and every day moved closer to liberation or to death.

The days were filled with endless gunfire, screaming, and the sounds of tanks as they rolled their way through to the other line, taking more land and villages as they went...no one trying to stop them. The Germans were going to get their way and, right now, there was no one to tell them they couldn't!

The next night, Mira could not sleep. She was scared to sleep, but she wanted desperately to shut out the world that she had to listen to and hide from. In her dreams, there was another type of fear. It was the haunting images of her own people and her own race being brutally murdered. It was the images of those she had watched die, including her family. She could not seem to make the dreams stop. Even during the day, they were playing over and over in her mind, like a broken film projector. But her body was too weak, and she did not want to have to fight with herself to stay awake. So she gave in.

*This time she found herself standing in the middle of a set of railroad tracks. The sky was crystalline and the air warm on her skin. Mira looked down at her bare feet that were red and blistered from walking on the hot tracks. She didn't know where she had been or how she had gotten there or even where she was going, but she knew she had to keep following the set of tracks.*

*There were no signs that a train still ran on these tracks, because the ties were rotted away in places and weeds covered the space between the rails. She started to walk again and set herself at a steady pace.*

*Before long, she came upon a fence that started to run the length of the rails and continued on into the horizon. It was a tall fence, with barbed wire at the top. It was made to keep people in and everyone else out! Mira*

*walked and kept her eyes searching for any sign of anyone or anything on the other side. Nothing. Suddenly, she noticed some tiny figures off in the distance leaning on the fence. She saw what looked like an arm stuck out between the spaces, and now she began to run.*

*She stopped where the fence opened at a massive steel gate with a sign hung high above it. In tall, thin, inscribed letters it read, "Work makes one free." It was the gate to the entrance of Auschwitz, one of the concentration/labor camps. Just inside the gate stood a group of children.*

*They stared at her with huge, curious eyes. Some of them took a step closer to the fence. Finally, she walked up to it and ran her hand along the cold steel*

*A small, frail boy stepped up to the front of the group. "Are you our hope? Are you here to help us and to set us free?"*

*He stepped back as a girl pushed her way up to the gate to speak. "Thank you for keeping the candles lit. They give us hope...when we have nothing else. You have saved us, although you may not realize it. Your candles help us to make it through another day, with the hope that we will some day be free again and the Germans will leave us. Thank you, Mira!"*

*Mira stood there and stared at them and looked for some explanation...some understanding as to who they were and how they knew who she was.*

*"But, how do you know me? What do you want me to do for you... please, tell me so that I can help..."*

*"You are helping us, Mira. Each one of us is alive because of you and because of the hope and faith that you still have... you are helping us..." The young girl smiled at her as she turned to the others. They slowly began to fade, leaving her standing alone on the tracks, still reaching out to grip the metal of the worn gate.*

Gunshots pierced the air and rang in her ears, as she jerked herself out of the dream. This time, she had the feeling that she was in danger of being found. She crawled across the floor to the opening in the wall and peeked through the tiny crack. She could see nothing, but she heard footsteps of several men climbing up the stairway to her floor of the old apartment building.

She almost let out a scream as the door was kicked in and men stormed into the apartment. They were all screaming in their German tongue, so she couldn't make out what they were saying.

Just then, two of them entered the kitchen. She turned around putting her back against the board and faced the ring of candles.

"A flame for life...a flame for hope," she whispered.

Someone was running the barrel of a rifle along the wall checking for loose boards and cracks. She knew that she would soon be found and most likely killed, but she also knew that she couldn't keep hiding forever. Mira went and sat in the ring of candles on the floor and picked up her prayer book and began to pray.

"Jehovah, give me the hope...the candles must stay lit for them, and for me..."

Just then, the board concealing the entrance to the room was kicked in and light filtered through. An SS guard crawled through and aimed his rifle around the room, shouting again in German. He stood still and focused his eyes on the ring of candles and spit at them in disapproval and utter disgust.

"No one in there...just a ring of burning candles on the floor..." he reported to the others.

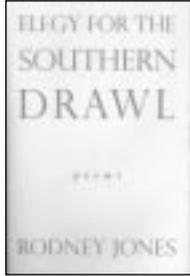
As the men stormed out of the little apartment and down the stairs, Mira opened her eyes and stared at the opening with tears streaming down her face. Rays of bright sun were flooding the room. She stood to her feet and looked down at the candles still burning bright. She began to sing in Hebrew. Outside the sound of fighter planes roared overhead. They were the planes of the Allied forces. 

# REVIEWS

## *Elegy for the Southern Drawl*

by Rodney Jones  
Houghton Mifflin, 1999  
112 pp. Cloth, \$20

Mr. Rodney Jones is a singing man, a jam-rock man whose “music is not sound but an engraving of silence.” He finds that voice inside the poem and listens while it sings through him “the beautiful/Tune of [its] ego.” In the book’s first section, “The Changing of the Present,” a drunken voice from the poem “Not See Again” recalls



how lucky I was  
To have gone broke, not to have it all  
regurgitated  
For me from some book, but to have lain  
in a field  
With the tongue-tied, the murderous, the  
illiterate,  
And the alcoholic.

This wonderfully generous voice is the magnetic power at the center of *Elegy for the Southern Drawl*.

In the second section voices from some old worrying with work and place sound like the “racket of crows.../In all their larceny, loud talk, and glitter-lust.” Most of the voices flitter, break wind, and die away, but one voice stays a constant concern for what poetry is, where it might be found, and who is reading it. That voice longs

for the true  
Reader, the one who vanishes into Joyce,  
The one who admires Hart Crane only  
for the sound,  
And the one who quit medical school  
To spend a year washing dishes and  
reading Whitman.

