

2ND & CHURCH

Where America's Writers Read

Issue 3: 2013

Weightless: Dr. Rhea Seddon

PHYSICIAN, FORMER ASTRONAUT GOES IN
DEPTH WITH KORY WELLS

The Writer's Loft

THE LITTLE WRITING PROGRAM THAT
COULD – AND HAS – FOR A DECADE

IN THIS ISSUE

The Slaughters: A Literary Partnership
Featured Bookshop: Reading Rock Books

Cheekwood: And Her Seven-Story Treehouses
Les' is More: Songwriting Dos & Don'ts



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2nd & Church is excited to bring to its readers another collection of wonderful writers and poets. For a complete list of this issue's contributors, check out their bios on page 60.

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LEFT The Tennessee Theatre on Gay Street, Downtown Knoxville (Photo by Gary R. Johnson)
bottom Space Shuttle clears the tower (Photo courtesy of NASA)

A word from the editor

I'll never forget the day I saw the space shuttle *Challenger* explode, or so I thought way back then.

It was January 28, 1986, and I was doing jumping jacks on something called, "the grinder," the concrete-asphalt area at the Naval Training Center (NTC) in Orlando, Florida where we boot-campers did our morning calisthenics workouts. Recruits were under surveillance, and anyone not in motion was verbally...encouraged to begin again. Halfway through the workout, we witnessed the shuttle's launch, in the east, from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral. When it exploded and came apart, we all stopped for a moment, but we were urged aggressively to restart.

It wasn't until later in the day that we understood what we had witnessed. In President Reagan's speech, he said, "We mourn seven heroes...We've grown used to the idea of space, and perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They, the members of the *Challenger* crew, were pioneers... We'll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue."

It's been nearly three decades, and often I've questioned my memory of that cold morning. Memory can often be deceitful and unreliable. Sometimes the memory was clear; other times, it seemed like an old movie that I saw once or a dream. I began to question my recollections of the details. Could I have even been able to see that far away?

After talking about the event with former astronaut Rhea Seddon, she reminded me that I was only about an hour from Cape Canaveral's launch site and reassured me that if the day was clear—which it was—then I could have seen the shuttle's ascent.

Yep: I remember. Like I said, I'll never forget the day I saw the space shuttle *Challenger* explode.

It's fitting that Dr. Seddon's new book is a memoir entitled *Weightless: One of America's First Female Astronauts Finds Her Space*. She's allowing us to print an excerpt from her story, and she's answering questions that deal with her being one of NASA's first female astronauts,



with her experiences being married to an astronaut (Robert L. "Hoot" Gibson), and with a whole lot more. (And for all you agents and editors out there, Dr. Seddon is wrapping up final edits on her manuscript, and a full book proposal is available upon request.)

2013 is going to be exciting. In addition to Dr. Seddon's wonderful words, we have two more issues this year. Issue 4 will be in June, and it's our Journalism in Tennessee issue featuring Middle Tennessee journalist John Egerton, and Issue 5 is our Ernest Hemingway issue, and it hits stands on August 1.

A comprehensive table of contents for each issue is available on our website. In addition to the literary stories and poetry that you're accustomed to finding in our pages, Issue 5 begins an expansion of sorts with literary news from La Crosse, Wisconsin; Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; Mobile, Alabama; and Louisville, Kentucky.

But that's the future. Now, it's time for our third issue.

Since we last published, we've added a location where local readers can grab some copies of *2nd & Church*. That literary hotspot is East Side Story bookshop, and its owner, Chuck Beard is our newest columnist covering the local writing and poetry scenes. Award-winning

novelist Gary Slaughter and his wife Joanne show us how true literary partners behave for success.

The Writer's Loft over in Murfreesboro is still nurturing writers and poets a decade after its arrival, and our feature story on Reading Rock Books may just prompt you to head to Dickson, Tennessee. And while you're on the road, keep going to Knoxville and Chattanooga. Literary treasures from both cities are included in these pages.

And no issue of *2nd & Church* can be complete without some coverage of the Nashville Shakespeare Festival. This is a large issue full of surprises, including a little something special at Nashville's Cheekwood. And before you put down this issue, please note our subscription page. That's right! We are now offering readers the chance to subscribe!

Wrapping up this issue, I'm reminded of all the organizations and individuals who continue to support us: a big thanks to everyone! We appreciate everything a great deal. Thinking about future issues and plans to come, I can't help but give a backwards glance to Dr. Seddon's words and to some of those by President Reagan, as well:

"The future doesn't belong to the faint-hearted; it belongs to the brave."



Welcome to *2nd & Church*

2nd & Church is a literary journal by, for, and about writers and readers. We publish several issues a year, and readers may download a free digital copy and/or purchase a traditional paper copy by visiting us online at <http://www.2ndandchurch.com>. Own an iPad? If so, then do you have the MagCloud app? It's free and allows you to download all sorts of FREE publications, including *2nd & Church*! Fire it up and search for us. It's fast, free, and easy.

As part of our public service mission, we make a limited amount of complimentary copies of each print run available at the following locations:

- East Side Story Books (Nashville, TN.)
- Knox County Public Library (Knoxville, TN.)
- Lawson McGhee Library (Knoxville, TN.)
- Mysteries & More (Nashville, TN.)
- Parnassus Books (Nashville, TN.)
- Poets on the Square (Cookeville, TN.)

- Reading Rock Books (Dickson, TN.)
- The Arts Center of Cannon County (Woodbury, TN.)
- Winder Binder Gallery & Bookstore (Chattanooga, TN.)

Our mission

Our goal is to be inclusive of many different types of writers and writing: creative nonfiction, technical writing, literary fiction, W4C, poetry, translation, and commercial fiction.

In addition, *2nd & Church* includes brief news and feature stories that explore the creative writing life.

What does it mean for a writer or reader to live a life of fine arts, especially in the 21st century? Where can writers and readers go, either alone or in groups? What do they choose to write and read about? Which experiences make it from their lives to the pages? How are writers

engaged, entertained, and provoked? And in turn, how do those writers engage, entertain, and provoke via their words and phrases?

These are some of the questions our editors seek to answer when selecting work for publication in *2nd & Church*.

Submission guidelines

We welcome unsolicited manuscripts, but the expectation is that the work will support our mission. Send up to six poems and/or about 1,000 words of prose. For work over 1,000 words, query first.

We will consider novel excerpts, but the selection of material must be able to stand alone — be self-contained. We prefer to assign book reviews and criticism; please don't submit those to us. And in general, we don't publish essays on craft. (Please visit us online for complete writing and submission guidelines.)

LEFT A view from St. George Island, Florida
(Photo by Fredrick A. Dye)

From the Poetry Editor

Poetry and technology, science and sentiment: Yes, Virginia, there is a Large Hadron Collider by Alvin Knox

Poetry, in case you haven't noticed, isn't all about flowers, youth and love, nor clouds, winter, and death. Poetry is a vehicle to explore our lives and world, and the diversity of existence is reflected in poetic content. Though to many it may seem contrary to the goals of poetry, science and technology themes and references have become common in poems. In "The Decoration Committee," Dean Young (re) presents the idea "that some subjects cannot be made poetic" (*Strike Anywhere*, 1995, Center for Literary Publishing/University Press of Colorado), a notion he quickly negates, by the way: "After hours of voodoo drumming, everything / you do may seem like a poem." Science and voodoo are not so very dissimilar. Both, to a majority of us, are a little shadowy and mysterious: what does go on in the graveyards of Haiti or in the tunnels of the Large Hadron Collider? Poetry, like science, is a way to examine the mysteries of our universe and hopefully to make some sense of them; therefore, science and technology not only do, but must be addressed in poems if the poet's words are to remain relevant to our existence.

Science and technology, and the tools of modernity derived from them, seep into poetry almost as effortlessly as they have wiggled their way into our lives. Sometimes, they seem to creep sideways into a poem, as with Tony Hoagland's "Candlelight" (*Donkey Gospel*, 1998, Graywolf Press); the title of might suggest a romantic dinner, but the poem's body examines the ecological impact of our lifestyle choices: "steak / raised on pasture / chopped out of a rainforest."

Sometimes science and technology announce themselves as the explicit topic with a grandiose flair in the title of a poem, and sometimes those poems address the topic in a scientific and informative manner. For instance, there's the "Large Hadron Rap" (by Katherine McAlpine, viewable on YouTube), assuming

you're willing to extend the definition of poetry to include rap. If not, and if you're not looking for scientific accuracy, other poems about the Large Hadron Collider (CERN) can be found, such as "according to the Standard Model, it's unclear if I exist," a poem that contemplates the discovery of the Higgs boson, aka "the God particle" (RK House, available at rkhouse.wordpress.com). Or, if you're looking for a love poem and touch of humor, try "The Large Hadron Collider Poem," in which the speaker and his love are destined for collision on "the most fantastic ride I've ever seen" (leander42.wordpress.com). It is not uncommon that poems frequently utilize scientific concepts but end up somewhere far, far away.

One of my favorite such poems is chemist and poet Jennifer Gresham's "Explaining Relativity to the Cat" (available in *Diary of a Cell*, 2005, from Steel Toe Books and *Explaining Relativity to the Cat*, a chapbook of science poems from Pudding House Press, 2004). Though the poem incorporates a lot of science, it seems to say more about the nature of cats than it does of relativity.

Of course, not all poems use science/technology as a focus in their development. Many just use ideas and/or facts from the world of science to help convey another point. In the 1972 collection *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (Penguin Books), John Ashbery's "Voyage in the Blue" suggests the concept of the "tip-ping point": "And once this // Distant corner is rounded, everything / Is not to be made new again." The poem continues a few lines later, "It should have been a caution to you / To listen more carefully to the words / Under the wind as it moved toward us." Poet Richard Jackson (UT Chattanooga) frequently interjects scientific facts into his poems, sometimes blending them with figurative language to illuminate some point about the poems' topics. For instance, in "Do Not Duplicate This Key" (*Heartwall*, 2000,

University of Massachusetts Press), a complex exploration of love reveals, "it has been discovered that all life / probably began on the surface of deep sea bubbles / which came together in Nature's little cocktail party . . . the kind of molecular sex that excites chemists." Just a few pages later, in "Possibility," a poem which contemplates perception, our technological approach to the heavens is juxtaposed with that of our distant ancestors: "Far off, a radio telescope / crackles with news from all directions of the cosmos / from a time when we handled stars as carefully / as precious stones." One of my favorite Jackson poems is "True or False" (*Alive All Day*, 1992, Cleveland State University Poetry Center). In this poem scientific facts such as "Over 96% / of visible matter is hydrogen or helium" or "there are 2 million atoms of nickel for every / four of silver in our galaxy" or "What we are is / 62,000 miles of capillaries if we care to line them up" underpin less substantiated facts and observations about our world and our existence. The poem even ends with a statement of scientific fact: "Somewhere, a nameless / star is collapsing, but its light won't stop arriving, / it won't ever stop arriving for millions of years."

Sometimes the gleanings of technology have become so entrenched in our lives that we barely notice them as such anymore; televisions and cellphones with more technology than sent a man to the moon are accepted now as "one small step" toward an increasingly technological world. As generations of poets who cursed their word processor programs for capitalizing the beginning of each line are supplanted by generations who create collaborative poems via Twitter, the language of science/technology is going to find its way into poems more and more, and the good poems of that future will continue to help us mediate between an increasingly (dis)connected world and human existence.

A Gallery of Poems

A collection of inspired works from poets across Tennessee.

How We Become

By Bill Brown, TWA 2011 Writer of the Year

How we become
 who we become
 is a conundrum,
 so many bridges
 crossed over creeks
 with names
 we promised to
 remember: Knob Creek,
 Cub Creek, Sinking.
 Some mornings we
 rise early,
 their names disappearing
 from our tongues.
 A heron, an osprey,
 a brook trout—
 a first love,
 a brother,
 grandmother with a cane pole,
 a can of red wigglers
 we dug beneath
 barn straw;
 not stolen
 but mostly lost
 to the insistence
 of an adult world
 and its misdirection.
 But the creeks haven't dried up,
 their song, a ripple
 over limestone
 older than bone,
 memory fading
 and so dear,
 we dare not rush from it.
 What's the cost
 if we sacrifice
 sentiment to cynicism?
 Drought can't erase
 the scent
 of coming rain.

Entering the Dark

By Rebecca Cook

I'll go into the shadow. I'll start walking and keep going. They know me here where the moon has lost its face and the night has loosed its clothes. I'll pick up the brush and begin to paint again. I remember how to do it. When I was eight I painted the Starry Night, after Vincent. Another girl was jealous of me, how I so elegantly duplicated his swirls. Now I'll take the brush and poke my brain, undo its secrets. Just here, where the ears attach, I'll jab until the whole contraption flips open and I can find the reasons it's so hard to think. I'll find an opening. A place to start where I am white and hollow, full of blue smoke and pink winking. I'll squeeze all the water from my brain into a glass and dip crackers into it, one at a time, so soggy I can barely lift them, spongy on my tongue until everything is gone and I start over.

The Perfume of Leaving

By K.B. Ballentine

Mid-March and fireflies already star the dark.
 Jasmine and honeysuckle base notes linger in heavy air,
 storms moving in after midnight the weatherman said.

Winter waned early, grass still green
 as flakes whispered, melted into blue skies.
 Spring's top notes evaporated in an early heat wave,
 crocuses and daffodils bright then brown.

The heart of summer has yet to arrive
 and already earth's fragrance burns —
 the echo of dry days knocking at tomorrow's door.

In Lightning Bugs

By Tess Melete

I swam all day until my palms went prune
 floating on my back staring up at some
 swiftly changing clouds being other things
 then wrapped in a sun warmed too big towel
 with a lemonade and *The Complete Years*
 I flopped down to lie in the cool green grass
 watching robins and squirrels shake tree branches
 then push off into the twilight sky one by one
 I found myself pondering the hows of world building
 the whys of god making and the ifs of growing up
 with every possibility open I never dreamed of settling
 in or down or just to survive another...
 my direction was a compass rose in bloom
 my world the Garden of Eden before The Fall
 I had a heart bent on wanderlust
 breaking under the unknitting tethers of childhood
 oh to be all of that potential again
 to possess my own pure power now
 my raw... ness oh...how...
 I sat up all night waiting for meteors
 pleading with the Pleiades
 wishing praying longing for flaming falling stars
 needing to see such a thing was real and not
 just another fairy story
 kneeling on our tatty old dew drenched family quilt
 with a wasted picnic and co-philosopher dog
 well...we never saw a one in the red city sky
 finally somewhere closer to dawn
 I turned my eyes away from heaven
 exhausted and devoid of magic
 let go my telescope
 squinted toward the unlit house
 to start my stumbling in at last through
 the perfect black nothingness and...there
 they were...the heavens all around me zooming
 infinities of stars dancing in the dark yard
 suddenly I forgot which way was up...blanket...
 for a flash
 and which way was down...sky...
 I fell hard
 rolled and reached out to touch...
 they came to me and I cried because...
 it was more beautiful than what I had wanted
 it was more...beautiful
 than what?...I had wanted?
 I sank into the folds of the family quilt...into heaven...
 into a sleep consuming all my lost desires softly
 touching stars...stars falling onto me so...softly
 stars crossed my heart...my cheek...my hand...
 covered in stars
 there I was twinkling and falling
 to sleep in my own backyard

A poem of questions

By Bill Brown

In the future will our women and men be fighting a war?
 Will the homeless black man live under the Rosa L. Parks Blvd Bridge?
 And the Vietnam Vet sleep in a cardboard box behind Hume-Fogg?
 Will the illegal alien from Chiapas find someone at the rescue mission who
 speaks Mayan?

Will Macy's open at 4 am on Black Friday and traffic back up three blocks at
 the mall.

Will knuckles burn white on stirring wheels?

Will the Prince of Peace be born again in a barn?

Will some new Gautama the Buddha walk from his palace in the suburbs at the
 edge of Davidson

County, and seeing how others live, take a vow of poverty and meditation, teach
 us the Buddhist way, a
 principled life, so that others might have?

Oh Ganesha, the Hindu elephant god, wise and rich, but humble enough to ride
 on a mouse, as the
 remover of obstacles and symbol of forgiveness, will you help the
 downtrodden rise?

Adonai, Adonai, shalom, masterful creator whose name, out of reverence, we
 dare not speak, will you
 help us strengthen the Covenant in the Temple so that we might seek justice in
 an unjust world?

And Rumi, Sufi mystic and poet, will you be reborn in our city so that you can
 speak poems for us to
 write-- teach us to honor the news inside, to knock on both sides of the door,
 teach us to listen to the
 reed song beside the river and in our hearts, as you spin and spin your swirling
 dervish for Allah?

Will the Titans return to the Super Bowl, the Preds storm the NHL?

Will Music Row build more beautiful naked statues?

Will Dancing with the Stars run out of stars?

Will I-pad six mean less flesh to flesh communication?

Will Opry Mills survive the next thousand year flood?

Will college students get their smart phones out the second they leave
 the library?

Will we still have books to dog ear?

Will the homeless man still live under the Rosa Parks Bridge?

And the Iraqi vet sleep in his cardboard box behind Hume-Fogg?

Will Black Friday become our symbol of Christmas and Macy's
 open at 4am?

Ganesha, Gautama, Allah, Adonai—

Will the prince of peace be born again in a barn?



We Sell works by
→ ALL LOCAL ←
authors & artists



LEFT Chuck Beard at his East Side Story bookstore, 1108 Woodland Street, Unit B. Open Tuesday-Friday: 1-6p.m.; Saturday: 11-5p.m. or by special appointment (Photo by Terry Price)

BELOW Photo by Terry Price

Bookends and Beginnings

Introducing East Side Story, a new Nashville bookstore with a special love for local writers by Chuck Beard

Hello, my name is Chuck Beard. I feel the need to introduce myself properly since *2nd & Church* has allowed me the opportunity to write a few good words here and there on this page and in subsequent issues of the journal. That said, I will try not to write a novel or ramble too much.

You might have heard a little about me already as being the slightly crazy and latest person to open a bookstore in Nashville, at a time when many critics who own the latest iPhone or Kindle believe that physical books are nearing their end. One thing you should know about me is that I don't listen to many critics. The one person I listen to is my wife, and she loved the idea of opening Nashville's sole all-local bookstore as soon as I told her the name: East Side Story.

With so many talented writers in the Nashville area, now is the perfect time for a few good people, organizers, and spotlights to take our literary scene to the next level ... maybe even shake up things enough inside and beyond the city limits—encouraging others to start recognizing us more for our thinking caps rather than our cowboy hats. At least we know that *2nd & Church* will do its best and a job well done.

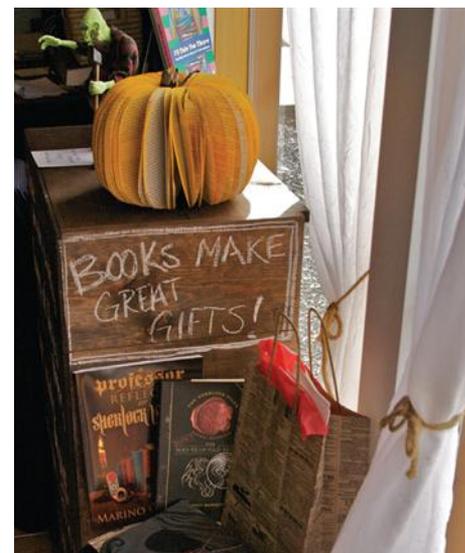
So I guess that leaves me here with a moment to let you know how a few friends of mine and I are going to do our part in this new literary frontier.

First, East Side Story has opened its doors, and many local people have taken notice. I

have had both a steady flux of readers coming in to find out what the locals are writing about as well as tons of authors who have connected with the store's shelves to help show, promote, and sell their works in a more grassroots angle. Now that we're open and people know where and what we are, East Side Story is about to give local writers even more chances to become involved. East Side Story has launched its Web site and will use the "Express Yourself" tab to offer writing contests and prompts. Feel free to go directly to your nearest computer or smart phone and check out everything East Side Story is about at www.eastsidestorytn.com ... like *NOW!*

Second, aside from keeping up with the times of technology, it's important that we take things back to the origins of every book that we've ever read ... the story. As if starting a bookstore doesn't take any time out of the daily grind, I pitched an idea to a few literary fans and things have come together yet again to make another idea into a reality. This one, tied in with East Side Story, is called East Side Storytelling! Since early November, I've been the host of East Side Storytelling' with the help of WAMB radio and Rumours East restaurant and wine bar.

Located at Rumours East, up to 30 people have witnessed a wonderful event: the pairing up of an author with a featured musician/duet for an extraordinary live event. The author reads from his/her work for about 15 minutes, and then the featured musician(s) plays original songs and shares the stories behind the songs,



similar to VH1 Storytellers' style. After the music stops, I interview the author and musician(s), and it's all played on WAMB radio, as well as on our East Side Story blog (and podcast) the following week.

Now, I bid you adieu. This has been a splendid introduction to a few things I am and what we at East Side Story are trying to do for our part in this exciting time for Nashville scribes. In the next go round, I'll spend less time writing about my ideas and more time spotlighting the local authors and books that you should be taking notice of before they end up on a Kindle near you.

As you were, busy writing and happy.

Literary Treehouses

Celebrating great works of literature at Cheekwood's treehouse exhibition



ABOVE Photo by Terry Price

The Swiss Family Robinson no longer has a monopoly on the tree house business...thanks to the 2012 efforts of Cheekwood. From May 26 through September 3, this 55-acre Botanical Garden & Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee featured Treehouses: Great Works of Literature. Seven large-scale structures were placed throughout the gardens, and each was designed to represent one of literature's great works.

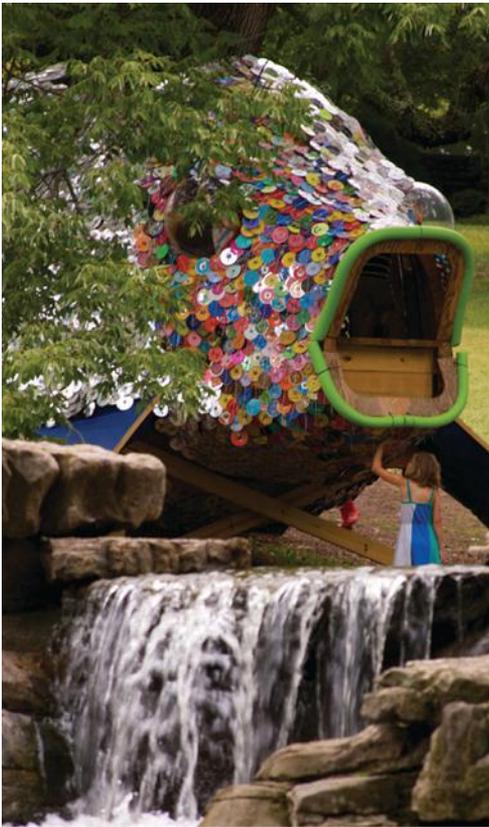
"I'm happy to share that over 125,000 people came to see the exhibition in the three-month period, and 1,800 new members joined as well," said Claire Brick Corby, vice-president of marketing at Cheekwood.

