

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE

VOL. XVII NO. 3 \$5.00

Inside Looking Out

Mental hospitals are overflowing with people searching for freedom and community.

ALSO

***A Black Governor
in Virginia?***

Gators! Beer! CajunLand

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Cover Section Editor: Grace Nordhoff

Managing Editor: Eric Bates

Design: Jacob Roquet

Cover Photo: Tom Waters

Editorial Interns: David Ramm and Leah Fortson

Circulation: Sharon Ugochukwu

Fiction Editor: Susan Ketchin

Special thanks to: Maureen Shurr, Mary Jane Hart, Ronald Mandersheid, Kay Omholt, Chuck Taylor, Alan Lewis, Elizabeth Whitmer, Robin Epstein, Lynn Pruitt, Carl Anderson, John Ruoff, Kamau Marcharia, Deborah Franks, Mary Eldridge, Sue Estroff, Deborah Greenblatt, Suellen Galbraith, Janet Irons, Jack Womack, Andrea Fleck Clardy, Jessica Philyaw, Tom Waters, Lee Formwalt, Harvey Fretwell, Page McCullough, Sally Gregory, Jim Overton, Kay Alexander, Barry Yeoman, Carol Roquet, Wells Eddleman.

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Fall Issue: Copyright 1989, Institute for Southern Studies, 604 W. Chapel Hill Street, Durham, NC 27701.

The Institute for Southern Studies is a nonprofit, publicly supported corporation working for progressive change in the region. In addition to publishing *Southern Exposure*, the Institute sponsors a variety of research, education, and organizing programs. At the center of each is an emphasis on (1) building effective grassroots organizations with strong local leadership and well-informed strategies; (2) providing the information, ideas, and historical understanding of Southern social struggles necessary for long-term fundamental change; and (3) nourishing communication and understanding among the diverse cultural groups in the South.

Southern Exposure is published quarterly by the Institute for Southern Studies. Annual subscriptions are \$16 for individuals and \$20 for libraries and institutions. *Southern Exposure* is indexed in *Alternative Press Index*, *The American Humanities Index*, and *Access: The Supplementary Index to Periodicals*. Address all editorial and subscription correspondence to *Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702. Second-class postage is paid at Durham, NC 27702 and additional offices. ISSN: 0146-809X. Post Office No. 053470.

POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 with address changes to *Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

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BEYOND AWARDS When the *Utne Reader* gave *Southern Exposure* the Alternative Press Award for regional reporting this summer, the judges said: "SE courageously raises uncomfortable issues and provides valuable information to a region where the alternative press has otherwise few inroads."

In the coming year, we'll continue to raise uncomfortable issues — but we need your help. Some topics being discussed for future cover sections include:

- ▼ how progressives can reshape the crime issue
- ▼ reforming the business of nursing homes
- ▼ the state of the South's environment
- ▼ the fight for reproductive rights

If you want to write a story, lend a hand, or simply make a suggestion, write Future Issues, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.



He Included Me

The Autobiography of Sarah Rice

Transcribed and Edited by Louise Westling

In her own words, a black woman born into the rural twentieth-century South recalls her life. Laced with humor and strength, *He Included Me* presents a rare account of a black family and race relations at the poverty line and the spirited testimony of a determined working woman.

"*He Included Me* provides a female counterpoint to *All God's Dangers*. . . Sarah Rice is a remarkable woman, and the interview transcript prepared by Louise Westling is an extraordinarily rich and compelling testament to that life"

—Jacqueline Jones, Wellesley College.

15 illustrations \$19.95

Storytellers

Folktales and Legends from the South

Edited by John A. Burrison

Ranging from "vulga" tales swapped by men and overheard by women to the adventures of Jack the Rogue, from the horror of witches bounding through the darkened countryside to illogical jests and puns, the more than 250 authentic folktales in *Storytellers* confirm the oral tradition of the South—the African-American, Anglo-Saxon, and Native-American heritage of a region whose diversity is preserved in the telling of tales.

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The People of Johns Island, South Carolina—Their Faces, Their Words, and Their Songs Revised and Expanded Edition

Recorded and Edited by Guy and Candie Carawan

"This volume brings up to date the story of blacks on a sea island begun in the first edition published over 20 years ago. The author and his wife lived on Johns Island for two years, 1963–65, collecting folk songs (many of which are included) and interviewing the inhabitants. They have continued to return ever since then. The result is a detailed account of a way of life that is falling victim to the ravages of time"—*Library Journal*.

140 photographs and 1 map \$29.95

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DATELINE: THE SOUTH

BATON ROUGE, La. (June 5) —

The Champion Insurance Co. was declared insolvent today, leaving more than 100,000 motorists in Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee without coverage. The insurance company failure — the largest in state history — is expected to cost taxpayers more than \$55 million in unpaid claims. Alabama now is suing Champion owners for diverting company funds for their personal use.

CLARKS HILL, S.C. (June 6) —

Area residents gathered over 80,000 petition signatures to protest a congressional decree renaming the 70,000-acre Clarks Hill Lake in honor of U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond. Townspeople said the new name — "Thurmond Lake" — will hurt business and detract from local history. Thurmond said he prefers the new name.

POINT PLEASANT, W. Va. (June 19) —

A circuit court ordered the Mason County School Board to give math teacher Bill Webb his job back, saying it was illegal to fire him for refusing to wear a tie to class. Webb's usual outfit of jeans and a flannel shirt violates the dress code for Mason County teachers. The school board said it would take the case to the state supreme court.

KEY BISCAYNE, Fla. (June 23) —

State officials announced plans to spend \$11 million in public funds to help build a private \$15 million tennis stadium for the annual, for-profit Lipton tennis tournament. The 12,000-seat arena will stand on public land deemed "environmentally sensitive." In 1988, the Lipton tournament returned \$84,000 in tax revenue to the county.

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (July 16) —

Officials at the Arkansas Arts Center began covering a life-sized sculpture of a nude woman with a gray felt bag when children younger than 12 toured the gallery. Townsend Wolfe, director of the center, said he feared the children would be embarrassed and would "turn around and walk



out and never come back." He later uncovered the artwork when sculptor John DeAndrea protested the censorship.

BLUE HILL, Miss. (July 22) —

Twenty years after a man first walked on the moon, 40 families in this small community finally received running water. Residents campaigned for a decade to secure federal loans to extend water lines to their front doors. The water does not reach inside their homes, however, because most residents have no money to purchase plumbing fixtures.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (July 25) —

Nine Ku Klux Klan leaders convicted of assaulting civil rights marchers agreed to settle a lawsuit by taking a class in race relations from the Reverend Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Klansmen attacked a 1979 civil rights march in Decatur, leaving nine wounded. James Farrands, the Klan's Imperial Wizard, called the class "cruel and unusual punishment."

HOUSTON, Texas (July 26) —

A federal judge ruled that the Immigration and Naturalization Service broke the law by detaining six Central American refugees in the Rio Grande Valley while they applied for political asylum. The ruling is expected to help thousands of people fleeing U.S.-sponsored wars in Central America. The INS has refused to let refugees work while they wait for the agency to review their cases.

NEW ORLEANS, La. (July 27) —

The Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks voted down a motion to admit women to their national club of 1.5 million men. Some 5,000 members met behind closed doors on the final day of their 125th convention to vote on the motion. "I'd say it was overwhelmingly defeated," said the group's new Grand Exalted Leader.

ANGOLA, La. (July

14) — A U.S. District Judge declared a state of emergency and ordered a federal attorney and former warden to investigate conditions at Louisiana State Penitentiary. In the 14 months prior to the order, four prisoners were stabbed to death, five committed suicide, 11 tried to escape, and 64 more were knifed. R. Hilton Butler, warden of the prison, responded to the order by saying, "I don't see any emergency in this prison."

SALUDA, S.C. (July 27) —

The Saluda Swim and Tennis Club agreed to open its swimming pool to blacks today, two weeks after turning away three black church volunteers. The pool is on land willed to the Saluda Jaycees 66 years ago with the stipulation that it be used by whites only. The national Jaycees bylaws prohibit racial discrimination.

LOACHAPOKA, Ala. (July 29) —

A local Baptist preacher said he still intends to enter the seminary, even after white deacons in town voted to remove him from the pulpit for inviting blacks to a church revival. "It would have been all right if he had invited them to worship," said one church member, "but he invited them to a social." Pastor Johnny Clark said he simply wanted to bring new members into the church, which has only 25 white parishioners.

LAUREL, Miss. (Aug. 2) —

Documents filed in a federal hearing revealed that white residents have systematically avoided sending their children to mostly black city schools, claiming the students actually live in the county. According to the documents, more than 470 children have been shipped to the mostly white

county schools since the school systems were desegregated 10 years ago. Despite the evidence of segregation, U.S. District Judge Tom Leever refused to merge the two systems.

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (Aug. 5) —

Teddy the cat was ordained a minister of the United Christian Church and Ministry Association today after his owner sent in \$20 for the mail-order title. Kathleen Calligan, head of the local Better Business



Bureau, never explicitly betrayed Teddy's species on the application, although she did note that he was born on April 2, 1989 and his "calling" was "to make people happy and not hunt birds." The president of the Tennessee-based ministry called Calligan "a master liar."

ATLANTA, Ga. (Aug. 7) —

Hundreds of gay men from across the country drifted down the Chattahoochee River on rubber rafts for six hours today, capping a weekend of festivities called the Hotlanta River Expo. An estimated 4,000 people attended the 11-year-old event. "This sense of community and belonging is good for us," said one participant. "I was expecting a lot more decadence, but it's really more friendship and community."

DALLAS, Texas (Aug. 9) —

An undercover police officer admitted he watched a group of suspected drug dealers rape a woman because he did not want to blow his cover. Officer Tomas Echartea said he pretended to be sick to avoid participating in the attack by men he was investigating. "If it had been a life-threatening situation, I'd have blown my cover," he explained. "I'd've had to. You just can't let someone be killed."

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (Aug. 10) —

A federal judge gave city officials 75 days to replace the city commission, saying it violates the 1965 Voting Rights Act by relying on city-wide elections to dilute black representation. The decision settled a 1987 lawsuit brought by 12 black leaders in the city, who said commission-

ers should be elected by districts to ensure adequate minority representation.

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Aug. 10)

— State health officials have launched an unofficial effort to stop corporal punishment by placing teachers and principals who paddle students on Florida's confidential Child Abuse Registry. Officials denied any focus on educators. "We don't have any position on corporal punishment," said one. "We do have a position on injury."

ATLANTA, Ga. (Aug. 19) —

Nashville-based fast-food chain Shoney's signed an affirmative action pact with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference today, promising to recruit and train blacks as managers and establish black-owned franchises. The SCLC had accused Shoney's of discriminating against black employees. The agreement covers nearly half of the company's 1,600 restaurants.

NATCHEZ, Miss. (Aug. 25) —

A recent consolidation of white and black high schools has not sent whites fleeing to private schools, surprising city officials and the judge who ordered the merger. Records show that the number of transfers from public to private schools

almost equals the number of private students returning to public schools. School board president George West Jr. said he thinks "the majority of people want to see what the end product will be, what the school system is going to be like."

STOCKBRIDGE, Ga. (Aug. 29)

— Parents joined more than 70 students in a demonstration at county offices to protest a new school rule that limits hair length to above the collar and establishes a rigid dress code that bans flip-flops and mandates "proper undergarments." Students say teachers have grabbed their hair and pulled it down over their collars to check the length.

HOUSTON, Texas (Aug. 30) —

FBI officials are investigating charges that state appeals court Judge Paul Pressler, a leading conservative in the Southern Baptist Convention, has misused county office equipment and staff for church business. President Bush is reportedly considering Pressler to head the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

Illustrations by Steven Cragg.

Readers are encouraged to submit articles to Dateline: The South. Please send original clippings or photocopies and give name and date of publication.



NASHVILLE, Tenn. (July 15) — Investigators discovered that The St. Paul, a luxurious retirement center with apartments renting for up to \$2,300 a month, was financed through a federal Housing and Urban Development program intended for low-income housing. John Rochford, developer of center, insisted that it will serve not only the wealthy, but also "lower-income residents able to pay as little as \$1,350 a month."

OUT OF WORK MEANS OUT OF INSURANCE

Losing your job is bad enough. Losing it in the South is far worse, according to a new study that blows another hole in the myth of Sunbelt prosperity.

According to the study by the Washington-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Southerners were more likely to be out of work last year than their neighbors outside the region. They went without jobs longer, and they got far less help from state unemployment insurance.

The study, entitled "Unprotected: Unemployment Insurance and Jobless Workers in 1988," says that more than two-thirds of jobless Americans went

without unemployment benefits during a typical month last year. The 4.6 million unprotected jobless people in 1988 compares with an average of 2.7 million in the 1970s when fewer than half the unemployed went without benefits.

Under Ronald Reagan's policies, jobless rates soared and federal programs that extended unemployment coverage were cut. States responded by tightening eligibility requirements for their insurance funds and limiting benefits.

To make matters worse, the Reagan administration slashed job training and employment programs by 57 percent between fiscal 1981 and 1989. "As a result," says the Center, "more of the unemployed not only lack much of a safety net to catch them when they fall, they also lack access to a ladder to help them climb back into the labor market."

The Center says its findings are "of particular concern given the strong signs that the nation could slip into a recession during the coming year." But for many Southerners — especially those in the oil and coal states — the recession of the early 1980s never ended.

Louisiana and West Virginia top the list of unemployment rates by state. Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas, and Alabama rank fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth, and tenth respectively. Overall, 6.2 percent of Southerners were unemployed last year, compared to 5.2 percent outside the region.

In all these states — plus Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia — the percent of workers receiving unemployment insurance has declined since 1979. In Arkansas, the percentage of the protected jobless fell from 42 to 30; in Kentucky, it dropped from 45 to 21.

All 13 Southern states are among the 32 nationally that paid benefits to less than one jobless worker in three last year; nine are among the 16 states that protected fewer than one in four.

Altogether, 1.8 million unemployed Southerners went without insurance benefits during 1988. After adjusting for

inflation, those who did receive help got about 30 percent less than their counterparts of the mid-1970s, yet they were out of work on average a third longer. With 29 percent of the nation's workers, the South had 34 percent of the unemployed in 1988 and 39 percent of the unprotected unemployed.

Another study by the Center shows that Southerners also bore the brunt of the housing crisis during the Reagan era. With the largest share of the nation's poor, the 17 states in the Census South are also home to half of all substandard housing — units that lack adequate plumbing, heat, utilities, or kitchen facilities.

The report, "The Crisis in Housing for the Poor," shows that Southern whites are twice as likely to live in inadequate housing as whites elsewhere. The region is also home to 70 percent of all blacks and 25 percent of all Hispanics who live in substandard units.

—Bob Hall

Both reports are available from the Center, 35 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002.

NO JOB, NO INSURANCE

Southerners were more likely to be out of work last year than their neighbors outside the region — and they were far less likely to be covered by state unemployment insurance.

	% Without Benefits	U.S. Rank	% Jobless
Florida	82.7	1	5.0
Virginia	81.1	3	3.9
Texas	80.6	5	7.3
Georgia	79.9	7	5.8
Louisiana	79.8	8	10.9
Kentucky	78.7	11	7.9
Mississippi	77.2	13	8.4
Alabama	76.3	14	7.2
W. Virginia	76.2	15	9.9
S. Carolina	71.9	22	4.5
Arkansas	71.2	25	7.7
Tennessee	68.8	28	5.8
N. Carolina	67.7	30	3.6
South	78.3	—	6.2
Non-South	63.4	—	5.2

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

PITTSTON MINERS LEARN LESSONS FROM MASSEY

It has become a regular occurrence these days for thousands of miners and supporters to turn out for rallies against the Pittston coal company in southwest Virginia, where nearly 2,000 miners remain on strike against the Connecticut company. Woven into the camouflage clothing, the speeches by union leaders and high schoolers, and the bluegrass music is a sense of confidence that the strikers are rebuilding the United Mine Workers Union (UMW) to its former strength in the Appalachian coalfields.

But the applause is slightly muted in West Virginia, where the A.T. Massey company broke a UMW strike from

1984 to 1985. With the help of the courts and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Massey succeeded in isolating the miners until they returned to work unconditionally after 15 months. The company used heavily armed guards to provoke violence, and many workers were never allowed to return to their jobs because of "strike-related misconduct."

The comparisons between Pittston and the bitter Massey strike are sobering. Pittston has used the same legal team and the same Vance International security firm, and has shown the same ability to gain assistance from the courts and the NLRB. Pittston, like Massey, has also gained major corporate financing to break the current strike.

Jim Reid, president of a key West Virginia local during the Massey strike, said such parallels make the UMW strategy of "selective strikes" risky. "Massey did it; Pittston is going to do it," he warned. "It'll just be another company each time the contract comes up."

Reid said the NLRB is behind court decisions limiting strike activities. "They respond quick to company charges, and they shelve union grievances. The NLRB is out do the UMW in, that's my gut feeling."

Reid noted that the union was better prepared for the Pittston strike, and has succeeded in turning out impressive numbers of supporters. Two months into the strike, 45,000 miners in 10 states walked off the job in support of Pittston workers. In West Virginia, the wildcat strikes involved both union and non-union miners. Massey was the target of repeated picketing.

Reflecting on the Massey loss, Reid spelled out areas where he thinks the union must draw the line against Pittston. He said the corporation must be prevented from buying coal from non-union suppliers and shifting production to non-union "paper companies."

"Contracting out has been devastating to the Mine Workers," he said.

Reid, denied his job at Massey, has moved from the union hall in Matewan, West Virginia to the statehouse in

Charleston. As one of six miners and supporters elected to state office after the strike, he now deals with the dramatic state fiscal crisis brought by the instability of the coal and energy industries.

Despite his new status as a state official, Reid still reserves his most pointed criticism for governors who pledge neutrality and then use state police to escort coal through picket lines. Without such intervention, he said, the union would win: "If the governor pulled back the state police, we would solve this thing quick."

—John Enagonio

FORMER KLANSMAN MAKES HIS MARK ON LOUISIANA HOUSE

When David Duke was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives last March, many well-meaning people argued that he should be given a chance to prove he had left behind his extremist past as a Ku Klux Klansman and was ready to function in mainstream politics. Others suggested that Duke would soon become just another obscure freshman in the House, unable to translate his ultra-right rhetoric into effective legislative action.

Photo by Robin May/Times of Acadiana



FORMER KU KLUX KLANSMAN DAVID DUKE HAS SHIFTED THE AGENDA TO THE ULTRA-RIGHT IN HIS FIRST TERM IN THE LOUISIANA HOUSE.