And that voice worries in “The Poetry Reading” that “perhaps the university is not the place for poetry.”

We turn a page, “catch a stray whiff,” and begin the center piece, “Elegy for the Southern Drawl,” a lament for the dead and dying, something gone and going, the way we saw it once, our folk from the past.

Everywhere in this section you can hear the voices of the dead slowly dying in our own ears. Again you hear

the hugging voice of a grandmother, “ya’ll gon spin the nite?” Jones seems almost desperate in his search for a place to store the past. He uses tales, jokes, stories, yarns, and legends, and he stuffs them full of voices living in a slow strum of time, pilgrims strung out along some dusty road going somewhere in Alabama, Mississippi, possibly even Tennessee. I can hear them even now in my father’s memory, “Big Jim Folsom promised to pave the roads, and he did.”

From somewhere way off a voice, perhaps in a dream, says, “if ya’ll don’t mind, I’ll go with you ‘A Piece of the Way,’” and we enter the fourth section of the book. Here the voice is haunted by “The great, trembling laugh of beautiful grief.” The lament for the dying, the leaving, and the not having been

risers now, among the dogwoods  
And through the ink of papers stacked  
on desks where flowers are forbidden.

Father, husband, lover shuffle, stumble, mutter into the cautious dismissal of uncertainty,

I do not ever cross  
A bridge but that whole histories of  
options  
Crop up like bubbles from the river’s  
bottom.

The real interest in this section is the father’s humble recognition of his inadequacy in the presence of the son’s huge and curious needs.

The final section of *Elegy for the Southern Drawl* is “The Sorrow Pageant.” Now, some facing up to do, some holding back the need to weep for all of us who know, or must learn, what it is

to be old, as though underwater  
And weighted with lead, you’d half  
A mind to struggle as you sank, and so  
Stumbled on, or crawled.

The darkness descends in this somber moment of knowing that we belong to this world in some very painful, tearing, and real way.

Read this book slowly and more than once. Listen to this voice that so subtly draws us into the human world of love and astonished anger, of fear and questions, and of utter dismay that we have so concocted our own confusion. This book is not only an elegy to something peculiarly southern; it is an elegy to something terribly human.

*Ed Hicks is professor of English at Troy State University and editor of the Alabama Literary Review.*

## *Detecting Metal*

by Fred Bonnie  
Livingston Press, 1999  
160 pp. Cloth \$19.95; Paper \$9.95

Fred Bonnie is an immigrant. He came to Alabama from Maine in 1974 and continues to write, in this his sixth volume of short stories, of both places. Of the twelve stories in this volume, six are set in New England, four in Alabama, one in both places and one nowhere/anywhere.



No matter the setting, however, this is Bonnie’s best book and every story is a winner. *Detecting Metal* has been named an “Editor’s Choice” by *Booklist*, and this puts it in very select company.

Of the twelve stories, two strike me as extraordinary. Appropriately enough, one is set in Maine, one in Alabama. The title story, “Detecting Metal,” sends the reader away with a sweet aftertaste. A fiftyish Maine farmer, George Stockton, who reminded me of one of Garrison Keillor’s Norwegian bachelor farmers, goes to the airport to meet Jenna Simmons, a girl he had a crush on in high school. She has been widowed for five years and “George could not help but wonder what she looked like now—and what she might think of him.” George has hopes. But George has never before been to an airport and has no experience with metal detectors. He is carrying in his overalls his watch, keys, a pipe cleaning tool, a miniature screwdriver set, an Allen wrench, a metal tape measure, his old volunteer fireman badge, and, of course, a large pocket knife. After one rejection by the security guard, George puts all his metal objects under his hat, on top of his head, thinking this might outwit the machine. George is ridiculous, but we already knew that and we have come to like him anyway.

“Rest Areas” is the most emotionally moving new story I have read in years. The narrator, Ben, a perfectly ordinary young man, is enlisted to help his buddy care for his old and dying mother, Opal. Ben drives Opal to her dialysis treatments, gleefully aids her in cheating on her diet—she is dying, after all—spends time with her, comes to know her, and finally comes to love her. Although they seem to have a gen-

uine sexual passion for one another, there is no physical dimension to their relationship; there cannot be. But they both sense that however unlikely it might seem, if she weren't ill, there would be. Like the "lovers" they are, they set out on a road trip to the beach, but they never make it. Opal dies in a rest area just south of Evergreen. When Ben delivers Opal's body to the emergency room in Mobile, the intern, a young woman, asks, "You her son?" Ben answers, "Boyfriend."

*Don Noble is professor of English at the University of Alabama and host of Alabama Public Television's "BookMark."*

### Poachers

by Tom Franklin

William Morrow and Co., 1999  
192 pp. Cloth, \$22

So much was said about *Poachers*, Tom Franklin's first book of stories, that I anticipated a major new talent. Then I read his *First Draft* reflection on the enduring relevance of Southern history, the importance of family, and other worn sentiments we've grown numb hearing. Then his book opened with yet another autobiographical reflection, again on Alabama and its importance in the writer's life. I



prepared to acknowledge another who lives by the front porch storytelling tradition of Mama and Daddy and Aunt Sophia.

But of course I was wrong. When Franklin writes that he comes to Alabama—especially “the wooded counties between the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers”—he sets the hook by admitting he's here to “poach” for stories. In strange and powerful and unexpected ways the poaching theme returns again and again. It's one of the many twists and turns that make for a fresh, exciting, exhilarating read.