Cheekwood's Botanical Garden is a dazzling showcase of color and horticultural diversity, and each season brings new activities and experiences. There are barbershop quartets, family nights, and summer camps. The garden presents spring with tens of thousands of blooming flowers, the facility transitions to fall colors with scarecrows, a pumpkin patch, and Chrysanthemum displays, and the holiday season includes Santa, trains, a magic show, designer trees, and holiday music. And there's the summertime, which in 2012 included Treehouses.

"The Treehouses exhibition was a delight for our members and their families, but it also served as a city-wide invitation to visit our museum and gardens, to imagine and explore, and to interact with art and design in a truly memorable way," Corby said. "We are thrilled that so many people enjoyed it."

Treehouses @ Cheekwood 2012

- The Rainbow Fish: *The Rainbow Fish*, by Marcus Pfister
- The Jolly Roger: *Peter and Wendy*, by J.M. Barrie
- Ocean of Notions: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, by Salman Rushdie
- Up and Down Again, A Hobbit's Tale: *The Hobbit*, by J.R.R. Tolkien
- Walden Treehouse: *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau
- Conch House: *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding
- The Giver: *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry



THIS PAGE Photos by Terry Price



Welcome to Space

From ignition to weightlessness, an excerpt from Dr. Seddon's autobiography on her journey of a lifetime by Dr. Rhea Seddon



TOP Dr. Rhea Seddon. Learn more about [Dr. Seddon](http://astronautrheaseddon.com/) at <http://astronautrheaseddon.com/> (Photo courtesy of NASA)

We boarded the ancient, rusted metal elevator that had whisked Apollo and earlier shuttle crews before us to the tops of their rockets. Along with the launch pad itself, the elevator had withstood the rocket blasts from blazing spaceships for almost two decades. Up we went, all the way to the 195-foot level where a walkway led out to the White Room, a small antechamber at the end of the retractable arm that snuggled up against the crew hatch. It was a cool, damp spring morning with drizzle starting to fall. As I waited for the crew compartment to be readied, I walked out on the gantry way and saw the first faint light of dawn to the east over the Atlantic. The vehicle hissed and groaned as various fuels and gasses were loaded on-board. *Discovery* had come alive.

One by one we crawled through the open hatch and snaked to our seats. With the orbiter tipped with its nose skyward, our seats lay on their backs and everything looked odd. Like a car upended, the dashboard was above us and the floor was vertical. I walked on temporary platforms laid across the rear cockpit windows. The experienced hands of the suit technicians guided us in the right direction. Lead Tech Al Rocheford, who had overseen all the strap-ins since the Apollo days, awaited us. He anchored us to history.

As I eased into my seat on the flight deck, my hands fluttered around, trying to be helpful with my seat harness. The tech helping me tapped me on the shoulder, sighed, and patiently looked me in the eye.

"Go limp," she said. The voice of experience.

With all the preparations completed, the last of the techs patted the commander on his helmet, waved, and disappeared out the hatch. There was never a greater sound of finality than the CLUNK of the shuttle hatch closing. Suddenly, it seemed quiet. It was now too late to get out. Even in the practice countdowns they had never closed the door.

The final countdown preparations swirled around us and below us. The Orbiter Test Conductor requested that either our Commander (Bo Bobko) or Don Williams (our

Pilot) reposition certain switches, check certain meters. As the clock passed our planned launch time, he let us know what was obvious out our cockpit windows – that the weather was no good. The dawn had revealed what the weatherman had predicted – low, gray clouds obscured the sky. Occasional sprinkles of rain passed across our windshield. A typical spring day usually included vultures catching warm updrafts of air to circle the pad. Not today. On April 12, 1985, they stayed home.

The countdown continued until the nine minute hold, a built in stopping point where all the systems were in a good configuration for launch but could wait for several hours. We waited a long hour, uncomfortable in our hard seats, our bladders filling, dozing, and going over the procedures we would need to perform in space. As we checked our watches, it became clear that if we were to get off the ground before the end of the launch window, the decision would have to be made soon. As if on cue, the test conductor came on the line about one minute before we needed to pick up the count.

"Commander, what would be the best way to get this thing off the pad today?"

"We could pick up the count," Bo said, almost quizzically.

"Roger, Commander. Launch Team, we will pick up the count on my mark in 30 seconds. *Discovery* crew, good luck! Have a good flight!"

I was stunned and thrilled as the clock began counting downward. The Launch Control Center personnel were checking each system. Our on-board computers were ingesting thousands of bits of information each second. It was as if some giant chain reaction was getting bigger and bigger racing, beyond my control, toward an explosion. All I could do was "go limp."

I could see the gaseous oxygen vent arm, the "beanie cap," swing away from the nose of the big, orange external tank. The fuel tanks were now pressurizing. I could feel the far away vibrations of our main engines repositioning themselves. The calls from the test conductor, and Bo's and Don's answers, became more rapid-fire and clipped. Time



LEFT The crew of space shuttle *Columbia* STS 40. After Dr. Seddon's successful mission in 1985 aboard the space shuttle *Discovery*, which is the subject of her memoir excerpt, she served on *Columbia* STS 40 in 1991. (Photo courtesy of NASA)

seemed to compress.

At 31 seconds to go, our on-board launch sequencer took over automatic control. The personnel in the launch center ran through their last second checks. The on-board sensors fired rapid bursts of data at our computers. If at any point something wasn't right, the launch sequence would halt.

Sixteen seconds before lift-off, a huge waterfall at the base of the launch pad activated to dampen the reflected sound vibrations about to belch forth from the boosters and engines. Three hundred and fifty thousand gallons of water gushed into the flame trench below.

At launch minus 10 seconds, the ground's launch system sent its final command to *Discovery*: *GO for main engine start.*

We were on our own now.

Just before the chain reaction reached critical mass, I turned my head to the left to watch the launch tower out the side window. At launch minus 6 seconds we felt the deep, throaty rumble of the first main engine igniting. Then in rapid sequence the second and the third. Boom! Boom! Boom!

As expected the firing of the engines caused the tip of the rocket to sway backward about two feet. I knew the booster hold-down posts would be groaning with the strain of the tilt. Slowly the vehicle swayed back upright. I knew that when it pointed straight up the eight explosive bolts on the hold-down posts which attached the two boosters to the launch pad (and us to the earth) had to fire at the precise millisecond that the boosters themselves ignited. If there was any hang-up in that

choreographed timing, if the bolts didn't separate cleanly, or if one of the boosters hesitated, there would be a horrendous cataclysm in which all of us and the vehicle would be blown to bits.

Lift off!

The split second I felt the bone-jarring blast from the boosters, my gaze shifted from the launch tower, which had vanished from the window, to my hands in my lap. From the noise, vibration, and acceleration, I was sure the shuttle had blown up, and I was about to watch my body disintegrate. That fearsome thought was interrupted by Bo's call as we cleared the tower, going upward now at over a hundred miles an hour.

"Houston, *Discovery*, roll program."

We were on our way! I was alive!

"Roger, roll, *Discovery*!" responded our Capcom, the Astronaut communicator in Houston's Mission Control which had taken control of our flight at lift off. As we went through the rain, little rivulets of water collected and danced around the edges of our windshield. We broke through the gray of the clouds and could see blue sky and sunlight above us. I craned my head around to look out the overhead window but was disappointed to see only gray cloud tops below us, so uniform that it was hard to tell if we were one mile or a hundred miles above them.

The early ride on the boosters was teeth-rattling, more intense than I had ever experienced in the simulator. This was for real.

Two minutes after launch at an altitude of 150,000 feet, there was a sudden forward lurch

and the flash of an explosion out the forward windows. The boosters blasted themselves away from the tank, having burned up two million pounds of propellant. After that I wondered if we were still flying, it was so smooth and quiet.

The main engine instruments signaled everything was working as expected, and the gentle push skyward continued. Almost imperceptibly at about seven minutes after launch, the G-forces began to press down on my chest as the acceleration to orbital velocity continued. Somewhere around eight minutes the crush reached the maximum of 3-Gs—three times the force of gravity—and became uncomfortable. Difficult to breathe, to talk, to move my arms or turn my neck, I was comforted to know this would last only about 30 seconds.

And then it happened. At over 25,500 feet per second, more than 17,000 miles per hour, and at 250 miles above Mother Earth, we reached the point of "Main Engine Cut-Off." The acceleration stopped, and we lurched forward against our harness straps. Gravity disappeared.

An errant bolt drifted up from behind the instrument panel beside me. Pencils, books, our arms, sparkling dust particles – everything – was adrift. Since we had expected and trained for this moment, all of our equipment including books and pencils were tethered. They wouldn't float far away from us, but, oh, the wonder of seeing them unfettered by earth's pull.

Dave Griggs, sitting in the seat next to mine, turned to face me, and his enormous smile mirrored mine. Bo said the words we had all waited so long for:

"Well, rookies, welcome to space!"



LEFT Launch of space shuttle *Discovery* – STS 51D (Photo courtesy of NASA).

Her Amazing Journey

A conversation with doctor and former astronaut Rhea Seddon by Kory Wells

“I don’t think I ever took risks for fun,” says Rhea Seddon as she looks up from a quick check of her buzzing cell phone. In contrast, her husband is at the Reno Air Races, she explains, and after last year’s crash that killed a pilot and ten spectators, she appreciates his messages to let her know he’s alright.

Seddon, with a quiet confidence and measured, intelligent manner, is no worrywart, and she’s no stranger to risk herself – at least for professional purposes. Although her petite figure and youthful, blue-eyed blonde looks somehow belie it, Rhea Seddon, MD, has a history of strapping herself into rockets and orbiting the earth in the name of medical science. One of the first six women chosen for NASA’s astronaut program in 1978, Seddon flew on three missions, deploying satellites, serving as Payload Commander, and conducting life sciences research, among other tasks.

After nineteen years with NASA, Seddon went on to serve as Assistant Chief Medical Officer with Vanderbilt Medical Group, where she applied her experience to patient safety and quality of care. Now she devotes her time to speaking and consulting. I had the pleasure of sitting down with her in her Murfreesboro, Tennessee, home to talk about her experiences and her progress toward one of her long-time goals of writing and publishing her remarkable story.

Kory Wells: You’re not an air racer, then?

Rhea Seddon: I would never do air racing. And I probably would never jump out of an airplane just for fun.

KW: I always thought I wanted to do that – until my first time up in a small plane!

RS: There were parts of flying lessons that I hated. Stalls I didn’t particularly enjoy. Acrobatics made me sick. But when you have a goal, you can get a whole lot braver and work

a whole lot harder when you say, “I want to do that, so I’ve got to do this.”

KW: Speaking of goals, tell me about your transition from doctor and astronaut to writer.

RS: It was an incredible level of challenge. I didn’t write my book to become a writer – it’s not that I have taken on another career. I simply wanted to tell the story.

I had my book essentially handwritten on yellow legal pads – the chronology and major parts of the story – before I left NASA in 1996, so I could still go and ask the people I was working with, “Do I remember this right?” But in technical fields, you don’t put your feelings in there. You don’t put creative writing in there. You have to be very factual.

I was having a difficult time trying to figure out how to make it into a story that people wanted to read, rather than just a technical paper on my experience. So the yellow legal pads sat for years.

the same one –

RS: I had a wonderful mentor, David Pierce, who was kind enough to stick with me through the whole thing and very helpful in teaching me more about writing a good story and all of the techniques that writers use. I got the book into much better condition. As we went through the first iteration, David kept putting in the margin, “What were you thinking at this point? How did you feel?” I realized that people want to know, and that’s what makes a book lively, but I hadn’t quite learned how to do that. He would ask, “What’s the point of this story?” Many times I’ve gone back to the beginning and had to refresh it, and I’m still in the process of doing that.

KW: So what is the point of your story?

RS: I hesitate to say that this is a hero’s journey, but it kind of is. It’s being the first woman in a man’s world, and what it was like to want a woman’s life along with it – I wanted to marry and have a nice house and children – and try-

Things you do in your life can inspire other people to do the things they want to do. I think people ought to be given that as one of their assignments in life. Write something down.

After my second career at Vanderbilt, I had more free time, and I started thinking about it again. Of course one of the wonderful resources here in Murfreesboro is Middle Tennessee State University. Serendipitously, I came across the Writer’s Loft. I thought, *How perfect would that be?* Have certain assignments in writing, have a mentor to help me, but have very little class time.

KW: Students in the program can work with different mentors each semester, or stay with

ing to figure out how to be able to do all those things. When I reach 65 – which is rapidly approaching – if I ultimately had to choose between shuttle missions and children, would I have rather been among the first American women in space – possibly even the first – but never had any children, or would I have wanted to have had children but possibly missed any chance to fly in space?

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RIGHT Dr. Seddon conducts scientific research in space during her third flight, which was aboard the space shuttle *Columbia* – STS 58. (Photo courtesy of NASA).

... Her Amazing Journey continued from page 17

My husband [Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson] was also an astronaut. He’s a macho man, a man’s man, and that’s another part of the story. It’s also a circular story because after I went away and did all of those things, I came back to my hometown to raise my children and returned to the sort of the life I had started out to lead.

It’s a personal journey but in some ways typical of women my age.

KW: I’ve felt a kinship with you because of our mutual interest in math and science – but yours is an exceptional story for any generation. You’ve done what few have, regardless of gender.

RS: David Pierce reminded me of this: people want to come out of a book having learned something. I’ve done enough speaking that I know, from the questions I get, what people don’t know. People say, “Did you go to the moon in the space shuttle?” “What was the training like?” “Was it physically hard?” “Was it mentally hard?” “Did they try to weed people out?”

KW: And how did you get to be an astronaut? And before that, how does a girl growing up in the ‘50s and ‘60s come to decide, “I want to be a medical doctor?”

RS: Around 1960, *Life* magazine had a beautiful article about the discovery of the double helix of DNA and another theorizing the effects of weightlessness on humans. Those were hard reading for me in the seventh and eighth grades, but they caught my attention.

Luckily I had support from my parents, who told me, “You can do anything you want.” I had some practical advice from my father about how much money I would make, what kind of living I would have if I did this versus that.

I wanted to live an independent life. I wanted to have my own job and my own money and my own career. My mother was a wonderful person, but she was very dependent upon my father. There were things she would’ve liked to have done that my father didn’t want her to do, so she didn’t do them. I didn’t want to be that way.

I was fascinated by medicine, by physiology, by human, living creatures. I went to medical school because I could imagine myself doing that, day after day, taking care of ill people. But it was also the fact that it was fascinating, which I think is probably why I decided to apply to the space program. What a way to spend your days!

KW: I think your book is important not only for scientific and social history, but also for how

it relates to today’s context – how America is falling behind on math and science education and how fewer women are interested in some math and science fields.

RS: That’s one of the sidebars of my story, to inspire young women to go and do what they want to do, to encourage them to do some of the things that are hard.

KW: NASA recruited women for the shuttle program from the start. So on the one hand, they had to respect how much they had invested in you –

RS: Yes.

KW: But you gave birth three times while you were there. How did NASA react to your maternity?

RS: Shannon Lucid, who came into the program when I did, already had children. I was the first of us to get pregnant. Hoot and I didn’t tell anybody until I was well into the pregnancy. We went to Chris Kraft, the center director. He was wonderful, but when I got back to my office, the phone was ringing, and it was the flight surgeon, who said, “You’re grounded from T38 [jet trainer] flying.” That kind of broke my heart.

That was the only restriction they put on me, and I got some good job assignments in that time frame, but I sweated bullets about senior management – which was all male – and their opinion of pregnant women. I felt a lot of pressure to come back to work in six weeks. I came to the office before that, with the baby in the carrier.

With my second and third children I took three months off. It took a little courage to go to the boss and ask for that, but it worked out.

KW: It would seem to me, as a mom, that flying missions after the *Challenger* explosion would’ve been very hard. Yet I can also imagine that you could have felt more confident, as a scientist, post-*Challenger*. Did you have an increased sense, after *Challenger*, of knowing what the risks were?

RS: Yes – the reality. I think we all fooled ourselves because we had never lost any astronauts in space. The Apollo One fire happened on the launch pad. There were so many checks and balances on decisions and the machinery. After *Challenger*, seeing not only that astronauts lost their lives, but the devastation of families that were in the public eye – it was terrible.

A number of people left the astronaut program at that point in time. A lot of them not

because they were ready to leave but because their families didn’t want them to fly. Hoot and I didn’t really have that discussion, because we both knew we wanted to stay.

In a way the decision was easier for me because I had already been assigned to a second flight, one that was exactly what I came to NASA to do: life sciences research in space. I was very, very dedicated to that flight.

For my first flight, I was ready to die. If it happened, it happened. One of my philosophies in life is that you’ve got to be ready to meet your Maker, meaning: fill your life, do the important things (the book is certainly an important thing), try to do **today** what you want to do, because there may not be a tomorrow. So I was prepared in my own heart for that. But my husband flew the second flight after *Challenger*. I had a child who was six, and he was anxious about it, and I was six months pregnant. I wanted to be very positive, but at his launch, it was hard.

KW: I brought these copies of *Life* magazine from July and August, 1969. I’m sure you have better space souvenirs than this...

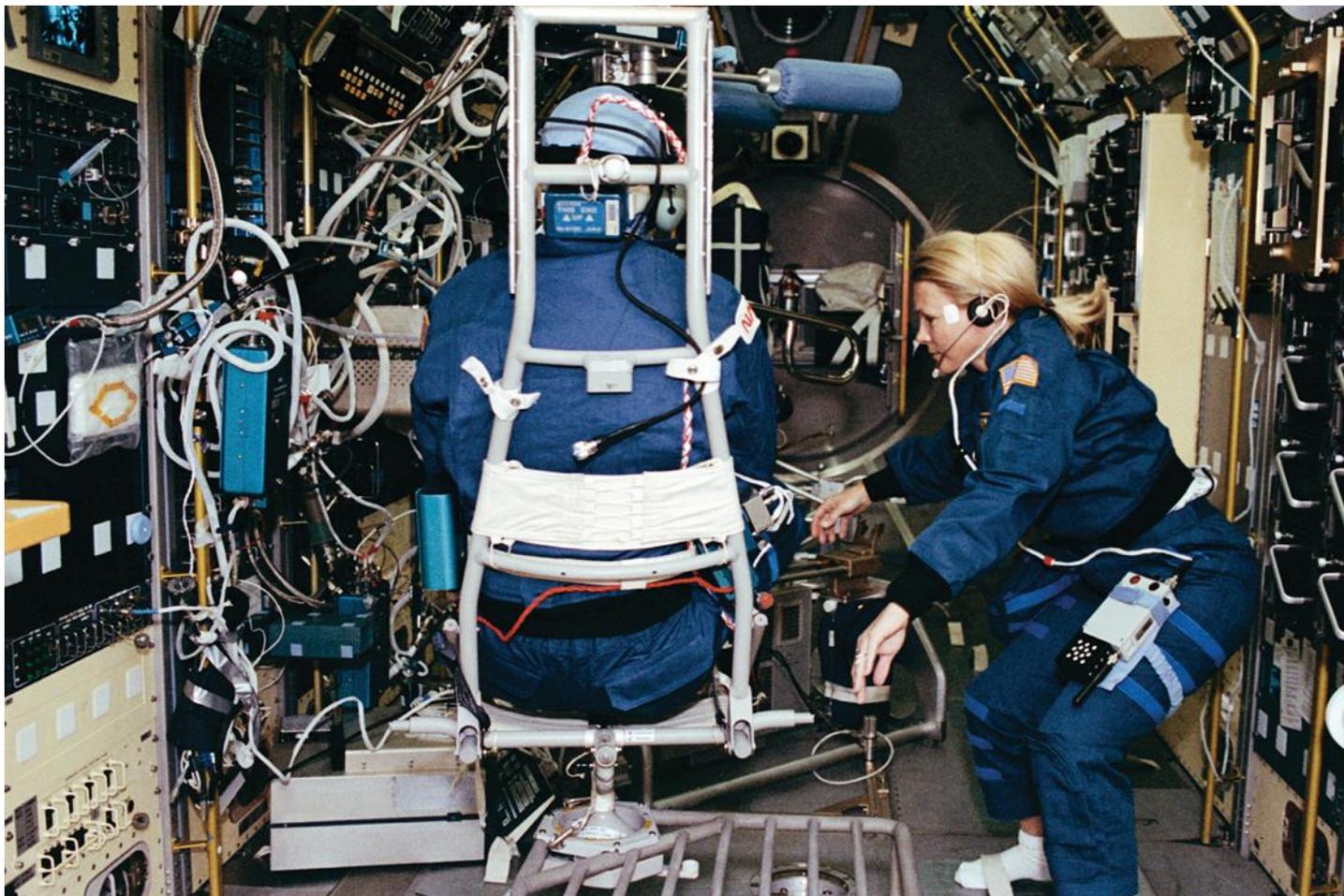
RS: Maybe not! Look at that!

KW: Spread after spread on the astronauts. Photos, in-depth interviews, even a poem by James Dickey imagining the walk on the moon. What excites us so much these days? What do you think about the status of U.S. space exploration and the end of the shuttle program?

RS: I’m not sure that anybody has been able to capture how we ought to set these audacious goals now. I think we were at a particular moment in time when the space program came along. We were worried that the Russians were going to put missiles in space – it was a Cold War, a scary thing – and I think JFK had his finger on the pulse of the people. He had strong leadership in the Congress, who also caught the vision. All of a sudden kids wanted to be engineers. Kids wanted to be astronauts. The country got behind it, universities got behind it, everybody jumped on board.

I’m kind of amazed that now the United States has said, “Space is a sideline over here. We’ll let business, the capitalist system, build rockets, and we won’t worry about it too much.” NASA’s still hanging on, but I think it looks for the next great challenge that people can get behind.

I used to say to kids, “If you’re the first person on Mars, send me a postcard.” There was a



definite date out there, and we were building the rockets that were going to get us there, and that looked like a feasible goal. You could see kids' eyes light up with that possibility. I can't really say that now.

Now it's "How do I be a rock star?" Not "How do I go to Mars?"

KW: You mentioned Kennedy's "audacious goal" for the country. Did you think of your career in terms of audacious goals?

RS: I don't think so. What I wanted to do was satisfy my own curiosity. When I applied to the space program, I had very little idea of what I would be doing. But the more I learned, the more people I met, the more I said, "I really want to do this." I was delighted they accepted me. But I never said, "I'm going to have this huge goal in mind."

KW: You've got this distance from your flights now...what's the big picture that you have as a result of looking out that window from the shuttle to Earth?

RS: From the shuttle, you can't see Earth the way the astronauts who went to the moon did. You can't see it as a big blue ball out in the

distance. You can see vast swaths of the earth, and you realize how connected we all are. You can see dust from Africa coming over and landing in Tennessee.

You can see smoke from fires in Central America wafting down. You can see the Amazon where they're cutting trees and all the mud is flowing into the river, and how it comes down and silts up on the coast.