With his first term now completed, it is clear that both were wrong. David Duke has demonstrated without a doubt that he is still tightly wrapped in the embrace of anti-Semitic, neo-Nazi groups around the country. Yet more frightening is the skill with which Duke has pursued his legislative agenda. He has scored several victories, albeit small ones, for a carefully crafted package of crypto-racist bills and begun to hack out a place for himself in the Louisiana Republican Party.

Since his election to the House, Duke has publicly posed as a conservative lawmaker. But privately he has done little to sever links to his extremist political base. Within days of taking office, Duke was addressing the national convention of the Populist Party in Chicago, which was attended by a number of neo-Nazis, Skinheads, and other assorted political hate groups.

Duke also hired the former legislative director of the Liberty Lobby, a vicious anti-Semitic organization, to run his state office. In May, researchers at Tulane University purchased a number of books with Nazi, racist, and anti-Semitic themes from Duke's legislative office in the New Orleans suburb of Metairie.

In his first term, Duke won committee approval of a bill that cuts off welfare to individuals convicted of drug-related offenses. He passed a House bill requiring drug-testing of all new drivers. And he convinced a committee to unanimously approve a measure outlawing all future minority set-aside programs.

Although the bills never made it all the way through the legislative process and onto the governor's desk, Duke was extremely effective for a first-time legislator. In Louisiana, most rookies are consigned to oblivion for at least two years.

What's more, legislators say, Duke's presence in the House created a more divisive and polarized environment. Rather than moving to the center of the political spectrum to distance themselves from Duke, conservatives accommodated him, in some cases actively providing assistance in parliamentary maneuvers.

The notoriety he has received has also fueled Duke's ambition for higher political office. He is currently considering a challenge to U.S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston in 1990 and a run for governor in 1991. For now, he is crisscrossing the state to oppose a

constitutional amendment that would ensure the election of more minority judges in the state.

Whatever his future political plans, observers say, it is clear Duke is one leopard who has not changed his spots. According to Yigal Bander, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Baton Rouge and an ardent Republican, "We are up against an amazing amount of apathy and cowardice in the face of this really monstrous man."

—Richard Baudouin

TEXAS BANS BOOK IN STATE PRISONS

When Bo and Sida Lozoff founded the Prison-Ashram Project 15 years ago, their original mission was to visit prisons and answer letters from prisoners. They wrote thousands of messages of understanding and encouragement to people behind bars, and eventually collected them in a book entitled *We're All Doing Time*.

Over the years, the Lozoffs have counseled inmates in 41 countries, stressing values of self-honesty, self-forgiveness, and meditation. Bo has lectured at Harvard and Oxford, and organized a highly successful rock 'n' roll prison tour in his home state of North Carolina. In January he published his second book, *Lineage and Other Stories*.

Both of Lozoff's books are sent free upon request to prisoners anywhere the world — anywhere, that is, except Texas. It seems that the Texas Department of Corrections has decided to ban *Lineage* from prisons in the state, saying it incites inmates to attempt escape.

Someone in the Texas system apparently read the second of four short stories in the volume and panicked. Entitled "The Slowest Way," the story follows a violent inmate through a stay in solitary during which he finds a "trail" through the prison's abandoned heating ducts. Crude signs posted in the ducts read, "Slowest Way is Fastest." Eventually, the man discovers that although he cannot physically escape through the ducts, his life has been changed by the physical, mental, and

emotional endurance he practiced to attempt his escape. Once out of solitary, he is able to finish his time with grace and growth.

But the very word "escape" set off alarm bells for a censor in the system — and prison rules say that once a section of a book is deemed objectionable, it can be either partially censored or banned outright. *Lineage* joined the list of forbidden reading material.

Letters of objections poured in from across the country. Inmates, families, psychologists and psychiatrists, prison chaplains, ACLU officials, the director of North Carolina prisons — even the late U.S. Representative Mickey Leland had written to protest the ban. Despite their pleas, *Lineage* remains unavailable to prisoners in Texas.

"Attempts to escape from prison are a serious matter and do impact the safety and security of the institution," Texas prison director James Lynaugh wrote in a letter to Leland.

Mark Jeldness, a prisoner in Oregon who wrote Lynaugh to protest the ban, scoffed at such claims. "In my whole time of reading both of these [books], I have never got a hint of escape except for *within ourselves*," Jeldness wrote.

Lozoff calls the ban "a question of pure bureaucratic stubbornness. They claim I wrote the story 'solely for the purpose of communicating information designed to achieve a breakdown of prisons through inmate disruptions such as strikes or riots.' They've never overturned a decision to censor once they've made it."

Lozoff said his attorney, University of North Carolina law professor Barry Nakell, will file suit against the Texas prison system unless the state lifts the ban. "This is a healthy, positive, constructive story," Nakell said. "Censoring it for prisoners is a clear constitutional violation."

—Kay Robin Alexander

For more information contact the Prison-Ashram Project, Rt. 1, Box 201-N, Durham, N.C. 27705.



NASA PLANS TO LAUNCH PLUTONIUM ABOARD SHUTTLE

When the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded over Florida's densely populated Atlantic Coast just seconds after takeoff three years ago, millions of Americans mourned the seven astronauts who died in the blast.

Now, NASA plans to launch more than 40 pounds of plutonium 238 aboard the space shuttle *Atlantis*. If the blastoff goes as scheduled this fall, millions of Floridians run the risk of being exposed to the world's most toxic substance.

Officials with NASA and the Department of Energy insist that the plutonium is necessary to generate electricity and warmth for the instrument panel on the *Galileo* probe bound for Jupiter. They also say the plutonium will be snug in hardened graphite casks considered almost indestructible.

Tests show that the canisters are designed to withstand pressures of up to 2,000 pounds per square inch. According to a recent government safety report for the *Galileo* mission, an explosion like that of the *Challenger* could generate pressure up to 10 times greater than the casks can withstand. Japanese officials were so confident in the casks that they recently refused to use them to transport plutonium on an airplane, saying they were afraid an accident would rupture them.

Even NASA admits that a few casks might break open if the space shuttle explodes, or if the satellite carrying the plutonium fails to achieve orbit and falls to Earth. If that happened, scientists agree, anyone who inhaled or ingested particles of plutonium 238 would be almost certain to develop fatal cancers.

It has happened before. Twenty-five years ago, an American navigational satellite failed to achieve orbit and burned up over the Indian Ocean. The plutonium 238 on board showered down, tripling the amount of the toxin in the environment. In 1978, an orbiting Soviet nuclear reactor used to track U.S. naval forces crashed in northern Canada, scattering deadly radioactive waste over 40,000 square miles of tundra.

As more people learn

about the plutonium launch, opposition has begun to grow. In Orlando, the Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice has been organizing local residents to stop the mission. The group plans to hold a demonstration at the space center on October 21 to protest the launch, and is urging citizens to write to Congress demanding the mission be postponed.

"The Department of Energy is pushing nuclear power into space to break the ice," said Bruce Gagnon of the Florida Coalition. "They want to get the public used to the idea of nuclear power and weapons in space and undercut cries against the use of nuclear reactors for space warfare."

Gagnon said that moving the arms race into space will help the defense industry maintain its hold on the federal budget. A recent article in *Aviation Week & Space Technology* quoted a Defense Department study that called for "substantial advances in the state of the art of power technology" to help meet "battle conditions" for the Strategic Defense Initiative, better known as Star Wars.

"The time has come for us to view space as part of our eco-system, a

wilderness that must be protected from contamination and war," Gagnon said. "Like everything else good that happens, only a grassroots outcry will bring this debate to the public."

Several Florida newspapers have also editorialized against the plutonium launch. "The space agency may be ready to risk innocent lives in the name of science, and as a step toward developing the technology for the controversial Strategic Defense Initiative," the *St. Petersburg Times* wrote. "There is no reason for Floridians to accept that risk as their own."

News departments compiled by David Ramm.

Readers are encouraged to submit news items to Southern News Roundup. Please send original clippings or photocopies with name and date of publication, or articles of no more than 300 words.



AN ACCIDENT ABOARD THE SHUTTLE COULD CAUSE FATAL CANCERS IN ANYONE WHO INHALES OR INGESTS PARTICLES OF PLUTONIUM 238

A **BLACK** Governor in the South?



It might happen this year in
Virginia.

By Dwayne Yancey

ROANOKE, VA. — Doug Wilder courts potential contributors to his gubernatorial campaign by taking them to lunch at the Commonwealth Club, a genteel preserve of the Virginia aristocracy that only last year admitted its first black member. His political trademark is barnstorming the backroads of rural Virginia, dropping

in at country stores to slap backs, shake hands, and pose for pictures in front of Confederate flags. Last winter, he was a star guest at the Democratic Leadership

Wilder yet, he's an even bet to be elected governor of Virginia this November. The campaign's first poll put Wilder in a dead heat with his Republican opponent — not

Photo by Nancy Cook/Daily Press



Council bash in Philadelphia for party centrists.

So what makes Doug Wilder different from any other Southern Democrat?

Well, for starters, there's his complexion. Doug Wilder is black.

And, although we don't know whether Pete Rose has put any money down on

couldn't be more favorable. Governor Jerry Baliles and former Governor Chuck Robb, now a U.S. Senator, are popular, middle-of-the-road New South Democrats, so Wilder has the unlikely advantage of positioning himself as the low-risk candidate of the status quo. To preserve their gains he's even billed himself as a

bad when you consider that the Old Dominion isn't exactly a trend-setter when it comes to politics. (The joke here goes: How many Virginians does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: five. One to change the bulb and four to reminisce about how much better the old one was.)

No black has ever been elected governor anywhere in the nation. Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley went to bed a winner on election night in 1982 and woke up a loser, after the absentee ballots came in. In 1986, both he and Wayne County executive Bill Lucas in Michigan came up short against entrenched incumbents.

So what makes anyone think Doug Wilder will fare any better this year in a Southern state — one where there's a relatively small black vote (18 percent, as compared to 35 percent in Mississippi) and where the state song still glorifies slavery with references to "massa" and "this old darky"?

For one thing, the political landscape

"conservator," which some joke is Wilder's campaign for the hard-of-hearing ("Eh? What's that you say? Doug Wilder's a conservative?"). That's a big reason why strategists on both sides look for a campaign that won't be decided until the final weekend.

While Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns and the racially polarizing mayoral elections in Chicago have dominated the national news, a remarkable story of black political progress has been quietly unfolding in Virginia.

In 1985, Doug Wilder defied the odds and was elected lieutenant governor, one of the few blacks anywhere to win a statewide election. Now political handicappers are so high on Wilder's chances of winning the governorship that Larry Sabato, an analyst at the University of Virginia and perhaps the state's most respected political observer, is already touting Wilder as a potential national celebrity, a rival to Jackson, a sure finalist on any Democratic nominee's list of vice-presidential prospects.

So what gives in Virginia? How has this 58-year-old grandson of slaves managed to come so close to having the most exclusive address in the capital of the old Confederacy?

It's a story that even Hollywood would be hard-pressed to imagine: a black politician, given up for dead by leaders of his own party, ushered into office on the strength of votes from Appalachian mountaineers and white-flight suburbanites. But it happened. And it's a story that tells as much about the changing South as it does about Wilder himself.

CARRY ME BACK

Doug Wilder grew up in the slums of Richmond, the youngest of 10 children. His father supervised agents for a black-owned insurance company. The Wilders were middle-class blacks for their time, the 1930s, but didn't know it. "My father never made more than \$50 a week," Wilder recalls.

The young Wilder worked his way through high school by shining shoes and washing windows and worked his way through college by waiting tables in the high-class white hotels downtown. He volunteered for combat duty in Korea and won a Bronze Star, yet returned home to find that the only job his chemistry degree qualified him for in the 1950s was as a cook in a juvenile detention center, so he worked his way through law school at

Howard University by waiting tables some more.

In 1959, Wilder was the only black to pass the state bar exam. He went home to Richmond to open a law office in the heart of the neighborhood where he had grown up. His practice started out so slim that he often spent his Saturday mornings scrubbing the floor in his overalls while he waited for clients to trickle in. "Nothing's been given to Doug," says state legislator Chip Woodrum. "He's managed it on his own."

And he's managed quite well, thank you. Wilder was the first member of his

"He lives the good life," says Jay Shropshire, state senate clerk and Wilder confidante, "but on the other hand, he's worked hard to live it."

Wilder's aristocratic tastes are reassuring to many white Virginians, accustomed as they are to governors who portray themselves as successors to the old plantation families, not as descendants of the field hands. This is no backwoods preacher out leading marches and whipping up the congregation. Here is a member of the propertied class. Wilder's resume and lifestyle signal to the captains of industry that he is, in many ways, one of them. This is no black power radical; this is someone they can do business with. An aide to Governor Baliles once offered an unusual description of the state's most prominent black politician: "He talks like a Southern gentleman. He dresses like a Southern gentleman. He acts like a Southern gentleman." It's just that his skin is darker than most.

Photo courtesy Roanoke Times



DOUG WILDER SIGNALS HIS VICTORY IN THE 1985 RACE FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, MAKING HIM THE HIGHEST-RANKING BLACK ELECTED TO STATEWIDE OFFICE IN THE SOUTH.

family to own a car. Now he drives a Mercedes. He's made himself a millionaire speculating in real estate. He belongs to a country club. His law office may still be in the poor, black neighborhood where he grew up, but he now lives in predominantly white and upper-middle-class Ginter Park, in a 15-room Georgian house decorated with art and antiques picked up on his world travels. He employs a housekeeper, favors light opera, dabbles in oils.

played. "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" was racist, he said. Wilder's outburst horrified tradition-minded Virginians who revered the song, and his attempts to repeal the anthem failed. "But they don't play it anymore," he says with obvious glee.

Wilder made his name in Virginia politics nearly two decades ago when, as a freshman state senator, he outraged colleagues by stalking out of an official reception where the state song was

played. "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" was racist, he said. Wilder's outburst horrified tradition-minded Virginians who revered the song, and his attempts to repeal the anthem failed. "But they don't play it anymore," he says with obvious glee.

From then on, whenever Doug Wilder got his name in the paper, it was usually for tackling racial issues: pushing for a Martin Luther King holiday, accusing the

state speaker of the house of suffering from a "magnolia mentality" and threatening to campaign against him, threatening to lead black Democrats out of the party altogether if it didn't nominate more liberal candidates.

Along the way, though, Wilder also accumulated legislative seniority — and committee chairmanships. A survey of legislators and lobbyists ranked him the fifth most influential senator. The classic outsider became the consummate political insider. One way or another, Shropshire says, "every governor of Virginia has had to go through Doug Wilder."

When Chuck Robb restored the Democrats to the governor's mansion after a 12-year absence in 1981, his staff consulted with Wilder on an almost daily basis about appointments. That might have been enough for some politicians, but not Doug Wilder. He'd seen enough Virginia governors up close to conclude that the only difference between them and him was their skin color. What the man who enjoyed speculating on rental property in low-income neighborhoods really wanted was a temporary lease on the fine old beige mansion in Capitol Square.

LONG-LOST COUSIN

In 1985, Wilder executed his most daring racial power play, bluffing and blustering his way onto the statewide ticket as a candidate for lieutenant governor. Democrats were too afraid to say no; they knew better than to offend their black supporters. So the Democrats gave Wilder the nomination, then gave him up for dead. Republicans joked that their candidate's chances were the same as his actuarial odds of being alive on Election Day. What neither party counted on was that Wilder wasn't interested in making a symbolic bid for office; he wanted to win.

To prove he intended to represent all citizens, black and white, Wilder borrowed a station wagon and embarked on an epic journey across Virginia. He pledged to spend two months driving from one end of the state to the other, stopping in every town he came to, no matter how small. And to start his marathon, he ventured into the roughest territory of all, culturally as well as geographically — the rugged coalfields of Appalachia.

Democratic leaders were horrified, and held their breath expecting some

racial incident. Instead, folks in the coal counties greeted Wilder like a long-lost cousin.

"Now my daddy hated niggers," explained Horace Jones, a 66-year-old retired coal miner. "I've got more in common with Wilder. He come up hard like I did. I wore patches in my britches and I was ashamed of it, and I'm sure Doug Wilder did too. I think Doug Wilder is for the working man."

The next thing anyone knew, Wilder was saturating the airwaves with a TV commercial featuring a beefy white police officer giving the black candidate his blessing. Political pros snickered at the corn-pone gimmicks, but they turned Wilder into an unlikely folk hero among white voters who didn't take the lieutenant governor's office all that seriously anyway. With a bumbling opponent who ignored Wilder until it was too late, the coattails of a Democratic sweep, and friendly new media that made no effort to contrast his liberal voting record with his newly conservative rhetoric, Wilder won a narrow victory — bolstered by a stunning 44 percent of the white vote.

A fluke? That's what some analysts said. So with his eye now on an even greater prize, Wilder has spent the last four years trying to reassure skeptical white voters that, deep down, he's really one of them.

The death penalty? Wilder is not only for it these days, he's proposing new crimes one can be executed for. Welfare? Wilder has told blacks they need to work harder and not look to government for help. Right-to-work laws? If they're good for business, Wilder now supports them. In short, whatever positions a middle-of-the-road Democrat would be expected to take in Virginia, Wilder has not merely taken, he's championed.

The result: Wilder out-maneuvered likely rivals and wrapped up the Democratic nomination more than a year in advance. Some Democrats genuinely saw Wilder as the logical heir to Robb and Baliles; others simply feared alienating black voters by mounting a challenge. Either way, Wilder now faces Republican Marshall Coleman, a telegenic former attorney general.

RACE IN THE RACE

How much will race affect the campaign this fall? It's tough to say. In a close election, you can point to anything and say that made the difference. Maybe

some voters won't like Wilder's mustache. But, incredible as it may seem, it appears that race won't be much of a factor.

For one thing, Wilder has a unique appeal to those to whom race usually matters most — rural whites. Through his backroads tours, Wilder has subtly persuaded many rural whites that they actually have much in common with the state's most prominent black politician. Coal miner Horace Jones is the prime example.

Besides, there's not much of rural Virginia left anymore. The Old Dominion is fast becoming a Sunbelt suburbia, as explosive growth in the Washington-Richmond-Norfolk crescent has made Virginia the sixth-fastest growing state in the nation. More than half the state's voters now live in the suburbs.

There, says analyst Larry Sabato at the University of Virginia, "race cuts both ways. Middle- to upper-middle-class white suburbanites are conservative fiscally but not terribly conservative socially and do not want to be identified with what they regard as low-class, white-trash racism. They want to be associated with Wilder, because he serves as a signal that they are urbane, sophisticated. Wilder has become a badge of honor for middle- and upper-middle-class white suburbanites."