The people in Franklin's stories aren't pretty, but they are real. His purpose in *Poachers* is to capture their stories before they disappear along with the old hardwood stands that are being clear-cut, hewn: poached. The opening story, “Grit,” with its amazing characters in a modern Snopes fable, offers the first of many great lines when Snakebite says: “If Michael Corleone waded

out in the ocean and [mated with] that shark (from *Jaws*), then you'd have old Roy.”

Most of Franklin's many great lines appear in the dialogue, though the stories have relatively few spoken words. When these characters speak, something is always being said. Relish the “pork chop” exchange between the drifter and the watermelon man in “Shubuta”; the cell phone call and the reminiscence on the lost son in “Dinosaurs”; the heart-rending conversation about cowboy business in “Blue Horses.” The dialogue is perfect. The settings are on target. Alabama is nailed down here by one who knows it. If you've been around, especially in that area *Poachers* inhabits, you know these things to be true.

And the details are rife. They're free-flowing and lurid and wild. Steeples on flatbed trucks, midgets at filling stations, cracked car batteries leaking into oil-stained sand. If there's one problem with these stories it's that Franklin sees everything, and occasionally an editor might rein in his enthusiastic eye for life and slow death. Nice problem to have. Then there's the long last story, “Poachers.” It's been nominated for lots of important awards and will probably win some. It's also included in a collection of the best mystery stories of the century. And on and on. That's because it's so good.

Tom Franklin is the most forceful new fiction writer I've read since encountering Larry Brown several years ago. The two have the hard edge and jagged truth in common, though Franklin ultimately takes the reader to a higher level of mystery and wonder.

There's a haunting contrast in the neat, tight “Triathlon” where Bruce leaves rubber on the highway with no other trace of himself. “But there's traces of me everywhere,” the narrator tells us. Tom Franklin writes with Old Testament wisdom, folding it in with the same excitement Adam must have felt when naming the animals. *Poachers* will shoot you through the mind and heart.

*George Littleton teaches English at Auburn University.*

### *A Messy Job I Never Did See a Girl Do*

By Mary Jane Ryals

Livingston Press, 1999

116 pp. Cloth, \$20.95; Paper, \$9.95

Geographically, the Florida Panhandle is not that far removed from

Alabama, but the landscape of Mary Jane Ryals is not necessarily land nor water but a state of emotion that is regionally specific yet universally true.

A collection of short stories, her book, *A Messy Job I Never Did See a Girl Do*, is like a series of drawings that can be rapidly flipped to create the illusion of movement. In many instances, her images are striking and brutal. Her language is a good match for those harsh images, sometimes crystal clear and sometimes deliberately muddled.



The characters in her stories are the women and girls who must find their way alone. Some by choice, others by circumstance. These are women without men, or so disconnected from the men in their lives that they might as well be alone.

For the most part, the characters are poor, and often young. Some of the most potent stories are set in the past and explore the difficulties of negotiating racial and male-female relationships. Ryals explores these themes with honesty and no apology.

Her language is both a joy and a bother. There are times when her chock-full sentences snag rather than flow. But when they flow, which is a majority of the time, they are like rapids, shooting fast and furious between the rocks. In describing the flood, she writes “all you could see was the pink light on the barge's bow and the broil and roar of the floodwaters, the humming under it like blood as it sliced and dissolved the face of this earth.”

In “Swallows Dance” the main character has found the man she loves. She “hangs in his carved out muscle arm” and finds a haven until flood and tragedy strike once again.

In my favorite story, “144” (a kids' shorthand for something awful), the protagonist discovers a terrible secret about her best friend. In this story, though, there is hope that the young girl will connect with her mother long enough to find at least some answers to human behavior and a bit of protection.

Ryals is a talented writer with a fine ear for the melody of the battered heart—and the words of the brain that try to heal us.

Carolyn Haines's novels include *Touched and Summer of the Redeemers*, as well as more than 25 mystery/intrigue titles.

***Under the Same Heaven: A Novel*  
by Marjorie Bradford  
Black Belt Press, 1999  
459 pp. Paper, \$17.95**

Any time a novel begins with a long list of characters and several different settings, one expects it to be slow going. However, Marjorie Bradford's *Under the Same Heaven* is so meticulously structured and her characters so well drawn that it is surprisingly easy to follow. It is also a very suspenseful book.

Waverly, Georgia, may be a small town, but it has more than its share of secrets, mysterious visitors, and unsolved crimes. It even has a ghost, for after his death in an airplane crash, Price Townsend, or "County Pa," the wealthiest, most powerful man in South Georgia, can still be seen guarding his game preserve. County Pa also continues to dominate the lives of his sons. By leaving his estate to Rudolph, County Pa made sure that Carlton would hate his brother, even to the point of stealing the girl he intends to marry.

However, *Under the Same Heaven* is one of those old-fashioned novels in which Providence is always at work. The hobo Will Fable publishes his book; Jake Potter is rescued from a life of crime and set up in a woodcarving business; the golf pro Jack Hamilton returns to his wife;

Carlton, reformed, makes up with Rudolph, and both of them end up with the right girls; the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. Unfortunately, Bradford's prose style is choppy, and her dialogue seems stilted and artificial. However, if one ignores those stylistic defects, *Under the Same Heaven* is an interesting read.

Rosemary M. Canfield Reisman, English professor at Charleston (SC) Southern University, co-authored Contemporary Southern Men Fiction Writers, published in 1998 by Scarecrow Press.