You have this larger perspective of how we're connected, how the earth is this one thing we've all got. You don't see the little things that people are doing. You see the big things that are happening.

You're also aware of the fact that you can't see borders like a map, but you can see differences in how people live. For instance, if you take a picture from space of the border between the U.S. and Mexico, you can't see the people or buildings or anything like that, but you can see where the border is because north of the border are big fields. **Big** fields. Then there's a line, and below that are only little fields. The border between Egypt and Israel is similar because in Israel they irrigate. North of the

border, it's green and below is sand. It makes you ponder how we live differently in different places.

KW: You mentioned your yellow legal pads for the first draft of your book, but did you also keep a journal?

RS: In my heart I wanted to keep a journal, because I knew it was going to be a fabulous journey, one that women had not walked before. I wrote down a few things, but not much. I kept notes in the back of my schedule book, usually when I was mad about something (*laughter*), or something struck me about one of my kids.

I try to encourage people to write a book about their life – or ten pages about their life. I found a three page letter, typed, probably 1900, obviously dictated, by my great-great-grandfather. It documented what he did in the Civil War.

I would never have known anything about him other than his name had I not come across that. Things you do in your life can inspire other people to do the things they want to do. I think people ought to be given that as one of their assignments in life. Write something down.



LEFT Bronze statue of the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald by the artist Michael Price. Created in 1996 and located in St. Paul, Minnesota's Rice Park. Throughout Fitzgerald's career, he mentored fellow writers, and The Writer's Loft was created with this generosity of spirit in mind. (Photo by Gayle Edlin)

Lofty Writers & Poets Engage Middle Tennessee

How MTSU's Writer's Loft is mentoring new writers by Amanda Moon

What do a Vanderbilt pediatrician, a stay-at-home mom, a grandfather, and a NASA astronaut have in common?

All are alumni of The Writer's Loft at Middle Tennessee State University.

Twice a year, students and mentors gather for a weekend of workshops, discussions, and planning, then scatter back to their normal lives and back to their writings.

The Writer's Loft is now in its tenth year and offers students one-on-one mentorship as they work toward this non-residency certificate in creative writing. The program is self-directed through the partnership between the mentor and student with the pair determining the student's reading list and writing goals based on their overall objectives. Some students come to the program looking to begin a creative outlet, others have used the program to pen memoirs, poetry collections, and novels, and still more to launch their freelance writing careers.

In the summer of 2010, I found myself with a successful (if unfulfilling) corporate career, a fabulous family, and an uncontrollable need to write. I began looking for creative writing courses and thought about pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Writing degree, but with no formal writing experience I didn't feel comfortable with the financial commitment required to even apply to such a program, much less to cover the actual cost of the degree. The Writer's Loft's focus on mentorship and working with all levels of writers, along with the modest tuition, appealed to me, and I applied.

Each of the fall and spring semesters at the Loft kicks off with an intensive on-site orientation weekend. Although referred to as an "orientation," the weekend is as much for returning students and alumni as it is for new students. Each weekend is different: taught in a workshop style by the Loft's mentors and other creative professionals, topics vary from general lessons in creativity to writing exercises and discussions of current publishing trends. My first orientation weekend began with Whitney Ferre,

Roy Burkhead, then a full-time writer and editor at MTSU. At the time, he was also a fiction genre student in Spalding University's Master of Fine Arts in Writing program, he had a new baby, and he was looking to create a program for aspiring creative writers, something that was a step above a simple creative writing course.

Terry Price, current Loft mentor and director emeritus, was a student in the inaugural class.

"The Loft is a good way to find out if you have the discipline and the passion [required]

The Loft is a good way to find out if you have the discipline and the passion [required] before you commit your time and finances to a degreed program.

author of *The Artist Within: A Guide to Becoming Creatively Fit*, leading us in a group painting exercise, followed by a discussion about how to best tap into our inner creativity and combat blocks. Over the rest of the weekend, the other attendees and I (including a host of alumni who popped in and out as their schedules permitted) completed several writing exercises, worked with our mentors, and discussed various writing issues.

I was in heaven.

The Loft began in 2003 as the brainchild of

before you commit your time and finances to a degreed program," Price said. "Some people are affirmed in their directions, and we've had many students go on to earn their MFAs.

"We've also had people take a semester at the Loft and find out that [the writing life is] different or harder than they thought; in both cases, the Loft has served a valuable purpose."

"I've mentored three students in poetry," said poet Bill Brown. "One, Sandy Coomer has since

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The Writer's Loft

A decade-old community at MTSU by Charlotte Rains Dixon

I live in Portland, Oregon, but my writing community resides in Nashville.

Oh, I know a few writers in Portland, and I meet with them regularly. But I know *tons* of writers in Nashville, too many to count. And I see as many of them as possible when I come to town in January and September. I leave my trips to Music City refreshed, inspired, and energized... which is why a community is so vital to the solitary creatures named *writers*.

But that's getting ahead of the story. The first question you're probably asking is this: why is my main writing community in Nashville rather than Portland?

The answer is simple: The Writer's Loft.

I owe my wonderful writing community to this non-residency certificate in creative writing program, started by Roy Burkhead in 2003 and now run by Rabbi Rami Shapiro and headquartered at Middle Tennessee State University's English Department. (Read more about the Writer's Loft in Amanda Moon's article, elsewhere in this issue.)

Roy hired me to be the program's first mentor, and I continue to mentor for the Loft, which is why I arrive in Nashville every January and September. And through the Loft, I've met both students and mentors who have gone on to become close friends. Dozens of writers have gone through the three-semester program by now, and it's a certified success.

But back in August of 2003, when I first landed in Nashville (or more precisely, Murfreesboro), if you'd told me I'd be making the journey east from Portland regularly a decade later, I'd have said you were nuts...because not much about that first experience screamed success.

There was no budget for hotels or gas mileage, so Roy hosted the out of town mentors at his home. Drinking wine and eating ham with his family and with fellow mentor Linda Busby Parker that first night, I had my initial taste of a southern thunderstorm, complete with a tornado warning, which scared the bejeezus out of me. Later that night, Linda somehow managed to claim the private room which left another mentor and myself sharing the pull-out sofa surrounded by the toys of Roy's young son, Seth. We

lay there and talked and laughed into the night. Bleary-eyed, we arrived at the auditorium where the orientation was to take place, and the seats outnumbered participants by about ten to one.

And yet, from those inauspicious beginnings, the program grew and thrived.

It's been under the direction of a number of people since Roy left MTSU (including myself and my co-director Terry Price for a couple of years). Students have gone through their three semesters and continued to rave about the program. Some have taken one semester to gain help with a book, and others have completed the three semesters necessary for graduation and continued to sign up, unwilling to sever their connections with their mentors. Our alumni include an astronaut (Rhea Seddon), an award-winning author (Phil Scearce), and numerous writers who have published articles, poems, and books, as well as to be accepted into competitive programs like the Sewanee Writers' Conference and to have their prose included in national and foreign anthologies.

One of the reasons the Loft is so successful is because it has always emphasized community. I know of at least one writer's group that grew from the program which has continued to meet for years, and the Loft has spawned many lifetime friendships among writers. Often when I arrive in town, a big group of us who've met through the Loft gather for dinner or drinks. We talk shop, commiserate with each other about lack of progress on WIPs (works in progress) or gaining acceptances, and cheer each other's successes.

So let's talk a bit more about community.

One thing I've noticed is that writers are excellent at supporting one another. The director of Spalding University's MFA in Writing program, Sena Jeter Naslund, gives a welcoming lecture to new and returning students each semester. At every one of those I attended, I heard her emphasize the same thing: "Your competition is not in this room, it is in the library." And that has been my experience with writers. Sure, we may become jealous when one

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TOP Photo by Elizabeth Weeks



... Lofty Writers & Poets continued from page 21

published a chapbook with Finishing Line Press, another, Tiana Knight was awarded a full assistantship in the MFA program at Southern Illinois University, based on an interview and the manuscript she created during The Writer's Loft experience. It is an important part of our literary community."

The Loft requires the student to create a writing habit. Each student submits to his or her mentor three packets consisting of up to 25 pages of writing and an essay on the semester's reading.

For example, the mentor during my first semester was novelist Linda Busby Parker, and we focused that semester solely on getting words on the page. I used the structure and confidence I gained to complete an entire novel manuscript throughout my subsequent semesters.

My mentors provided me with several craft books that helped me through the drafting process that I continue to refer to throughout my re-writing process.

The other goal of The Writer's Loft, to create a community of writers within Middle Tennessee, has been successful, resulting in several writing groups, a thriving Facebook community, and connections to various publications.

"I am indebted to Terry Price and Charlotte Rains Dixon," said Phil Searce, author of *Finish Forty and Home: The Untold World War II Story of B-24s in the Pacific*. "This book would still be an idea if not for the structure and support of The Writer's Loft.

"My writer friends, other students of the Loft, and the mentors who contribute their time and talent to the program nurture creativity, cultivate writing, and demystify the process."

Several program alumni have published their works, both independently and traditionally. Director Rami Shapiro is particularly interested in seeing student work available in print and digitally.

"The Writer's Loft is really about completing publishable manuscripts; we are looking for students who want to sharpen their writing as they produce marketable material," Shapiro said. "I think the changes we will see over the next few years will be shaped by developments in digital publishing. Good writing will still be good writing, and bad writing will still be bad writing.

"We will work with students to make their writing as good as it can be, but what will change is the way we think about publishing our work."

The Writer's Loft may be found online at: mtsu.edu/theloft



LEFT Photo by Terry Price

The Technical Truth of Creative Writing

Smoothing out the harsh lines of writing words by Gayle Edlin

When I walked out of the deep darkness of the bedroom into the murky light of the hallway, I picked up a follower. When I turned fully to face her, I could distinguish her arching back as she rubbed up against the corner near the door. Her swishing tail, too, was visible, if not well defined.

I smiled and reached out to the waiting cat, who obligingly tipped her head towards me as her tail continued its graceful sweeps. I placed my fingers near her head and pressed downwards, to stroke that soft fur that I knew so well.

My hand went right through the cat before me, and she dissolved into the indistinct ether of the night like the ghost that she was. I remained where I was, hand outstretched, alone with nothing but the grainy haze of darkness all around and the emptiness of loss.

Good technical writing is incapable of surprising us in the way our lives seem to delight in doing. The moment when my hand slipped through my ghost cat would have been mitigated if the manual of my life pointed out at the beginning of this vignette—as manuals are obliged to do with shocking information—that the cat who trailed me on that otherwise unremarkable night had died some months before.

I don't believe in ghosts, but that's not the point of recounting my encounter with a ghost of the feline persuasion. Whether or not she was "real," my ghost cat was true. However unreal our experiences may be, they are true when we experience them, with every resonating detail, with each corroborating or refuting bit of evidence from our past. Truth is how our stories appeal to their audiences.

Technical writing, unlike life, is absolute in its linearity. It has no conception of how to insert a memory in the middle of a sequential task and courts absolute disaster for those following its steps when it offers disordered advice such as, "1. Connect the wires. 2. But first, disconnect the 240-volt power source."

Our lives are lived in an exquisite procession of moments, but our minds latch onto select few memories for preservation. There are precious few events that we recount—to ourselves or to others—in comparison with the steady stream of moments we actually live through. We polish these rough, singular truths through determined repetition until they have a luster beyond their original immanence.

The rough corollary in technical writing is the steps that are left out of the procedure. Not even a technical writer will tell you everything, though that may be hard to believe if you've ever seen the sentence, "From the File menu, select Open." I've never read a manual that tells me to begin by getting out of bed in the morning, though that certainly is a required step in the abundance of processes about which I have written during my career.

No, just as truth is a requirement of telling a good tale, so are accuracy and precision. The elements revealed must be on target and relevant, even if they don't begin at the beginning of the day you pick up a technical manual, even if they span decades in a fictional character's mind, or in your own. Unlike a good manual, a true story meanders; like a great manual, an excellent story reveals enough to support the

truth and not so much to obscure it.

And if this all seems like a bit much to get out of a ghostly encounter with a cat, well. That explains something about me, doesn't it? Because if you're gathering that I'm over-analytical and dedicated to finding meaning in my experiences, you're right. Communicating this kind of truth is a deeper process, far more personal than any technical manual could either aspire to or dare to imagine, which may be why I find it takes a lot of time and energy for me to do so.

Truth, when stated in facts, is not a difficult writing proposition. An engine either runs at 4800 rpm or it does not. But truth enumerated through individual experience becomes an exponentially more complex trial. It involves knowledge of character, of course, but it also involves willingness to reveal what one might rather wish to conceal.

The best product in the world can hurt you, if you use it improperly or under certain conditions for which the product is not designed. And the truth is, we all harbor ghosts we don't understand—and might not even fully believe—that haunt us in uncomfortable or enriching ways, or both. As writers, we delve into these spaces, digging into both the logical and illogical aspects of humanity, exposing the things that connect us all through emotional response rather than sequential continuity.

To cultivate the truth of experience runs a gamut of levels from noble to maddening, and

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... The Writer's Loft continued from page 22

among us gets a publishing deal and we're still languishing, but that jealousy is also combined with hearty congratulations.

Writers are the most interesting group of people to meet for social occasions. This may fly in the face of the conventional view of writers as introverts who are miserable socially, but I've found the opposite to be true. Because writers are at heart curious souls and generally passionate ones as well, conversations tend to be full of interesting turns and detours. And of course, there's all that chance to talk shop as well.

How do you find a community of writers?

There's lots of ways. Join a program like the Loft, or take a writing class at a community college. Check into local Meet-up groups. Go to a writing conference or retreat and chat up people. Attend an event like Nashville's Literary Libations, which meets at 5:30 p.m. the fourth Thursday of each month in the Prime 108 bar in the Union Station Hotel. Join a critique group. You can find support online, as well—check out writing blogs and forums and join in on the discussions.

If you're used to being a shy writer at home, the thought of stepping away from the computer can be daunting. The rewards are more than worth it, trust me.

... The Technical Truth of Creative Writing continued from page 25

the writers I know are drawn to the process with a dedication that approaches obsession. The stories we want to tell live in our minds, but bringing them to the page with the intricacy of honest truth can be about as easy as petting a ghost cat. And that complexity might be the root reason underneath all the tangled branches we cite for not finishing our works.

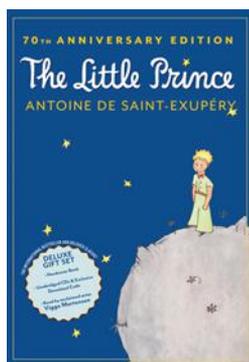
To tell the truth of our stories, we have to inhabit them, with all their oddities and flaws and denials; we have to accept the implausibilities of our stories and present predilections in a genuine way, regardless of what we--or our readers--would like to believe. To tell the truth of our stories, we first have to reach out to them ... and sometimes, through them.



LEFT Photo by Terry Price

Le Petit Prince

Revisiting a childhood favorite brings a rediscovery of life's little lessons by Renaud Rousselot de Saint C eran



On July 31, 1944, Antoine de Saint-Exup ry, aviator and arguably one of France's most famous 20th century writers, disappeared over the Mediterranean Sea during a reconnaissance mission for the Free French Air Force. It wouldn't be until 2003 that his plane, found 250 feet below the surface near Marseille, was identified. The exact circumstances of his death, however, are still a mystery.

In the 1920s and 30s, he was one of the pioneers of international postal flights, flying routes in Europe, Africa, and South America. His career as an aviator would inspire most of his work as a writer and novelist.

Already known internationally at the time of his death for his novel *Night Flight* (*Vol de Nuit*, 1931) and his memoir *Wind, Sand, and Stars* (*Terre des Hommes*, 1939 - winner of the U.S. National Book Award and the 'Grand Prix du roman de l'Acad mie Fran aise'), he achieved true worldwide fame posthumously after the publication of his most famous book, *The Little Prince* (*Le Petit Prince*, 1943).

Written in 1942 in New York City and Long Island, *The Little Prince* has since been translated into many languages and dialects, as well as adapted to various audio recordings, plays, and movies. It is still today one of the best-selling books of all time and a personal favorite.

Behind the appearances of a children's book, Saint-Exup ry – Saint-Ex as he was nicknamed – delivers a touching story about love, friendship, misunderstandings between kids and adults, and death.

The story: After his plane goes down due to engine problems, an aviator finds himself stranded in a remote area of the Sahara desert. Although far away from civilization, he wakes up the next morning to the voice of a little boy asking him to draw him a sheep. From this unlikely encounter springs a friendship between the two. The aviator soon learns about this boy's planet, his journey to the Earth in search for friends, his encounters with strange adults, and his troubles with a rose.

I first heard of this book as a young little boy myself. Pressed by my parents, I agreed to read it, even though the title didn't sound all that exciting. The copy they handed me, raggedy with yellowed pages, did nothing to stir my curiosity - or lack thereof. At a time when my reading list was spelled *Nancy Drew*, the story of a strange little boy troubled by a rose and his subsequent adventures hardly made an impact on me. While Nancy's investigations used to keep me up at night (hidden under my blanket with a light), I fought against boredom and yawned all the way through the Sahara desert and the existential concerns of that little prince. I did find the book nice and melancholic, but my seven- or eight-year-old brain failed to comprehend the message. As new characters appeared, their significance kept eluding me. It took many readings over several years, as well as some research, before I was able to decipher the story. To this day, I keep discovering new depths to *The Little Prince* every time I open it.

The success of the book lies in its ability to reach people of all ages. It is a philosophical tale with the appearance of a children book, which means there is something for everyone.

The younger ones will enjoy it for its fantasy aspect: the adventures of an extra-ordinary little boy who travels from one planet to the next carried by a flock of birds, meeting strange adults along the way. They may even identify themselves with him and his opinion of grown-ups. However, the metaphors and the messages behind the story may elude them the same way they eluded me. They will look at it as another tale, somewhere in between *The Arabian Nights* and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales.

Adults, however, will be able to read deeper into the story and be more receptive to the main theme: what's important in life cannot be seen with the eyes, as they are

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... Le Petit Prince continued from page 27

deceiving. One has to be able to see through the outward appearance of a person or an object in order to understand what is truly special. This message, essential to the book, is delivered to the little prince by a fox who then proceeds to tell him that what makes someone special to him is the time he devotes 'taming' that individual –another essential theme.

Adults may also understand the connections between the book and Saint-Exupéry's own life and appreciate the extra dimension these connections give to the story: The aviator marooned in the desert is based on the author's own near-death experience, when he, too, was forced to land his plane in the middle

of the Sahara desert. The relationship between the rose and the little prince may very well be inspired by the difficult relationship the author had with his wife. The baobabs growing on the little prince's planet could be a metaphor for the rise of extremism (the book was written right in the middle of World War II). His obsession to weed them out then makes a lot of sense.

Over the years I've grown increasingly fonder of this tale. As is the case with the narrator, wheat fields and stars remind me of that little prince. Three years ago, they started reminding me of my own little prince; a little guy with long, blond hair, large blue eyes, and a smile that turns any gloomy day into a joyful one.

I must apologize to those of you who have never read this story, or who have forgotten it. The enigmatic characters I mention, or the strangeness of the story itself, may turn you off the same way it failed to pick my curiosity some years ago. If this is the case, please don't let the appearances deceive you! Pick up the book and immerse yourself in the melancholic world of this little prince. If the first read falls short of sparking your interest, give it a second shot; let it sink in. I vow that, in time, it will become a favorite of yours, as well.

LEFT Photo by Gayle Edlin

To Write from the Heart

How songwriting from the heart can be written on assignment by Les Kerr

It's been my good fortune to have been commissioned to write some theme songs over the past few years. One was for a city and the other for a university fund-raising campaign. In each case, I enlisted my friend Bryan Cumming to help. While I write plenty of lyrics and melodies, Bryan has a special touch and a musical background that I knew would enhance each project. Prior to that, many years ago I co-wrote a song for a city "on spec" that was also utilized. Again, my co-writers, Jerry Powell and Tim Lovelace, had musical chops I could have only dreamed of for myself.

The heart is where most writers of words, music, and combinations thereof begin. What motivates most people to write their first song is the need to express thoughts or emotions or to tell a story. Sometimes, emotions and ideas are told through the vehicle of a story song combining all of those elements. After that first song is finished with the perfect blend of a melody and lyric that make the whole thing click, euphoria consumes the songwriter and, perhaps, another song comes out directly from the heart. Then, someone else hears one of these early tunes and enjoys it. A compliment on a line, melody, or completed tune rings like new strings on a good guitar. The declaration is made either verbally or within the songwriter's mind: I Am a Songwriter! The hard part is living up to that declaration.

A hit songwriter once said he considered the songs that pour out and practically write themselves to be gifts. Those presents may come along a few times a year but in between them, it's hard work. All writers, consciously or not, are on the lookout for ideas. Fodder for a new song could come from an emotion, a subject, or a conversational sentence uttered with perfect cleverness or turn of phrase. Such gems may be filed away in a writer's mind to resurface when it's time to create. If you pursue a clever title

idea, hook line, or topic worthy of a song, then you've given yourself an assignment, much like an academic requirement to support a thesis in a term paper. You have to prove your point, tell your story, or describe your feelings in a certain way to successfully support your song idea.

How can writing from the heart be combined with writing on assignment? There's a little bit of "you" in everything you do. Sometimes, there's a lot of "you" in whatever work you do or item you produce. It's important to remember that the feeling a song gives is just as important as a lyric or melody. The three must work together to strike the emotion of a listener and make that person remember a song and want to hear it again. That feeling in the listener originates from the heart of the songwriter — it's a part of you.

Commissioned works

O.K. Someone knows you write songs and asks you write one for personal or professional reasons. Some friends might ask you to write a song for their wedding. The leader of a city group or project may ask for a theme song, as was the case for me. If the idea is something you can put your heart into, do it. If you cannot put your heart into it, say, "No, thank you." You will disappoint yourself, your friend, or your client if you agree to something you can't embrace.

If you accept and you have some knowledge of the subject matter, that's a good start. If you've known one or both people getting married, you'll have some idea of what they might like. Also ask the person involved if there was a specific theme or thought he or she had that they want you to convey. After all, you are writing the song for them.

In the case of the song Bryan and I wrote for the city, Cookeville, Tennessee, I thought the area was beautiful but didn't really know that much about it. So I learned. Cookeville is

not far from Nashville, so it was easy for me to go spend some time in the area, soak up the atmosphere, and formulate my own impressions and emotions about it. There was also a specific message. The chamber of commerce already had the title and performers picked out, so that gave us some guidance. We were to write a song called *Highlands of Tennessee* that would be performed by a bluegrass band. I have played in bluegrass bands off and on since college and love the music, so I enjoyed writing a bluegrass song about a beautiful part of Tennessee.