There's also the peculiarity of Virginia social upbringing. Virginians may be as racist as the next American, but they're too polite to say so — and aren't about to embarrass themselves with a crude display of racism. When Republicans clumsily brought up the subject of Wilder's skin color in 1985, it backfired like a firecracker at one of those roadside stands Wilder is always dropping by. The GOP lost nine points in the polls overnight. Much like the Old South matrons who discreetly referred to the Civil War as "the late unpleasantness," Virginians loathe the controversy — and some may have felt forced to vote for Wilder last time simply to avoid facing tough questions about why they would reject a man who otherwise seemed perfectly qualified.

So the outcome this time may depend on just how the campaign is framed.

Coleman, taking a cue from George Bush's 1988 campaign, is trying to accentuate Wilder's negatives with sharp attacks on his liberal legislative record and ques-

tionable real estate deals, suggesting that Wilder simply can't be trusted to be the reliable middle-of-the-roader he now claims to be. Coleman's TV campaign — depicting Wilder as a slumlord, a sloppy administrator, a scheming egomaniac willing to take whatever position is convenient at the moment — may be one of the most brutal ever seen in Virginia, a state that prides itself on its gentlemanly style of politics. Can Wilder take the pounding?

Wilder, in turn, aims for a more upbeat, image-oriented campaign. "We want to keep moving forward," he says.

"We don't want to go back to the 1970s." That analogy refers to the days when the GOP was last in power, but it conveniently doubles as a metaphor for Virginia's social progress, too. In effect, Wilder is telling image-conscious suburban voters: Prove you're not racist by voting for me.

"Can an outstanding black overcome racism and be elected governor?" Sabato asks. "If the election is framed that way, Wilder has it won."

"He come up hard like I did," explained Horace Jones, a 66-year old retired coal miner.

ABORTION AND COAL

To avoid startling skittish white voters, Wilder has nailed together a platform of safe issues, including such yawners as "rural economic development," a buzzword to poor whites and business leaders alike. But he may have found an unexpected crowd-pleaser with one of the most emotional of issues: abortion.

Polls show that, for all their innate conservatism, most Virginians want state abortion laws to stay unchanged. Yet to win the GOP nomination, the relatively moderate Coleman promised the religious right that he would push to outlaw abortion even in cases of rape and incest. So when the Supreme Court tossed the abortion issue back to the states last summer, Wilder was quick to jump on it. His attempt to portray Coleman as a right-wing extremist on abortion has had surprising resonance. When Coleman met with financial backers of the two candidates he defeated for the GOP nomination, abortion dominated the session.

"These are business people who usually don't care about social issues," says one astonished Coleman contributor who

attended. "They care about the sales tax. But now they're starting to hear about abortion from their wives and secretaries."

So score one for Wilder, who now has a chance to peel off some suburban voters who have always supported Republicans on economic issues without paying much attention to the GOP's social agenda.

Wilder, though, faces a threat from an unlikely quarter — his old coal mining friends in Appalachia. The prolonged United Mine Workers strike against the Pittston Coal Group, which started April 5 and threatens to drag on for years, has turned much of the coalfields into a war zone, with smashed windshields, slashed tires, and burned-out buildings almost a daily occurrence. Governor Baliles sent

on retracing his 1985 backroads tour, even though it took him through the heart of the strike zone. Wilder spent a full day stopping by picket shacks, listening to miners give him a piece of their mind. His bravery played well, especially since Coleman has stayed as far away from the strikers as possible. But miners demanded Wilder declare himself firmly on their side. "If this keeps going," warns striker Ross Miller of Clintwood, "I think the Democrats can kiss the ninth [congressional] district goodbye."

PINSTRIPE COALITION

Perhaps the key question, however, is not whether Wilder will win in November, but to what extent his success so far is an isolated phenomenon — or a blueprint that can be duplicated in other states.

Until recently, black politicians have concentrated so much on winning elections in black-majority districts, they haven't given much thought to exploring the uncharted territory of statewide elections, where they must appeal to white voters as well.

But there are signs that's beginning to change. In 1990, at least two blacks will be seeking major statewide offices. In Georgia, Atlanta Mayor

Andrew Young is eyeing a race for governor. In Illinois, comptroller Roland Burris has already announced for attorney general after initially exploring a gubernatorial bid.

The Wilder example has not been lost on either of them. "Black politicians all over the country, particularly in the South, are looking to Wilder," says Sabato, the University of Virginia analyst.

"Wilder has a sophisticated and charming air that makes it easy for whites to be attracted to him. In leaping over the racial barrier, you need the right personality — and Wilder is the model of that personality."

Wilder has always been engaging — warm and witty, dropping quotations

from Shakespeare as easily as he assesses the Redskins running game. What's different lately is that he has moderated his politics. "If you want to be taken seriously in a largely white constituency," Sabato says, "you have to prove that you will represent that constituency — and almost inevitably that means moving to the middle and abandoning some old-time liberal stands."

Just as significantly, Wilder also has figured out how to send subliminal signals to middle-class whites that he's not much different from them. Some are obvious: He no longer mentions racial issues, he schmoozes with business leaders, he surrounds himself with white advisors. If Jesse Jackson has relied on a Rainbow Coalition, Wilder has knitted a pinstripe coalition. Other signals are less intentional, but perhaps more telling: his real estate investments, his home in a well-to-do white neighborhood, his children who graduated from the prestigious University of Virginia.

Wilder's biggest challenge "is to allay fear, some vague, non-specific fear, [to convince white voters] to be comfortable with him," says Larry Framme, chairman of Virginia's Democratic Party. And Wilder's middle-class trappings do more to help him than any specially made TV spot could do. Class, contends Paul Goldman, Wilder's top strategist, is ultimately a bigger hurdle than race.

Goldman, in fact, suggests black politicians may find it easier to win white votes in the South than anywhere else.

In 1986, fresh off the Wilder upset, Goldman went to Pennsylvania to advise Dwight Evans, a black state legislator seeking the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor. But the New York lawyer and political consultant encountered difficulties in exporting the Wilder phenomenon.

"Virginia is light years ahead of Pennsylvania on race," Goldman says. "I can't believe it. In the South, if you get past race, you have to look hard for the next prejudice. Up there, you have ethnicity, religion, neighborhoods, ward leaders. So much in the South is put on that one arbitrary distinction, when you bust through that, you get voters who are a little more honest." □

Dwayne Yancey is a reporter for the Roanoke Times & World-News and the author of When Hell Froze Over (Taylor Publishing, 1988), a book about Doug Wilder now in its third printing.

Photo by Don Petersen/Roanoke Times



WILDER HAS FACED TOUGH CRITICISM FROM STRIKING UNITED MINE WORKERS ANGERED BY THE USE OF STATE TROOPERS TO KEEP THE PITTSSTON COAL MINES OPEN.

in state troopers to keep the roads open and Pittston coal trucks moving. That decision outraged union members, who now threaten to take their anger against Baliles out on Wilder either by not voting for him or by writing in the names of union leaders.

The strike has put Wilder in a bind. The southwest Virginia coal fields are a key ingredient in any Democrat's winning coalition. Yet this is one part of the state where promising to carry on Baliles's policies actually costs Wilder votes. Yet he can't disavow Baliles for fear of alienating business leaders and moderate voters elsewhere in the state.

Instead, Wilder has pledged "neutrality," hoping both sides will think he's secretly with them. In August, he insisted

Inside Looking Out

Painful images of “mentally ill” people confront us every day. TV evangelist Jim Bakker has a nervous breakdown. He is manacled and driven away, disheveled and sobbing, to a mental institution. Talk show host Oprah Winfrey does a program on “Paranoid Schizophrenics Who Kill.” She cries as she listens to a woman describe how her husband incinerated their two children. A “severely disturbed” man in Louisville opens fire on his co-workers with an AK-47 attack rifle. He kills seven and injures 13 before taking his own life.

The South has a particular history of—and fascination with—images of madness. The crazy cousin who thinks he’s Stonewall Jackson, the grandfather who has a habit of bursting into the parlor stark naked, the charmingly “eccentric” aunt who talks to imaginary friends—all are firmly rooted in the myth and folklore of the region. The topic of insanity also figures prominently in Southern literature, from Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The myth and literature have their roots in stories that are all too real. Like a girl we know of who walked home from school to find her mother gone. “She’ll come back someday soon, don’t you worry,” the girl was told. She never learned that her mother was sent away to a mental hospital, severely depressed.

Or the parents who couldn’t understand why their college-age son was obsessed with a rock star and refused to come out of his room. Eventually, they had him committed to a mental hospital, fearing he might have schizophrenia. The neighbors watched from behind their curtains as the sheriff came to take the young man away.

Such stories stir something deep inside us. They remind us that the line between “us” and “them” is precarious at best—that we are lucky if we have never experienced serious abuse at some time in our lives, if the biochemistry in our brains seems balanced, if we manage to live through a nagging depression or don’t flip out when things get too stressful.

Yet whether we realize it or not, we all have friends or family who have entered the mental health system looking for help. Studies show that one out of every five Americans has been diagnosed with mental illness. Many belong to what mental health professionals call “the worried well,” people who seek advice from therapists. Some simply crack under the pressure of daily life and spend a few months in a psychiatric ward. Others have lifelong illnesses, like schizophrenia or manic-depression, that permanently alter their minds, bodies, and spirits.

The mental health system has worked for some people—especially those with the resources to harness its expertise. But as the stories in this cover section of *Southern Exposure* show, the system often serves as little more than a dumping ground for anyone society doesn’t want or doesn’t like. Blacks get carted off to mental hospitals at a higher rate than whites.



Teenagers troubled by the world they live in are sent away to private psychiatric hospitals. Elderly residents are stuck in adult homes, small facilities that are fast becoming a big business.

The South has never been known for its humane care of the mentally ill. Southern states were slow to follow the rest of the nation in letting mental patients return to their communities, and decent mental health care still exists only in selected pockets of the region. Big mental hospitals remain the main destination for most people diagnosed with serious mental disorders, yet those hospitals remain colorless and confining, and offer little in the way of treatment.

The lives of many Southerners have been inextricably altered by their experiences in mental hospitals. Some are still on the inside, looking out. Others are struggling to survive in communities across the South. A few are even beginning to shape new identities as mental health “consumers” and to forge new alliances of ex-patients. Their advocacy efforts prove that there are few of us—no matter how serious our “illness”—who do not heal better with healthy doses of freedom and community.

Like Atticus Finch, whose daughter’s life was saved by Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, too few of us recognize the silent role our mentally ill neighbors play in our own lives. And like Blanche DuBois, committed to a mental hospital at the conclusion of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, too many of us have been forced to depend on the kindness of strangers.

—Grace Nordhoff and Eric Bates

Over Committed

Blacks are nearly three times more likely than whites to be locked up against their will in Southern mental hospitals.

By David Ramm

CHARLESTON, S.C. — When Donna Blixen took her neighbor's car out for a spin two years ago, she thought she had permission from God.

Her neighbor thought otherwise. When Blixen returned, the police were waiting. They slapped handcuffs on her, put her in the back of a patrol car, and carted her off to jail to await psychiatric evaluation.

Blixen, a 60-year-old retired nurse, remembers an officer at the jail telling her, "We gonna *kill* you." She says that her cellmates called her names and beat her repeatedly.

After two days in jail, Blixen was committed to a state mental hospital. She was held for a week before being diagnosed as manic-depressive, given a prescription for stabilizing drugs, and released.

Those nine days left Blixen shattered. Today she discusses her experience with few people. She is afraid to leave her home, and she fears the police even more. "Her self-esteem is gone," says the leader of her mental health support group, who asked that Blixen's real name not be used. "Nowadays she's talking about suicide."

What happened to Donna Blixen underscores the physical and emo-

tional violence that can accompany admission to state mental hospitals. Last year Southerners were committed to 72 state-run psychiatric hospitals against their will more than 86,000 times. Most were locked up with only a cursory psychiatric evaluation, then forced to wait days or even weeks for a public hearing.

Many Southern states have few legal safeguards to protect anyone from being involuntarily committed to a mental hospital. In South Carolina, for example, citizens can be held for three weeks with no chance to contest their confinement. All it takes is two signatures — neither of which need to be from someone experienced in mental health care.

Such wide-ranging powers have given states tremendous control over whom they label "crazy" and commit to hospitals, resulting in widespread discrimination. In-

formation gathered from the National Institute of Mental Health and state mental health departments reveals that race plays a primary role in determining who gets committed to mental hospitals against their will, where they are sent, and how they are treated.

Taken together, the numbers indicate that states are using their authority to lock people up in mental hospitals as a powerful form of social control, creating a system of racial segregation.

"If you want to control people, what better way than to use the disability system?" says Curtis Decker, executive director of the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Services. "The system meets the needs of racial segregation . . . by sending people away to secluded places in the country. We have a history of putting people we don't like away from us."

BLACK AND WHITE

Our survey of nine Southern states that provided admissions data by race reveals a mental health population sharply divided according to their skin color. Some of the findings:

◆ A disproportionate number of people involuntarily committed to state-run mental hospitals last year



were black. Overall, blacks were 2.7 times as likely as whites to be committed without their consent. Although Florida hospitalized people at the lowest rate of any state, it discriminated the most on the basis of race, committing blacks at a rate nearly five times greater than that for whites.

◆ Nearly 37 percent of those committed against their will were black — even though blacks represent only 19 percent of the population of the surveyed states. The widest disparity again occurred in Florida, where blacks comprise 14 percent of the state population but make up 35 percent of involuntary commitments.

◆ Three of the blackest and poorest states in the nation — Mississippi, South Carolina, and Alabama — have the loosest commitment laws, allowing citizens to be confined to mental hospitals indefinitely, without judicial review.

◆ Economics and the unbalanced commitment process create public and private psychiatric hospitals that are divided along racial lines. Blacks accounted for 34 percent of all residents at state mental hospitals in the South in 1986, but only 13 percent of residents at private psychiatric facilities. Based on state populations, blacks were overrepresented in public hospitals and underrepresented in private facilities in every Southern state except Virginia and Arkansas.

◆ Black patients were consistently diagnosed with more severe mental illnesses than whites, subjecting them to heavier doses of drugs and longer hospital stays. In South Carolina, for example, a third of all blacks were diagnosed with schizophrenia, a figure three times that of whites.

National studies indicate that this pattern of discrimination is not confined to the South. According to a 1980 survey of selected psychiatric hospitals by the National Institute of Mental Health, blacks were 2.8 times as likely as whites to be involuntarily committed to mental hospitals.

“The problems faced by black and Hispanic and other minority mental health consumers are serious and widespread,” concludes a report released last year by the

Mental Health Law Project, a non-profit research group in Washington, D.C. “It is a fact of their everyday life that black and Hispanic consumers are underserved, misdiagnosed, segregated, and overinstitutionalized.”

Out of shame or sloppiness, most states try to keep their discrimination a secret. No Southern state keeps a count of the number of blacks they commit to mental hospitals each year; many of the figures in our survey had to be compiled on a hospital-by-hospital basis. Hospitals in four states — Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, and West Virginia — refused to provide any racial breakdown of their admissions.

“We’re never asked to break them down that way,” said Janet Jenkins, director of admissions at Central State Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky. “We break them down by sex, but not by race. We just haven’t experienced any demand for that information.”

The figures obtained for involuntary commitments tell only part of the story. Southerners also willingly signed themselves into state mental hospitals 27,000

we’ll keep you for three weeks, and if you don’t, we’ll keep you for three months.”

With the number of voluntary admissions to state hospitals declining in many states, the racial disparities appear to be worsening. In both Texas and North Carolina, the only two states with consistent records, the number of black patients remained relatively steady between 1975 and 1985 while the number of white patients plunged — by 21 percent in Texas and 53 percent in North Carolina.

“UNFAIR TO EVERYBODY”

The primary reason blacks are committed to mental hospitals more frequently than whites is that they are easy targets for an arbitrary commitment system — a system the U.S. Supreme Court has condemned as a “massive curtailment of liberty.”

Patients like Donna Blixen who have been arrested and committed call the process “dehumanizing” and “nightmarish.” Kay Omholt, a former patient who now works as an advocate for the mentally ill in Arkansas, said being threatened with involuntary commitment “was the worst experience of my life.”

Although our survey counted anyone locked in state-run psychiatric hospitals against their will — including mentally ill citizens awaiting trial, mentally retarded adults, and substance abusers — most of the involuntary admissions involved people who have committed no crime. The legal protection they receive varies from state to state, but many have few ways to escape when faced with imprisonment in a mental hospital.

In every state, anyone — even a total stranger — can sign a petition asking officials to commit you to a

mental hospital. You would then be examined by a doctor to determine if you are mentally ill and represent “a danger to yourself or others.” Only Virginia and West Virginia require that the examining physician have experience in diagnosing the mentally ill.

File photo



WHO GETS COMMITTED

Blacks were involuntarily committed to state psychiatric hospitals at a rate 2.7 times that of whites. (Rates represent number of people committed per 100,000 residents.)

	White Rate	Black Rate	Ratio
Florida	26	125	4.8:1
Texas	44	119	2.7:1
N. Carolina	101	253	2.5:1
Tennessee	147	366	2.5:1
Virginia	98	223	2.3:1
Georgia	270	540	2.0:1
S. Carolina	162	296	1.8:1
Mississippi	85	154	1.8:1
Louisiana	90	152	1.7:1
TOTAL	90	242	2.7:1

Source: Southern Exposure survey.
Note: Louisiana includes voluntary admissions.

times last year — often only after being arrested or pressured by their families and officials.

Ken Thomas, a former patient at state mental hospitals in Kentucky, says officials routinely “coerce” people into signing “voluntary” admissions forms by telling them, “If you sign that paper

If the doctor agrees to commit you, you could be held in a mental hospital for anywhere between three days and three weeks before being given a chance to contest your incarceration. During that time you could legally be restrained, locked in an isolation cell, or given mood-altering drugs without your consent.

A full commitment hearing is usually held before a probate judge, although Louisiana allows local coroners to have the final say in committing people to mental hospitals. The maximum legal length of commitment ranges from 45 days in Arkansas to unlimited terms in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina — the only three states in the nation which allow citizens to be locked in mental hospitals for life without any periodic review.

"It seems to me that the system is unfair to everybody," says Laverne Bonner, an advocate for the mentally ill in South Carolina. "The system is unfair — period."

Bonner's state is especially unfair. Under South Carolina law, all it takes to commit someone to a state hospital for 20 days is two signatures. No other state allows citizens to be detained for longer than 10 days without a hearing to determine "probable cause" for commitment.

Even when a citizen finally receives a hearing, it's who you know that counts. South Carolina Probate Judge Bernard Fielding told the *Greenville News*, for example, that a fellow judge committed a man who had not yet arrived for his hearing.

"It seemed that the doctor was in a hurry," Judge Fielding said, "and in order to accommodate the doctor, he went ahead with the trial and said the hell with the patient." When the client arrived in court, the judge sent him away, saying he had "already tried him."