***The Voyage of the Encounter*  
by Sheldon Burton Webster  
Rutledge Books, Inc., 1998  
434 pp. Cloth, \$24.95**

In his suspenseful first novel, *The Voyage of the Encounter*, Sheldon Burton Webster, a Birmingham accountant by profession and a sportsman by nature, pulls his readers through a dangerous financial intrigue. His protagonist, Wall Street investment banker Peter Slade, is targeted for arrest by a vengeful Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigator for Slade's artful duplication of a colleague's illegal insider trading. The consequences of that arrest follow Slade from his marriage to a Rhode Island heiress through a romantic and business entanglement in Bermuda with an infamous madam.

The novel's pace and tension build with vivid and detailed descriptions of international banking scandals, an open-water yacht competition, and a life-threatening storm. Webster's writing, described by one critic as "Elmore Leonard with a dash of Sidney Sheldon," is marred by some technical flaws. Despite this, *The Voyage of the Encounter* affords readers a compelling insider's view of both Wall Street high finance and international yacht racing.

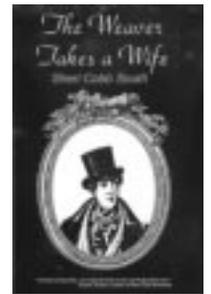
Lisa Brouillette is a writer who lives in Auburn.

***The Weaver Takes a Wife*  
by Sheri Cobb South  
Prinny World Press, 1999  
234 pp. Paper, \$12.95**

It is easy to understand why Regency romances are so popular with women readers. Like Cinderella, Pamela, and Jane Eyre, the heroines in these books labor on, unappreciated, until a wealthy aristocrat happens along, recognizes their true worth, and whisks them off to his world of wealth, privilege, and abundant hired help. Although Sheri Cobb Smith calls her new novel a Regency romance, *The Weaver Takes a Wife* is not typical of the genre.

In this case, the heroine is the aristocrat, the daughter of a duke, while the hero is an orphan without a pedigree. All that Ethan Brundy has to rec-

ommend him as a husband is the wealth he derives from his textile mill in Lancashire. However, since the father of the beautiful Lady Helen Radney has gambled away the family fortune, she has no choice but to marry Brundy. At first, Lady Helen is embarrassed to be seen with her spouse, whose manner of dress and speech, as well as his radical opinions, brand him as a man unfit for polite society. A session with a tailor improves Brundy's appearance; however, even to win the heart of Lady Helen, he will not alter his principles. It is Lady Helen who changes. At the end of the novel, she has become both a compassionate individual and a loving wife.



One reason the characters in *The Weaver Takes a Wife* are so believable is that, from the Duke and his friends to his Lancashire son-in-law to the little servant Sukey, all of them speak exactly as they would have in the Regency period. South is at her best when she lets her characters reveal themselves in dialogue. The response of members of a Tory club when Brundy attempts to defend the poor makes authorial comment unnecessary. Occasionally, the novel moves toward melodrama, but fortunately the author soon returns to her comic mode, or even to farce, as in the final episode. *The Weaver Takes a Wife* is really too good a book to be dismissed as a Regency romance; it deserves to be described as a novel of manners in the Austen tradition.

Rosemary M. Canfield Reisman

***Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage*  
by Dennis and Vicki Covington  
North Point Press, 1999  
214 pp. Cloth, \$22**

Dennis and Vicki Covington are acclaimed writers, Dennis for the ground-breaking book of literary journalism, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, and Vicki for three critically praised novels. Like so many writers of both fiction and nonfiction these days, they have turned their talents to memoir.

I date the blossoming of the new American memoir from the publication and unexpected popularity of two books published in the early 1980s, Eudora Welty's *One Writer's*

*Beginnings* and Russell Baker's *Growing Up*. Since then, the form has flowered in the literary marketplace and the national psyche. In less than two decades, memoir has diversified and matured into a full-fledged literary genre as capable of illuminating the human condition as fiction, poetry, or song. Memoir seems to have become the new literature of the masses. Experimental approaches abound.



As the title tells us, rather than being the usual slice of individual life written by the person who experienced it, *Cleaving* is the story not of one person and not of two but of the unpredictable two-headed oneness we call "a marriage." In alternating chapters, these two skillful writers chronicle the wayfaring of their troubled souls, their love for each other, and their attempts to anchor both love and trouble in the ever-absolving waters of their Christian faith.

Their two very different voices flash backward and forward in time, revealing the story of a love that began 25 years ago. It is also the story of alcoholism, a divorce, infidelities, abortion, depression, barrenness followed by the miraculous birth of two daughters, missionary travels, conversions, re-conversions, a thousand falls from grace, and two checkered careers graced by a shared love for the written word.

In writing their lives as sin, confession, and the quest for salvation, the Covingtons follow a tradition in Christian literature that goes back to the confessions of St. Paul and St. Augustine. The Covingtons fail that heritage only in their inability to provide the moral and spiritual reawakening that is required to put the seekers on a new path.

Readers of memoir look for a resolution that connects the writer's experience with their own and gives shared suffering new meaning. *Cleaving* offers a few glimpses of larger truths but nothing suggests either personal redemption or the salvation of the marriage.

One of the challenges of memoir is that you can't make up the ending. You have to wait for it. The Covingtons, as writers, are too honest to fake it.

*Cleaving* shows two gifted writers grappling with some of life's hardest lessons in a budding genre still too young to know exactly where it is headed. Those who want to see them at their best would be better served to read Dennis' *Salvation on Sand Mountain* and Vicki's *The Last Hotel for Women*.