Dos and don'ts

- Do combine your own emotions with the message. That will give a human touch to the finished song.
- Don't write a jingle! Creating a laundry list of items that rhyme set to a catchy tune will undermine your mission. Write a song you would enjoy hearing whether or not you knew anything about the subject. Think "Danny's Song," "New York, New York," or "Rocky Top." Write a good song. If it gets condensed to a jingle, make sure the original is worth repeating.
- Do stay on point. If you're writing about a couple, don't bring other people into the song. If you're writing about a place, stick to it. I once heard a song about a city that referenced two other cities before the main subject was even mentioned. Stay focused.
- Don't be offended if the person you are writing for makes suggestions. They are the customer.
- Do ask for specific ideas before you start writing.
- Do your best. Whether you give yourself an assignment or you've been commissioned to produce, write your best song.

Whether you create your own assignment or follow someone else's, songwriting can be hard work. But it's work worth doing.

A Talk with Jaden

Nashville author Jaden Terrell shares the story behind her Jared McKean book series



Reprinted from Permanent Press Books, late August 2012, Jared McKean Series

Q: In this second book of the series, PI McKean has to get his nephew Josh off the hook for murder of a Goth leader. Describe the relationship between McKean and Josh?

JD: Jared taught Josh to play guitar and bought him his first “big-boy” bike. Josh finds it easier to talk to Jared than to his dad, and when Josh ran away from home, Jared was the one who found him and brought him back. Jared has been closely involved in the lives of both his brother’s children, but he has a soft spot for Josh, because Josh seems more adrift. Jared is both proud of and worried for him. He loves Josh like a son.

Q: How do you like Josh and how did you decide to posture him as a follower of the Gothic cult?

JD: I love Josh. He’s bright, sensitive, and talented, but he’s also struggling with his sexual identity and the fear that he’s not the son his father always wanted. He’s troubled, but he has a good heart. I’m not sure I made a conscious decision to make Josh Goth. A lot of creative, bright kids are drawn to the Goth lifestyle—the drama of it, the melancholia—and when I first saw him in my mind, he was clearly enmeshed in it. I wrote a scene where he runs away to live with an older man known as the Vampire Prince of Nashville and realized that Josh had drifted into a more dangerous fringe group of that subculture. It heightened the tension and deepened the story, so I ran with it.

Q: This book is edgier than the first book, *Racing The Devil*. Did you know it would have this dark side back when you were planning the series?

JD: No, I had some loose ideas for other books, but I didn’t realize the second would have such a different tone

from the first. But the victim in this book is much less innocent than the one in the first, which took the book in a different direction.

Q: Which character did you enjoy developing the most in *A Cup Full of Midnight*?

JD: That’s a hard question. I really enjoyed creating the relationship between Jared and his nephew, but I’ll assume you mean new characters as opposed to those who made an appearance in the first book.

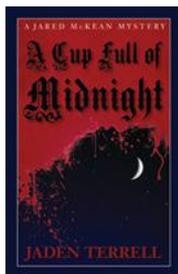
The victim was a complex character, and I enjoyed figuring out how to reveal the various aspects of his character, but I especially enjoyed developing Dylan, the man who gave Jay, Jared’s roommate and best friend, AIDS. Near the beginning of the book, Jay gets a call saying Dylan is in the end stages of the disease and has no place to go, and Jay insists on bringing him home and caring for him. Dylan doesn’t play a large role in the book, but it’s an important one.

Q: Was the second book easier or harder to write than the first book and why?

JD: Easier, because I had a better sense of how to put a story together. Harder, because the story is more complex and more emotionally draining.

Q: Set in Nashville, you have a nice mix of landmarks in the story. Is this by design?

JD: It is. In early drafts, I tend to pay a lot of attention to the characters and dialogue, and I can sometimes forget to ground the scenes in terms of setting. A friend read an early draft and said she didn’t get a good sense of place, so in the next edits, I made a point of making the settings more vivid, including many that are unique to Nashville. I love Nashville and hope readers will get a sense of what’s special about it when they read the book.



<http://www.elizabethterrell.com/>



RIGHT Laura Hill at her Dickson store, Reading Rock Books. In this family bookstore, good days are filled with much talking. (Photo by Terry Price)

Reading Rocks Dickson

This locally owned bookstore keeps it in the family by Suzanne Craig Robertson

Laura Hill and Amy Jernigan both do the books at Reading Rock Books, but their jobs are quite different.

"She tells me how much I can spend," Hill says of her older sister, who handles accounting and bookkeeping for the Dickson, Tennessee store. Hill, as manager, takes care of the day-to-day selling and buying of the actual books, while Jernigan crunches the numbers from home and does Friday shifts at the store.

The sisters co-own the store, while Hill and her husband (John Hill) own the building it's in. The girls' mother, Mary Phy, works at the store part-time, and Hill's three-year-old son has spent much of his young life surrounded by the cozy bead-board walls lined with bookshelves. Now he spends many days at both his grandmothers' houses, but his first two years he came to work with his mom every day. In fact, he was even there before birth.

The store opened in August 2008; he was born in September 2009.

"Everyone knows Jack the Bookstore Baby," Hill says.

An English major from Western Kentucky University with a minor in writing, Hill says she once had aspirations to be a writer, but not anymore.

"I am a reader," which started early. "As a kid I read all the time. I read everything," she says. "I never had a 'conversion;' I've just always have been a reader," which is where they got the idea for what to call the store, named for an actual rock, a childhood quiet place she would

frequent, book in hand.

"Everything we came up with [to name the store] sounded ridiculously feminine," she laughs, "and we didn't want men to think they couldn't come in."

Husband John designed the logo, a silhouette of a child sitting high atop a large rock, reading a book balanced on his knees. Jernigan has two boys, 9 and 12, and the child on the logo resembles them, as well as Hill's son.

Hill pegs the start of her love for independent bookstores to a trip a college professor took her class on, to Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi. Not stopping at *telling* them how special independent bookstores are, he *showed* them. Years later when she and her husband moved to Los Angeles for his job as an animator, she remembered Professor Rutledge's lesson and looked for a job at a bookstore. She began working at Dutton's Books in North Hollywood, and then she was manager at Portrait of a Bookstore in Studio City, California.

When it was time to move back to Middle Tennessee, the sisters knew they wanted to open a bookstore. They chose Dickson, about 30 minutes from their roots in Houston County's Erin, for its safety and the "warm, sweet people." The historic downtown area — night-and-day-different from the strips of chain stores along Highway 46 — has undergone a major facelift in recent years.

The renovated Main Street with its vintage feel and easy parking has aided in the town being a destination for locals as well as tourists

looking for antique stores, men's clothes, quaint restaurants ... and books.

"The other merchants on the street are fun," Hill says. "We are all doing it because we love it and are passionate about what we do." The store pays for itself now, she says, although she doesn't make a living yet. "It will come," she says. "We've seen growth, year over year."

With her experience managing a bookstore, she says her job is just what she expected. "I got a good taste of what it was like to be on this end," she says of her early jobs. In those stores there were a lot of part-time workers, so she managed people as much or more than books. "It was scheduling shifts. Not here — I'm it."

Most days, it's just her, the books, and her customers sharing space. Kids can touch and read books, as well as play with toys and activities at eye-level tables while their parents browse the shelves or flip through prospects on nearby overstuffed chairs and benches.

On a "good day there is a lot of talking," she says. A *bad day* is spent cataloging used books, "but that's still a good day." Either way, she can't seem to stop smiling when talking about her store and the life it has given her. When she's alone in the store she's either reading, cataloging used books, or shopping for what to order.

"I know how to cultivate the stock," a balancing act of "what I like and what will sell."

About half of Reading Rock's books are used, shelved neatly in the back room. Hill gives credit for good used books, 25 percent of the used price. In other words, bring in four and



you can take one home. A woman with a huge shopping bag full of paperbacks strides through the store and is greeted like an old friend. After handing over the goods, she heads to the back room to shop while Hill rummages through the bag, figuring the credit.

"We always need westerns and good nonfiction," she says, but not so much romance.

If she had to choose her favorite type of writing, it would be literary fiction. She loves authors Lorrie Moore, Per Petterson, and Vendela Vida. She likes historical fiction okay but admits "it's a genre with a lot of baggage."

Baggage comes with the job, though, as Hill compares selling books to being a bartender: "You'd be surprised what people will tell a bookseller."

As if on cue, a young woman comes in looking for a book for a Father's Day gift, and Hill shifts into full-on bookseller mode.

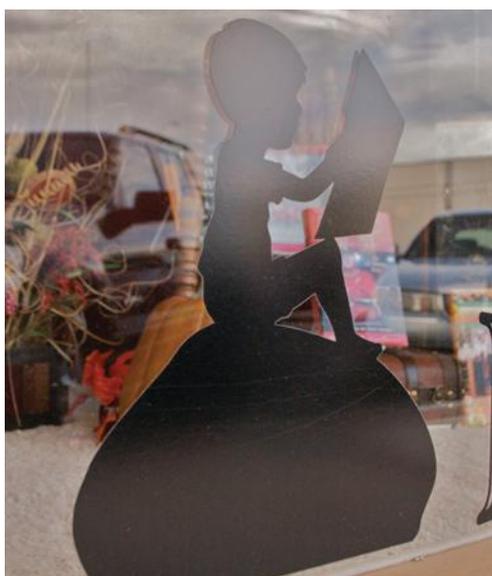
"What does he like," Hill asks. "What is he like," she rephrases, and within four minutes she knows about his recent hip surgery, prognosis for recovery (a while yet so he needs a lot to read), and that he likes mysteries, but he's already read all the John Grishams. In response to Hill's questions, this grown daughter describes her father in such detail that Hill says, "I want to meet this man!"

On a mission, she steps behind the counter, the blue reflection of her computer lighting her face and showing her the publication date of John Grisham's latest novel. The daughter makes a phone call to confirm her dad has read that one, then Hill darts from shelf to shelf pulling other books he might like. For good measure, in addition to murder mysteries by area authors Steve Womack and J.T. Ellison—and explaining the plots with enthusiasm—she comes up with some nonfiction choices that he also might like. The woman leaves, bagged books in hand. Hill smiles.

"What people want from independent bookstores is for someone to say 'I like it and you will, too.'" It's a tall order for her to know about all 11,000 books she has in stock. She says she's only read "a small percentage" of the books in her store, but she works at it all the time. She leads two book clubs, so she keeps up with those selections and much more. She also counts on customers to fill her in on books she doesn't know about.

"I can't know all the books," she says. "But I want to."

Reading Rock Books is located at 122 N. Main Street in the heart of downtown Dickson, about 40 minutes west of Nashville. It is open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Learn more at <http://www.thereadingrock.com/>



TOP, LEFT Photos by Terry Price



LEFT Winder Binder Gallery and Bookstore owner David Smotherman pauses during a busy day to talk about the book business. Located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at 40 Frazier Avenue, Winder Binder Gallery & Bookstore is one of the dozen or so places throughout Tennessee that provide complimentary copies of *2nd & Church* to the public. <http://winderbinder.wordpress.com/> (Photo by Roy Burkhead)

Scenic City Poets Abound

Poetry alive and well in Chattanooga's writing scene by K.B. Ballentine

Chattanooga, Tennessee, is known as the Scenic City: outdoors and active. But it's also home to the creative spirit. Art, craft, and antique stores are tucked along side streets and main streets throughout downtown. Jazz and blues spiral the evening air as musicians fill taverns and cafes.

What you might not know is that Chattanooga has a lively writing scene, and it's growing. This writing scene isn't a new one, but, especially for poets, many additional venues are emerging to join the ranks of Chattanooga's

well-established ones.

The quickest way to meet fellow writers is to join the Chattanooga Writers' Guild (CWG). Though there is an annual fee, there are several writing groups in every genre available to collaborate with. CWG makes a lot of information available in one location with monthly meetings and an e-newsletter, but there are a number of places outside the Guild that are open to everyone.

For over ten years, Barnes and Noble has been the home of Open Mic every last Friday of

the month from January through October (7:30 p.m.). Launched by Jenny Sadre-Orafai and now hosted by K.B. Ballentine, this group of diverse writers comes together to read their work and to share with others the writing they've been working on in solitude. Organized for new and seasoned readers, this is an informal Open Mic: no sign-up sheet, no minimum or maximum number of poems to read. Writers can share as often as they'd like, dictated only by the size of

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Paired Poets at the Corner

Malcolm Glass and Mitzi Cross Read at The Poet's Corner by Michael Turner

In June 2010, Poet's Corner, a place where poets can read their work in an informal setting and can talk about their poems and interact closely with audiences, Tanya (TJ) Jarrett, a writer first and a software developer second (to support her habit of writing), was the first poet to read. Having published in such journals as *African American Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *DIAGRAM*, *Linebreak*, *Rattle*, *Southern Poetry Anthology*, and *Third Coast*, she set the standard for excellence and variety that would mark the poets who have read monthly at the Poet's Corner at Scarritt-Bennett. Jarrett recommended much of the lineup of poets who were to read that first year.

Every fourth Thursday in Nashville at 7:00 p.m. (except for different days in November and December), the public may hear poets read at the Ogburn House on the Scarritt Bennett campus, a stone house located at the corner of Grand Avenue and 19th Avenue South. Enter the front door on 19th Avenue—making your way along the hallway, you'll find a kitchen, where coffee and treats are available for about a dollar. As you go through the kitchen, you'll discover a room where tables and chairs are set up, much like a coffee house. In the corner of the room, a lectern and a microphone stand, ready for poets to, as Shakespeare said, speak their words "trip-pingly on the tongue."

Poets never receive money, though they can sell their books. Poets share diverse ideas, as Joyce Sohl, organizer of the Poet's Corner, writes, both "religious and secular; about hurt and healing; often times dealing with relationships."

Each poem served as a world; each poet took us to places, places we didn't know we would go.

Poets who have read at the Poet's Corner include Leslie Collins, Bill Brown, Kelly Falzone, David Till, Stephanie Pruitt, Patricia Albrecht, Bob Bradley, Jeff Hardin, and Heather Dobbins-Combs. In addition, all of 2013 is fully scheduled. (Next to the Ogborn House is the International Garden and Labyrinth, a labyrinth you can walk beforehand, meditating and reflecting before you hear words spilled out into a room, entering the voices of the poets reading, the words dashing and sparking among the audience).

On May 24, 2012, wife and husband poets Mitzi Cross and Malcolm Glass read together, pairing poems around different perspectives,

poems that were different and similar, simultaneously.

Under lanterns and lights of the room, people heard poems to make them pause, to make them stop, to catch them. Photographers and playwrights as well as poets, Malcolm and Mitzi shared a visual tapestry, using words to paint scenes, to etch emotions.

Stating that many of their poems are inspired by photographs, Mitzi Cross shared her poem, "Lily," letting us see beyond what a photograph could capture. Next, Malcolm shared his counterpart poem, "The Photo." Where "Lily" described how Lily brought people together, even in loss, "The Photo" dealt with the breaking asunder of lovers.

Malcolm goes on to describe how this imaginary photo would reflect the aloneness of togetherness. Life is filled with promises we don't keep; our past is often riddled with them, as the closing lines of Malcolm's poem states.

Each poem served as a world; each poet took us to places, places we didn't know we would go. Poetry readings are like that—each poem is a voyage, each word a part of the structure.

Characters in and experiences from literature do not stop at the borders of published works. Instead, themes from poems can be elaborated on, explored, took apart, and made into

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... Scenic City Poets Abound continued from page 34

the crowd that wants to participate.

Now in its second year, Wide Open Floor meets monthly on each first Friday at Barking Legs Theatre (8 p.m.). Initiated by dancer Angela Sweet, Wide Open Floor features dancers, musicians, and poet performers sharing their work in a lovely melding of the arts now hosted by Marcus Patrick Ellsworth.

A newer event that has appeared in Chattanooga is Poetry Too, which meets on the first Tuesday of each month at Pasha Coffee and Tea (6 p.m.). Founded by host Ray Zimmerman,

Poetry Too offers writers a chance both to read and to critique their work. If you are willing to share your work and would like to participate in the workshop, just take ten copies of one poem you'd like critiqued. Often there is a discussion about what's going on in the writing world, so it's a good place to catch up on all that "writerly" gossip.

Another new outlet for the aspiring writing/performer is Manifest (8:00 p.m.). Christian J Collier hosts this exciting new venue at Camp House every second Saturday. Each month

focuses on a different theme and, according to Collier, is meant to "showcase local artists of different mediums," which includes music, poetry, and visual arts.

Chattanooga is certainly a scenic city for writers. Sit by the Tennessee River, stare back at the fish at the Aquarium, sip tea by the Choo-Choo. Watch the joggers and the tourists along the River Walk. Visit those spots, write about them, and share what you write – there are plenty of venues to do that. Whatever inspires you, jump into Chattanooga's writing scene.



LEFT Up until early in 2012 when the 30-foot high memorial statue of Martin Luther King, Jr. was erected in Washington, D.C., the distinction of being the world's largest statue of an African American was held by this 12-foot statue of *Roots* and *Queen* author Alex Haley, a bit east of downtown Knoxville. (Photo by Gary R. Johnson)

A Vagabond Comfort

A brief literary history of Knoxville, Tennessee by Christine Dano Johnson

On the banks of the Tennessee River, just downhill from the quiet, relaxed bustle of downtown Knoxville, Tennessee, there is a stone placard that marks the spot where Frances Hodgson Burnett lived and did much of her early writing. Frances, her siblings, and their widowed mother lived in a large, gracious but tumble down home she called Vagabondia. The family immigrated to East Tennessee from Manchester, England when Frances was a teenager and had once been wealthy, but they had fallen into a sort of genteel poverty. Perhaps because of her family's 'fall from grace,' Frances had a way of infusing beauty and a bohemian sort of refinement into her daily life.

When her mother died, Frances turned Vagabondia into an eccentrically beautiful castle of art, literature, and music. Knoxville was a rough, wild place in the wake of the Civil War, but Frances cultivated the beauty around her, much like Mary Lennox, the heroine in Burnett's classic children's novel, *The Secret Garden*. "Vagabondia Castle" is now gone, with the city and county government's cement structure in its place. But from the banks of the Tennessee River on Volunteer Landing, you can kind of look up the hill past Neyland and imagine what life was like in a bohemian paradise after the Civil War.

A short walk from Volunteer Landing, on a hill overlooking Knoxville's Market Square, sits Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. A silver plaque is erected near the chapel entrance, marking the spot where a famous priest and poet lived, worked, and wrote the most famous poem of the Civil War.

For two years in the twilight end of the war, Father Abram Joseph Ryan officiated over a congregation of both Union and Confederate

Knoxvillians. Spending much of the war as a freelance chaplain for the Confederates, Father Ryan had a gypsy spirit and rarely stayed at the reigns of one church for long. In 1865, he had arrived in Knoxville, and when the news reached him in June that General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox, the "poet-priest of the south" sat down in his chambers at Immaculate Conception and wrote "The Conquered Banner." The lyrical poem became the eulogy of a scarred region after it was published in *The New York Freeman*. Knoxville (like much of East Tennessee) was primarily populated with Union sympathizers, but families often were split in their allegiance, and it was not uncommon for "brother to fight brother."

Just a block away from Immaculate Conception is Knoxville's Market Square, which has been immortalized by Knoxville native sons

home. Told from the perspective of Agee as a young boy, the home, the neighborhood, and downtown Knoxville are characters in of themselves: large, looming, full of mystery and luxurious detail.

The actual home where Agee grew up, and where the novel takes place, is no longer standing. But blocks away is a small garden park, erected by the city and cared for lovingly by volunteers. The park sits on an old foundation of another home that was leveled many years ago. Some of the neighborhood's mansions are still kept up in the original style of the neighborhood, but many have been chopped into student apartments and sadly have fallen into disrepair.

Though the surrounding streets are a bit on the rough side, James Agee Park is kept up by volunteers who love the neighborhood and

When her mother died, Frances turned Vagabondia into an eccentrically beautiful castle of art, literature, and music.

Cormac McCarthy and James Agee. On the pavement, the city has place markers etched with quotes from their novels describing downtown Knoxville and Market Square, the most famous of which is James Agee's Pulitzer Prize winning autobiographical masterpiece, *A Death in the Family*.

James Agee grew up in the Ft. Sanders neighborhood near the University of Tennessee, which is the setting for *A Death in the Family*. In the novel, Agee's father dies and is kept laying in wake in the parlor of the family's large

love Agee. Hundreds of different species of flowers and herbs fill the park with fragrance and color, and there's an elegantly crafted metal gate marking the entrance from the street. It's a lovely and quiet spot in a neighborhood that is much different now than it was in Agee's day; the park feels like a colorful and soft pocket of calm.

Up until early in 2012 when the thirty-foot-high memorial statue of Martin Luther King, Jr.



... A Vagabond Comfort continued from page 37

was erected in Washington, DC, the distinction of being the world's largest statue of an African American was held by a statue of *Roots* and *Queen* author Alex Haley, a bit east of downtown Knoxville. Haley chose East Tennessee as his home later in life, working and living on a farm north of Knoxville in Clinton, Tennessee. A frequent presence downtown because he utilized the university archives to research, Haley, though originally from West Tennessee, became a beloved native son to the area. The twelve-foot statue erected in his honor shows him smiling serenely and holding a book, and next to the memorial is a playground. Sounds of happy children playing permeate the joyful spot.

Twenty miles north of Knoxville, in Clinton, is Haley Farm. Here, Haley lived and worked until his death, and his home and land have been turned into a retreat and research center.

Run by the Children's Defense Fund, the lush, 157-acre farm is also home to the Langston Hughes Library, a small research library named after poet Langston Hughes. Primarily holding African American literature of all genres, the structure was converted out of an old cantilever barn, a nod to the Appalachian roots of African Americans in East Tennessee. In the library and surrounding farm, student groups and researchers can conduct research, learn about Haley and other African American writers, and take in the peaceful setting that was Haley's final home.

Knoxville, and the rest of East Tennessee, is such an assuming, unpretentious place that it might at first seem hard to grasp that so much influential literature was written here. But if time is spent on its quiet, tree-lined streets or in the forests, rivers, and mountains that surround the city, it becomes apparent: the city's inspiration

lies in its quiet beauty and in the hearts of its people. Here is a list to guide you on an informal literary tour of the area:

- Volunteer Landing: www.cityofknoxville.org/parks/volunteer.asp
- Market Square and Gay Street: www.knoxvillemarketsquare.com/
- The Campus of the University of Tennessee: www.utk.edu
- Haley Heritage Square: www.cityofknoxville.org/parks/haley.asp
- Haley Farm: www.childrensdefense.org/about-us/haley-farm/
- Immaculate Conception Catholic Church: www.icknoxville.org/
- James Agee Park, Ft. Sanders: www.cityofknoxville.org/parks/jamesagee.asp

**Attributed to Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel, Vagabondia.*

A Literary Heritage

Knoxville, Tennessee's vibrant literary community by Christine Dano Johnson

Knoxville is known as a college football town, but thanks both to the influence of the University of Tennessee and to the lush landscape of the nearby Smoky and Cumberland Mountains, the city has a rich artistic and literary heritage. Whether they frequent our local independent bookshops, conduct research in our thriving local library system, or attend a lecture at the University of Tennessee, poets and writers living and working in Knoxville are blessed with a warm, welcoming community.