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

The commitment system hits the poor the hardest because they lack the money to hire lawyers to defend themselves. Deborah Whisniet, a Florida attorney who serves as an advocate for the mentally ill, compares commitment hearings to trials. "When you go to the hearing, the person who has the most resources is most likely to win," she says.

In many cases, those "resources" are enough to keep affluent patients out of state hospitals. In West Virginia, a relative or friend can step forward during a commitment hearing and volunteer to take care of the person being committed. "Blacks may not be able to pay for something like that," notes one West Virginia advocate.

The lack of resources available to low-income blacks results in increasingly segregated public and private psychiatric hospitals. While the poor can get federal and state aid to help pay for care in state mental hospitals, they usually have no health insurance and cannot afford private care. Residency in private mental facilities often runs as high as \$13,000 a month.

"Private hospitals certainly only serve a certain segment of the population," said Deborah Whisniet.

As a result, whites make up a much higher percentage of residents in private psychiatric facilities than at state mental hospitals. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 83 percent of residents at private Southern hospitals in 1986 were white, compared to 63 percent at public hospitals in the region.

The figures also show that West Virginia and Kentucky — the whitest states in the South — have the greatest disproportion of black residents in state mental hospitals. According to the figures, three percent of all West Virginians are black, compared to 14 percent of all patients in state mental hospitals. Blacks in Ken-

tucky make up seven percent of the population outside state hospitals, but 20 percent on the inside.

The shortage of community mental health services in most states also condemns the poor to second-class care at large state institutions. Community-based mental health centers are supposed to provide more individual treatment and counseling than understaffed hospitals, which tend to rely on drugs to keep patients restrained.

Yet studies indicate that even when mental health services are available in black communities, they often fall short of the care provided in white neighborhoods. "Like other scarce public resources," says the Mental Health Law Project, "mental health centers tend to be even less adequate in low-income communities."

SCHIZOPHRENIA AND SHOE POLISH

Race not only plays a central role in who gets committed against their will and where they are sent, it also shapes how patients are treated — and mistreated — once they enter the mental health system.

According to 1986 figures from the National Institute of Mental Health, psychiatrists tend to diagnose minorities with more severe mental illnesses than whites. Black men in both public and private mental hospitals, for example, were diagnosed as having schizophrenia — one of the most severe mental illnesses — at almost twice the rate of whites.

The disparity is even greater for black women. A 1981 study published in *Professional Psychology* revealed that schizophrenia ranked last as a diagnosis for white women admitted to psychiatric care, but it was the leading diagnosis in the admission of black women.

The numbers mean that black patients are likely to be locked up longer — and drugged more heavily — than their white counterparts. "The diagnostic pattern makes hospitalization both more likely and more dangerous," reports the Mental Health Law Project, "because schizophrenia carries with it a poor prognosis and a greater expectation of chronicity. Further, misdiagnosis leads to mistreatment."

Behind the numbers, mentally ill citizens and their advocates tell stories of how racial bias permeates the mental health system. State mental hospitals with black populations of over 40 percent often have few or no black psychiatrists

WHERE THEY ARE SENT

Blacks made up a higher percentage of patients at state mental hospitals than their numbers warranted in every Southern state, and a lower percentage at private facilities in every state except Virginia and Arkansas.

	% In State Hosp.	% in Private Hosp.	% of State Pop.
Alabama	46	8	26.2
Arkansas	33	19	16.6
Florida	29	8	13.9
Georgia	40	14	27.0
Kentucky	20	3	7.1
Louisiana	47	27	30.0
Mississippi	50	30	36.3
N. Carolina	38	4	22.5
S. Carolina	42	14	30.5
Tennessee	27	8	16.2
Texas	19	5	11.8
Virginia	33	23	19.0
W. Virginia	14	3	3.3
South	34	13	16.0
Non-South	19	11	9.0

Source: National Institute of Mental Health, 1986

or social workers on staff. The result: Low-income black patients are usually diagnosed and treated by middle-class white professionals who know little about their language and culture.

Laverne Bonner, the South Carolina advocate, cites the case of a black woman who was interviewed by a white psychiatrist for admission to a state hospital. When asked if she had attended college, the woman replied that she had. The doctor wrote in her records that the patient was exhibiting signs of "grandiose ideation."

Bonner says the woman later produced proof of her degree, but the doctors were still skeptical. "When she showed them her transcripts, they said, 'Maybe.'"

Frank Chaney, a black patient at Florida State Hospital in Chattahoochee, tells similar stories of discrimination. He says he has

been called "nigger" and "boy" by hospital staff, and has asked repeatedly to speak to a black psychiatrist. When he put the request to his current psychiatrist, he says, the doctor was eager to comply.

"He said, 'I'll put some black shoe polish on my face and we'll sit down and talk,'" Chaney recalls.

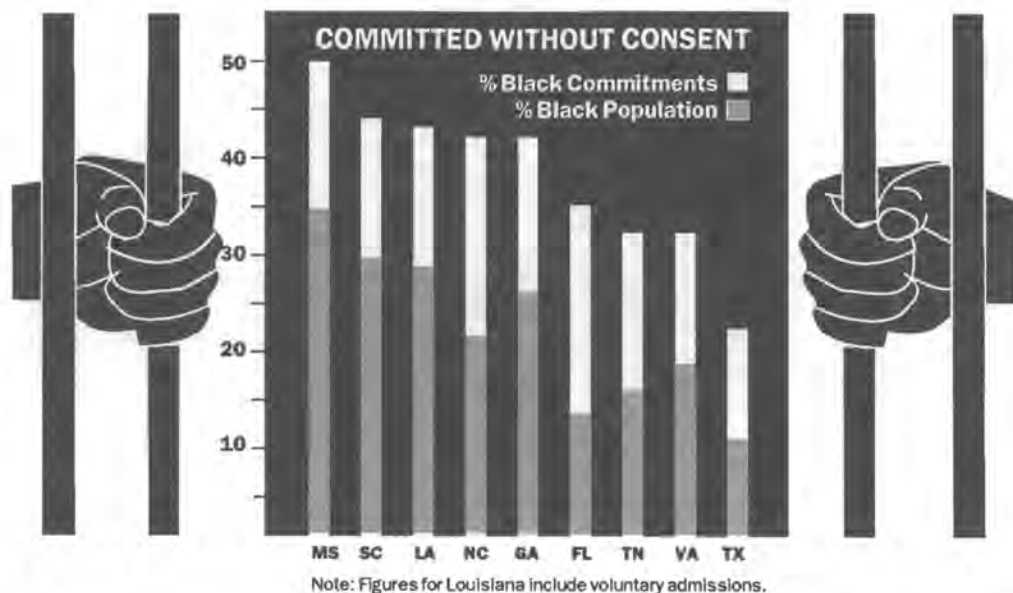
Faye Alcorn, assistant administrator at Florida State, says she knows of no such incident. "I hope that wouldn't occur here," she says. "That's not something we would approve of."

Alcorn acknowledges that none of the 52 psychiatrists at the hospital is black, even though four out of every 10 patients are. "I wouldn't say that not having any black psychiatrists hurts the black clients," she says.

Such cases of outright prejudice and cultural insensitivity also extend to poor whites. Bill Stewart, director of the Kentucky protection and advocacy system, says he knows of psychiatrists who have used the Appalachian expression "I don't care" — which often means "yes" or "sure" — as evidence of mental illness.

DANGER IN THE LAW

Despite evidence that most states use commitment laws to segregate mental hospitals, advocates for the mentally ill say there is a move on to make it easier for states to commit people involuntarily. "I see a strong, national movement to loosen commitment laws," Stewart says.



BLACKS COMPRISED ALMOST 37 PERCENT OF ALL INVOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS TO STATE MENTAL HOSPITALS BUT ONLY 19 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IN THE SURVEYED STATES. THE WHITE AREAS ON THE CHART SIGNIFY THE LEVEL AT WHICH BLACKS WERE COMMITTED ABOVE THE BLACK POPULATION IN EACH STATE. SOURCE: SOUTHERN EXPOSURE SURVEY.

In state after state, the battle over commitment laws is pitting the mentally ill against members of their own families. The Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI), a national organization for families of the mentally ill, has pressed for broader laws that often give states greater freedom in deciding who will be committed to mental hospitals.

Many of the legislative fights center on slight changes in wording that can dramatically alter the criteria for commitment. Most states require that the person being committed be shown to present "a danger to himself or others," and a few even require that the threat be evidenced by some "overt act" — but family members and patients often disagree about what constitutes a danger.

"Family groups and patient groups have different interests," says David Marshall, a former mental patient who serves as an advocate for the mentally ill in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. "A big problem is what 'overt act' means. It depends on what county you're in."

Marshall called one recent bill "literally the worst commitment procedure I've ever seen. Anyone with arrest power could detain people for observation." Advocates rallied against the measure, and the bill was killed in committee.

In North Carolina last year, AMI members convinced the state to pass an "emergency commitment" law allowing them to bypass the court and have family members committed by a psychiatrist or

psychologist. "I know of a number of cases where, for families, that has been a real godsend, because they have not had to go that extra step," said John Baggett, state director of AMI.

Baggett acknowledged some people committed under the new law have been freed by a judge who ruled they were committed improperly. He emphasized, however, that AMI "does not want to undo the due process aspects of commitment procedure. We would like to make commitments less traumatic for everyone."

Without significant civil rights protections for those threatened with involuntary commitment, however, states will continue to have wide discretion in labeling people "dangerous" and sending them away to mental hospitals. Most changes in state commitment laws currently being discussed seem unlikely either to improve treatment for the mentally ill or to abolish the pattern of widespread discrimination.

Kay Omholt, an Arkansas advocate for the mentally ill, recently sat on a task force that argued "for hours and hours" about commitment laws, and eventually changed the wording substantially. The result? "The wording didn't change anything," Omholt says. "It's still up to the judge's subjective judgment." □

David Ramm conducted this investigation as an editorial assistant at the Institute for Southern Studies. He is currently a student at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Keys to the Asylum

Seventeen years after winning a landmark court case that opened the hospital doors, mental patients in Alabama are still locked in a struggle for better treatment.

By Grace Nordhoff

TUSCALOOSA, ALA. — Tom Hammond was an honors student at Louisiana State University when his mother died of lung cancer in 1969. After her death he started feeling paranoid and went to live with his uncle in Alabama. A year later he was committed to Bryce Hospital — one of the oldest state mental hospitals in the South.

"The hospital was an extremely humbling experience," said Hammond. "They told you you were crazy and would always be crazy. They told me I could never get a job."

Nineteen years later, the stigma of mental illness Hammond first encountered inside Bryce still hovers over his life. According to Tom, everyone in town knows he's crazy. He knows where he can go and sit without being asked to leave. He knows where he can get a free loaf of bread.

He's been able to get jobs, but doesn't keep them. "After a few months I get bored and then I get hateful and then I quit. It's just one no-good job after the next." Sometimes when he looks for work, he can't even get his foot in the door. "They say there's no vacancy, but you can see other people getting hired."

When his marginal life in the com-

munity overwhelms him, Hammond goes back to Bryce. He has been in and out of the hospital several times, but things have changed since his first trip in 1970. Back then, Bryce was the state insane asylum — a place where people were sent away, never to return. Now it's a state mental hospital — a way-station where people like Hammond come and go through revolving doors.

The change can be traced to a landmark court case that started the year Hammond first entered Bryce. The case — called *Wyatt v. Stickney* — pitted the staff and patients of Bryce against the administration of then-Governor George Wallace. The result was the first federal ruling to establish that mentally ill people have a constitutional right to treatment.

Wyatt brought sweeping changes to the mental health system in Alabama. Acting under orders from a federal judge, Bryce opened its doors and cleaned up its act. Today there are fewer patients, more staff, and better conditions.

But *Wyatt* also sparked a 14-year showdown between state bureaucrats and mental health reformers that left many patients like Tom Hammond living on the edge. Almost two decades have passed since the case began, but the state is just now starting to create community services for those who are released.

Some, like Hammond, don't even feel that Bryce has improved. "It's a minimum security prison," he said. "Bryce is worse except for one thing. You can get out now."

A HUMAN WAREHOUSE

Bryce stands at the end of a long driveway, its elegant columns gracing the entrance to the hospital grounds. Green farmland stretches from the highway on one side to the University of Alabama campus on the other. There is no barbed wire, no armed guard watching from a gun tower. You can simply walk right



into the hospital, and — if you're lucky — you can walk right out.

The hospital building itself is noteworthy. Completed in 1861 after social reformer Dorothea Dix lobbied the state to provide care and housing for the mentally ill, Bryce was expanded over the years until today it is the second longest continuous building under one roof in the United States, outdistanced only by the Pentagon.

Bryce was originally designed to house 250 people, but it gradually grew into a giant human warehouse packed with more than 5,000 patients. Almost all were confined to huge, open wards where as many as 80 patients slept in beds crammed side by side. Most spent their lives in the hospital, with little to do all day but rock in chairs provided to soothe whatever craziness was supposedly going on inside their heads. Many received routine shock treatments; others were lobotomized, portions of their brains cut out in the name of mental health.

The hospital had also become a warehouse for the state's old and undesirable. An estimated 1,600 elderly residents and 100 mentally retarded patients received no treatment at all. "We just dumped them," said Paul Davis, a reporter who covered the Wyatt lawsuit for the *Tuscaloosa News*. "Bryce was known as our state nursing home. You could go to your probate judge and get your medical doctor to sign a form that says 'Granny's getting old' and

the sheriff would take her off to Bryce."

By 1972, neglect and abuse were rampant. "Thousands of people received no treatment whatsoever," said Jack Drake, who took on the Wyatt case as a young lawyer in Tuscaloosa. "Terrible things happened to people who never should have been there."

The files of people who died in Bryce revealed ghoulish conditions. Two patients were scalded to death, and another died when a patient stuck a garden hose up his rectum and exploded his intestines. "This happened just because one aide watched 250 to 300 patients," Drake said. "Bryce was just a horrible place. It was a nightmare."

The neglect stemmed from understaffing. The hospital had only one Ph.D. clinical psychologist, three medical doctors with a smattering of psychiatric training, and two social workers with masters degrees to treat more than 5,000 patients.

Bryce typified not just the worst in neglect of the mentally ill, but also the worst of Southern racial discrimination. Soon after the hospital opened, black patients were confined to separate "lodges." In 1902 the state sent all 318 black patients to an old military barracks near Mobile which eventually became Searcy Hospital, the third separate mental hospital for blacks in the United States.

Conditions at Searcy were even worse than at Bryce. In 1968, there was but one

licensed physician and a few unlicensed Cuban refugee doctors to treat 2,200 patients. Wards were overcrowded, with iron grillwork covering the windows and yellowed, dirty plaster on the walls. Heating ducts and pipes for water and sewage were exposed overhead. Patients were beaten with whips made from electrical cords. (See sidebar, page 21.)

By 1970, when mental health systems around the nation were releasing patients to the community as part of a movement known as "deinstitutionalization," the conditions at Bryce and Searcy were at their worst. Alabama ranked last in the nation in daily per-patient expenditures. By 1971, the state was spending only \$7.55 a day per patient, at a time when the Southeastern average was \$12.36 and the national average was \$14.90. The daily food allowance for patients at Bryce was less than 50 cents a day.

HERE COMES THE JUDGE

There were those in Alabama who wanted to shake up the system — and one of them was a self-avowed troublemaker named Stonewall Stickney. In 1968, Stickney became the state's first full-time commissioner of mental health, and the first leader of the mental health system who was not directly connected to Bryce Hospital. The following year he seized upon a federal court order to integrate Bryce and Searcy and, despite interference from the governor's office, completely desegregated the hospitals by the end of 1970.

When the state cut the budget for mental health services that same year, Stickney immediately laid off about 120 employees at Bryce. "We planned to create so much trouble that the legislature and the governor could not afford to overlook the department anymore," Stickney said later.

Stickney was hoping to create a crisis, and he succeeded. Several Bryce employees and a patient, Ricky Wyatt, filed a complaint in federal court in

Photos by Tom Waters



A PATIENT AT SEARCY HOSPITAL IN 1982.

October. "The lawsuit originally filed was an attempt to save jobs," recalled Jack Drake, one of the original attorneys.

Federal Judge Frank Johnson refused to hear the case. But as the plaintiffs were leaving his chambers, Johnson reportedly muttered to himself, "It seems to me you'd be more interested in the patients' rights than the rights of the staff."

The employees were back before the judge several weeks later, their case focused solely on the patients' constitutional right to adequate treatment. This time, Johnson consented to hear the case. *Wyatt v. Stickney* was under way.

The lawsuit quickly exposed the horrible conditions at Bryce and Searcy. In March 1971, Johnson ruled that the thousands of long-term patients being warehoused at Bryce had a constitutional right to treatment. "To deprive any citizen of his or her liberty upon the altruistic theory that the confinement is for humane therapeutic reasons and then fail to provide adequate treatment violates the very fundamentals of due process," Johnson ruled.

Johnson expanded the case to include residents at Searcy Hospital and the Partlow State School and Hospital for the mentally retarded, and gave the state six months to institute a treatment program at Bryce. When the state failed to do so, he ruled that patients were being forced to live in substandard conditions. "The dormito-

ries are barn-like structures with no privacy," Johnson wrote in December.

"There is not even a space provided which [a patient] can think of as his own... The toilets in restrooms seldom have partitions between them."

As the case continued, the court heard testimony from some of the foremost mental health authorities in the United States. Finally, on April 13, 1972, Judge Johnson established 35 medical and constitutional standards governing the treatment of patients in Bryce and Searcy. They became known as the Wyatt Standards, and they established one of the first "bill of rights" for the mentally ill.

The rights Johnson enumerated were remarkably simple. Mental patients, he declared, have a right to wear clean clothes, receive visitors, send mail, exercise, interact with the opposite sex, go outside, and refuse lobotomies, shock treatments, and excessive medication.

Mental health reformers across the country hailed *Wyatt* as a landmark decision. "Symbolically, it marked the transition of Alabama from disgrace to respectability," said Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, who heads a national watchdog group that rates state mental health systems.

"I think we had to be just about kicked into compliance," explained David Marshall, a former Alabama mental patient who now heads the Coalition of Men-

tal Patients, the largest such group in the South. "That's the history of our government over the past 20 years. We tended not to correct a lot of things until a federal judge explained it to us. Schools, prisons, mental institutions — all those things were reformed by federal courts. I'm sorry it had to be that way, but I'm glad those courts were there."

"BROKEN PROMISES"

Although Johnson had placed the state system under federal control and ordered that "neither funds, nor staff and facilities, will justify a default by defendants in the provision of suitable treatment for the mentally ill," the state refused to devote enough resources to improve mental health care. The *Wyatt* battle was over — but the war had just begun.