Judith Paterson grew up in Montgomery. She is the author of the critically acclaimed *Sweet Mystery: A Southern Memoir* and teaches writing at the University of Maryland.

***A Pirate Looks at Fifty*  
by Jimmy Buffett  
Random House, 1998  
458 pp. Cloth. \$24.95**

A quick and easy gallop through Margaritaville, that fabulous fantasy world that Jimmy Buffett has created in his music, *A Pirate Looks at Fifty* brings to the pages of his half-century autobiography a journey into the Caribbean, through Costa Rica, down the Amazon, and into the islands.

As a Parrothead lover of this Mobile native's rendition of "Stars Fell on Alabama" as well as his own laid back ballads, it was easy for me to fly and sail with Buffett from the moment he leaves Florida until he sweeps back over the Gulf of Mexico, a restless fellow.



He tells about his long love affair with the novel *Don't Stop the Carnival* by Herman Wouk and his passion to turn that work into a Broadway musical, about his work with unique professional artists, friends, gringos, natives, living Boogie Nights and days.

He tells of a close call in Colombia, problems wherever he goes, and "another snowy day in Paradise" at the Cartagena International Airport. Need I say more? When the writer-singer of "Pencil-Thin Mustache" settles into prose, he flies.

Wayne Greenhaw's latest book, *Beyond the Night: A Reminiscence*, will be published in the fall of 1999 by Black Belt Press.

***But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*  
by Glenn Eskew  
University of North Carolina Press, 1997  
472 pp. Cloth, \$19.95**

On April 2, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fred L. Shuttlesworth launched a campaign of nonviolent protests in Birmingham that precipitated the most profound racial crisis of the early 1960s. The principal demand of the protesters—that the city's department stores permit black customers to eat at their lunch counters—appears, with hindsight, absurdly mild and self-evidently reasonable.



In 1963, however, the mere assertion of black rights in the form of public protest was utterly unacceptable to the city's white rulers. Birmingham was the "Johannesburg of the South," where racial segregation resembled South African apartheid; it was "Bombingham," where the Ku Klux Klan dynamited the homes of black people who moved into white neighborhoods. Above all, Birmingham was the political domain of Eugene Theophilus "Bull" Connor, a pugnacious, dictatorial, and ruthless politician whose ironic title, Commissioner of Public Safety, belied the fact that he used the police force to bug, browbeat, and brutalize the black population. In fact, so vehement was Connor's reaction to the protests led by King and Shuttlesworth—especially his unleashing of police dogs and fire hoses upon black demonstrators—that the nation and the world recoiled in horror. The Civil Rights Bill of 1964, introduced by President Kennedy as a direct result of the protests, swept away racial segregation and constituted a milestone in the history of the South.

Or so it seemed. For in his deeply researched, passionately written, and controversial book Glenn Eskew challenges the view that the Birmingham campaign of 1963 represented a straightforward victory for the Civil Rights Movement. For one thing, the goals of national civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. were often at odds with those of local black leader

Fred L. Shuttlesworth. Although the two men were ostensibly co-leaders of the 1963 protests, King ultimately pulled rank, Eskew argues, in order to impose a negotiated settlement which, while it advanced King's reputation and fathered the Civil Rights Bill, did little to improve the position of ordinary black people in Birmingham. To Eskew, Shuttlesworth was the real hero of Birmingham—a diminutive Baptist clergyman whose inspired, tenacious, and courageous leadership kept the Civil Rights Movement alive between 1956 and 1963. King, perversely, was the villain of the piece—a bourgeois compromiser who betrayed Shuttlesworth and his local followers. Indeed, in a pessimistic coda to his book, Eskew concludes that the Civil Rights Movement advanced the interests of the black middle-class but, judging by the fact that at least a third of the black population still lives below the poverty line, achieved only a limited success.

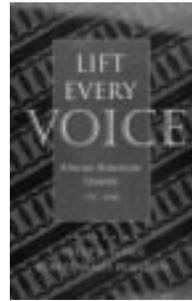
A superb account of racial politics in Birmingham between 1945 and 1963, *But for Birmingham* is so aggressively revisionist that it is likely to be the last word on the events of 1963. Eskew is surely correct to insist that Fred L. Shuttlesworth was absolutely central to the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. His harsh criticisms of King, however, are not always well-supported. Still, although its conclusions are tendentious, this book is important.

*Adam Fairclough is the author of To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1987) and Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972 (1995).*

***Lift Every Voice: African-American Oratory, 1787-1900***  
**Edited by Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham**  
**The University of Alabama Press, 1998**  
**925 pp., Cloth, \$49.95; Paper, \$24.95**

This is a massive volume, comprising 151 speeches by African-Americans, male and female. At a time when so much African-American writing is being printed and reprinted, one might ask of the need for this book. In the deeply informative introduction, Branham tells us, "Of the thousands of speeches published in [the series] *Vital Speeches of the Day*, published before 1970, less than one-tenth of 1 percent

were by African-Americans." And the fifteen-volume *American Eloquence* (1925) contains only two speeches by a black, both by Booker T. Washington.



This volume is a revised and expanded version of volume one of Foner's two-volume *Voices of Black America* (1972), now out of print, with a number of previously abridged speeches now included whole and over 60 new ones. Ending in 1900, this volume will be followed by two more, 1900-1945 and 1945 to the present.