Even with such a strong support system in place, Knoxville was in danger of losing two of its most prominent independent bookstores a year and a half ago. Months ahead of the Borders demise, two beloved area independent bookstores, Carpe Librum and Book Eddy, announced their closure.

Knoxville readers and writers alike felt the loss keenly, but the void was not left empty for long. Carpe Librum's former owners opened a smaller shop downtown, called Union Avenue Books, and the owner of Book Eddy reopened as Central Street Books in the quirky "Happy Holler" neighborhood in North Knoxville. Union Avenue Books, with its close proximity to Market Square, Gay Street, Lawson McGhee Library, and the University of Tennessee, has fast become the

place to meet with a book club or listen to author and poet readings. In May 2012, dozens of people piled into the small storefront to listen to the poet Nikki Giovanni, who was born here in Knoxville and spent her childhood summers a few miles from downtown.

Central Street Books, like its predecessor The Book Eddy, focuses on antique and vintage books, and the interior has a wonderful masculine feel to it. Cow skulls, stuffed birds, and other oddities float from the ceiling and peer over the dark wood shelves, which are filed with the most gorgeous old books. It's a place to fall in love with books for pure aestheticism.

Union Avenue Books often plays host to events coinciding with those of the Knoxville Writers Guild, an extremely active organization for writers and poets of all backgrounds and experience.

In addition to monthly meetings that host featured local authors such as Pamela Shoenwaldt, Jack Neely, and Amy Green, they also host a yearly series of writing contests and publish a semi-annual anthology. It's a great resource for writers new to the area or new to the craft; the guild members are friendly and generous with their advice and praise. The Guild's monthly meetings are held in the old

Laurel Theatre in the Fort Sanders neighborhood, just steps away from where James Agee grew up (and the park that was dedicated to his memory).

Several guild members are also involved with the University of Tennessee's Creative Writing Program (and many are alumni of the university). Headed by the prolific poet Marilyn Kallet, this Department of English program boasts an illustrious reputation for fostering strong talent both in its graduates and its faculty.

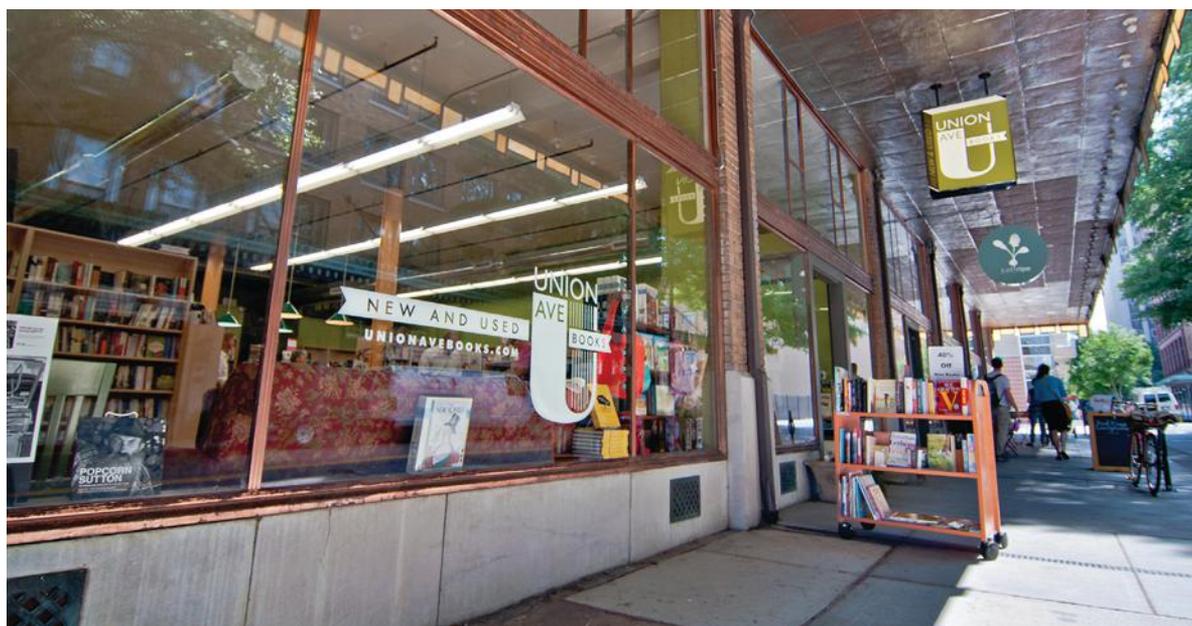
The program also hosts a reading series during the school year, a Young Writers Institute, produces a student-published literary journal (*Grist*), and each year hosts a Writer-in-Residence. It's a rich, diverse department, in a city flourishing with talent.

Literary Knoxville Online

- Knoxville Writers Guild: www.knoxvillewritersguild.org
- UTK Creative Writing Department: www.creativewriting.utk.edu
- Union Avenue Books: www.unionavenuebooks.com
- Central Street Books: www.facebook.com/pages/Central-Street-Books

LEFT The James Agee Park, Ft. Sanders Neighborhood, near the University of Tennessee campus (Photo by Gary R. Johnson)

RIGHT Union Avenue Books, Union Avenue, Downtown Knoxville (Photo by Gary R. Johnson)





LEFT Photo by Natalie
Brasington Photography

Meeting Michael Morris

Southern novelist shares insights on craft and conflict by Julia Watts

Late last year, Tennessee writer Julia Watts sat down with Southern novelist Michael Morris after the publication of his novel, *Man in the Blue Moon*, to talk about his start, about his literary influences, and about historical fiction.

Julia Watts: According to your website, you worked in pharmaceutical sales and didn't really start writing seriously until you were in your early thirties. Can you talk a little about the process of how you came to understand yourself as a writer?

Michael Morris: Like many writers, I had a high school teacher who first gave me encouragement. Linda Maultsby was my eleventh grade English teacher, and she told me that I had talent. I was a C student at best and her words made me feel like I could soar right out of the classroom. But in my mind, writers were not from a small paper mill town in Florida. Writers were from New York, Paris, or if they were from the south they were eccentric alcoholics. I thought that I'd use my writing skills to major in public relations, which I did. I ended up working in the pharmaceutical industry, both in sales and in public affairs. When I was thirty, I began to take stock on my life. My mom and I had fled an abusive household when I was young, and we had never talked about it. I knew that was a topic I wanted to explore. For me, writing is a way to understand the gray zone in life.

A breakthrough moment for me was when I was shopping my first novel, *A Place Called Wiregrass*, to publishers. Twenty-seven publishers turned the book down. I was discouraged and disappointed but not deterred. Writing the novel had opened up a dialogue within my family, and it gave me a sense of purpose. I still remember the day when I looked down at the manuscript that was sitting on the floor in a Kinko's copy box and decided if nothing else, when I was dead and gone, somebody in my family would find a mildewed box with my story in it. They might even sit down and read it. For me that is what writing is all about, telling a story honestly and leaving a footprint. *A Place*

Called Wiregrass did eventually get picked up by a small press and thanks to the support of independent bookstores, it found a loyal readership. But today whenever I start a novel, I still come back to that moment and the Kinko's box. I feel that I first have to write for myself – to write the story that I would want to read.

JW: Your work has been praised by such luminaries as Lee Smith and Pat Conroy and has been compared favorably with the writing of Harper Lee and Flannery O'Connor, which puts you in some pretty "tall cotton," as we say in the South. Can you tell me about your literary influences?

MM: Thanks to my discovering writers like

the first quote I ever received. I still have that letter. It was a wonderful moment because she was the first writer who really opened up my reading world and she was the first writer who supported my work. I will always love her for that.

Pat Conroy's *Prince of Tides* is another book that had a great influence on me. The beauty of the language and the themes of the love of land and family secrets have stayed with me. Although it's been more than twenty years since I first read that novel, out of the blue scenes from the novel will still come to mind. In my way of thinking, Pat Conroy is the king of Southern fiction. He has been a huge encourager and

But hardship, pain, love, and the search for redemption are universal. At the end of the day, I try to write stories that capture these elements of life.

Lee Smith, I began to identify with characters in fiction – real Southerners like the ones I'd grown up with who faced major intersections in life. At the time I started to explore my life history and started writing, I moved to my company's home office in North Carolina, coincidentally where Lee Smith lives. I went to every book event and speaking engagement that Lee Smith did. After I finished my first novel, *A Place Called Wiregrass*, I went to one of Lee's events, stood in the back of the line, and asked if she would read it. Of course, I didn't realize that it is not protocol to simply walk up to a writer at an event and ask her to read your novel! But being the warm and generous person that she is, Lee agreed to read it. I think she recognized me from all the events I'd attended, sitting on the front row. I was basically a literary stalker. A couple of months later, she sent me a letter which ended up becoming

a guiding force – not only to me but to many other writers.

Just this week I was talking to someone about Harper Lee, Flannery O'Connor, and Eudora Welty and how it seems odd that their work was not taught in my high school. I wish that I would have found out about their work earlier in my life. The short stories of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor can always be found on a table some place in my house. I also love *Flannery*, the biography of Flannery O'Connor that was written by Brad Gooch. Her life and self-deprecating humor are as inspiring as her work. I love how unpretentious she was. Her stories pick up on the peculiar, and I love that – particularly her physical descriptions.

JW: Do you consider yourself a regional

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... Paired Poets at the Corner continued from page 35

something new in other poems, a building of allusions and illusion. Literature becomes timeless when other writers reflect, twisting and remunerating characters, ideas, dreams, making us see things we didn't earlier see.

The hour quickly passed, Malcolm and Mitzi going back and forth, sharing poems gathered together, each poem paired together, each sharing illuminating the poems.

Both poets ended with two pairings, four poems of love, Mitzi sharing first, then Malcolm; then, Mitzi, and Malcolm, reading the final

poem of the evening.

In the poem "Moss," Mitzi tells how her husband carefully rescues the moss, and she reflects on how the natural world and Malcolm's love are united in her mind. In Malcolm's final poem of the evening, "The Dream I Send You," Malcolm sends a dream he has to his wife.

The Poet's Corner at Scarritt Bennett gives us all a gift, a way to hear words spoken, a place to question poets about why they chose the words they did, and to be spellbound, to return to a past caught in our genes, a past where spoken

language was first written down as poems.

To see who else will be reading in 2013 at the Poet's Corner, including bios and samples of each poet's work, visit <http://www.scarrittbennett.org/programs/pc.aspx>

Since this piece has been written, the Poet's Corner has moved to Fondren Building, 2nd floor. The most convenient parking to Fondren is in SBC Parking Lot A, accessible from 18th Ave S. A Scarritt Bennett campus map is available at http://www.scarrittbennett.org/about/images/sbctmap10_12.pdf

... Meeting Michael Morris continued from page 41

writer, or do you think that term is too limiting?

MM: I am just glad to have readers, whether in the South or beyond! If I'd been asked this question ten years ago, I probably would have said no, I do not consider myself a regional writer. However, after having worked with editors from other parts of the country, there is no denying that Southern dialect and culture are unique.

Readers in the South seem to relate easily to the dialect and other aspects of my work, like the complexity between graciousness and racism and the eternal 'dinner on the ground' at church homecomings. But hardship, pain, love, and the search for redemption are universal. At the end of the day, I try to write stories that capture these elements of life.

JW: Your new novel, *Man in the Blue Moon*, is set during World War I. How did your experience writing historical fiction compare to writing fiction in a contemporary setting?

MM: *Man in the Blue Moon* is based on oral history that my grandfather shared. When he was a boy he and his brother were sent to the port city of Apalachicola, Florida, to pick up a delivery for their father's country store. They got the shipment back home, and their daddy popped the lid off the crate. A man climbed out of the box. He was on the run for a murder he claimed he didn't commit.

My grandfather was the best storyteller I have ever known. When he told a story, you were there in the moment. Through his oral history, I knew what Old Florida was really like. It was what we think of today as the Wild West, where an eye for an eye justice was often rendered. Oral history is really the most beneficial

resource I've found for historical fiction.

I also read books about the area during the early twentieth century, watched documentaries on the 1918 flu epidemic, and spent days reading the 1918 Apalachicola newspapers on microfilm. Then telling the rest of the story was not unlike writing contemporary fiction – focusing on the wants and the needs of people who are desperate. My main character, Ella, is struggling to save her land from foreclosure and trying to provide for her sons. The biggest challenge I found was trying to sprinkle details about the time period so that nothing in the story came across as a history lesson.

JW: Could you discuss your writing process a little, from the seed of an idea until fruition?

MM: Often I'll have an idea for a story and will file it away in the back of my mind until I can come up with additional conflict. For example, the original idea for my second novel, *Slow Way Home*, came to me before I wrote my first novel. I was in Fort Lauderdale in the back of a taxi, heading to the airport. I looked out of the car window and saw a sea of campers parked in a field that probably was once a cow pasture. My first thought was someone could get lost in that environment, and then in my mind's eye, I saw a pair of grandparents with their grandson. Since conflict drives a story, I didn't know where to take it so I went ahead and started *A Place Called Wiregrass*.

A year later, I was watching the news and saw a story about a Supreme Court ruling on a case involving grandparents and custody rights. The court ruled that grandparents have no legal rights in this country. I knew that was the conflict I needed for my vision of the grandparents

– grandparents who lose custody of their grandson and run away with him to protect him from their drug addicted daughter. Usually that is how a story develops for me – one idea builds upon another, but the ideas seem to occur over a period of time, sometimes it might be months, sometimes a year or longer.

JW: Do you have any advice for readers who have writing aspirations?

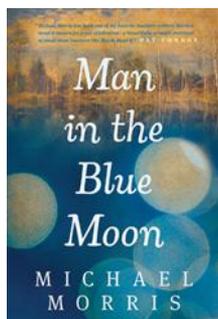
MM: The market is always changing, especially during these times. None of us should write for the market because it is unpredictable. In fact, I think publishing is the most unpredictable business there is. And of course, now there are many more options available to get your work out there, such as direct to consumer eBooks. The key is to make sure that the work has been vetted by a professional freelance editor or at the very least by a trusted group of readers who are not family members or friends. Writing is also rewriting.

The bottom line is that we first have to write for ourselves. We have to write what we would put down money to purchase and read. Some of the best advice I've ever gotten about the writing process came from a writing workshop I took through the North Carolina Writer's Network.

The workshop leader, author G.D. Gearino, said to "crank it out." He said once you start writing a story, keep writing it until you have completed a first draft and only then begin the editing process. Of course the temptation is to go back and spend your block of time editing what you did last week but don't. Crank it out and then edit. Twelve years later, it is advice that I still follow.

Man in the Blue Moon

Review of Michael Morris' latest historical novel by Julia Watts



"While world leaders stood on platforms and predicted the end of World War I, Ella Wallace stood behind a cash register in a country store and knew without a doubt that her battle was just beginning." So begins Michael Morris's *Man in the Blue Moon*, a historical novel set in Appalachicola, Florida.

An artist at heart, Ella abandoned her dreams of studying painting in France to marry Harlan Wallace, an opium-addicted gambler who abandons her after 18 years. Ella is left alone to raise their three sons, one of whom is critically ill, and to eke out a living by running a small country store. In debt thanks to her husband's habits, Ella is in danger of losing her family's land to crooked banker Clive Gillespie who holds a personal grudge against the Wallaces.

Help for Ella may come from the mysterious "man of the blue moon," Lanier Stillis, who arrives most unexpectedly, packed inside the crate for a grandfather clock Ella's husband ordered from the Blue Moon Clock Company. Claiming to be a relative of Harlan's, Lanier is on the run because his deceased wife's family has accused him of murder (he says her death was a suicide). But the circumstances surrounding Lanier's arrival in Appalachicola aren't the only mystery surrounding him: he soon reveals healing powers which are a blessing for Ella's son but a cause for suspicion in the community. Lanier helps Ella and her sons clear the land of timber to pay off the bank debt, but as Ella's feelings for Lanier deepen, forces in the town conspire to make her wonder who she can trust.

Some writers are natural storytellers, and there is no doubt that Michael Morris falls into this category.

In *Man in the Blue Moon*, he weaves an engaging yarn which, while primarily focused on Ella, also encompasses the entire Appalachicola community. Morris is especially adept at depicting the community's time and place in a believable manner—his characters' sensibilities never seem jarringly modern. As with the best historical fiction, the author has so thoroughly immersed himself in the time and place that readers will find themselves similarly immersed.

If any fault is to be found with *Man in the Blue Moon*, it is that some of its territory feels a little familiar. The situation of a woman on her own struggling to save her land feel similar to the film *Places in the Heart*, and the evil banker Clive Busby may feel like someone readers have met before. As a villain, Busby stops short of twirling his mustache, but still he feels a little too monochromatically evil. Just as compelling heroes often have a dark side, compelling villains show an occasional glimmer of light.

The fact that *Man in the Blue Moon* covers some familiar terrain is no reason to dismiss it. As has often been observed, there are only so many kinds of stories to tell; the quality of a story depends on the quality of the writing. And Morris is a good writer.

Interestingly, *Man in the Blue Moon* was released by Tyndale House, a publisher of Christian inspirational fiction. While fans of inspirational fiction will enjoy the novel, it would be a shame if it did not reach a wider audience. *Man in the Blue Moon* deals with issues such as faith, forgiveness, and healing, but without being didactic or alienating readers with different beliefs. Like good writers everywhere, Morris asks more questions than he answers.



LEFT Photo by Gayle Edlin

A Literary Landscape

Tapping into the natural inspiration of scene and setting by Kate Buckley

I've been thinking about place and landscape. How it informs us, shapes us—where we're from, where we choose to live. How a place itself is shaped by climate and geography, by the people who made it home—artist's enclave or mining post; river or college town. I grew up in the South, and that, even after spending most of my adult life in Southern California, is who I am.

So when my company offered me the opportunity to relocate to Nashville, I was flooded with romantic notions (having been born and raised in the neighboring state of Kentucky) of coming "home." And so I did. A year of memories in the making ensued: nights under the full-bellied moon, waking to dogwoods and cherry blossoms suffusing the lawn, as if overnight my yard had become a pointillistic painter's fantasy; al fresco dinners of sweet corn and tomatoes in the milk-thick twilight; honeyed accents spinning yarns in the way only Southerners can. I can't imagine my life without the friends I made in Tennessee. Yet apart from these kindred spirits, the most definitive source of literary inspiration for me is the landscape of Mid-South and the generations who've called it home.

I believe in the theory of "genetic memory"—the process by which genetic material encodes and passes on a memory of an individual's or species' past history. So, a memory can be recorded in the genetic material and stably inherited through cell division—passed down. This seems to happen frequently with artists and is an attempt to explain how sometimes people "know" things they have never learned or experienced. This's not a new concept, Carl Jung called it the "collective unconscious" and carried the idea further to describe not only memory or ability, but inherited traits, intuition, and collective wisdom of the past.

I think we tap into this genetic memory, or collective unconscious, when we do creative work, including what landscape influences our work or moves our soul. We are pulling on the visions of the past, the dreaming life—the walking, waking life, and the still, night of anyone who has ever lived, more so those whose blood runs still in our veins.

As a ninth-generation Kentuckian, this theory helps explain why the dark landscapes of the Appalachian forests and mountains have such a strong tug on me. Or why river towns have got an evolutionary moon tide pull on me. The first time I experienced this was when I'd first moved away from Kentucky...and then came home.

After college, I spent six months living in New York City, which, for me, was a bit like inhabiting an Edward Hopper painting. I'll never forget crossing back over the Mason-Dixon Line after the long slog south. It was a profound experience, the familiar smells filling me with elation, hope, and memories. It's strange how memory is contained; stored, cataloged, and brought forth, not at will, but at whimsy—the sounds, sights, and scents that come back to me—emotive as flags from half-remembered distant lands, icons from a Southern childhood.

I was listening to the radio while driving that day, windows down to the whistling wind, and it seemed that every song was written just for me: for that journey, for that moment. As the landscape of the Ohio River Valley gave way to the Mid-South with its smells of rich loam and fertile limestone, the dark water, heady circus of blossoms, I felt an overwhelming sense of euphoria, of home.

Landscape plays the role of interrogator in my work, and Tennessee's is no exception. There are times when a particular landscape will evoke

a sensation or idea—something that invites further exploration or demands an answer. And memory (genetic or otherwise) looms large in this equation: where was I when I last saw a leaf so moth-eaten? When did I last see the snow? What happened the summer there was no rain?

My favorite way of deriving literary inspiration from landscape is to meander through it—a moving meditation. I love the drive from Nashville to Franklin (the back roads, naturally). Or from Nashville to Mammoth Cave, or to Lake Cumberland. Each passing landscape evokes a different memory or mood, connection or sensation. Hiking does this as well for me—trekking through the Warner Parks, around Radnor Lake, or through the gardens at Cheekwood inevitably invites poems to my lips.

Any time spent in nature rouses a maelstrom of memories for me. I loved my Nashville garden—the big blowzy roses bursting with fragrance and all manner of insects. It's the bugs I remember most about summer nights of my childhood. My sister and I'd lie on our backs in the long grass and use our fingertips to connect the stars. We'd pluck fireflies from the skies, smear their phosphorescence in intricate patterns over our brown skin, and dance around like the small savages we were. It was like the 4th of July every time the sun went down, and the grass came alive with lightning bugs, lace bugs, and crickets.

And then there were the summer storms—the lightning storms in the Mid-South are bang-up, tremendous. They come on all of a sudden (the weather as changeable, as mutable, as a woman in love), wash the sky with black, then split the clouds with a crack so loud you think the very house might break in two. And then the rain. Sheeting and silvery, leaving the

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... A Literary Landscape continued from page 45

grass as wet and wobbly as newborn foal.

If you'd told me as a child I'd leave it, I'd have not believed you. Granny, my father's mother's mother, would say time and again she couldn't believe anyone would ever want to live anywhere else when they could live in the South. And when I did leave—first to New York, then to California, she'd always say the same thing when I'd visit: "Now, honey, it's so good of you to come and see me. Now where do y'all live?" And then I'd answer, as I always did, "Granny, it's Kate. I live in California now."

Then she'd wonder aloud to no one in particular why anyone'd ever want to leave the South and go all that way out west. Then she'd pat my hand and stare way out into the distance, past the single candle burning on the mahogany bureau, past the double window open on the

night, past the very night itself—a single moon burning clean.

She'd full blown dementia by then. We'd seen it coming on, but still it took us by surprise, or at least it did me, sharp as Granny was. She rarely watched television, read voraciously, and did the crossword every day, in ink. She could quote poem after poem and still sing every quavering note of the hymns she learned out at the little country church in Mt. Eden. She was a product of place more than anyone I've ever known.

Not much is in Mt. Eden, Kentucky anymore. It's one of those places that has shriveled rather than grown with time. Gone are the horse and buggy of Granny's youth, even Mt. Eden Church is in a squat modern building now, and most of the houses on the main street are boarded up. There's no trace of the General Store where

Granny's Aunt Sallie worked with her father in the mercantile business at Wayside during the late 1800s. There's no sign of the building where Granny's grandfather Cox served as the first president of Mt. Eden Bank.