The fight was ultimately over money. "It would cost \$1 million in staff per 250 patients" to improve conditions, said Paul Davis, the reporter who covered the case. "The state had figured out that 'That's not going to bankrupt us because we're going to send all the Aunt Bessies home.'"

The state was wrong, and conditions at Bryce remained substandard. In 1975, attorneys filed a motion alleging that doctors at Bryce were ignoring *Wyatt* standards and failing to follow accepted procedures in giving patients shock treat-



ments. "We still cannot boast that our state institutions provide a humane psychological and physical environment," Judge Johnson noted.

Advocates for the patients wanted the court to order the state to fund the hospitals adequately, but the state continued to fight to have the original standards eased. Finally, after 14 years of legal wrangling, the two sides declared a truce. The state agreed to spend more money on mental health care and secure accreditation for its hospitals. In return, patient advocates agreed to abolish the federal court office monitoring state compliance with the *Wyatt* standards. Judge Myron Thompson reluctantly agreed to the settlement, citing what he called "a trail of broken promises" by the state.

The immediate changes Judge Johnson had ordered in 1972 were still not in effect when the settlement was signed in 1986. Change, it seemed, did not come quickly to an antiquated system.

"That was the frustration for the plaintiffs and Judge Johnson," said Charles Fettner, the current director at Bryce. "They said, 'Here's the plan — do it.' And it didn't happen. I don't think it was because there was resistance on the part of the staff, but because of the difficulty in overhauling a system that had been in place for 110 years."

WYATT BABIES

Despite the stalling and legal battles, *Wyatt* gradually succeeded in improving conditions at state mental hospitals in Alabama. Today there are fewer patients, more staff, and better funding at both Bryce and Searcy.

"You could get someone into Bryce in a hurry, and it was almost impossible to get out," recalled Marshall, the head of the patient coalition. "That's been changed. It's more difficult to get people committed, and they have to be evaluated regularly and discharged if they don't meet the requirements."

"It cut the Bryce population by 80 percent, created a separate nursing home facility and a separate facility to handle prisoners," Marshall continued. "There are more psychiatrists now, and stringent requirements for shock treatments."

Patients also spend much less time in the hospital. "In the 1970's most of the patients were long-term," said Emmett Poundstone, associate commissioner for mental illness. "The average length of stay was years, but now it's much shorter."

Figures obtained from the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation show just how systematic the changes have been. In fiscal year 1971,

the department spent \$26 million on its mental health facilities. In fiscal year 1988, it spent \$226 million. The number of patients statewide has dropped from 8,100 to 2,000, while the number of staff has risen from 2,100 to 6,000.

"I'm one of the *Wyatt* babies," said Dr. Cynthia Bisbee, a clinical psychologist at Bryce Hospital. "After the settlement in 1972, they started hiring people right and left. I was one of the people who could breathe and had a degree."

Bisbee put her degree to work trying to improve care for patients at Bryce. In 1982 she helped found a new program called the NOVA Unit to "provide a more comprehensive approach to treatment."

Patients in the unit are people from 18 to 35 years old who have been diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia — one of the most severe and least understood of all mental illnesses. The unit is small, so residents have close contact with staff. They take mega-vitamins, stick to no-caffeine, no-sugar diets, and keep busy from 6:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. The goal of the unit is to discharge patients within one year and provide follow-up after they leave.

"We've had people try to move to the state to get their family members into the program," said Bisbee. "There's nothing else like it in a state facility."

The unit feels a little different from other parts of Bryce. The walls aren't as drab, and the unit is small enough so that patients can decorate their rooms without their belongings being stolen or confiscated.

Stanley McCoy, a 36-year-old black man, lives on the NOVA Unit. While Judge Johnson was listening to testimony in the *Wyatt* case back in 1972, McCoy says he was "hearing voices and having hallucinations." Since then, he has been in and out of Bryce for 15 years — and he has noticed the difference.

"It's changed," McCoy said. "It's become more comfortable in here."

McCoy especially likes the NOVA Unit. "I think this program has done a whole lot for me. All I want is to be able to think for myself. They let you do things here because I *choose* to do them, instead of jolting you all the time."

Brenda Russell, a 35-year-old black woman born and raised in Mobile, also lives on the NOVA Unit. She said her trouble began when she dated a boy whose parents were "involved in witchcraft — they put a spell on me." The onset of her illness confuses her to this day. "When I was a kid, I was a *perfect* kid in school. I just got fouled up as an adult."

SHOCKING CONDITIONS

Tom Waters worked at Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon, Alabama from 1968 to 1971. While there, he witnessed patients being given shock treatments.

There were 30 or 40 patients sitting on beds in an open ward. Some sat alone, lost in fearful quietness. Others sat on the bedsides and rocked slowly back and forth, their hands clasped between their legs. A young man was biting his bottom lip. Two patients, both grown men, wept openly, but quietly.

A patient was told to come over and lay down on the table. He did as he was told, without protest.

Four patients took him by the arms and legs and pressed him firmly to the bed. The physician placed a wooden tongue depressor between his teeth and told him to "bite hard." No sedative was given to calm the patient. No muscle

relaxant was administered to help avoid injury during convulsions.

Two electrodes, moistened with gel to ensure good contact, were pressed to patient's forehead. Wires from the electrodes were connected to a small box on the bed beside him.

The physician stepped forward and pressed a button on the box.

Immediately, the patient's eyes rolled up into his head and his body began convulsing. His body stiffened, strained against the restraining hands. Convulsions came in waves. After 20 seconds, the patient let out a low moan, then breathed in sharply through flared nostrils. The ward became deathly quiet. The electrical jolt had lasted a mere three-tenths of a second.

The patient was unconscious, spittle forming on his whitened lips. He was lifted by the other patients and taken to one of the many beds that lined the walls of the ward.

**A WARD AT SEARCY HOSPITAL IN 1968,
BEFORE IT WAS DESEGREGATED.**

Russell called the NOVA program "the best one up here. They treat everybody the same."

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Although McCoy and Russell have high praise for the NOVA program, neither has much good to say about the rest of Bryce. The hospital did not even begin providing active treatment for many patients until 1986—14 years after the *Wyatt* ruling. A recent tour of the hospital reveals that treatment remains haphazard at best—and that whatever the improvements since *Wyatt*, most patients still yearn to be free to leave.

"No one really knows what it's like when visiting hours are over and they shut the door," said David Marshall, reflecting on his years in mental hospitals. "You're utterly helpless. You're frightened. You're sick. And there's no way from getting away from the fact that you are mentally ill."

Half of the 660 long-term patients at Bryce live in three units of the Structured Living Program (SLP) East. Patricia Scheifler, head social worker for SLP East, leads the way down the long corridors and through the wards.

Scheifler is armed with keys to get in and out of each of the units. She points to exposed pipes and peeling paint, saying the hospital is building a new facility to house "chronic" patients.

Each unit is painted different shades

of pale green and yellow. As the hues change from unit to unit, so does the mood of the patients. In the "open" unit, a few people talk to each other as the sun shines in through the windows. On the "intermediate" unit, patients pace up and down the halls. On the "closed" unit—the most restrictive ward at Bryce—many people lie on their beds with their heads pushed deep into their mattresses.

As Scheifler unlocks the door to the closed unit, a woman falls to her knees, screaming and wailing. "Help me, Jesus, please help me! Take me out of here, Lord, please Lord, take me home!"

Scheifler walks back through the intermediate unit, heading toward the exit. As she pulls out her keys, a patient grabs her arm and begins to plead with her. "Let me go, darlin', let me go!" the woman demands. "If I can go home, I'll be all right. I just need to go home. Let me go!"

Safely through the exit, Scheifler slams the door, leaving the woman behind. She pauses, slightly embarrassed by the incident. "I reflect on that when I go home at night," she says. "I go home at 4:30 every day. These are people who can't leave."

BORN FREE

For the thousands of patients who *have* left in the days since the *Wyatt* decision, things haven't been much better on the outside. Patients don't stay as long at

Bryce these days, but they come and go more often. "We expect to see half of them come back," said Charles Fettner, director of Bryce.

Brenda Russell has come back several times. When she was released from Bryce in 1985, for example, she went to live with her mother. "I looked for a job, but I had a mental record and couldn't get one. Instead of giving me a break, people put a stumbling block in my way." When she got pregnant, Russell said, her mother called the police and had her sent back to Bryce.

"I was a very intelligent person up until I started going to mental hospitals," Russell said. "I'd rather live in the community. I mean, I was born free. Why can't I live free now?"

Russell's story is a common one—and it reveals one of the flaws in the original *Wyatt* decision. The court ordered that hospital conditions be improved, but failed to require the state to establish community mental health services throughout Alabama.

"Unwittingly, the community system was virtually ignored in *Wyatt*," said Dr. Robert Okin, assistant professor at Harvard Medical School. Okin added that a state survey shows that one-third of all patients in Alabama mental hospitals would be better off in the community, but continue to be warehoused because of the lack of local services.

Okin also chairs the Wyatt Consulting Committee, a group of "experts" set up by the court to oversee the 1986 *Wyatt* settlement. In just three years, the committee has managed to push the state to start developing mental health services in local communities.

To get things moving, Okin brought Alabama mental health professionals to Massachusetts so they could see effective community services for themselves. "It really made a difference," Okin said. "Could their clients do well in the community, given their severe symptoms? That question was virtually answered at a glance. Actually talking to clients in a different set-



BRENDA RUSSELL SITS ON THE PORCH OF THE NOVA UNIT. "I WAS BORN FREE," SHE SAYS. "WHY CAN'T I LIVE FREE NOW?"

ting provides a perspective that all the documents in the world don't have."

The field trips convinced many in Alabama that setting up a community system requires more than money — it requires careful planning that includes people who will be directly affected by the system.

"Not having had the services available has been a deplorable situation for Alabama families," said Rogene Parris, director of the Alabama Alliance for the Mentally Ill, who has been helping to plan community services. "People say that in the deep Southern states nothing is going on positively. Well, I say just watch us."

With the Wyatt Committee and community advocates pushing for change, Alabama now has a comprehensive plan to set up local crisis centers, transitional and group homes, and other community-based support services for the mentally ill.

"The plan is now in effect," said Kathy Sawyer, Alabama director of advocacy services and a member of the Wyatt Committee. "It's being funded. Facilities are now being leased and constructed."

POWER IN NUMBERS

Perhaps most surprising of all, the state is actually pumping money into the system to pay for new community services. The department of mental health received a 20 percent increase in its budget last year for community spending, and Governor Guy Hunt signed a bill in May 1988 allowing the department to issue \$100 million in bonds. So far, the department has issued \$60 million — half for community services and half for state institutions.

The bond issue was the result of intense lobbying by both mental health advocates and officials within the system. Charles Fettner, director of Bryce Hospital, pushed hard to convince the state to spend enough money to tear down parts of the 108-year-old hospital and build new facilities. Without the construction, he said, Bryce will be unable to maintain its accreditation

STANLEY McCoy SAYS THE WYATT RULING IMPROVED CONDITIONS AT BRYCE: "IT'S BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE IN HERE."

as required by the 1986 Wyatt settlement.

"Changes at Bryce required political planning, not just a dream," Fettner said. "We sold the bond issue to the legislature."

Before Fettner took over as director of Bryce in 1981, there had been eight directors in the nine years following the Wyatt decision. Unlike most of his predecessors, Fettner is a lawyer, not a psychiatrist. His favorite subject seems to be the architectural blueprints and color-coded charts of proposed construction that clutter his office at Bryce.

"We hope we'll have political leadership that recognizes the needs of the mentally ill — not because some judge is telling us to," Fettner said.

Rogene Parris, director of the state Alliance of the Mentally Ill, also lobbied for the bond issue. The mother of a son with schizophrenia, she has helped AMI grow from a small support group to a statewide organization of more than 1,000 families. The group held three rallies on the steps of the State House during the last days of the 1988 session to urge the legislature to approve the bond issue.

Parris knows her group's political power lies not in cozying up to politicians, but in numbers. "It shouldn't matter who is governor," she said. "Any governor should be putting the disabled ahead of politics."

Perhaps the greatest success of Wyatt has been in giving advocacy groups across the country a lesson in the politics of mental health. Lawyers on the Alabama case

went on to other big institutional lawsuits, using Wyatt as a precedent to spur other states to improve community services and conditions in state mental hospitals.

"States were very concerned about the litigation," says Phil Leaf, director of the Center for Health, Policy and Research at the Yale University School of Medicine. "They asked themselves, 'How far away are we from these standards?'"

In fact, Leaf said, Wyatt had a much more immediate effect on states outside of Alabama that were worried about lawsuits. "They focused on their level of funding and how it affected hospital staffing and individualized treatment plans," Leaf said. "There was a lot of action around the country as a result of Wyatt."

Advocates like Leaf say that experiences in other states prove that even patients with the most severe mental illnesses can benefit from a return to the community. The task in Alabama is to build a system that will make that happen.

With advocates like Rogene Parris and David Marshall hounding state officials, change is certain to continue. "I believe in going to the powers that be," said Parris. "They either produce or let's get someone new."

David Marshall agreed. "I start out with the attitude that there's no excuse, and I don't want to hear it," he said. "I want it changed." □

Grace Nordhoff is a graduate student in social work at the University of North Carolina.





The New Dumping Ground

Despite evidence of horrific abuses, Virginia officials are still placing the mentally ill in adult homes.

By Mike Hudson

ROANOKE, VA. — At Pine Ridge Home for Adults near Farmville, the new owner tangled with a mentally ill resident who refused to leave the kitchen. After the resident kicked him in the stomach, the owner pulled a gun and shot him.

At Arnold's Rest Home near Abingdon, a woman diagnosed with schizophrenia suffered mysteriously broken legs, arms, and ribs. For several days, the only way she could get from her bedroom to the dining room was by dragging herself across the floor on her bottom.

At Hairston's Home for Adults in Martinsville, the owners admitted a 26-year-old mentally ill man convicted of assaulting a resident at another adult home. A few weeks later, he was charged with murdering a 59-year-old resident by pushing him under scalding water.

At Cardinal Home for Adults in Botetourt County, a mentally ill resident threatened to commit suicide. The owner opened a medicine cabinet, showed him an unloaded gun, and said: "Go ahead."

Thousands of mentally ill people are in danger of abuse and neglect in adult "board-and-care" homes across Virginia.

They are victims of a handful of

untrained or greedy adult-home owners who try to squeeze maximum profits out of their businesses. They are victims of a weak-kneed welfare system that has largely failed to police these operations. And they are victims of a tight-fisted state government that has failed to come up with money to improve conditions in poorly run adult homes or find the mentally ill better places to live.

State officials have done little to change the flawed system — despite repeated critical studies and numerous horror stories over the past decade. Instead, officials have continued steering many of the state's most vulnerable citizens into adult homes.

Homes for adults are not nursing homes. Although they care for 20,000

people — including an estimated 4,000 residents with mental illnesses — they generally have no full-time doctors or nurses on duty. They are supposed to provide the basics — room, board, and supervision — to adults who have been unable to live on their own.

State officials and adult-home owners insist that most of the 446 adult homes in Virginia are safe, clean and well run. "I would say 90 percent are doing a commendable job," says Jo Ella John, president of the Virginia Association of Homes for Adults.

But a six-month investigation of adult homes in Virginia has uncovered widespread problems throughout the system:

- ◆ Most adult-home workers have no training in dealing with mentally ill residents. In many cases, the staff is underpaid and uneducated. At some homes, two or three untrained staffers are left to supervise dozens of seriously mentally ill residents.

- ◆ Adult-home owners can flout state welfare regulations for years. The only penalty the state has is to revoke a home's license — an action welfare officials seldom try.

- ◆ Social workers and mental health agencies, understaffed and



overburdened by growing case loads, often shunt the mentally ill from home to home with little regard for their needs.

◆ Thousands of mentally ill adults are stuck in large state institutions and adult homes because officials have failed to develop adequate housing and support services in local communities.

By steering people into adult homes, mental health advocates say, the state often exposes them to abuse and exploitation. Even well-run homes, they contend, do not offer the supervision and help the mentally ill need.

"DAD, I DON'T FEEL RIGHT"

Joe Pakush Jr. was a senior in high school when he sat on his parents' couch and said: "Dad, I don't feel right. I can't put my finger on it."

Joe had a lot going for him. He was an honors student at William Fleming High in Roanoke, a football lineman, an Eagle Scout, a member of the Order of the Arrow.

But he was beginning to exhibit signs of schizophrenia, a mental illness that disrupts normal thought processes and can cause delusions and hallucinations.

"If you've got muscular dystrophy, nobody is going to push you off the sidewalk," said his father, Joe Pakush Sr. "But if you're schizophrenic, they'll let you freeze to death and you'll be the butt of a lot of jokes."

Over the past 15 years, the younger Pakush has been in and out of mental hospitals and halfway houses. But mostly he has lived with his parents in Roanoke.

Last fall, when Pakush refused to take his medication and wandered into the front yard with only a bathrobe on, his parents knew it was time to find someplace else for him to live.

They started looking for an adult home — and at first, they didn't like what they saw. Three homes they visited were crowded and dirty. The bedrooms for two residents were so small, Pakush Sr. said, "they reminded me of jail cells built for one."

Also, he said, the homes were in the middle of nowhere, with nothing for residents to do. "There's no stimulation for the mind. Sticking them out in Oshkosh is not going to provide the proper stimulation."

Finally, they found a place they liked and moved Joe into the Hotel Botetourt, an adult home in Buchanan.

The home is a red-brick building that was built as a hotel in 1851 along the James River. About 30 adults live there. Joe Sr. says he likes it because it's clean

"To have four people jammed into a bedroom together, that's not a way anybody would want to live," said Karen Mallam, executive director of the Virginia Alliance for the Mentally Ill. "Why should our mentally disabled citizens be forced to live some way that other people wouldn't want to live?"

Gretchen Stubbs, a mentally ill woman who lived at an adult home that was shut down for mistreating residents, put it more directly. "When you're in an adult home," she said, "you feel like you're doomed until you die."

and airy, and it's in town so Joe Jr. can walk to the store if he wants.

Joe is big, 6 feet tall and about 230 pounds, and usually wears Pointer Brand overalls, a flannel shirt, and white canvas tennis shoes. His beard is dark and thick. He is now 33.

He doesn't want to participate in the home's activities, such as crafts or exercise sessions. He paces a lot and likes to lift his long arms over his head and stretch. Sometimes he walks downtown to get a hamburger.

His parents visit him several times a month, usually bringing a carton of cigarettes. At first, his father said, he and his wife Olga "went the guilt route," worrying whether they should put Joe in an adult home. But Joe's psychiatrist said it was best if he didn't live at home anymore.