Branham explains the central importance of oratory in the world before television, movies, radio, videotape, or audiotape. Oratory was how one organized movements, how one preached, and how one swayed opinion, and it was entertainment, with speeches and sermons commonly lasting more than two hours. African-Americans, who were frequently illiterate, by law or circumstance, particularly relied on the spoken word, and the spoken word was developed, in famous speakers such as Frederick Douglass or Sojourner Truth or W.E.B. DuBois or Booker T. Washington, to high art. (Frederick Douglass was asked by the abolitionist societies for which he spoke to be a little less eloquent, a little less perfect in his grammar and pronunciation, as some members of the audience were doubting he had ever been a slave.) Branham also introduces several "finds": hitherto little-known speakers such as Joseph C. Price, a Methodist who became a rage in England, and Lucy Parsons, an anarchist and a founder of the International Workers of the World.

It is understood that African-Americans, whether as escaped slaves or free men, spoke out against slavery in the 1840s, '50s, and '60s and spoke against lynching in the years after the Civil War. It is less well known that black speakers addressed all the big questions of the day: women's suffrage, temperance, labor organization/activism, educational reform, Indian policy, Chinese immigration policy. The black community did not speak with one voice; these issues were hotly debated. Should blacks support suffrage for black men, if black women were excluded?

Emigration to Africa or Canada seemed desirable to some, but what if it were coerced? Orators also debated immigration policies for the Chinese, concerned that there would be more competition for unskilled labor. Most African-Americans spoke out for temperance on the grounds that addiction to alcohol or any other variety of intoxication was a form of slavery, denying the freedom to think clearly.

This is a terrifically important volume. It belongs in every public library and for those concerned with African-American literature, in the private library as well. And a surprising number of the speakers, Booker T. Washington most notably, were Alabamians.

*Don Noble*

***Alabama's Historic Restaurants and Their Recipes***  
**by Gay N. Martin**  
**John F. Blair, 1998**  
**204 pp. Cloth, \$16.95**

Southerners, it can be argued, are a house-proud people. Perhaps that is because so many of our grand old homes were lost over the years, first to ravages of war and the abject poverty that followed in its wake, later to that most pernicious menace, urban renewal. Tales of parking garages built on the site of a city's grandest home are rife in Southern circles.

So it should come as no surprise to learn that six of the nine states (seven if you count Maryland) featured in the Historic Restaurant Series published by the John F. Blair firm are Southern. The newest, *Alabama's Historic Restaurants and Their Recipes*, debuted in late 1998. Profiled are 50 restaurants, distinguished not so much by superior food or service—or longevity for that matter—but by their setting. Put bluntly, this could be dismissed as a guidebook for the *Architectural Digest* set, wherein as much ink is spent describing a restaurant's heart pine flooring as the succulence of its deep-fried catfish. And yet the author does an admirable job of placing the restaurants in some sort of cultural context, a fine example of



*Continued on page 24*

## REVIEWS

Continued from page 23

which is her incorporation of a brief dissertation on the steel-making process in an entry on that longtime Bessemer favorite, The Bright Star.

Restaurants reviewed run the gamut, from Birmingham's temple of haute cuisine, Highlands Bar and Grill, to Red's Little School House in Grady, where mayonnaise-laced rolls are popular and the vegetables are grown out back. Recipes, usually two to three per restaurant, lean toward the continental end of the culinary spectrum, though offerings like cracklin' cornbread from the Irondale Café, give balance and heft to the whole.

*John T Edge is a contributing writer for the Oxford American and director of the Southern Foodways Symposium at the University of Mississippi.* 

## FROM THE FIELD

Continued from page 6

Robinson or hundreds of real men just like him—should be deprived of justice simply because they're different from their accusers. The story tells us things aren't often what they seem, as Jem learns as he comes to know the morphine-addicted crazy woman he's sentenced to visiting regularly. The story shows us the fallacy in judging others, as Boo Radley proves he's not a bogeyman after all. Through Atticus Finch, the story tells us that living up to one's responsibility is a hallmark of character, and is a rare quality to be cherished and admired. The story teaches us an age-old lesson in the tenacity of evil, and shows us that eventually, good will triumph.

We wanted to change the verdict. But Heck Tate was right: We couldn't change the ending, and we shouldn't if we could.

*Bill Perkins is editorial page editor of The Dothan Eagle.* 

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**CONCLAVE TO CHOOSE POET LAUREATE AT AUGUST MEETING**

The **Alabama Writers Conclave** (AWC) will convene its morning business session on Thursday, August 5 with four nominees to consider for the post of Alabama poet laureate: **Sue Scalf, Anne George, Helen Norris** and **John Morriss**. (**Sue Walker** withdrew her name from the list.) Nominations will be accepted from the floor provided the nominee has agreed to serve.

"Writers Paint With Words" is the theme for the Alabama Writers' Conclave August meeting at the University of Montevallo. "We put the budget into speakers this year, and it's going to be a great conference," said **Donna Jean Tennis**. The talented line-up includes **Dennis and Vicki Covington** (*Cleaving*), humor columnist **Susan Murphy** ("Mad Dog Mom"), novelists **Judith Richards** (*Summer Lightning*) and **Terry Cline** (*The Attorney Conspiracy*), **Connie Mae Fowler** (*Before Women Had Wings*) and veterinarian **Dr. John McCormack** (*Fields and Pastures New, Friend of the Flock*). There will be presentations by **Dr. Randy Blythe**, Emily Dickinson scholar. **Jo Kittinger** will talk about writing for the children's market; and **Rosemary Daniell** will conduct a short story workshop.

Registration for all three days is \$55 (includes 1999 member dues). For a registration form and information on accommodations write to **Harriet Dawkins**, 117 Hanover Road, Homewood, AL 35209. Phone **205/871-6855**.