My father and I once traipsed through a man's back pasture to find the forgotten cemetery where Granny's grandparents and brother are buried. It was August and the grass had yellowed, though the path was newly mown. We sidled past a garage spilling out its mechanical entrails and came upon the markers for the family plot. I was puzzling over our Southern genealogy at the time, obsessed with any details I could find to fill in the missing stories of the past. I photographed their gravestones, but the real find of it all was on the drive back—my father telling me story after story of his grandparents and eccentric great-aunts and uncles.

I've never met a Southerner who wasn't a storyteller, and these family stories live on in me, just as surely as do the genetic memories of those buried beneath those graves covered in yellow grasses, and the relics of thunder, the smells of sweet corn and roses, and the sound of laughter from far away.

Recently, I sold my Nashville home, and my primary base is again California. But Nashville will always be in my orbit, and I'd do it all over again in a sweet Southern second. As I reflect via the magical alchemy of associative memory—a hammock and the music of Amos Lee—I see fireflies, a fan, and a man who thinks nothing of opening fine wine with a Swiss Army knife. I am once again riding a tractor through lush and lovely fields, watching the sun dim then bloom over hills hemmed by a nimbus of fog; strolling through the gloaming, down the twilight path to Hidden Lake, fireflies flashing to either side, cicadas calling down the sun. And the sharp green scent of an evening after hard rain; the thick mud of a pond lying stagnant in the sun; the sweet sweat of horses in from the fields. My genetic memory still works its everyday magic, the Southern landscape and the stories of those who've gone before still inspire my writing... even miles away from Granny's resting place.



LEFT Photo by Elizabeth Weeks

Tootsie's Orchid Lounge

September 1966

Excerpt from novel-in-progress: *An Angel's Share* by Terry Price

The lavender neon of Tootsie's Orchid Lounge hummed and glowed, reflecting off chrome of passing Chevys and Fords in the Broadway night. Windows down, car radios blared the local WSM-AM signal, the same that weaved in and out of the September skies from the great Atlantic ocean to the wide Pacific shore, a radio Wabash Cannonball.

Inside, cigarette smoke covered the regulars, halo clouds gathering and rolling out through the always-open front door.

Dickie sat in his regular chair in the back left corner of the honky tonk, the one with the backrest into which Hank Williams had carved his initials back in 1949. That was back before Tootsie Bess bought the little joint known as "Mom's" and painted it purple. Hank came to Mom's to celebrate after the night he debuted on the Opry and got six encores, the only performer ever to get that. After a few shots he took the pen knife his daddy gave him when he was seven, the last gift he ever got from him, and carved a deep "HKW" into the middle of that top slat.

When the chairs were stacked at night after last call, the guys always took note of that chair and made sure to put it back in the same place every morning. And in the off chance that some new kid didn't know any better, Dickie would find and reclaim it when he arrived. If someone else had it, no one ever contested or fought. Dickie was not the most famous or successful of Tootsie's regulars but he was the most faithful. He seldom had money but never wanted for a drink. The regulars rarely talked among themselves but almost all had a story about Dickie—a loaf of bread and a package of fresh sliced bologna that showed up at just the right time, a carburetor mysteriously fixed overnight. A forgotten aunt, not long for this world, talking about that smiling man who sat with her and played and sang songs of Amazing Grace, how

sweet the sound, her only visitor that week until the nephew showed up.

A new kid in a tan unblemished cowboy hat finished singing his set with a song about losing his girl on a Friday night. But Dickie could tell this kid had never lost love that way. There were no tears in his words, in his voice. No life. Not like Hank. Hank didn't sing, he ached to music. That's why he was so damn good. He wasn't selling you a song, he was crying on your shoulder, he was bleeding so bad you felt the cut. Jack Daniel's wasn't liquor to Hank, it was anesthesia. This kid hadn't hurt enough yet to sing those songs but that's what being a kid is all about, he reckoned. The kid stepped down from the platform to scattered applause, a random brown Oertel's bottle held up as a tribute. Maybe this one night he might make it, God love him. But most likely, years from then, he'd be drifting off to sleep after finishing his second shift at a local auto parts plant in Topeka, still remembering that night in Nashville, his night to shine at Tootsie's. God love him.

Dickie stood up. There were only three reasons to stand with the crowds at Tootsie's on a Friday night—to get another beer, to go to the john, or to take your turn at the mic. Dickie still had most of his beer and it wasn't his night to sing.

The crowd was thicker than usual and Dickie parted them, pushing here and there as he made his way to the toilet. He went to his regular stall, the one he called his office. He had done some of his best songwriting in that stall, even penning a number that Lefty Frizzell almost recorded. Almost getting recorded by Lefty was like almost getting a date with Marilyn. He didn't quite make it, but he had a "what if" story that got him a free drink now and again, a story to which he often drifted off to sleep.

The bathroom door squealed as it swung

open, and from beneath the wall of the stall he saw four boots rumble in.

"Yeah, I saw it. They got no business down here. What if we marched down by their church on Sunday morning, playing our music. They'd have us arrested."

One unzipped his jeans. Tootsie's was a two stall, one urinal, kind of place.

"Damn straight they would," the other said, his boots shuffled as he fell back against the wall.

"I've a good mind," the first one continued, "to go out there and get in the middle of them. See how they like that." He laughed. "I'll help them bring in some sheaves."

He zipped back up and turned on the water. The other unzipped and staggered to the urinal.

"Idiots."

"What's going on?" Dickie called out from the stall.

"Church people. Out front. Walking in circles and singing."

"What for?"

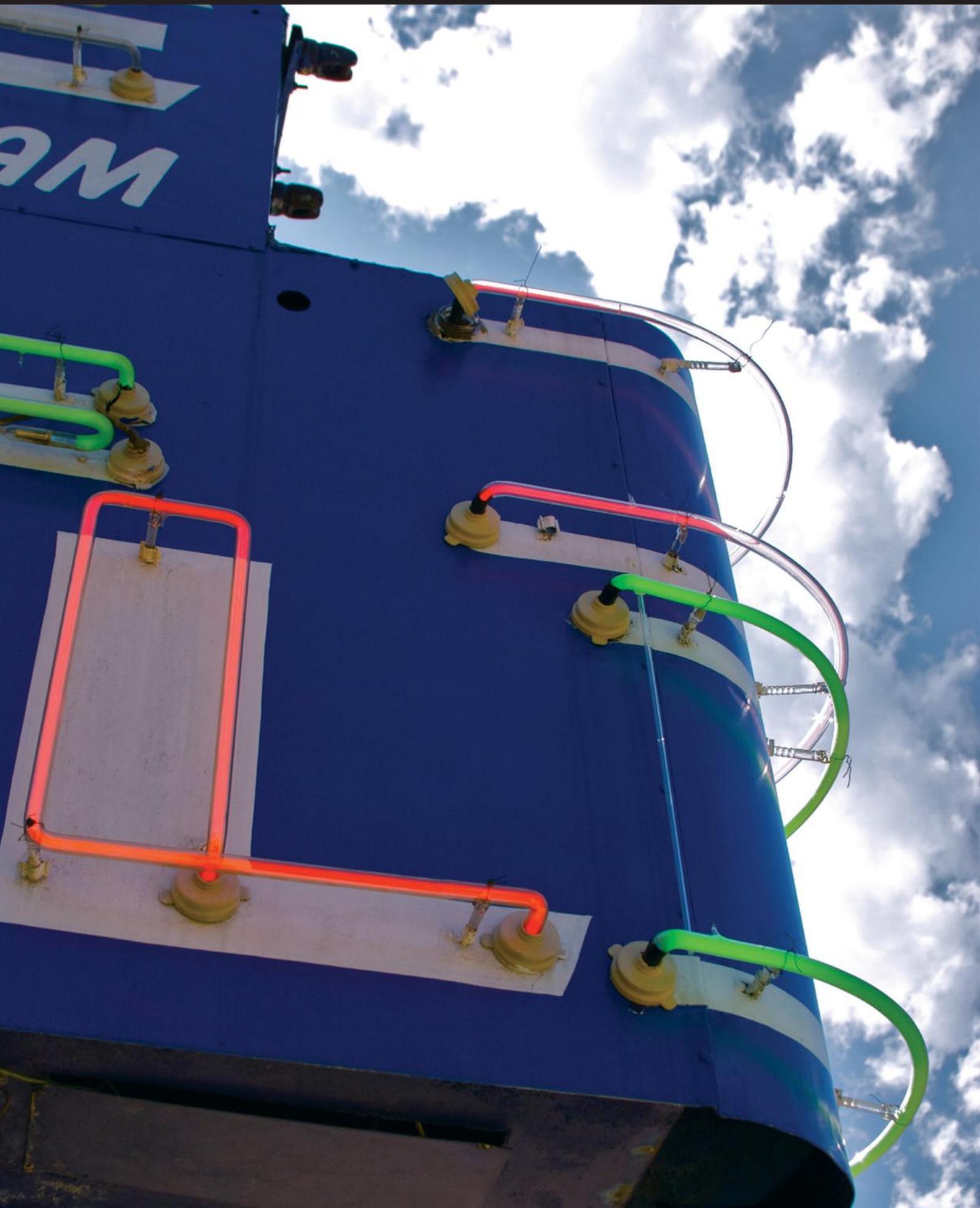
"Cause apparently they're here to save us. I ain't ready to be saved yet, especially by them."

Dickie finished his business, stood, tucked in his shirt-tail and fastened himself up. He unlatched the stall door, went to the sink and washed. "Church people, huh?" The guys nodded. "Well let's go have a look."

The three of them walked back through men and women drinking and dancing, unaware of anything going on in the world outside those orchid walls. But what were honky tonks for if not to forget about the here and now for awhile?

Just before the door, Dickie noticed the next singer in mid-song, a boy in navy work pants and rolled up sleeves, singing something about a train. Dickie shook his head. Damn. Another train song. But he could tell that at least that

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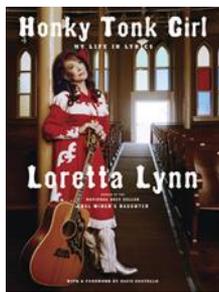


LEFT Photo by Terry Price

Honky Tonk Girl: A Review

Loretta Lynn's newest book shares her emotional life by Maggi Vaughn

The late award winning songwriter Harlan Howard is quoted as having said, "Country music is three cords and the truth." Loretta Lynn has done that in her latest book, *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics*. *Honky Tonk Girl*, published by Knopf, is a 228-page table-top book that mingles Loretta's life story about God, family, and friends. The book



includes Loretta's songs that speak of life, love,

despair, and happiness, all of which Loretta has experienced. She intermingles photos along with a handwritten lyric of "Coal Miner's Daughter." You will love the way Loretta spells words on this torn-out page of a notebook. An academic would have spelled all the words correctly, but Loretta wrote words from the heart, not a dictionary.

I met Loretta when she first came to Nashville over fifty years ago. I was a staff writer for Sure Fire Music, owned by the Wilburn Brothers. "Honky Tonk Girl" on the Zero label was making a splash across the country. The late Teddy and Doyle Wilburn heard Loretta's unique voice and introduced her to Owen Bradley with

Decca Records, and the rest is history.

Hit after hit are included in this book along with the dates they were released. Loretta hid nothing in her lyrics. She wrote life as she saw and felt it. Her life in happiness and sadness fill the pages of this book, and these songs brought her close to her admirers. People related to her lyric and loved her for it. They still love her, no matter where she goes. Like so many legends in country music, she still travels and entertains everywhere. I am so lucky that she has included me and some of my songs in this beautiful book. Being included in her life has made all the difference in mine, and you will cherish this book for the rest of your life.

... Tootsie's Orchid Lounge continued from page 47

boy had been on a train.

Dickie pushed through the crowd at the door and sure enough, a loop of men and women, white and grey haired, walked up and down the sidewalk, passing each other, shoulders grazing, eyes straight ahead, singing a cappella. It was hard to make out the song from the party in Tootsie's and traffic on Broadway. What was it? He knew the song, knew it deep, deep within. What was it? He caught bits of the words.

This is my story, this is my song...

For a moment he was back in that clapboard church, back with his big sister Louise, she with her hand on his back.

Praising my Savior all the day long...

He was a small boy with feet pinched from too-tight shoes because they couldn't afford new ones. He remembered the clean soap smell of his snow white shirt, his soft scrubbed hands, no trace of dirt to bring into the church. Not like now. His boots so scuffed and dirty few could guess they were originally black. He became aware of his smoked up beer stained shirt and his worn, cracked up fingertips.

The church men wore dark topcoats and skinny black ties, a few wore hats. The women

were bundled in black overcoats, clutching large patent leather purses to their breasts, all of them in hats. Some closed their eyes as they sang and walked. The smoke from Tootsie's mixed with the White Shoulders cologne a couple of the ladies must have been wearing. Occasionally one of the men would glance at the honky tonk then quickly look away, like Lot's wife looking back at Sodom.

The new kid staggered out of Tootsie's, a cigarette in his teeth, as he blew smoke from the right of his lips. He wore his guitar on his back with the strap across his chest.

"Get outta here!" said the kid to the church people, waving and shooing his hands as if scattering pigeons. A few of the Tootsie's crowd joined in laughing and shouting.

"They ain't hurting nobody," said Dickie.

The kid shoved and pushed into their circle and joined the march. He smiled and cocked his shoulders back and forth, keeping time with their singing. He even yodeled during the chorus. Onlookers cackled at the funny kid in the cowboy hat walking like a rooster in wet weeds. A few more from inside the bar wandered out to see what was going on. The church men looked

at each other with a "you first" sort of stare. A soft September rain began to peck at the hats and the purses. The singing softened and a couple of the ladies quit altogether and the eyes of one crinkled as if she would begin to cry.

The kid got louder with his yodeling as some of the guys standing in the doorway egged him on. One of the church men without a hat took a handkerchief and mopped the rain from his forehead. A woman with silver pin curls sang louder but couldn't compete.

As the kid lifted his hands to the sky, Dickie reached out and grabbed the neck of the guitar from the kid's back and yanked and twisted as hard as he could, sending the kid stumbling, face down onto the now wet sidewalk. Dickie held on to the guitar neck so it wouldn't get scratched. The church people leapt and screamed until the two men from the bathroom grabbed the kid and dragged him back inside.

Dickie motioned them back together with open palms. Slowly the line reformed and the singing resumed, a little stronger this time. Dickie took off his hat and stepped into the line, singing softly as tears mingled with the rain against his cheeks.

Transcendent Literature

Students bring age old carol to Cumberland University stage by Roy Burkhead

When is a book more than a book, when is it something magical?

Few books have helped change the world, but this one has.

Not all novels continue to lend themselves to the theatre, but this one does.

In fact, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens may be one of the first cross-genre properties of the publication industry.

The story was published in London as a novel in 1843, and when Dickens conducted his first public reading at the Birmingham Town Hall in December of 1852, he used *A Christmas Carol*. He read from this book in public his entire life. For the rest of that century and into the beginning of the twentieth, actor Seymour Hicks toured England with an adaptation. He played Scrooge, of course. And since then, in addition to all of the stage productions, there have been (and will continue to be) movies, television shows, radio programs, recordings, operas, graphic novels, and who knows what else.

Enter Stage Left: Cumberland University's Phoenix Players at the June and Bill Heydel Fine Arts Center, in Lebanon, Tennessee.

Playing up the book's supernatural themes, the play was an ambitious musical production that tested the boundaries of a stage's physical limitations, placed the actors in over 50 roles (many playing numerous parts), and bridged academia to the public using a cast Q&A session after many of the performances.

A production of the School of Music and the Arts, this musical took place from November 29 to December 2, and according to Elijah Dies, it was a joint venture between the Theatre Department and the Music Department. Dies is a Cumberland University theater instructor, and he was the play's director.

"The actual Book and Lyrics were written by Sheldon Harnick, and the Music was written by Michel Legrand," Dies said.

The musical contained 18 numbers that included original carols, ballads, and polkas with such titles as "Balancing the Books," "The Bells of Christmas Day," and "My Two Feet Polka."

"We started rehearsals right before Halloween," Dies said during the Q&A session, "five and a half weeks, four nights a week, Monday through Thursday, 6:00-10:00 p.m."

"The ensemble for the show was made up of the Cumberland Chorale, conducted by Dr. Brian Kilian, also the conductor of the orchestra for the show," said Brendan Martel, costume co-designer and one of the stagehand spirits. (Dr. Kilian is a professor of music at Cumberland University.)

"Out of the five instrumentalists, three were students who showed that they are professionals who can indeed make music with some of our best musicians in Nashville," Kilian said. "I want to underscore that all of the musicians made this happen in only three days of rehearsal."

"It was an honor to work with them."

According to Martel, who was a graduate assistant for the School of Music and the Arts, the performers at the University are known as Phoenix Players and "are a diverse group whose majors range from music, theater, art, education, and even nursing."

And according to Kilian, this diversity is represented in the orchestra pit, as well.

"The bass player (Lee Austin) was a bass and piano major at Cumberland, and he is currently working on his master's in bass performance at CU, the percussionist (Aria Bell) is a computer information systems major at CU, the

synthesizer (Emily Brooker) is a commercial music major from Trevecca and a student of Kelli Cox (our keyboardist)," Kilian said. "Kelli Cox is a professional jazz player. She also has a professional group, The Kelli Cox Collaborative."

"Robbie Shankle teaches adjunct for CU and is a sought after teacher in numerous colleges in Middle Tennessee. He plays about six or seven woodwind instruments: A truly fantastic player and a real gentleman."

After the music stopped and the last bows were taken, cast members, stage hands, and even the on-stage spirits who rearranged the play's sets (designed by Technical Director/Set Designer Chris Byrd) presented what they called The Phoenix Forum, a Q&A session with the cast and crew. The on-stage spirits, the cast, the ensemble, and even the Ghost of Christmas Past, Present, and well...you know...let their feet dangle off the edge of the stage and answered all of the audience's questions, including "How did you get all of the vintage clothing?"

"It was scary," Martel said. "Hours of googling and looking at pictures..."

Martel said that she was one of three costume designers, including Jessica Bailey and Brittany Heater.

"We rented pieces from both the Tennessee Repertory Theater and Performance Studios, and we also pieced things together from Goodwill and our own costume closets," Martel said. "Being my last show (Martel just graduated from Cumberland with a master's degree), I was thrilled that we played to packed houses, something we haven't done here since 2006's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. I was grateful to a receptive community and blessed to be a part of this classic Christmas tale."



RIGHT In 2012, author Gary Slaughter traveled to over 60 locations promoting his work, talking about his writing process, and revealing his experiences. (Photo by Terry Price)

Declassified: 2012 Tour

Novelist Gary Slaughter recounts tales of POWs and the Cuban Missile Crisis

by Roy Burkhead

Southern Festival of Books

Saturday, Oct. 13, 2012. The humble, quiet Gary Slaughter prepared to speak about his process of becoming a novelist, standing before a packed crowd and saying with modesty, "Thanks for being here; it doesn't always happen that way.

"Sometimes there are just one or two people, and that's a lot of fun."

Thanks to his *Cottonwood* series of novels, the crowd knew what to expect from this writer of critically-acclaimed, richly-detailed scenes of small-town life on the American home front during the last five seasons of World War II.

But what they discovered was that Gary had lived a life that could have come from the pages of most any 20th century spy novel. His experiences with WW II POWs in America are interwoven throughout his stories, so much so that he's a recognized authority on the subject—lecturing on the topic all over the country.

In addition, he's a key character from another Top Secret chapter in American history: the Cuban Missile Crisis.

"My lips were sealed for 40 years," Gary said. "Not even my wife knew about the incident."

But now he's able to speak and share his experiences as the communications officer aboard the USS Cony (DDE 508), a Fletcher class destroyer designed to search for, flush out, and attack enemy submarines in the Atlantic Ocean.

According to Gary, the United States government has declassified the incident, and that has allowed him to work with the British filmmaker Bedlam Productions on a documentary regarding his role in the incident.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis, this documentary was aired

on the PBS show *Secrets of the Dead* in October, not long after Gary's appearance at 2012's book festival.

And that appearance brought to a close the local leg of the *Cottonwood Summer '45* book tour. Throughout May, June, and July, Gary gave well over a dozen readings at bookstores, art galleries, book clubs, country clubs, libraries, and high schools throughout Middle Tennessee.

"2012 was an extraordinary year for Gary and me," said Joanne Slaughter, Gary's spouse and overall literary guru. "Early in 2012, we began scheduling book events—in person and virtual—for *Cottonwood Summer '45*; by early December, we had completed 64 different events and received one book award.

"We are so blessed to have had this unique opportunity to share these stories with so many people of all ages; what a way to conclude our *Cottonwood* series!"

"Actually, I consider Joanne a co-author, and I even proposed putting her name on the book cover with me," Gary said.

Before stormy weather brought the book festival to a close, Gary was able to share some of his writing secrets that included "a lucky set of accidents at birth, the ability to recall events that happened at an early age, and coming from a family of storytellers."

"One of the most important things I've learned as a writer is to write better and better opening scenes," Gary said.

Oh yeah, and he did his homework and research, but he didn't speak about that at the book festival. Instead, he shared those thoughts a few months earlier at an event known as *Annotations: Authors @ Cheekwood*. To celebrate the opening of the Sigourney Cheek Literary

Garden, Cheekwood invited Nashvillians to a series of literary events in the garden, and Gary kicked off the event.