They hope someday Joe will learn to live on his own. But the chances don't look good right now. They think he'll probably have to live in an adult home the rest of his life.

When Joe first started to withdraw because of his schizophrenia, his dad thought it was just teen-age laziness. He told Joe that he'd end up pumping gas if he didn't shape up.

"Now," his father says, "I'd give my right hand to see him pumping gas."

—M.H.

"A DISGRACEFUL FAILURE"

Virginia's adult homes are part of a national problem that the late U.S. Representative Claude Pepper of Florida called "a tragedy of epic proportions and a disgraceful failure of public policy." National studies this year uncovered widespread abuses at 68,000 board-and-care homes housing an estimated one million Americans.

The pattern of adult-home abuses is also a modern-day reminder of Virginia's history of institutional horrors against the mentally ill — including beatings, shock therapy, and sterilization.

Adult homes were originally established as "old-folks homes" where the elderly could quietly live out their years. Two decades ago, the rest-home business was a mom-and-pop industry of mostly small homes averaging about two dozen beds each.

That changed in the 1970s when Virginia joined a national movement known as "deinstitutionalization" — clearing

mentally ill adults out of state institutions. The goal was to help them live as normal lives as possible in local communities.

There was one flaw in the plan, however — there simply was and still is nowhere for many released patients to go. Often, they have no families, or their families cannot or do not want to care for them. Nearly as often, they are left with few choices, stripped of their privacy and dignity.

Instead of setting up publicly run group homes or apartment programs for released patients, the state placed many in adult homes — usually private,

for-profit facilities designed for the elderly and unequipped to care for the mentally ill. Since then, the number of people living in adult homes has more than tripled, and the system has become a catch-all dumping ground for the state's unwanted.

Today adult homes are a growing industry. Homes range in size from four to 600 residents, with an average of about



JOE PAKUSH JR. LIVED WITH HIS PARENTS BEFORE THEY PLACED HIM IN AN ADULT HOME IN BUCHANAN, VIRGINIA.

47. They care for a diverse population that includes the elderly, the retarded, and the mentally ill, and they have started competing with nursing homes for residents.

Many of the homes are supported at least in part by tax dollars. Adult homes receive up to \$581 a month for each of the estimated 5,500 poor residents who rely on federal Supplemental Security Income and state auxiliary grants to pay for their keep.

Yet that tax money — between \$30 million and \$40 million a year — seldom results in well-staffed adult homes. The state requires no minimum staffing levels, and homes that rely on public assistance often pay minimum wage to most of their workers and offer no training in caring for the mentally ill.

"Keeping good help is just almost impossible," says Jo Ella John, president of the adult-home association. "The pay is low and the work is difficult."

State officials and adult-home owners concede that the most vulnerable of adults — the poorest and loneliest of the mentally ill — are often the ones most at risk in homes staffed by untrained workers.

"MORONS AND WACKOS"

Samuel R. Keisler knew how to keep people in line at his home for adults in rural Gloucester County.

"I'm not talking about beating or anything," Keisler said recently. "I'm talking about shaking them up a little bit."

One mentally ill resident named Jack said Keisler beat him with a broomstick. Jack, 46, also said Keisler took him outside in the middle of winter and sprayed him with a water hose to teach him a lesson for spitting on himself.

Keisler admitted to officials that he yelled and cursed at Jack and made him stand in the corner for half an hour or more.

But he denied hitting him with a broomstick.

"It was a little bamboo stick, an Oriental backscratcher," Keisler said. "Yeah, I whacked him some."

Keisler also admitted he slapped Jack in the face. When a social worker asked

why, Keisler said: "Because he pissed all over the living room furniture. A person can only take so much. I can only stand so much."

Social workers run across scores of such cases of abuse and neglect at adult homes every year. In fact, a review of state inspection reports for more than 50 adult homes shows that such problems are not uncommon — and in some homes residents are abused or neglected for years without detection.

Keisler ran Abingdon Home for Adults for one and a half years before welfare officials discovered mistreatment and took away his license.

A licensing inspector said she found residents dirty and smelly and that Keisler had ordered male residents to urinate in the yard. Residents told the inspector that Keisler kept their welfare checks without giving them spending money required by the state.

Keisler called his residents "morons" and "wackos" in front of the inspector and

BUSY BREAKFAST

With state inspections infrequent and many residents too frightened or disoriented to complain, such abuse and neglect usually remain a well-kept secret. Nevertheless, complaints to local social workers have grown nearly fourfold since 1984, and state documents show that roughly 145 adult homes — one-third of the total — represent at least "moderate to serious" risks of abuse, neglect, or other problems.

State officials and adult-home operators say abuse and neglect often can be blamed on understaffing or on low-paid, poorly trained workers at the homes.

Each day, owners and aides in adult homes give out powerful medications to mentally ill people — yet few have the experience to notice when someone is being overdressed. At one home, the operator admitted he often changed the dosages of medications when residents became violent or began "acting a little funny."

Because few homes have staffers who



MANY ADULT RESIDENTS HAVE LITTLE TO DO ALL DAY EXCEPT SIT AROUND, SMOKE CIGARETTES, OR WATCH TV.

another social worker. "He made fun of one of the resident's haircut," the inspector reported. "When we pointed out that this is unacceptable, he just laughed."

Keisler accused mental health officials of using his home as a dumping ground for their most difficult clients. He said social workers were usually too busy to stop by — although they did give the Keislers some books on behavior modification to read.

encourage mentally ill residents to be active, many residents spend most of their time sitting around doing nothing, smoking cigarettes or staring at TV game shows. And sometimes worse things happen.

On the last Sunday in January 1988, for example, Southern Manor Home for Adults in Roanoke had three "housekeeper/aides" on duty to supervise about 70 residents. One resident diagnosed with schizophrenia wandered away and jumped to his death off the Wasena Bridge.

"I WAS ABLE TO REALLY LIVE AGAIN"

Pat Shunkwiler spent six years in Eastern State Hospital, drugged, dazed, and scared of the outside world.

These days Shunkwiler, 23, has his own apartment in Virginia Beach, with a portable TV, a soft couch, and a huge collection of music taped off the radio.

He's been out of the hospital for almost two years, thanks to a housing and support network created by mental health advocates in the resort city.

"I don't think I could have made it this long" without the housing program, Shunkwiler said. "I don't know where I would have gone. I probably would have been discharged to an [adult] home and been very, very unhappy."

Virginia Beach has the most extensive program in the state for the mentally ill, providing apartments for 78 mentally ill adults who pay rent with their federal disability checks. The residents, whose homes are scattered throughout the city, are visited by mental health workers on call 24 hours a day.

Richard Fletcher, an official with the apartment program, said it gives people with mental illness independence and the pride of doing for themselves.

City mental health officials estimate that as many as 50 of the 78 residents probably would be in adult homes — or still in mental hospitals — if the apartments were not available.

Karen Mallam, executive director of the Virginia Alliance for the Mentally Ill, says even people with serious mental illness are better off in apartment programs than in adult homes.

She said such programs give residents needed supervision while helping them learn to take care of themselves better.

The Virginia Beach housing program begins with a "sanctuary home" that helps people who are leaving a hospital or who have been kicked out of their homes.

The first person Shunkwiler lived with after leaving Eastern State last year was John Slapp, a retired Navy man with a degree in social work. Until his death from a heart attack last summer, Slapp contracted with the city to take residents into his home for short stays.

When Shunkwiler went to live with Slapp, he was shaking with fear. But the two quickly became friends. "He was the first person who believed in me and was able to look through any label that I have," Shunkwiler said. "I was able to really live again."

After about five weeks with Slapp, Shunkwiler moved into a "maximum supervision" apartment run by the Volunteers of America. The apartments are

staffed around the clock by mental health workers. Shunkwiler's counselor is there most of the day, and he talks to her frequently. He also has neighbors he can go to and say: "I'm feeling depressed. I need someone to talk to."

By this fall, Shunkwiler hopes to move



VIRGINIA BEACH PROVIDES SUPERVISED HOUSING THAT ENABLES MENTALLY ILL RESIDENTS TO LIVE ON THEIR OWN.

into a "moderate supervision" apartment, the final step in the city program.

Private landlords rent the apartments to about 30 mental health clients — with the agreement that case workers will visit at least once a week to check cleanliness and help residents deal with the stress of daily living.

William Newcomb, a 73-year-old man diagnosed with schizophrenia, lives in a moderate supervision apartment. "I can't keep up with the change anymore," he said as he sat on a couch with his two roommates. "I can't keep up with anything hardly. Brain damaged."

The key to the housing program is Beach House, the city's clubhouse for the mentally ill. Residents are required to visit the clubhouse often and help answer phones, cook, and clean. Shunkwiler serves as a tour guide for the clubhouse.

So far, six residents have "graduated" from the apartment program and gone on to live on their own. Fletcher, who used to coordinate the program, said the goal is to push people to do all they can — and not to underestimate what they can accomplish. "We don't know people's potential," he said.

—M.H.

An aide later testified that even though the man had been acting increasingly delusional, she didn't know that she was supposed to stay with him and watch him. And, she added, she was too busy during breakfast time anyway.

At Commonwealth Health Center in Martinsville, inspectors found that at times just one staffer had been assigned to care for 51 residents on three floors. During 1987, an inspector found repeated evidence that the staff was neglecting residents:

- ◆ One resident had thick, yellow toenails that were so long they were curling into his skin.

- ◆ A man with infectious hepatitis was allowed to share a bathroom with other residents.

- ◆ One 70-year-old woman's weight dropped to 56 pounds. At one point, according to records at the home, she was "down on her knees, lethargic."

- ◆ A mentally ill man who had emphysema sat in his room, with no fan and the doors and windows closed, sweating in 90-degree heat.

The inspector found live roaches in the home's records.

After two years of repeated violations at Commonwealth Health Care, state officials finally refused to renew the home's license. It closed in late 1987.

Similar evidence of staff neglect surfaced at Davis Adult Manor near downtown Richmond after the home was damaged by three fires last year.

Before the fires, the home had been cited for several fire-code violations. After the fires, residents were forced to sleep amid the rubble.

Two men slept in a bedroom with crumbling plaster and gaping holes in the ceiling. Two women were moved from their bedroom into the dining room, which also had a large hole in the ceiling. Vibrations from construction workers above caused plaster dust to fall on them. They stored most of their clothes by laying them over up-ended chairs.

After an inspection, the state refused to renew the home's license. A new owner has taken over and is renovating the home.

GREYHOUND THERAPY

Despite such evidence of abuse and neglect throughout the system, the state continues to dump hundreds of mentally ill adults in board-and-care homes.

Many adult homes have sprung up around state institutions in rural western Virginia, resulting in what one owner calls "Greyhound Therapy." Mental health officials in northern Virginia routinely bus mentally ill people hundreds of miles across the state to adult homes in the Roanoke Valley and far southwest Virginia—and forget about them.

They leave it up to local mental health agencies to take care of the new residents. But those agencies are often so overworked that the mentally ill get little attention. A 1986 study by the General Assembly found that one-fourth of adult homes that care for residents with chronic mental illness have no working relationship with local mental health agencies.

Mental health officials concede they often do not have the money or the people to give much support to adult-home residents.

Helen Dasse, support services director for Mental Health Services of Roanoke Valley, said her case workers are responsible for an average of 64 clients each.

"To my way of thinking, that's still trying to put a band-aid over a crack in the Hoover Dam," she told a gathering of adult-home owners this spring. "You want us to give you better services. I'm sorry. We can only provide so much."

Sandy Murphy spent more than a year trying to get her 40-year-old brother, Chuck, out of a state mental hospital and into a group home near his family in northern Virginia.

Chuck, diagnosed with schizophrenia, had gone to Western State Hospital near Staunton for what was supposed to be a short stay. But because of long waiting lists in the few housing programs in northern Virginia, he got stuck in the hospital, paying about \$4,000 a month out of the inheritance his father had left him.

Sandy Murphy finally gave up and

placed him in an adult home 365 miles away in Abingdon, near the Tennessee border. She said the home, Renaissance House, is a good one with a well-trained staff.

But her brother is not happy, she said. "He wants to come home. He was born here. He's lived his whole life up here. I think he feels cut off."

Citizens have failed to demand that government officials do something about



FACILITIES LIKE HAIRSTON'S HOME FOR ADULTS HAVE SPRUNG UP IN RURAL SOUTHERN VIRGINIA, STRANDING MANY RESIDENTS FAR FROM HOME.

housing for the mentally ill, Murphy said. "We need to keep the pressure on. And we should not take their feeble excuses as an answer any more."

NOWHERE TO GO

At the root of the problem is a housing shortage. Virginians diagnosed with mental illness have few choices about where to live. Usually, if they can't or don't want to live with their families and are unable to live independently, the only choice is a home for adults.

Mental health advocates say the state's continued reliance on adult homes has stifled the growth of better housing alternatives. Although Virginia has spent more than \$60 million over the past two years trying to improve mental health programs, a national survey last year ranked the state's housing for the seriously mentally ill among the worst in the nation.

As a result, advocates say, thousands of people are stuck in state mental hospitals because there is no place for them to go.

State officials put the figure lower, but concede that there are at least 1,000 people on waiting lists in state institutions who are ready to leave but have nowhere to go.

When residents do leave hospitals, they have everything they own in an old suitcase or a paper sack. They are taken to a rest home in a town they've never seen before and are introduced to roommates they've never met before.

"You come in there with your lone suitcase and they show you your bed," said Dasse, the Roanoke Valley mental health official. "There has to be a loss of dignity."

Mallam, director of the state Alliance for the Mentally Ill, said dumping the mentally ill into adult homes designed for the elderly has undermined the goal of getting people out of large institutions and helping them lead normal lives in the community.

She and other advocates say large adult homes in former hospitals or old motels are often little more than small institutions themselves, and smaller adult homes usually do not have enough trained staff to deal with the special needs of the mentally ill.

Advocates like Mallam favor group homes or apartment programs run and staffed by mental health professionals.

Mallam believes that 90 percent of the estimated 4,000 mentally ill people in adult homes should be in apartment programs that give residents the supervision they need while helping them learn to take better care of themselves. Yet there are currently fewer than 1,500 beds in such programs. (See sidebar, opposite page.)

A for-profit adult home has an economic incentive to keep a mentally ill resident from getting better and learning to become more independent, Mallam said. "You don't want him to get better and move. Because then you have an empty bed."

Mallam said adult-home owners have also lobbied against proposals to allow the mentally ill to receive state "auxiliary grants" to live in public housing programs. The state currently gives money only to mentally ill adults who live in adult homes.

"We've got an industry that understandably wants to protect itself," Mallam said.

OUTSIDE THE LAW

As the demand for housing has grown, hundreds of boarding houses and unli-

"WE CAN DO THIS"

Behind the closed door of her bedroom, Gretchen Stubbs told a state inspector last year that Callahan's Home For Adults allowed her just a quarter of a glass of milk a week.

After the inspector left, the home's owner, Patricia Hillman, knocked on her door. Hillman, red-faced, stormed into the room and called her a "two-faced liar," Stubbs says.

Hillman must have had an assistant listening through the bedroom door, Stubbs says.

Stubbs, diagnosed with manic-depression, had been friendly with Hillman since first coming to the adult home in Luray. After Hillman confronted her, she became so depressed she couldn't get out of bed.

"I was gonna take all my pills," Stubbs says. "I just felt like dying."

Mental health officials moved Stubbs out of the home and into a supervised apartment program in Winchester. These days, Stubbs, 50, lives in an apartment on her own near Cindy Robbins, another former resident of Callahan's.

They say getting out of the adult home is the best thing that's happened to them in a long time. "This is the best I've done in 10 years," Stubbs said. "When you're in an adult home, you feel like you're doomed until you die."

A GLASS OF MILK

State officials revoked Hillman's adult-home license for what they say was a pattern of mistreatment and harassment of residents. Hillman denied the allegations, but closed her home in August after losing a year-long appeal.

Robbins, 29, went to Callahan's in 1987 after spending years on a state mental hospital waiting list for community housing.

At first, she was so glad to be out of the hospital that "I felt like I wanted the people [in the adult home] to adopt me."

But then she began to realize things at Callahan's weren't so good. "The food there was so bad that nobody could stand it. Yet there wasn't enough for the people who were hungry." The refrigerator was chained at night so residents couldn't get food from it. If anyone complained, she said, Hillman yelled at them.

Robbins spent most of her time sitting on the porch, depressed. "She'd be sitting there talking to you and then she'd just stop and stare," recalls Annette Griffith, a former employee of the home. "You'd have to say, 'Cindy, Cindy.'"

When Stubbs arrived at the home last year, she saw Robbins standing sadly off

to the side. The two became friends and supported each other during the state investigation.

Mental health officials also helped Robbins move out of the home and into an apartment program in Winchester across town from Stubbs. Last February the two



AFTER YEARS IN MENTAL HOSPITALS, CINDY ROBBINS LIVES ON HER OWN FOR THE FIRST TIME, THANKS TO A SUPERVISED HOUSING PROGRAM.

moved into an apartment together. It was decorated with plants and a colored-pencil picture of a log cabin that Robbins drew for Stubbs. And it was all theirs.

"It's something to be able to open a refrigerator door and get you a glass of milk," Stubbs said.

Stubbs and Robbins pooled their federal disability checks of \$368 a month to pay the rent. Food stamps helped with groceries. They both want to get jobs eventually, but they began by concentrating on taking care of each other.

"I have a tendency to mother her, because I have four kids," Stubbs said. "She says, 'Don't mother me, I'm 29 years old.' Then she turns around and sends me a Mother's Day card."

In August, Robbins and Stubbs left the supervised housing program to live on their own in separate apartments, two blocks apart. Robbins goes to a local clinic for counseling, and Stubbs stops by once a month to pick up her medication. They're doing so well that mental health caseworkers no longer come by to visit.

"If we can do this, a lot of other people can," Stubbs said. "It makes you feel like a person again."
—M.H.

censed adult homes have sprung up across the state. Because the operations don't have to follow any of the requirements that licensed homes do, thousands of residents are at even greater risk in these unregulated homes.

Upstairs at Alice Odom's boarding house in Petersburg, an alcoholic man snoozed Sunday afternoon away, curled in a fetal position under an old purple bed-

spread. A pack of Richland cigarettes and a large can of Richfood pork and beans sat on the bedside table. A brown roach crawled brazen circles over the table.

Odom has been taking people into her cluttered frame house for years, a few hundred feet from the city welfare department building. She's sheltered alcoholics, former mental patients, people in wheelchairs, and bedridden old folks—charging them \$250 a month.

"Sometimes they get on my nerves," said Odom, 60. But without her, she said, "they would have to be in the street or find them another place. Then I'd have to go on welfare. Having this place, I'm able to take care of myself."