**HUNTINGDON OFFERS CREATIVE WRITING CREDENTIALS**

"There are lots of creative writing courses in the area, but no organized, credentialed program," **Dr. Ken Deal** said, explaining the reasoning behind

the new 30-hour certificate program offered through the Division of Evening Studies and Continuing Education at Huntingdon College in Montgomery. "This is the only credit program of its type in the state," said Deal, chair of the Department of Languages and Literature as well as Evening Studies dean.

The program is designed for beginning and experienced writers in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, drama, or children's/young adult writing. Coursework starts with a foundation study of general literature. Then there are workshops in specific genres under a professor who publishes in that area. More advanced work in the student's specialty leads to a final project of preparing a manuscript for publication.

Other new evening college programs at Huntingdon include certificate and bachelor's programs in arts management and non-profit management. Call **Pam Stein** at **334/833-4522** for more information.

**TELLING ALABAMA STORIES**  
The **Alabama Humanities**

**Foundation** (AHF) is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. In late October, a lecture by novelist **Toni Morrison** and a conference on "Stories Alabama Tells" will contribute to the festivities. The conference will be held at Birmingham's Wynfrey Hotel from noon on Friday, October 29, until 1 p.m. Saturday. The event will showcase spoken and written stories as well as poems, songs, paintings, sculpture and other story forms. **Kathryn Tucker Windham** will be the Friday luncheon speaker.

On Saturday evening, writer **Toni Morrison** will lecture at the Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center at UAB. Her talk will be followed by a VIP reception. For tickets, call **205/975-ARTS**.

# CALENDAR

## QUARTERLY EVENTS

### *Bookmark*

8 p.m. Thursday, 1:30 p.m. Sunday on APTV.

Hosted by **Don Noble**. *Bookmark* is a production of The University of Alabama Center for Public Television and Radio.

July 1: Journalist and novelist **Phyllis Perry**

July 8: **Roy Hoffman**, writer in residence at the *Mobile Register*.

July 22: Birmingham poet and author **Charles Ghigna**.

July 29: Novelist and short story writer **Nanci Kincaid**.

Aug. 5: **Lee Smith**, the author of three collections of short stories and nine novels.

Aug. 19: **Hal Crowther**, columnist for the *Oxford American*.

Aug. 26: **Jeanie Thompson**, poet and AWF executive director.

Sept. 2: Novelist **Madison Jones**.

### Through July 24—*Lurleen*, Montgomery

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival presents *Lurleen*, by Barbara Lebow. For tickets, call 334/271-5353 or 1/800/841-4ASF.

### July 9—Reading and Reception, Mobile

Emerging writers **Tom Franklin** (*Poachers*) and **Melinda Haynes** (*Mother of Pearl*) will be honored at 7 p.m. at the Laidlaw Performing Arts Center by the University of South Alabama (USA) Writers Association and the USA Library Collections. Call 334/460-6146.

### July 23 & 24—Harriette Austin Writers Conference, Athens, Ga.

Agents, editors, authors (including **Ralph McInerney** and **Nora Deloach**) plus forensics and criminal investigators hold sessions for writers of mainstream fiction, mysteries, nonfiction and children's books. Call 706/542-5104 or go to [www.coe.uga.edu/torrance/hawc](http://www.coe.uga.edu/torrance/hawc).

### July 25-30—Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, Oxford, Miss.

"Faulkner and Postmodernism" is the theme of the 26th annual conference. Program includes sessions on teaching Faulkner, lectures and discussions by Faulkner scholars and a reading by **John Barth**. Contact the Institute for Continuing Studies, The University of Mississippi, at 601/232-7282 or email: [cstudies@olemiss.edu](mailto:cstudies@olemiss.edu).

### Aug. 6-8/Birmingham Heritage Festival '99

**Poet's Corner** hosts readings, some combined with music and dance, also literary workshops and scholarship competitions. Contact 205/324-3345 or email: [rhinobham@wwisp.com](mailto:rhinobham@wwisp.com).

### Aug. 10-15—Mid-Atlantic Creative Nonfiction Conference, Baltimore, Md.

**Tobias Wolff**, **Diane Ackerman**, **Terry Tempest Williams** and others. The conference is held at Goucher College. Call the Center for Graduate and Continuing Studies, 1/800-697-4646.

### Sept. 9—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

**Tomaz Salamun**, Coal Royalty Chair holder, will read in Room 205, Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. Salamun is a Slovene poet whose works are translated by Robert Haas and others. Call 205/348-0766.

### Sept. 23—Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, Tuscaloosa

New UA faculty members **Don Belton**, novelist and editor of anthologies, and **Karen Volkman**, poet, will read from their work in Room 205, Smith Hall at 7:30 p.m. Call 205/348-0766.

### Sept. 24—Write Now! Author Series, Birmingham

The Alabama School of Fine Arts is sponsoring readings at the Hess Abrams Recital Hall on campus, 7 p.m. Call 205/252-9241.

**Oct. 7—Poetry Reading, Birmingham**  
Readings by Alabama School of Fine Arts students, 2:45-3:45 p.m. Call 205/252-9241.

**Oct. 14—Robert Pinsky, Tuscaloosa**  
**Poet Laureate Pinsky** will read, courtesy of the Bankhead Visiting Writers Series. Time and place to be announced. Call 205/348-0766.

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

Genre-specific workshops on craft and publishing information will be available at this 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 see the web page, [//hometown.aol.com/southbrez/](http://hometown.aol.com/southbrez/)

### Oct. 29-30—Stories Alabama Tells, Birmingham

A two-day conference features storytelling through many media. For more information contact the Alabama Humanities Foundation, 205/930-0540.