Cheekwood's Sigourney Cheek Literary Garden

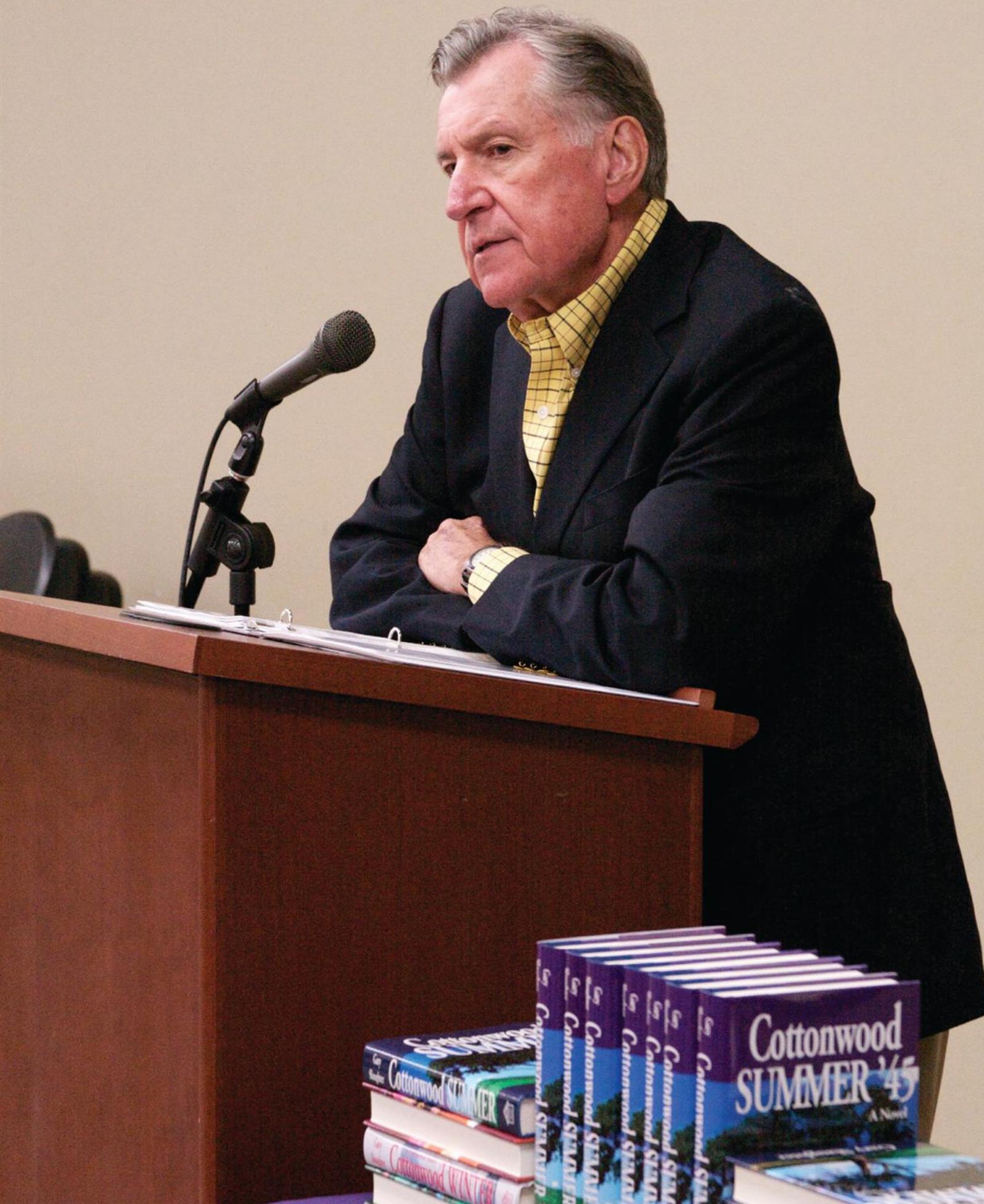
Sunday, May 27, 2012. Merciful shade bestowed its favour upon select nooks and rocks that semi-circled the garden's amphitheatre, and the 90+ degree temperatures made a momentary truce with the humidity to give those in attendance enough comfort to enjoy the event and the outdoors.

"Have you read any of Gary's books?" someone asked from under a large, floppy hat. "If you ever do, you're hooked." She then poured a beverage from a huge container of ice water with hefty chunks of lemon bouncing on the bottom.

A couple of electric fans swiveled and pivoted—directing too-warm air at readers who wore hats casting mobile showers of shade. Shirts endured beads of sweat that Jackson Pollock'd from side to side. And the shade of a single tree engulfed the podium and stool containing Gary's reading glasses, notes, research, and his reading copy of *Cottonwood Summer '45*—all waiting for him to talk about how he started writing his series of novels.

"A dozen years ago, our daughter suggested that I record my childhood memories to share with our grandchildren; for years she'd listened to my stories about life on the World War II front as seen through the eyes of a boy from a small town," Gary said of Owosso, Michigan. "To help me, she sent me a little workbook entitled, *Grandpa Remembers*, and I'll never forget the first question: What was it like growing up in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 55



COTTONWOOD SERIES
BOOK AWARDS**Cottonwood Summer '45**

2012 Indie Excellence Award; Finalist, Fiction

Cottonwood Spring

2012 Eric Hoffer Award; Finalist, Young Adult Fiction

2010 Benjamin Franklin Award; Finalist, Popular Fiction

2009 Next Generation Indie Book Award; Finalist, Young Adult Fiction

Cottonwood Winter

2008 Book of the Year (*ForeWord Magazine*); Finalist, Popular Fiction

2008 Next Generation Indie Book Award; Finalist, General Fiction

2008 Next Generation Indie Book Award; Finalist, Young Adult Fiction

Cottonwood Fall

2007 Benjamin Franklin Award; Finalist, Popular Fiction

Cottonwood Summer

2004 PIAS Award of Excellence; Winner, Cover Design & Layout

A Summer's Tale

Cottonwood Summer '45 helps transform Nashville from Music City to a literary town by Amira Ahmetovic

Nashville may be known worldwide as Music City, but it's also a literary town with scores of local novelists setting their stories throughout Middle Tennessee. Author Gary Slaughter is the latest writer to go local with *Cottonwood Summer '45*, the fifth (and possibly the last) book in his award-winning *Cottonwood* series.

"The first four *Cottonwood* novels are set in Riverton, Michigan," said Slaughter at a Parnassus Books reading event in the summer of 2012. "To thank all of the enthusiastic *Cottonwood* fans in Middle Tennessee, in this fifth book, our two heroes travel to Nashville to spend time with their friend JB, who is working as a counselor in a basketball camp held at Stony River Academy, a private school located in Belle Meade."

Perhaps a modern-day version of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer or a backward glance to Sherlock Holmes and Watson, the book's heroes and protagonists Jase Addison and Danny Tucker allow readers to follow their adventures from Michigan to Tennessee while they explore friendships, towns, and lessons learned along the way while finding themselves and each other.

As the journey begins, readers are introduced to Jase Addison, a charming and intelligent eleven-year-old boy who learns that his best friend Danny Tucker has disappeared.

Along with Danny's disappearance, Jase learns that a German POW has disappeared as well, leading Jase to believe that the POW took Danny as a hostage. This action serves as the catalyst for Jase's and Danny's journey from Riverton, Michigan to Nashville, Tennessee, in the last

summer of World War II.

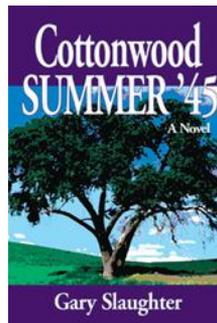
Following Danny's rescue, the two boys embark on a journey to Nashville, where they are robbed, but they quickly identify the crook and capture a Nazi POW, a feat that leads to their earning the key to the city, presented by Nashville's mayor. As a result of these actions, the boys experience an unforgettable summer with lessons learned along the way that change them forever.

As the story develops, the boys experience loss, death, the importance of friendships, family, racial segregation, and the women trying to find their way in society during that time. As the characters learn and grow, the readers are also presented with the opportunity to learn and grow along with them.

Slaughter takes the reader back to 1945 with historic insight into American society during World War II for both today's younger generations and the Middle Tennessee readers who may have lived through it, maybe even leaving those readers nostalgic with scenes set in Harvey's Department Store, a Nashville Vols game at Sulphur Dell, the Maxwell House Hotel, and many other local venues.

Slaughter explores society and relationships throughout the novel, taking the readers to a time period where there was a larger emphasis on family values. In a few of the chapters, Jase's mom cooks breakfast, and Danny is always in attendance. How many people—nowadays—have experiences that can compare to that, and Jase describes the time spent on his grandparents' farm with all those home-cooked meals.

Cottonwood Summer '45 is an informative, entertaining, educational novel, equipped with humor and wit for all ages. The charming and irresistible personalities of the two protagonists will make readers want to cheer and will leave them longing for more adventure. And who knows what the author may be planning next for Nashville's readers.



... Declassified: 2012 Tour continued from page 52

your hometown?

"I was provided about three inches for my answer: since then, I've produced five 400-page novels containing a combined total of 700,000 words."

...and within moments of those words, the fans stopped pivoting, the blades coasted to a stop, and the microphone whispered to silence. Yep: Mother Nature attacked with a good old fashioned power outage. A couple of ladies shifted seats to follow the shade, but no one left, not a person peeked at a wrist watch as Gary G-rated through the opening scenes of his latest book with what natural microphone God had given him.

One of the many things he spoke about was the POWs in his hometown: "If the United States Army hadn't established a German prisoner of war camp on the outskirts of Owosso, I probably wouldn't have written my first novel, but because POWs were such a significant part of my boyhood, I just had to tell the story.

According to Gary, his obsession with POWs began in June 1944 when two prisoners escaped from Camp Owosso with the assistance of two young local women who worked with the Germans at the canning factory in his neighborhood.

Gary said that Middle Tennessee had its share of experiences with POWs, as well, including a connection to Mr. John Seigenthaler, the award-winning journalist for *The Tennessean*, the founder of the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, and the host of the local NPT program, *A Word On Words*.

"John Seigenthaler told me that during the war, he worked for his father's construction company, building the VA hospital on White Bridge Road," Gary said. "His fellow workers were German POWs from a branch camp at that building site; John ate lunch with the POWs.

"Exercising my literary license, I arranged for Danny and Jase (the book's two protagonists) to visit the construction site where they met John Seigenthaler; after their visit, John drives the boys back to their dormitory."

In his latest novel, Gary worked in an entire chapter on the history of POWs in America from 1943 to 1946. Gary said that during the war, there were over 426,000 POWs interned in over 600 camps in the United States, and fewer than 1,600 POWs attempted to escape.

And what about...the incident with the Cuban Missile Crisis?

"There's more to come on that in a moment," Gary said. And with those words, the power

returned, the fans came to life, and the microphone once more propelled Gary's voice and his story across the newly-constructed, literature-inspired tree houses spread throughout the grounds—conjuring up memories from earlier in the month from Parnassus Books.

Green Hills: Parnassus Books

Thursday, May 10, 2012.

A wooden podium sat in front of a wooden table that was more than able to hold over two dozen hardback books spanning five fictional seasons. Five rolls of chairs were followed by two wooden benches with a big chair in the back for one lucky on-looker. The floor-to-ceiling shelves on both sides were full of must-have hardbound books that demanded to be placed spine out: the smell of fresh ink and high cotton-count paper accompanied the sound of the cash register selling copies of Gary's novels.

And the seats were full of over a dozen readers.

"This is hardly fair; I know everyone here!" Gary said. "I'm so proud to be your friend and have you support me."

Gary shared the stories from his latest work, and that May he started hinting at a tale to come, one that he would tell throughout his book tour, giving more details as the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis approached: a near-catastrophic confrontation between an American destroyer (the USS Cony) and a Soviet submarine with a deadly nuclear torpedo that was estimated to be in the 15-kiloton range.

"I was on duty the night of October 27, 1962 when we first made sonar contact with the Soviet submarine B-59," Gary said. "She was a diesel boat, so after 12 hours of unrelenting ASW hounding or 'prosecuting,' as we called it, the submarine's batteries were depleted, so she was forced to surface.

"As the communication officer, I was trained to communicate with Soviet war ships employing the Cyrillic alphabet transliteration table, International Signals Book, and Morse code, but because the sub was on the surface, I used our flashing light."

Gary said that her skipper (Captain Savitsky) refused to identify the name of his boat. When challenged, he replied that he was *Ship X* and reported his status as, "on the surface, operating normally."

"I asked, 'Do you require assistance?' At first, he said no. Oddly, shortly thereafter, our arch enemy admitted that his crew could use some fresh bread and cigarettes if we could spare

them," Gary said. "We put together a parcel of freshly-baked bread and American cigarettes and prepared to high-line the parcel."

According to Gary, high-lining involved the use of a shotgun to propel a floatable projectile attached to a light line over to the receiving ship, but the Russians used a "monkey fist" attached to a light which was thrown by hand.

"When we had closed to within a hundred feet or so, we discharged the shotgun," Gary said. "At the sound of the shot, Captain Savitsky ducked and cleared his conning tower, apparently preparing to submerge. Perhaps realizing our intentions were benign, he soon re-manned his conning tower, retrieved his parcel, and came to a north-easterly heading. As he slowly chugged toward Russia, recharging his batteries, we set our course to parallel his and followed along about a hundred yards off his starboard beam."

"Just then, one of my overzealous aviator friends nearly did us in," Gary said. "Out of the night sky suddenly a Neptune P2V roared over us and dropped several small incendiary devices presumably to activate his photoelectric camera lenses. It sounded like a string of large firecrackers exploding. Bam! Bam! Bam! And the light flashes were absolutely blinding."

According to Gary, "in the reasonable belief that he was being attacked, Savitsky again cleared his conning tower and this time appeared to wheel his boat around to bring his torpedoes to bear on us. My C.O. immediately directed me to signal Savitsky apologizing for the provocative nature of the pilot's conduct. Thankfully, Savitsky cooled down, accepted the apology, and held his fire."

"We steamed along like this for several more hours, until we were relieved by the USS Waller (DDE 466). Some hours later, we received word that B-59 had submerged and Waller had lost contact with the submarine. Later all crew members were sworn to secrecy about the whole incident."

Middle of the Night

Tuesday, March 5.

Looking back on that summer, it was apparent that Gary did a marvelous job bringing the readers into his world and setting up passages equipped with lists of places where his characters have been—as if they were real people visiting actual locations, but perhaps...maybe, after reading all of those novels, it seems somehow possible now that those characters may have become real, after all.

A Writer's Best Friend

An interview with Joanne Slaughter by Roy Burkhead

The tale that has been told so many times over the decades has been that of the writer, working in isolation, either in the extreme a.m. or so late into the p.m. that it was the a.m. again. Rejection letters filled a shoebox. Then, one fine day, after sending out 150 book proposals, five agents asked to read the manuscript, and one took it...but only after the author agreed to rewrite the first two chapters. Then, there was a contract and a book deal: joy, success, and satisfaction! We've all heard at least a dozen variations on this theme over the years.

The tale that has rarely been told is that of the partner, the spouse, the person who keeps the place running while the writer writes, the one at home who plays the role of gentle reader to early draft upon early draft, the individual who puts plans and dreams aside to participate in the process.

Case in point: The literary partnership of Novelist Gary Slaughter and Joanne: spouse, reader, editor, researcher, promoter, graphic designer, marketer, and literary agent headhunter. *2nd & Church* enjoyed the opportunity to sit down with Joanne and view the writer's life from her side of the prose.

2nd & Church: Hi Joanne. Thanks for talking with us. We know you're busy. You have so much to share with our readers: let's just get started. Gary's first novel was *Cottonwood Summer*, and it hit bookstores in 2004. Eight years later, there are five books in the series, winning a total of nine awards so far. And you've read, edited, and reacted to every word in every book, in addition to everything else you've done. Looking back

nearly a decade, could you have anticipated what the years would hold for you? And if so, would you have done anything differently?

Joanne Slaughter: We began writing *Cottonwood Summer* in 1999. The last 15 years have been an exciting journey for us. While I wouldn't change how we chose to spend our time, a few more vacations would have been a welcome relief from our 24/7 involvement in all aspects of the book business!

2&C: Was any single book more work for you than the others?

JS: Gary was very reluctant to write about anything unless he had first-hand knowledge of the subject. So writing about Nashville in 1945 was problematic for him. Finally, I convinced him that having two boys traveling by train from Michigan to Tennessee and spending time in Nashville would be possible, provided we did extensive research and had the manuscript reviewed by persons who lived here in Nashville during World War II.

Providing the background material for *Cottonwood Summer '45* was my most challenging task. I was intrigued by the evolution of the track-side canteens on all railroad systems, as well as train travel during the war. While researching Nashville in 1945, I became enamored with bits of fascinating trivia. But I was very disappointed when some of my research didn't make the cut because it wasn't relevant to 1945 -- like the Monkey Bar at Harvey's Department Store.

I became absorbed in details about Sulphur Dell and the Vols baseball team, as well as

women's basketball during World War II. The Bomberettes was a team formed by female Vultee Aircraft employees. I also enjoyed delving into the history of the Jubilee Singers, The Arcade, Cain-Sloan and Harveys Department stores, Union Station, the main Post Office, the Maxwell House Hotel, and Cheekwood.

2&C: Did each individual book have its own cycle of work or did they all work together as a single piece?

JS: Since the novels are stand-alone books, each had its own cycle. Originally we hadn't planned to write more than the first novel, *Cottonwood Summer*. And we also had decided to stop after *Cottonwood Spring*, the fourth novel. Producing and marketing each book became easier as we built on the experiences of the previous books. I kept meticulous notes, and each project was very well-documented.

2&C: What sort of experience as a writer and editor did you bring to the projects?

JS: While living in Naples, Florida, I edited several books for a friend and had written numerous travel articles for the *Naples Daily News*. And I've always either edited or co-authored articles with Gary on the subject of managing corporate information technology. My previous life as an English teacher also proved a great asset.

2&C: You've said that the first novel took two years to edit and rewrite. What was that experience like for you, from your side of the editorial experience?

JS: While I had edited Gary's professional writing for years, this was the first time I had



ever read his fiction. I was amazed at the vivid, descriptive quality of his writing. I could see the scene as I read his words. But a first novel is always very difficult for the author and the editor, especially when the editor is the author's wife. During those two years, Gary was very possessive of each word that he wrote. Diplomacy was paramount when I suggested alternative wording or the deletion of non-value adding paragraphs.

2&C: The Cottonwood series of books has won so many awards over the years: congratulations! The first major one came in 2007. Could you talk a little about that award and your role in it?

JS: Our publisher is a member of the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA). Each year, IBPA presents the Benjamin Franklin Awards for books published during the previous year. In 2007, I entered *Cottonwood Fall* in the Popular Fiction Category where it became one of three finalists.

Before attending the awards ceremony in New York City, we read the other two finalist books. In congratulating the winner, we realized that our books would never become best sellers. Unlike the 2007 winning book for fiction, the *Cottonwood* novels contain no sex, drugs, violence, or offensive language. Instead our books

are strictly G-rated, so you can safely share them with your children and grandchildren.

2&C: Finding a literary agent is the dream of many writers. You did it. How hard was it for you to find an agent for Gary and his work? And what was the process from taking him from an aspiring novelist to someone who had—and has—a literary agent?

JS: After two years of major edits and rewrites, we felt the manuscript was ready to send to an agent. As I studied *The Guide to Literary Agents*, the Bible for finding an agent, I soon discovered that each agent had different submission requirements. I identified 170 potential agents for the fictional story of two boys growing up on the American home front.

My research showed that the best time for agents to receive proposals was in early fall. So we laboriously prepared and mailed those 170 individually-tailored proposals to arrive on agents' desks during the first few weeks of September 2001.

What timing! Since most agents were located in New York City, we're certain that many never received the proposals because of 9/11 and the subsequent anthrax scare. But 15 agents did ask to read the manuscript. Finally we landed a New York agent, and *Cottonwood Summer* was published in June 2004 following more rewriting

and editing.

2&C: You've had eight years of marketing novels. How has the marketing business changed over the years?

JS: As you can imagine, marketing has changed dramatically. Physical books and proposal packages are no longer snail-mailed for review. Today all information is transmitted electronically. While big-name authors—like Ann Patchett—still crisscross the country to sign at bookstores, less-known authors are doing virtual book tours where an author is interviewed on a radio station or blog site from the comfort of his or her home office. While we prefer hard-cover books, e-books are probably in the future as we continue to reach out to younger readers.

2&C: It's been a little while since the last novel, *Cottonwood Summer '45*, has come out. Is the job over for you, or are you still on the job?

JS: Yes, I'm still in the book business, identifying more venues for Gary's "Behind the Book" talks and conferring with school districts about incorporating the *Cottonwood* series into their U.S. History curriculum.

Recently Gary spoke to all eighth-grade students at Martin Luther King Magnet School here in Nashville. And the language arts teachers now have complete sets of the *Cottonwood* books available for their students' leisure reading.

2&C: In 2009, *Cottonwood Summer* was approved for the U.S. History curriculum of all Michigan schools. In 2012, Williamson County Schools here in Middle Tennessee incorporated the novels into their U.S. History curriculum at the nine high schools. And there's even more interest in adding *Cottonwood Summer '45* into the middle schools as it relates to life in Middle Tennessee. Could you talk about the experience in making all of this happen?

JS: Teachers in Michigan's Shiawassee School District told us that their students' interest in the World War II era had been stimulated by the *Cottonwood Summer* books that our publisher had given to the school libraries in 2004. Parents and grandparents, as well, told us of their experiences in sharing the World War II period with their children and grandchildren. It seemed logical that these novels might be incorporated into the high-school curriculum. The curriculum specialist and I launched a four-year effort to make this happen.

Finally in 2009, *Cottonwood Summer* was approved for the U.S. history curriculum of all Michigan high schools. Then in 2010, I approached the Williamson County Schools here in Tennessee. In January 2012, the novels were incorporated into their high-school U.S. history curriculum.



LEFT Former pro-football player Eddie George played Julius in *Julius Caesar*, produced and presented by the Nashville Shakespeare Festival in January 2012. [To listen to a snippet about the performance, visit NPR at <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/13/145173329/eddie-george-trades-touchdowns-for-togas>. Brian Webb Russell as Brutus, Eric D. Pasto-Crosby as Mark Antony (Photo by Jeff Frazier)

Nashville Shakespeare Festival: 2012-2013

Literary winters bookend Music City by Roy Burkhead

The Troutt Theatre, the Centennial Park Bandshell, and back again. The Nashville Shakespeare Festival. Winter's steam and summer's sizzle.

Enter three troupes of performers across 12 months.

Actors: Round about Music City go;
In the Caesar, Don Pedro, and Macbeth throw—

Directors, too: Baker, Hicks, and Chiorini,
Choreography—both fight and dance, in the cauldron boil well.

Stew thou Set Designs in the charmed pots!
High tech toys use, but during the performances? Not!

Sponsors and vendors, both plunge,
With kettle corn and cupcakes.
Grilled cheese, barbecue, and Thai galore!

Actors and Audiences: Double, double toil and trouble; sunsets burn and cauldron bubbled...at Shakespearean events from winter 2012 to winter 2013, all thanks to Middle Tennessee's own Nashville Shakespeare Festival.

On the sidewalk in front of Belmont University's Troutt Theater. A strong, sub-freezing wind ricocheted off a spotlight and shook its target, flapping above the entrance. Students walk by, bundled up with thick woolen coats, musical instruments hanging from their bodies. Couples cuddle and joggers shiver. One looks up to read the announcement:

The Nashville Shakespeare Festival Presents

Julius Caesar (Jan 12-29) Featuring Eddie George as Julius Caesar.

"Our 2012 *Julius Caesar* was our most successful Winter show to date," said Denise Hicks, executive artistic director with the Nashville Shakespeare Festival. (Winter Shakespeare has been in the Troutt Theater since 2008.). "Thanks to strong direction by Beki Baker and a stellar cast lead by NFL star Eddie George, we sold out several houses.

"We were thrilled to offer Mr. George his Shakespearean debut, and he performed magnificently; he's such a strong, disciplined man, and he applied the same amount of energy and dedication to the art of acting as he did to the game of football."

Inside, the theater is what one would expect of a major university in the heart of a significant Southern city. Three hundred dark velvet chairs welcome with equal enthusiasm those in blue jeans and college sweatshirts, as well as those in ties, suits, and dresses. Scarves, coats, gloves, and toboggan caps came to rest owner-less with the sounds of acoustic guitars floating around the room.