Her boarding house is part of an extensive, unregulated dumping ground for the mentally ill. These unlicensed and sometimes illegal businesses house much the same type of residents that adult homes do, including mentally ill people who are often poor, vulnerable, and have no one else to look out for them.

State officials have said for years that Odom is violating state law by taking money to care for four or more aged or disabled adults without an adult-home license. In 1985, welfare inspectors reported that she was housing about a dozen people in three buildings. The aging wooden houses were filthy, smelled of urine, had holes in the walls and looked like they were going to collapse in some places, the inspectors said.

A court order the following year forbid Odom from operating, but she continues to take in mentally ill people kicked out of licensed homes because the homes could not handle them. Some weeks she turns away three or four boarders. "They just always coming," she said.

State officials not only know about un-

licensed operations like Odom's — they regularly rely on them to care for the mentally ill. A 1986 study by the General Assembly criticized state mental health officials for placing mentally ill adults in boarding houses and other unlicensed facilities. The study said that at least 16 of the state's 40 local mental health agencies knew of unlicensed facilities that were violating the law by providing care to four or more mental patients.

It bothers some adult-home owners that anyone who cares for three or fewer adults doesn't have to follow even the most basic requirements — such as fire and safety rules — that licensed homes must follow. "We just feel these people ought to be brought into the system," said Bob Williams, who owns adult homes in Roanoke and Pulaski County.

CRIME WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

For state officials — already stretched thin in trying to watch over the nearly 20,000 people living in licensed adult homes — the prospect of increased regulatory responsibility is daunting.

Carolynne Stevens, state licensing director for adult homes, said the state doesn't want to "force people into too much or too little in the way of care or protection."

But critics of the current regulations say too little protection is what residents get. In 1985, for example, a 59-year-

old man died in a fire at an unlicensed Henrico County home. Fire officials said six adults were being cared for at the home.

The owner, Marie Petteway, had lost her license to operate an adult home in Richmond in 1979 for numerous safety and health violations. That same year a Henrico County judge had ordered her to stop running an unlicensed adult home at another site.

Even if officials required boarding houses and small adult homes to obtain licenses, however, they would have almost no way to protect residents from serious abuses. The state currently has only 21 inspectors for 446 licensed adult homes.

And even when inspectors find violations at licensed homes, their hands are often tied. Although many homes receive

public funds, officials cannot fine owners, forbid new admissions, or cut funding to homes that repeatedly violate state regulations. All they can do is revoke a home's license — an all-or-nothing measure that they seldom attempt.

Jo Ella John, president of the state adult-home association, said the state should fine owners to force them to improve. If an owner knew that certain viola-



SUSIE SOWERS SPENT 20 YEARS IN MENTAL HOSPITALS AND UNDERWENT SHOCK TREATMENTS. SHE SAYS DOCTORS DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS "TO TINKER WITH PATIENTS' MINDS." SOWERS NOW LIVES IN AN ADULT HOME.

tions would automatically cost \$100, she said, "that owner would get his act together in a hurry. And you would have a good home, and you wouldn't have to close it down."

NEW ROBBER BARONS

What is happening in Virginia is being repeated in adult homes across the country. Two federal studies released in March criticized federal and state officials for failing to protect residents and improve conditions in board-and-care homes.

The studies found many abuses, including rapes, beatings, deaths, fraud, crowding, and fire hazards. At a Mississippi adult home, nine malnourished adults were locked in a 10-square-foot

storage room with no ventilation, electricity, or furniture. They went to the bathroom in a bucket and slept on two mattresses covered with newspapers.

In South Carolina, a staffer was having sex with a mentally ill resident who was unable to defend herself. Local social workers excused what was happening, saying it was "mere extramarital sexual relations."

Despite repeated warnings about such abuses, the studies reported, federal welfare officials have actually cut back their efforts to improve conditions at board-and-care homes.

During congressional hearings in 1981, for example, Health and Human Services officials promised to come up with proposals for reform legislation. The agency has never followed through on those promises.

That same year, the General Accounting Office uncovered extensive fraud in the use of federal funds in adult homes. Angered by the findings, Representative Claude Pepper accused federal and state governments of trying to save money by shunting mental patients into adult homes.

"We have created a new kind of institutional robber baron who deals in slum property — and who has brought new meaning to the phrase, 'Bring me your tired, your poor.'"

The failure to provide adequate housing for the mentally ill has also angered people in Virginia. Last year, somebody found a blind woman wandering around downtown Richmond, disoriented and inching her way along buildings with her hands.

The woman, shoeless, dirty, and emaciated, was taken to the Salvation Army. Social workers discovered she had walked away from an adult home.

For Ellen White, welfare director for the Salvation Army, the woman is an example of how society's most vulnerable members are often at risk in "an eclectic dumping heap" of adult homes and unregulated boarding houses.

They have nowhere else to live, she said, because nobody is willing to do anything about the problem.

"We're all engaged in this kind of denial," she said. "We're all implicitly looking the other way." □

Mike Hudson is a staff writer with the Roanoke Times & World-News. This story is part of a six-month investigation he conducted for the paper.

The Death of Sammy Owens

A deputy sheriff killed him — no one disputes that. But now his community wants to know why the police have no mental health training.

By Eric Bates

WINNSBORO, S.C. — Nearly 1,000 people marched down Congress Street, moving slowly but deliberately. Many carried homemade signs. They were headed for the sheriff's department.

When they got there, they found the doors locked. Sheriff LeRoy "Bubba" Montgomery was gone.

Kamau Marcharia, a local community leader, shook his head sadly. "Evil flees in the face of righteousness," he said. The group prayed in the parking lot, and then moved on to the county courthouse. Marcharia stood on the steps and addressed the crowd.

"The fact that everyone is here today says 'no' to the plantation mentality," he said. "We are here to show that you cannot shoot black people and drag them through the woods like animals."

A few people watched from the sidewalk in silence. They had never seen anything like it before. Winnsboro is a town of fewer than 3,000 people, yet here were hundreds of ministers, grocers, factory workers, home-makers, anti-nuclear activists, grandparents — all rallying together under a single banner.

The banner bore the name of a young man with a history of mental illness who had been shot dead by a sheriff's deputy. The banner read, "Remember Sam Owens."

GOING CRAZY

Henry Owens remembers the night his son died. It was the evening of January 5, 1989. The family was at home, and Sammy was out in the woods, inhaling gasoline fumes from a plastic milk jug.

"He was sniffing gas, and some of the little grandboys were throwing rocks at him," Henry recalled. "That's when he got upset. If you say anything to him or throw a rock at him or something like that, then he just goes crazy."

Sam grabbed an ax and started to knock the awning off the front porch. "He told me he'd kill me," his father said. "He don't know me from anybody when he get like that."

Sammy got like that a lot. He had been sniffing gas since he was 10, and had dropped out of school a few years later. At age 25, addicted to the gas fumes and unable to find work, he often sat around the

house all day, depressed and bored. The gas made him wild, drove him into a frenzy if provoked. His family had learned to steer clear of him — and to call the police to take him to the state mental hospital in Columbia when he got violent.

"He been back and forth to Columbia 40 or 50 times," said his sister Mary. "We asked them to keep him a while and maybe he would get better, but once he got off the gas they said there was no reason to keep him and they would let him go. Then he would be back on it. He would go off to that area in the woods with his gas jug and you could hear him out there hollering and yelling."

On that January evening, as Sam tore up the house with an ax, his sister once again called the police. Sam heard her on the phone, and ran off into the woods behind the house. There, 60 yards into the tangled underbrush, he climbed a cedar tree, the gallon jug in one hand, the ax in the other. It was growing dark.

THE KILLING TREE

Deputy sheriffs arrived minutes later, and Henry Owens led them into the woods. "I tried to get Sammy down out of the tree," Owens recalled. "He was cussing



so much, I just come on back to the house.”

When the family heard shouting in the woods, Owens sent his oldest sons, David and Alphonso, to see what was happening. When they got there, the brothers were startled to find seven armed deputies at the bottom of the tree. Sam was surrounded.

Some of the deputies had dealt with Sam before; on one call, it had taken three of them to subdue him. Just a month earlier, he had damaged a highway patrol car with a pipe. Sammy had four outstanding arrest warrants on charges of disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. They knew he was addicted to gas fumes, and they knew he had a history of mental illness.

Yet instead of trying to calm Sam down, deputies began to taunt him. David and Alphonso stood by as deputies called their brother “pussy” and “faggot” and “coward.” The more they jeered, the angrier Sam grew. He shouted back, threatening to kill them. Later he threw the gas jug at them.

For over an hour, deputies circled the tree, shining their flashlights on Sam and calling him names. No one bothered to call the local mental health clinic where Sam went for medicine and counseling, where there were people he knew and trusted, where there were professionals trained in dealing with mental illness.

Finally, enraged and out of gasoline, Sam climbed down out of the tree with his back to the deputies. Nobody moved to grab him, to take the ax away. Instead, the deputies turned and ran.

Sam walked towards them, carrying the ax. Several pulled their guns. Captain Keith Lewis backed into a tree. Another deputy got his foot caught in some old bed-springs rusting in the underbrush. Sam lifted the ax above his head. When he was 16 feet away, Lewis shot him twice with a 9 mm pistol.

The first bullet struck Sam in the groin. The second blast tore through his chest, leaving a two-inch wound in his heart. He spun around and fell to the ground, landing on his back.

Lewis turned to another deputy. “Someone handcuff him,” he said.

“You don’t have to put the cuffs on him,” Alphonso Owens said. “You can see he’s shot.”

A deputy ignored Alphonso and handcuffed Sam. Lewis turned to another deputy. “Mark my spot,” he said.

Then, as family members looked on, deputies took Sam by his jacket collar and pants leg and dragged him through the thick underbrush. As they reached the dirt road by the edge of the woods, Sheriff

Montgomery and two paramedics pulled up. Sam was taken to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 7:55 p.m.

RED EYES, WHITE LIES

Within an hour, state law enforcement agents arrived at the scene and launched an investigation. What they were told did not match up with what eyewitnesses saw.

The paramedics swore to investigators that they, not the deputies, had dragged Sam out of the woods. Deputies said Owens had jumped, not climbed, out of

avoided. On February 6, a month after Owens died, investigators delivered their findings to Sixth Circuit Solicitor John Justice. Justice cleared the deputies of any wrongdoing in the shooting.

Instead, he blamed the state mental hospital in Columbia.

“The pity of it all is, Sammy Owens is not alone in the sense that we get these people down there in Columbia, but they don’t keep them,” Justice told a reporter. “I couldn’t count the number of people we have dealt with in court who need long-term and heavy-duty mental health care.”

UNITED ACTION

Community leaders were outraged. “Perhaps they didn’t do anything illegal,” said Kamau Marcharia. “But it was certainly immoral, and clearly unprofessional.”

Marcharia heads Fairfield United Action, a community group headquartered in Winnsboro. The group was organized to protest the building of a local nuclear power plant in the late 1970s. Since then, it has led voter registration drives, helped fix up low-income housing, and fought for single-district elections to ensure that the county’s black majority of 58 percent is adequately represented in local government.

A few days after Sammy Owens was killed, Marcharia was approached by Charles Sharp, a former police officer, and Coit Washington, a former city councilman. The men decided to call a community meeting to discuss what to do about the shooting. To their surprise, more than 700 people showed up.

“That’s unusual for a rural community,” Marcharia said. “That’s a lot, a lot of people.”

Those who attended formed a new group, Concerned Citizens for a Better Fairfield, and asked Sharp to conduct an independent investigation. Sharp — who spent seven years in the military police and three years as a civilian officer — examined the shooting site and spoke to eyewitnesses who were not interviewed by state investigators.

“The officers just did not know how to handle this individual,” Sharp concluded.

Photo by Joe Jackson/The State



SAM OWENS SPENT THE LAST HOUR OF HIS LIFE UP THIS TREE.

the tree, and had rushed at them with the ax raised. They also said it was too dark to see, even though several gave vivid descriptions of how crazy Owens looked.

“I could really see the white of his eye and right before he come down that tree, his eyes was red,” Lewis said in a sworn statement. “I mean, if the devil has red eyes, he had eyes like the devil.”

A review of the records showed that state agents seemed more intent on clearing the deputies of blame than on finding out whether the killing could have been



HENRY AND MARGARET OWENS OUTSIDE THEIR HOME IN BLACKJACK WHERE SAMMY GREW UP.

"He was a mental patient for six or seven years. They were there for over an hour. They had ample time to contact mental health. This could have been avoided."

Eleven days after Owens died, leaders of the group met with Sheriff Montgomery and Captain McKinley Weaver of the State Law Enforcement Division. The sheriff admitted that his officers receive no training in dealing with the mentally ill. Asked why deputies taunted Owens, Captain Weaver replied, "We aren't psychiatrists." Asked why deputies failed to call mental health officials for help, the sheriff replied, "I can't answer that."

The group demanded that the sheriff suspend Keith Lewis and the other deputies and establish an independent citizens review board. The sheriff refused. On the first Sunday in March, 1,000 people marched on his office. Two months later, hundreds marched past his home. They chanted, "Bubba, Bubba, have you heard? This is not Johannesburg."

Before long, T-shirts and bumper stickers emblazoned with the words "Remember Sam Owens" were appearing all over Fairfield County.

BLACKJACK

Winnsboro lies just 20 miles due north of the state capitol at Columbia. Farmers once grew cotton here, but by

1908 the land was the most eroded east of the Mississippi. By 1951, Fairfield was the only county in South Carolina with fewer than 1,600 farmers.

Today there are only two incorporated towns — Winnsboro (population 2,919) and Ridgeway (population 343). The remaining 17,000 people in Fairfield County live in small clusters of homes scattered across the pine-covered countryside.

Henry and Margaret Owens live in a small house next to a church in Blackjack, a tiny settlement about a mile outside Winnsboro. They raised eight children here, including Sammy.

They are now in their sixties.

Sitting in the family living room, the couple described how Sam and his nephew Bob used to spend all week fishing at a nearby pond. One day, when Sam was 19, their boat capsized. Bob couldn't swim, so Sammy ran a mile for help. By the time he returned, it was too late. Bob had drowned.

"He just went kind of in shock like," his mother recalled, sitting in the family living room. "He took it hard. He never did get over it."

"He sure was different after that," agreed her daughter, Caroline Dorsey. "He would stay shut up in his room by himself. He'd get his jug and sniff gas and talk to himself. He just sort of went out of

his mind. . . . He blamed himself for not being able to save Bob. It put a big load on his life."

Sam knew how to fix anything. He liked to play the guitar, and once in a while he would deejay dances at a local club. After the accident, out of money and desperate for a high, he would go out in the parking lot and suck on the exhaust pipes of cars.

Two years later he made his first trip to State Hospital, the mental facility in Columbia. "They mostly just gave him sleeping medication," his mother said. "After the accident, he never could sleep."

Caroline brought out dozens of empty pill bottles and dumped them on the coffee table. "Sometimes he would take pills and sniff gas. Then he'd just go plumb crazy."

"I just asked them to take him and keep him, but they never listened to me," Margaret

said. "If they had kept him at least six months, he would have been better off. But they never even kept him a month. I thought there was a place where they keep mentally ill children, but they never kept Sam."

When Sam was home from the hospital, he would visit Mary Green, a therapist at the local mental health center. "She loved him," his mother said. "She thought a lot of Sam and really tried to help him. She got him on a mobile work crew, and that was taking him away from the gas."

"We tried to call Mary Green the night he climbed the tree, but we couldn't reach her," Caroline added. "Those deputies never tried to call her at all."

Caroline watched that night as deputies dragged Sam's body out of woods. "They didn't carry him like he was a wounded person — they carried him like he was a dead animal. They could have helped him, but they never did."

Her mother began to cry. "I really feel sorry for anyone who has to go through what I went through," she said. "There's a lot of families with mentally ill children in Fairfield County. I hope nothing like this ever happens to them."

STREET TALK

Almost seven months after Sam was shot dead, people around Winnsboro are still talking about the killing.

"I think it was wrong to shoot a mental patient like that," said Earl Bonne, sitting in Heath's Barber Shop, where he has cut hair for 20 years. "There was enough of them out there that they could have handled him in a more respectful manner instead of shooting him like a rabbit. The police should be trained better to handle stuff like this."

Out on Congress Street, a young man who asked not to be identified said he knew Sam from State Hospital. "Mentally ill people — these cops take advantage of them," he said. "Really, nobody can do anything."

A middle-aged woman in the Fairfield Museum who also asked not to be identified had a different opinion. The killing "may have been justifiable," she said. "Frankly, there's been too much attention about this thing, especially the unfavorable newspaper coverage. And then those NAACP marches — I didn't like those."

Around the corner in the Lauderama on West Liberty, Willie Mae Robinson was washing her clothes. "They didn't keep him long enough in State Hospital," she said. "You can't stay in three weeks and expect to get better."

"I got a cousin who acts out," she added. "They wish he could stay in the hospital longer. If they could sign him in for six or nine months, maybe he would get better. But two or three weeks isn't going to help anybody."

JESUS CHRIST

A few blocks away, LeRoy Montgomery — "Sheriff Bubba," as he's known around town — sat in his office. On the wall was a movie still from an old *Our Gang* film. Buckwheat was cross-examining Alfalfa under the stern and unyielding gaze of Judge Spanky. Alfalfa looked surprised. But then, Alfalfa always looked surprised.

The sheriff did not want to talk about what happened to Sam Owens. "I don't want to talk about it until everything has been settled," he explained.

He admitted that his officers receive no training in how to handle the mentally ill, and that his department has no written policy regarding mental health care.

"Our response is not significantly different in any situation where an individual is temporarily berserk," he said. "There's not a great deal of difference in the way they behave."

Finally, he cut the conversation off. "There's been a lot of television and newspaper writing about this, and we just don't want to go into it," he said. "They were that away about Jesus Christ. They crucified him. There is no way you can satisfy everybody's opinion."

THE SAME MISTAKES

John O'Leary knows that law enforcement officers in South Carolina receive

no training in how to handle the mentally ill. O'Leary was director of the state Criminal Justice Academy for six years, and also served as president of the National Association of State Directors of Law Enforcement Training.

"There are going to have to be a lot of changes in the way mental health problems fit into law enforcement," O'Leary said. "Officers are treating people who are mentally ill as criminals."

O'Leary is looking at the death of Sam Owens from a slightly different angle. As the attorney for the Owens family, he is preparing to sue Fairfield County, alleging that deputies were improperly trained to handle a mentally ill person like Sam.

"We are not challenging that Lewis shot Sam Owens in self-defense," O'Leary said. "The question we have is, why did they let it get to the point where they had to shoot him?"