### Oct. 30—Toni Morrison, Birmingham

"An Evening with Toni Morrison" begins at 8 p.m. at the Alys Stephens Center with sponsorship by the Alabama Humanities Foundation. Admission \$35; \$175 includes performance, signed book, and reception. For tickets, call 205/975-ARTS.

## ANNOUNCE YOUR LITERARY EVENTS ON AWF'S WEBSITE CALENDAR

Send us your calendar items—meetings, readings, etc.—and we will include them in the calendar on our website:

[www.writersforum.org](http://www.writersforum.org).

Send us your information by email: [awf1@arts.state.al.us](mailto:awf1@arts.state.al.us) snail mail: The Alabama Writers' Forum, Alabama State Council on the Arts, 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, AL 36130-1800 phone: 334/242-4076, ext. 233 or fax: 334/240-3269

FROM THE ALABAMA WRITERS SYMPOSIUM IN MONROEVILLE



Lee May autographs his book *In My Father's Garden*.



Phil Beidler and Madison Jones, winner of the Harper Lee Award for a Distinguished Alabama Writer display their trophies which are modeled on the Monroeville courthouse clock tower by sculptor Frank Fleming.



In the courtroom Madison Jones reads from his latest novel, the *Civil War-era Nashville 1864: The Dying of the Light*.



Allen Cronenberg, director of Auburn University's Center for the Arts and Humanities caught between sessions.



Rodney Jones and William Cobb talk shop.



Phyllis Perry reads from her novel *Stigmata*.



Nanci Kincaid reads from her latest novel, *Balls*.

Photos by Katie Lamar Smith

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

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## LURLEEN

*Continued from page 8*

Part of Lurleen's discovery of self involves her perceiving alliances across borders of nationality and color. She sympathizes with the Japanese mothers and children who await their husbands and fathers after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Lurleen and her friends imagine the women in Germany, ten years after the war and short of men, as strong "on their own" and having each other. The most poignant alliance, however, is that formed between Lurleen and Martha—the African American woman who works in her home and then in the governor's mansion. Toward the end of the first act, Lurleen and Martha connect as friends, sympathizing with each other's experience of miscarriage. In the second act their friendship, with its tension and honesty, evolves while George Wallace obstructs justice and engenders hate crimes. The killing of the four little girls in Birmingham is the critical point where Lurleen and Martha are allied in their suffering. Later Martha confronts Governor Lurleen about her racial attitudes and reflects that she doesn't know "her own heart yet." Before dying Lurleen tells Martha that she is "still trying to figure it all out."

Lebow's play is an engaging and creative work that asks us to resee and rethink who Lurleen is and what she represents. The playwright urges us to revisit a public figure from a different view, calling to mind Toni Morrison's comment: "The crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot" (*The Site of Memory*, 113). Through knowing the raw, historic facts that define the public life and shadow the personal life of Lurleen in the 1950s and 60s, the playgoer can understand Lebow's artistic commitment to revealing possible truths of individual women's experiences.

*Chella Courington is Associate Professor of Literature at Huntingdon College in Montgomery.* 



(Left to right) Regan Thompson, Stephanie Cozart, Heather Robison, and Monica Bell in *Lurleen*.

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### *Our writing faculty...*

James White, Director, is the author of *Birdsong*, *Clara's Call*, *California Exit*, (Methuen) and *The Ninth Car* (Putnam's). He has co-edited *Where Joy Resides: A Christopher Isherwood Reader* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux) and recently completed editing Isherwood's *Commonplace Book*. A Guggenheim fellow, White graduated from Brown University in 1973 and has taught writing since—at UCLA, USC, and USA. White's former students include Mark Andrus, co-author of the film *As Good As It Gets* and Carolyn Haines, author of *Touched*.

Sue Walker, Chair of English, holds a Ph.D. from Tulane and edits *Negative Capability*. Her many books include *The Appearance of Green* (Nightshade Press), *Shorings* (South Coast Press), and a new book forthcoming from Amherst Artists and Writers Press. She has co-edited *Ways of Knowing: Essays on Marge Piercy*, *Life on the Line*, and *Marge Piercy: Critical Views*. Winner of an Alabama Artists Award and numerous others, Walker has organized poetry workshops and conferences as well as served on state and national literary boards.

Tom Franklin's *Poachers* will be published in June, 1999, by William Morrow & Co. Inc. (and in French by Albin Michel). His novel *Hell at the Breach* will appear in the summer of 2000. In 1998 he won the Writers at Work Literary Non-Fiction Prize. He has published stories, poems, and articles in numerous magazines. A graduate of the MFA program at the University of Arkansas, he was a recipient of an Arkansas Arts Council grant for the short story. As an undergraduate at the University of South Alabama, he was a winner of the *Playboy* College Fiction contest.

# RENEW OR JOIN NOW!

The Alabama Writers' Forum is currently wrapping up the FY 99 Associates Renewal Campaign. Many associates have sent their dues and contributions and the Forum is grateful for your continued support and encouragement. If you have not renewed, please take a moment to use the return envelope in this issue of *First Draft* to do so. And if you have been receiving this complimentary copy of *First Draft*, won't you please begin today to be an associate of the Forum at the \$25 (individual) level, or higher if you are able? The Alabama Writers' Forum will continue to produce *First Draft* packed with news and features about Alabama literary arts on a quarterly basis with the support of our associates!

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