Moments before the performance, an older man walked up to a young woman—a student—and said, "How's it going?"

"It's great," she replied.

"It is great!"

"It's different, though," she said.

"I'm happy for you, though."

As he walked away, he seemed satisfied for having said it, and her body language signaled her appreciation in receiving it. She returned to

typing on her electronic device, just one of the many iPads, kindles, iPhones, and Blackberries that sent puffs of light into the air, and the young man next to her pulled out a small bag of sugary cereal as he read Director Beki Baker's words from the program bulletin:

"So why are we performing a play that is over 400 years old about a story over 2,000 years old? Because politicians are still corrupt. Because people are still selfish. Because, as Cassius says, 'the eye sees not itself/but by reflection, by some other thing' (I.ii). We need our old stories because they speak true, and that truth serves as a mirror by which we can better see and know ourselves."

"Over 2,500 students attended our 10a.m. matinees, and the feedback from them and the teachers was extremely positive," Hicks said. "Education is a very important part of our mission, and we were thrilled to have such a powerful production to share with the students who are required to read the play in school.

"Seeing Shakespeare played live by professionals can really change a person's mind about the relevance and importance of the work."

January 12...sunset
Much Ado About Nothing?

There was much ado about something in Nashville's Centennial Park Bandshell on August 16, 2013 when the Nashville Shakespeare Festival performed the Bard's work for the 25th consecutive year; this particular play was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 64

Meet Our Authors

Learn more about our contributing writers who help make *2nd & Church* a reality

AMIRA AHMETOVIC

Book Review: *Cottonwood Summer '45*

A recent graduate from Western Kentucky University with a BA in journalism and political science, Amira is a freelance writer, currently residing in Bowling Green, Ky. Her prior experiences include interning at the *Bowling Green Daily News* and MTV/CMT-Nashville. She also worked for WKU's *College Heights Herald* and WKU's iMedia team during her undergraduate career. Her work and studies have given her an opportunity to work internationally in Hong Kong, China and Ghana, Africa. Amira is currently perusing a MA in organizational communication at WKU.

K.B. BALLENTINE

<http://www.kballentine.com>

Feature Story: "Scenic City Poets Abound" and Poetry: "The Perfume of Leaving"

K.B. Ballentine has a M.A. in Writing and a M.F.A. in Creative Writing, Poetry. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and publications, including *Alehouse*, *Tidal Basin Review*, *Interrobang?!*, and *Touchstone*. In 2006, she was a finalist for the Joy Harjo Poetry Award and was awarded the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize in 2006 and 2007.

Fragments of Light (2009) and *Gathering Stones* (2008) were published by Celtic Cat Publishing. In 2011, two anthologies published her work: *Southern Light: Twelve Contemporary Southern Poets* and *A Tapestry of Voices*.

CHUCK BEARD

<http://www.nashvillesheart.com>, <http://www.eastsidestorytn.com>

Column: "Bookends and Beginnings"

Chuck Beard is a thinker by trade (will think for food; food for thought if you will), people observer-questioner/mental note-taker by habit (self-taught mind you), and curator of meaningless words searching for a dome near you.

He works part-time at Oasis Center, is the editor for *Number*; contributor for Nashville Galleries *Examiner*, a blogger, freelance writer, published author, and sole proprietor of East Side Story (Nashville's only all-local bookstore). Follow him on Twitter: @eastsidestorytn.

BILL BROWN

Poetry: "A poem of questions" and "How We Become"

Bill Brown just retired as a part-time lecturer at Vanderbilt University. He has authored five poetry collections, three chapbooks and a textbook. His three current collections are *The News Inside* (Iris Press 2010), *Late Winter* (Iris Press 2008) and *Tatters* (March Street Press 2007). Recent work appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *English Journal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. Brown wrote and co-produced the ITV series, "Student Centered Learning" for Nashville Public Television. The recipient of many fellowships, he received the Writer of the Year 2011 award from the Tennessee Writers Alliance.

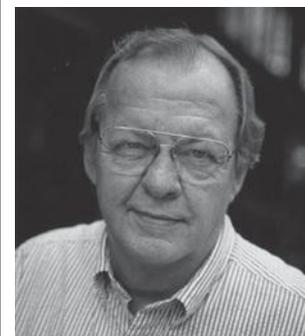
KATE BUCKLEY

<http://www.katebuckley.com/>

Feature Story: "A Literary Landscape"

Kate Buckley's poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *The Cafe Review*, *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Slipstream*, and other literary journals. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and is the

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE



Issue 4 is our Journalism in Tennessee issue, and we are thrilled to announce that journalist and author John Egerton is the In Depth cover story/interview for that issue. He has written or edited nearly two dozen non-fiction books and one "contemporary fable," and he has contributed scores of articles to newspapers and magazines.

In addition to the cover story interview with Mr. Egerton, we will review one of his latest works, *Ali DUBYIAH and the Forty Thieves: A Contemporary Fable*. He participated in Future Break 2012, speaking on the future of the book and the late Ray Bradbury. (A feature story on Future Break 2012 will appear in the issue, as well.)

As part of our coverage, we will review *Home to Us: Six Stories of Saving the Land*, by Varina Willse. (This review will include a sidebar story, covering the book's discussion panel at the 2012 Southern Festival of Books) Mr. Egerton edited the project.

Issue 4 stories include:

- Feature story on *The Contributor*, a member of the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA)
- Book review on *Life of Dreams: The Good Times of Sportswriter Fred Russell*, by Andrew Derr

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author of *A Wild Region* (Moon Tide Press, 2008) and *Follow Me Down* (Tebot Bach, 2009). A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her awards include a Gabeheart Prize and the North American Review's James Hearst Poetry Prize.

REBECCA COOK

<http://www.godlikepoet.com>

Poetry: "Entering the Dark"

Rebecca Cook writes poetry and prose and has published work in many literary journals. Look for recent work in *Plume*, *Southeast Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Grist*, *Stone Highway Review*, and coming soon in *Pank and Mayday Review*. Her chapbook of poems, *The Terrible Baby*, is available from Dancing Girl Press. She teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

CHARLOTTE RAINS DIXON

<http://www.charlotterainsdixon.com>

Column: "The Writer's Loft"

Charlotte Rains Dixon mentors entrepreneurs and creative writers from passionate idea to published and highly profitable. Charlotte is a free-lance journalist, ghostwriter, and author. She is Director Emeritus and a current mentor at The Writer's Loft, a certificate writing program, at Middle Tennessee State University.

She earned her MFA in creative writing from Spalding University and is the author of a dozen books, including *The Complete Guide to Writing Successful Fundraising Letters* and *Beautiful America's Oregon Coast*. Her fiction has appeared in *The Trunk*, *Santa Fe Writer's Project*, *Nameless Grace*, and *Somerset Studios* and her articles have been published in *Vogue Knitting*, the *Oregonian*, and *Pology*, to name a few. Her novel, *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, was published in February 2013.

GAYLE EDLIN

http://www.gcedlin.com/?page_id=2

Technical Writing Column: "The Technical Truth of Creative Writing"

Gayle Edlin excelled in undergraduate mathematics and chemistry but floundered in graduate studies in physics. Through an unlikely sequence of employment events, Gayle made her way into technical writing where she flourished ... at least on the surface.

Technically satiated but creatively starving, Gayle stumbled across a writing group and seized the chance to join it. Sparks flew and before she knew it (i.e., five years later), Gayle finished her first novel, which she is now revising in preparation for seeking a publisher. Gayle also enjoys photography and takes frequent walks to indulge both this interest and her love of nature. She is seldom at a loss for words in the written form, but frequently stumbles over them in speech.

CHRISTINE DANO JOHNSON

<http://www.silverfinofhope.com>

Feature Stories: "A Literary Heritage" and "A Sort of Vagabond Comfort: A Brief Literary History of Knoxville, Tennessee"

Christine Dano Johnson lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. She is the co-editor of *Far Away Literary Magazine* and has previously been published in *Seeing the Everyday*, *The Ends of the Earth Anthology* (with Heather Lende), The Knoxville Writers Guild 2011 Anthology *A Tapestry of Voices*, and The Friends of the Knox

County Library's *Big Read*. She will also be featured in the forthcoming issue 3 of *Glint Literary Journal*. Read more of her work at www.farawayliterarymagazine.com.

LES KERR

<http://www.leskerr.com>

Songwriting Column: "To Write from the Heart"

Les Kerr is a songwriter, recording artist, and performer who merged Cajun music, blues, Rockabilly, bluegrass, and New Orleans music to create his own genre, "Hillbilly Blues Caribbean Rock & Roll." A Nashville resident since 1987, the Gulf Coast native was born in Louisiana and raised in Mississippi. Kerr has recorded six CDs and performs his original music at concert venues, festivals, nightclubs, and special events throughout the U.S. He is also featured periodically in broadcasts, including "Civil War Songs and Stories"; a PBS TV documentary aired nationwide in 2012.

Having earned a journalism degree at Ole Miss, Kerr is a former broadcast news director. He co-authored *The All-American Truck Stop Cookbook* (Thomas Nelson) and *Tennessee* (Graphic Arts Books), and two of his original lyrics were included in the New Orleans poetry anthology, *Maple Leaf Rag IV* (Portals Press). Allusions to works by authors as diverse as Hemingway, Dickens, and Hunter S. Thompson have found their way into some of Kerr's music.

"Most of my songs tell stories or describe people, places, and things I've done," Kerr said. "I have always been influenced by authors and others who tell great stories in person or in print."

ALVIN KNOX

<http://www.mtsu.edu/english/Profiles/knox.php>

From the Poetry Editor Column: "Poetry and Technology, Science and Sentiment: Yes, Virginia, there is a Large Hadron Collider"

Alvin Knox received his MFA in Creative Writing--Poetry from Vermont College in 1999. Currently an Instructor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, he is one the founding mentors of MTSU's Writer's Loft program. His poems have appeared in various publications, including the *Southern Indiana Review*, *Algonquin*, *Frisk Magazine*, and *Tar Wolf Review*.

TESS MELETE

Poetry: "In Lightning Bugs"

Tess Melete began college at age 14 and holds degrees in various subjects, including an MA in English from Belmont University. She was the 2006 recipient of The Red Mud prize. She travels internationally as a mathematical logician and systems architect, building financial systems for the world's largest banking and technology companies, then comes home to the tiny steamboat ghost town of Granville, TN and her 200-year-old Falling Star Farm, overlooking the lake, where she strives to protect endangered heritage breeds like the Tennessee Fainting Goat and plants like the Southern Lady's Slipper Orchid. But above all her occupations, she considers the opportunity to write about life's beautiful struggles her greatest privilege and honor.

AMANDA MOON

<http://www.amandamichellemoon.com>

Feature Story: "Lofty Writers & Poets Engage Middle Tennessee"

Amanda Moon is a writer, jewelry designer, and Pilates instructor. She has a Certificate in Creative Writing from Middle Tennessee State University and a

Bachelor's in Business Administration from Belmont University. She has contributed articles to [radiantmag.com](http://www.radiantmag.com) and [pilatesdigest.com](http://www.pilatesdigest.com). Excerpts from her current works-in-progress, along with links to her jewelry and Pilates pages, may be found at her Web site.

TERRY PRICE

<http://www.anangelsshareblog.com>

Excerpt from Novel-in-Progress: *An Angel's Share* "Tootsie's Orchid Lounge: September 1966"

Terry Price is a Tennessee writer, born in Nashville, about a half of a block from where he currently works. He has his MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University in Louisville and is a mentor in, and Director Emeritus of, The Writer's Loft creative writing program at Middle Tennessee State University. His work has appeared in the online magazine *NewSoutherner.com* and in their print anthology, *Best of New Southerner*, as well as in *Writers Notes* magazine, the online journal *BloodLotus*, and the *Timber Creek Review*, and he has had a story nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

SUZANNE CRAIG ROBERTSON

Feature Story: "Reading Rocks Dickson"

Suzanne Craig Robertson has been editor of the *Tennessee Bar Journal*, a statewide legal publication, for more than two decades. In the course of this work, she has written about members of the state and federal judiciary, recovering alcoholics and drug addicts, lawyer-missionaries, low-income people in need of legal services and those who helped them, pioneer women who broke through glass ceilings, and more.

She received her bachelor's of science degree in communications/public relations from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, a certificate in creative writing from The Writer's Loft at Middle Tennessee State University, and has been a workshop participant at the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference in Grapevine, Texas.

RENAUD ROUSSELOT DE SAINT CÉRAN

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/renaud-rousset-de-saint-ceran/6/5a9/325>

Column: "Le Petit Prince"

Born in Paris (12e arrondissement), Renaud lived there until he was six years old. Then, he moved to Orléans, where he lived until he boarded the plane that took him to Clarksville, Tennessee. After graduating from the University of Orléans, he finished a bachelor's degree at Austin Peay State University in Foreign Languages with a minor in Business. He accepted a French translation and technical writing position in Clarksville in 2006 and works there today, editing manuals, publishing literature, updating websites, validating literature translated into French, and reviewing safety messages. Recently, he was promoted to Technical Writer II.

DR. RHEA SEDDON, PHYSICIAN AND FORMER ASTRONAUT

<http://www.astronautrheaseddon.com>

Excerpt from Memoir-in-Progress: *Weightless*

A veteran of three space shuttle flights, Dr. Rhea Seddon spent 19 years with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). In 1978 she was selected as one of the first six women to enter the Astronaut Program. She served as a Mission Specialist on flights in 1985 and 1991 and as Payload Commander in charge of all science activities on her final flight in 1993. This brought her total time in space to 30 days. After leaving NASA in 1997, Dr.

Seddon was the Assistant Chief Medical Officer of the Vanderbilt Medical Group in Nashville for 11 years. There she led an initiative aimed at improving patient safety, quality of care, and team effectiveness by the use of an aviation-based model of Crew Resource Management. Now with LifeWings Partners, LLC she teaches this concept to healthcare institutions across the United States. A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley with a degree in physiology, Dr. Seddon received her MD degree from the University of Tennessee College of Medicine in Memphis, where she completed her residency in General Surgery. Rhea Seddon lives in Murfreesboro, Tennessee with her husband (Former Astronaut Captain Robert "Hoot" Gibson) and their children.

MICHAEL TURNER

<http://www.meetup.com/nashvillewriters>

Feature Story: "Paired Poets at the Corner"

Michael Turner earned a Masters of Arts in English in 1995 from Austin Peay State University. Since 1999, he has worked at Tennessee State University as a computer lab manager, writing tutor, and scholarship coach. He believes that people should be able to go to college without massive amounts of debt and maintains the Tiger Scholars blog for that purpose. Since 2004, Michael Turner has headed the Nashville Writers Meetup (NWM). With about sixteen different writing groups (everything from nonfiction to novels to poetry to blogging) meeting under its umbrella, the Nashville Writers Meetup currently has about 1,200 writers.

KORY WELLS

<http://korywells.com/>

In Depth Interview: "Her Amazing Journey: A conversation with Doctor and Former Astronaut Rhea Seddon"

Kory Wells is author of the poetry chapbook *Heaven Was the Moon* (March Street Press). She often performs her poetry with her daughter Kelsey, a roots musician, in an act that's been called "bluegrass rap" and "hillbilly cool." The Murfreesboro duo's first CD came out in 2012. Kory's novel-in-progress was a William Faulkner competition finalist, and her "standout" nonfiction has been praised by *Ladies' Home Journal*. Her work appears in numerous publications, most recently *Christian Science Monitor* and *Deep South Magazine*.

TENNESSEE POET LAUREATE MAGGI VAUGHN

Book Review: *Honky Tonk Girl*

A resident of Bell Buckle, Tennessee, Maggi Vaughn has been Poet Laureate of Tennessee for over 15 years. She is the author of fourteen books (and counting!), her first book being published by *The Tennessean* in 1975. She has written the official "Bicentennial Poem of Tennessee" and the official poem commemorating the Tennessee state quarter. Vaughn is the writer of the gubernatorial inauguration poems for Gov. Sundquist, Gov. Bredesen, and Gov. Haslam. Maggi penned the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Poem for U.S. Air Force which was read into the Congressional Record of Washington, D.C. In addition to her poetry, Vaughn has written plays produced by The Barn Theatre in Nashville, The National Quilters Convention, The Galt Theatre, and many other venues. She is the only poet ever to receive a Mark Twain Fellowship from Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies in Elmira, New York. (This fellowship has only been offered to scholars who write biographies about Mark Twain.)

In 2007, she received The Literary Award from the Germantown Arts Alliance chosen from writers all over the South and Southeast. Former winners

include Eudora Welty, John Grisham, and Shelby Foote. She represented Tennessee at the First National Poets Laureate Conference in New Hampshire in 2003 and was quoted in the *New York Times* coverage of the event. She has represented Tennessee in other national Poet Laureate conventions. Vaughn's books have been taught in colleges and universities as well as in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country. She has made a major contribution to education by teaching teachers and students, from kindergarten to the university graduate level, and in giving in-services for educators throughout the country. She has traveled several hundred thousand miles throughout Tennessee and America as Poet Laureate. Vaughn received the Governor's Award as an Outstanding Tennessean in 2003. Her poems have appeared in magazines, literary journals, and newspapers, and have been read on nationwide television and radio shows including National Public Radio. She's been published in journals such as *The Thomas Wolfe Review*, *The Distillery*, *Alcalines of Radford University*, *The Elk Review*, *The Tennessee English Journal*, and several journals at MTSU. She has been included in anthologies such as *The Other Side of Sorrow* and *Southern Voices in Every Direction* as well as in other national publications and articles. Vaughn was quoted in Ted Turner's nationwide book on country music. Vaughn was the subject of a historical 2 CD set called "A Southern Voice", a compilation of her original readings which was highlighted on PBS

nationwide in 2006. She has appeared on Tennessee Crossroads, The Arts Break, A Century of Country Music on CBS, Ted Turner's national TV documentary about country music, and numerous other TV and radio shows throughout the U.S. Vaughn creates her inspiring poems that reverberate with the magical incantatory power of family and roots. As she says, "Poetry is for everyone, and we need to keep alive the message that is understood by all walks of life." In addition, Vaughn is a well known country music songwriter whose songs have been recorded by Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, Ernest Tubb, Charlie Louvin, and other legendary stars. In fact, Vaughn was asked to write a poem for the funeral of Jeanette Carter, daughter of A.P. Carter who is well known as the Original Song Catcher of historical country music.

JULIA WATTS

Book Review: *Man in the Blue Moon*

Feature Story: "Meeting Michael Morris"

Julia Watts is the author of the Lambda Literary Award-winning young adult novel *Finding H.F.* (reprinted by Bella Books, 2011), the Lambda Literary Finalist *The Kind of Girl I Am* (Spinsters Ink, 2007), and the *Spirits* series of middle-grade novels (Beanpole Books).

She lives in Knoxville and teaches at South College and in Murray State University's low-residency creative writing program.

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... Nashville Shakespeare Festival: 2012-2013 continued from page 59

last performed in the park in 1992. The latest production contained over a dozen musical numbers spread out over two acts.

"I set our production in 1945, USA, as the boys are coming home from the Second World War," Hicks said. "We've adapted it into a musical because these characters are so joyful, or so in love, or so delighted with their own cleverness that they can only express themselves through song."

Hick's official title is that of executive artistic director, but she seems more like an orchestra conductor before a performance, moving about, coordinating and greeting and enjoying. She worked the crowd, communicating with the pre-show band (The Hunter Moore Trio) via hand signals, quickly moving the event toward the start of the performance, and she plucked select individuals from the crowd and connected them with other individuals, finding folding chairs for those on the ground.

As the sun continued toward the horizon, itsy bitsy dogs appeared alongside oversized purses. Big gulp soda pop and Grande cups of coffee invigorated those relaxed on the grass in front of the stage. A string of Christmas lights began to glow, and their light followed an elderly woman's words to their destination: "No fat, no calories, all fiber." She then handed an old man a homemade platter of Brussels sprouts. As she read the play's program, he enjoyed his plate of no fat, no sugar, no nothing," or so the expression on his face suggested.

Across the bandshell, next to the stage, one said to another, "Thanks for letting me come along on this little Shakespeare adventure," and two rows back, someone said to someone

else, "The only Johnny Cash song I know is 'Ring of Fire!'"

In the back row, someone seeking extra credit in higher education said, "I used to go see Shakespeare in the Park in St. Louis, and I didn't understand it." The accomplice replied, "I don't understand any of it."

As the sun vanished, the crowd hushed, and the Christmas tree lights grew brighter, the amps shimmering across the crowd's silent faces: the families, the strangers, the little squirts and high school wanna-bes. The middle aged moving toward nursing homes. Some skinny, others not. The *hot* and the *cool*, as well as the never-gonna-be *hot or -cool*. The aged and the advanced. The needy and the needed. The hungry, the hungrier, the hungriest.

Their facial expressions in the blue, yellow, and green lights revealed their oneness with the moment and the production, everyone brought together to this particular spot, at this particular moment, entranced by a dead man's words from four centuries ago. And for one night, one moment, they all forgot about their problems and heartaches, all those things that are not proper to speak aloud in polite conversation.

At one of the many appropriate times, the crowd clapped and cheered, and a breeze a bit too cold blew through the crowd, carrying with it the subliminal message that they would all be together again in front of another stage, in another season, on the other side of the holidays and celebrations.

Another January, late-afternoon. 2013.

A calm, cool early evening followed several days of showers, and the #2 Belmont/Green

Hills bus passed between Sterling Court's leafless courtyard and the Trout Theater.

Plain clothes travelers slipped off the bus, passed under a free-floating banner, and entered the building, along with the well-dressed, the dressed down, the coordinated and grunged alike, and the unwashed—all leaving a long string of giggles, whispers, plain talk, and eye gestures stretching behind them. The glow of technology Halseled and Greteled from the street to the theater seats as the conversations expanded to include those not present.

Moments later, the lights dimmed, the sun and moon danced in an eclipse that was painted high on the wall above the stage, and the Nashville Shakespeare Festival launched a fresh season with a startling, shocking, and satisfying power grab of a play: *Macbeth!*

In between the white spaces left by the play's words existed the three witches, portrayed by members of the Nashville Ballet Second Company. They graced and nimbled their way from scene to scene—testing and threatening the notion of free will.

The play continued and ended the way it has done for four hundred years, and what it left was a promise, a promise and a guarantee of the quality and inventiveness to come in the 2013 Shakespeare in the Park and the 2014 Winter Shakespeare.

And as the audience left after the evening's performance, they read, chiseled on the wall:

"O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention!
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!"

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- Feature story on the Opening Day Celebration of the Sigourney Cheek Literary Garden
- Feature story on the Sewanee Writers' Conference
- Feature story on the Cannon County Arts Center
- "Making Music with the Muse," by

River Jordan

- "My Affaire de Coeur with Nashville," by JT Ellison
- New poems from local and regional poets
- Book review of *The Politics of Barbecue*, by Blake Fontenay
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