Only two Southern cities — Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia — employ social workers to give officers mental health training and accompany them on calls. Jim Huegerich, a social worker who heads the Chapel Hill crisis unit, said police have come to rely on social workers to defuse emotionally-charged situations. "Most officers come up to us afterward and say, 'I'd rather have one of you than three of us.'"

John O'Leary said other towns need to provide similar training. "I hope law enforcement can learn from situations like this," he said. "Unfortunately, most times we don't. We're still making the same mistakes now that we did 20 years ago. And that's sad. Situations like Sam are a tragedy for the whole community."

People in Winnsboro say they won't give up until officers are taught to treat the mentally ill with respect. They predict that things may change come next election.

"Shit, most people think the damn sheriff should have been fired," said the barber, Earl Bonne. "They voted him in — I guess they can vote him out." □

Eric Bates is managing editor of Southern Exposure.

Photo by Todd Houston/The State



SAM OWEN'S PARENTS LEAD A MARCH TO DEMAND JUSTICE IN THEIR SON'S KILLING.

“I Finally Got Out”

Anita Courtney talks about overcoming shock treatments and finding a healing alternative to mental hospitals.

*Interviews by
Grace Nordhoff and Eric Bates*

Anita Courtney describes herself as a “mental health systems survivor.” At age 16, confused and saddened by her mother’s death, she was placed in a private mental hospital, drugged, and given shock treatments.

Today, 16 years later, Courtney frequently speaks about her experience at schools and churches near her home in Lexington, Kentucky, hoping to warn others of the dangers of mental hospitals. She also participates in co-counseling, an alternative counseling network that emphasizes emotional expression over drug treatment.

It started when I was 12. We found out my mom had cancer. For the next four years she just got sicker and sicker. She ended her life in a nursing home, on morphine, bald, blind, covered with bedsores and weighed about 80 pounds. It was awful.

I spent a lot of time with her during all of that. I would go to school during the day like a regular teenager and then spend the rest of the day in the nursing home with her. Everybody

was so impressed that I was such a trouper, that this young girl was taking care of her mother. And then she died.

The whole thing was really hard on me because as the youngest child I was very close to her. She gave me unconditional love and looked out for me, so it was devastating to have her get sick and go through all that.

A few months after she died, I just got terrified. I’d never felt anything like it; I was really scared. I started to think a whole lot about why we are on this earth, the meaning of life. It seemed to take up all of my attention.

I told my dad how I was feeling, and it was hard for him to see his daughter with all these emotions. I don’t mean to bad-mouth him in any way. I just think he

didn’t have a clue of what to do with me. So he said, “Well, let’s go see the family doctor tomorrow.”

My doctor said, “This isn’t normal.” He gave me a prescription and made an appointment for me to see a psychiatrist. So I told the psychiatrist, “I feel really scared, I’m wondering about the meaning of life and death.” And he said, “That’s not normal. You need to go into a mental hospital.”

So a few days later I was put into a place called Our Lady of Peace, which I always think was a great name for a mental hospital. It was a joke among the people in the hospital — “Where is she? Has anybody seen her? Where is this Lady of Peace?”

But I remember being scared and not wanting to go in.



I got put on the fourth floor of Our Lady of Peace, which is a private facility in Louisville, very posh — swimming pool, tennis courts, bowling alley, crafts, cafeteria. It was a pretty nice place. My dad’s insurance paid for it. I was put on Thorazine and Ste-

lazine, which are heavy-duty drugs. I was so overdressed for the first week that I would just shuffle around. Drugs like that glaze you over and make you real fuzzy and tired. Physically and mentally I felt awful.

My psychiatrist was not very helpful at all. He said my problem was that I wanted to sleep with my father. My mother had just died, and he made it into this sexual thing.

I only spent about five minutes with him a day. I'd be in the hall and he'd come up and say, "How are you, honey?" And I'd say, "Oh, I feel awful." And he'd say, "Well, I'll see you tomorrow." And then I'd get a half-hour session once a week. I

think there's an idea that when you go into a hospital you're going to get all this care, but in fact they don't have enough staff in those places, and you end up getting very little attention.

It got weirder and weirder as I went on. I remember one session he said, "Who is your prettiest girlfriend?" This was the kind of 'useful' stuff we'd do. I would always fight him, and he'd badger me. He'd say, "Okay, now I want you to imagine making love to her and tell me what it would be like." He was always wanting me to sit on his lap. I mean, here I am, 16 years old, trying to deal with my mother's death, and he's doing all this weird stuff.

Every time I tried to fight back and stand up for myself, he would say, "Who's the patient? Who's the patient?" He'd ask the question about six times and finally I'd just get sick of hearing him and I'd say, "I am." He'd say, "Who's the doctor? Who's the doctor?" And I'd finally say, "You are." It was a real power struggle.

This kind of horrible counseling went on for three or four months. I wasn't feeling any better, and he finally said, "Well, I think you need shock treatments." I said, "No way, I don't want them." I remember fighting that a lot. But he had so much more power in the situation that I didn't have very much choice.

My whole family felt uncomfortable with him, but we had no clue as to what to do. He was the expert, even though all this bad stuff was going on. He had hung a shingle out that said, "I am Dr. O'Connor, I am a psychiatrist. I know how to help people who are struggling with their emotions." We all believed him. We were the

typical middle-class Americans — you put your faith in the medical establishment. He did a great sales job about how the shock treatments would "cure" me. We got talked into it, even though our best instincts told us differently.

So I started getting the shock treatments, and outside of my mother's death they are the worst thing I've ever been through. God! They were physically and emotionally torturous — that's the word I would use. I can

remember being terrified the night before having them.

What happens is you get up and you leave your nightgown on and sit around by yourself and wait. An aide would give me a shot that would dry out my mouth, which was extremely uncomfortable. I guess they don't want you choking when you go through the convulsions. Then someone would take you down to the waiting area, and then you'd have another



ANITA COURTNEY

Every time I tried to fight back and stand up for myself, the doctor would say, "Who's the patient? Who's the patient?"

wait. And then you finally get rolled in to get your shock treatments. It was a long morning of dread.

I can remember every single time before I was going to get them, I'd say to the doctor, "I do not want these." The way I understand the legalities of it, if you say you don't want them, you shouldn't have to get them. He'd respond by saying, "Oh, you're just afraid we're gonna look up your robe." He'd say all this sexual stuff. Then he'd give me general anesthesia, which I hated because I was already so drugged.

What they do is they put electrodes to your head, and then they put between 75 and 150 volts through your brain to put you through a convulsion. The next thing I know, I'd wake up feeling very disoriented, with a pounding headache, and I couldn't think. For someone who's been told that they're "mentally ill," not being able to think is no fun.

After about two days, I'd start to feel somewhat like myself again. The anesthesia and some of the physical effects of the shock would start to wear off — and then I'd get another shock treatment. I got them every two or three days for about a month, so I could never come out of the zombie state. I got so I couldn't look at myself in the mirror anymore, because I didn't look like myself anymore. I was just glazed over.

After every treatment he would say, "How do you feel?" And I'd say, "God, I feel awful, just awful." What I finally realized was that as long as I said I felt bad, I kept getting them because he thought that meant I needed more treatment. So the next time I said, "I feel much better now," lying through my teeth, because the more I got, the worse I felt. He said, "Oh, maybe we'll be able to stop these soon." After the next one I said, "I feel great!" And then he stopped them. That was what all the patients around the hospital taught each other — that if you wanted to stop getting these things, don't say how bad you feel, say how good you feel. Then they'll think they're working and they'll leave you alone.

I still have shock treatment nightmares, where there's like this explosion going off in my brain and I can't wake up. I keep trying to wake up, but I can't. It's a very physical dream.

The one nice part of the whole experience is that I made wonderful friends. Some of the other patients were some of the nicest people I ever met in my life, the most fun and creative. We had a good time goofing off, laughing and talking.

That was what saved me — it wasn't like I got any help from my psychiatrist at all.

It was interesting, too — they all had a story to tell of some way they'd been hurt dramatically before they got in there. One woman's husband was beating her a lot. Another girl's dad had been sexually molesting her. There was a nun put in there because she was angry about the sexism in the Catholic Church. People had gone through hard times, and they got called "mentally ill" for it. It made them feel bad about themselves, and that what they had gone through was somehow their fault.

I finally got out. I was in the hospital for five months. And I felt so much worse when I got out than I had when

I went in, because I had gotten all these bad messages about myself, plus all the physical stuff that I had been through.

I went back to high school. Interestingly enough, it was a fairly common thing for people in my high school to go into that mental hospital. When I was in I think there were four other kids from my high school in there.

The doctor still wanted me to stay on these drugs. He said, "If you don't stay on these drugs, you will really go crazy." Even though I felt awful on the drugs — I was tired, I couldn't concentrate — he had me living under such fear that I felt like if I didn't take them I would fall apart.

The interesting thing was, when I finally quit taking the drugs a year later, I started to feel much better. I quit thinking about, "Why are we on this earth?" I got back to myself and I started feeling much better and I did fine.

I felt like I was trying to deal with my mother's death, and I just took this huge detour. I was looking for help, but I got hurt instead. Then I came back out, back from this very wrong turn.

I got involved in something called co-counseling, where two people take turns listening to each other. One person can't have such power over another. It's an

equal relationship.

Co-counseling help me realize that I didn't cry or grieve very much when my mother died. Since then, what I have done is spend a lot of time crying for her loss and for all that I went through, and that's what's healed me.

I talked about it at every co-counseling session for four years. I've done a lot of crying and raving and talking and shaking about all of this. It's helped a lot to vent about all that happened. If I didn't have co-counseling, I don't think I ever would have started talking about it among my friends and to society.

This lecture circuit I've gone on, it's really hard to stand up in front of large groups of people and tell this story. It's pretty scary, but I don't want anyone else to go through what I went through. I always think, God, I wish when I was 16

years old there had been someone out there saying, "Shock treatments may harm you more than actually help you."

At a talk I gave a while back, a guy who was there said they were getting ready to give his niece shock treatments. He went and called his sister and said, "I heard this woman speak and she said that they didn't help her, they only made things worse." And his niece didn't get them.

There is a lot of literature that says, "Shock treatments cure people," but I think it just makes troublemakers real docile and quiet and cooperative. It may look like they've improved on the psychiatric charts, but inside they're really struggling. You can do the same thing with a child — you can beat the shit out of them and they'll act like you want them to, but it doesn't put them in any better position.

If people ask my advice about seeing a psychiatrist, I say be very careful. Really pay attention to your own instincts. What you'll need more than anything is to get to talk and cry about it, and if you're getting drugged up that's going to interfere. In my mind, people cry because they need to be healed, not because they need to be drugged, to have it turned off. When I was

The interesting thing was, when I finally quit taking the drugs a year later, I started to feel much better.

trying to deal with my mom's death, the drugs put a big roadblock in the way.

I feel confident now that I will never get in that situation again because I have so much support. I have a much better

sense of how to handle hard times. I have a much better sense about what an "expert" is. I know what I need for myself most of the time. □

back a few months later, a little better but certainly not well. Within a matter of weeks he was back in a serious psychotic condition. That was the first of many hospitalizations. We were not well off, and we had exhausted our resources on his initial treatment. Our insurance was very poor — it covered a very small part of his psychiatric care.

From then on, we dealt with the public mental health system. We could no longer afford the private system.

"Like Lightning Striking"

John Baggett used to be ashamed of his son's schizophrenia. Now he leads a movement for families of the mentally ill.

John Baggett is a gentle, bearded man who lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. As director of the state Alliance of the Mentally Ill (AMI), he lobbies for families like his own who care for relatives with severe mental illnesses.

As the mentally ill have been "deinstitutionalized" — moved out of psychiatric hospitals and returned to their families — AMI has become the fastest-growing consumer movement in the country. In its first decade, the group has grown from just 200 families to more than 70,000. "If we keep that up," Baggett laughs, "by 1992 everybody will be a member."

My story begins with my son John Mark's illness, which came on rather suddenly when he was 17. Prior to that he was a gifted and talented young man with a bright and promising future. We noticed he was having some school

problems and drug abuse problems. When we first saw signs of the illness, we thought it was substance abuse.

Our denial about the mental illness kept us from seeing what was there. We should have been brighter, we should have known that we were seeing signs of illness. But like many families, it was the last thing we wanted to admit to ourselves. It was too horrible to see.

Our introduction to the mental health system let us know very quickly that things didn't work the way they're supposed to. Our son did not want to be hospitalized, so we had to go through an involuntary commitment proceeding. It created an adversarial situation where we had to testify against our own child. We were saying, "Here's a sick child, he needs help," and the service system was saying, "We can't do that without going through this system." It was a rude awakening for us.

He was hospitalized. He went to a private psychiatric facility, and he came

John Mark was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. We did not know what that meant, and nobody really explained it to us.

One of the popular theories was that it was caused by families. So we felt like, "Oh, my gosh, we've done something terribly wrong." We struggled a lot with the guilt, and we also found that a lot of families went through that.

What we know now is that he suffers from a genetically based brain disease. It's a no-fault disease, like diabetes or muscular dystrophy. Kidneys can be diseased, hearts can be diseased, and brains can be diseased. He just happens to have a brain that doesn't function normally.

When you have a serious mental illness happen in your family, as it did in ours, it is like lightning striking. It just catches you off-guard, and it's devastating when it happens. The person who used to be your son isn't anymore. Parts of him are still the same, but he's been changed by what's happened to him. There is a loss, and you grieve over that.

Over time, however, you also learn to love and appreciate the new person who has taken his place. I have great, great affection and admiration for his courage in just getting through, day by day. All of us sometimes have difficulty getting through the day. But only a person with a serious brain disease such as schizophrenia knows the incredible amount of courage and energy it takes just to struggle through a day-to-day existence.

One of his symptoms is that he hears voices. And the voices he hears are just as clear to him as my voice is to you right now. Those voices can be very distracting. They can be very loud. They can be very accusing, and they can be amusing.

The voices make it hard for him to concentrate. He couldn't last more than two or three days in a job, because he was so distracted by what was going on in his head. He went through I don't

know how many jobs before he got totally discouraged.

He was living at home, and we were really struggling. He would get off his medication and get very, very sick. We were in almost constant crisis. He would leave home, go out on the road, and become homeless for a while. It worried us greatly; something very serious could have happened to him out on the streets.

The only services available were outpatient care by a psychiatrist at a mental health center, or inpatient care at the state

hospital. Those are not very good choices. There were also services in other states that weren't available to us — services like psychosocial clubhouses or residential group homes.

We knew John Mark couldn't live independently at that point, but we also knew it was not healthy for him to be living at home. An adult per-

son in his late twenties living with mommy and daddy is not the healthiest situation. His illness made it very stressful for everybody.

We had a very disturbing crisis that made it clear John Mark couldn't continue to live with us. We managed to get him committed to John Umstead Hospital in Butner, but three days later they wanted to send him home. He wasn't even stabilized; it was absolutely ridiculous.

I went to the hospital and sat down with the doctor and one of the social workers and said, "He cannot come home, and he has no place else to go. If you release him, I will hold you accountable." They decided to keep him.

Three weeks later they wanted to let him go again. I went back and made the same speech. We talked about how he was sitting on the wards all day, getting medication and what we call "TV and

cigarette therapy." It was just a warehouse.

I pushed to get him additional treatment, and he started seeing a staff psychologist. She had a no-nonsense approach, and that made a tremendous difference. She didn't do any of this psychoanalytical stuff. She tried to get him to accept the fact that he was ill, talk with him about coping with it, and develop better skills for dealing with people.

We noticed a difference right away. We'd take him a little present like a shirt or something, and he would say, "Thank you." We hadn't heard "thank you" in months.

Then we got really lucky. The hospital started a program to help long-term patients learn skills so they could live in the community. We were fortunate enough to get him in that program.

He ended up staying in the hospital 11 months. If they had released him in three days, or three weeks, or even three months, I don't think they could have provided the training he needed to live on his own.

Now he lives in a mobile home which I own. He has a roommate, and they rent



We felt like, "Oh, my gosh, we've done something terribly wrong."

JOHN BAGGETT

the mobile home from me. One of the reasons I own it is because mentally ill people often have trouble with landlords. We've had that arrangement now for almost five years, and it's worked well most of the time.

We have had some crises along the way. But he's independent; he often goes for several days without our needing to check up on him. He doesn't ask for help except when he needs it.

He had a crisis recently with his roommate, who took all of my son's medicine and attempted to take his own life. My son tried to reach me, but he couldn't get me right away, so he called 911 and got the emergency people to take the roommate to the hospital. My son had done all he could, so he went to bed. He called me the next morning. He handled the situation very, very well, and didn't really need me to resolve it.

He's made a lot of progress, and we have too. We never know when there's going to be another crisis. You learn just to be grateful for the days when you don't have a crisis, and to get through the ones when you do.

I felt emotionally very isolated. Then in 1984, seven years after Mark got sick, I got an announcement in the mail about a meeting to form a state affiliate of the Alliance of the Mentally Ill. I didn't know anything about it, so I drove to Greensboro where the meeting was being held.

It was my first time in a roomful of people who had been through what I'd been through. I found that there was a great deal of healing for me just talking to other people about it. I'd never attended a support meeting of family members.

There was a time when I was very ashamed of my son's illness and tried to keep it a closely guarded secret. Joining AMI made me come out of the closet and say, "Hey, there's nothing to be ashamed of here. This is a devastating disease, and it has a terrific impact on the mentally ill person and their family."

I was impressed that the Alliance not only provided support, it provided education for families. It was also committed to advocacy for changes in the mental health system. Our experience had impressed upon me that there was a real need for change. I began to ask questions about why things are not better than they are. And one of the biggest answers was that

there wasn't enough money devoted to provide better services.

A state official got up at that first meeting and talked about how wonderful deinstitutionalization was. I was appalled! What deinstitutionalization had meant to me was, I couldn't get my family member into the hospital when he needed to go. When he went in, he didn't stay long enough to get stabilized. That's the way it really worked. It just got people out of the hospital — it didn't provide appropriate care in the community.

The state didn't commit money to create community services. So the family ended up with the primary responsibility for taking care of the mentally ill. The system transferred the care from the hospitals to the families.

After the meeting, I went home and helped organize a local chapter of the Alliance. Two years later I was hired as executive director of the state AMI. So I've been very involved in helping to build a public consensus to make mental illness a state priority.

Traditionally, the mental health system has emphasized a wide variety of mental health problems, rather than serious mental illness. Many resources were going to serve what we call "the worried well," and very few dollars were going to people with serious illnesses like manic depression or schizophrenia.

In 1985 the state set aside no money for people with chronic mental illness. In 1986 we got them to budget \$1.25 million. Today there is close to \$30 million dollars set aside — and that's a direct result of the advocacy of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

The reason for our success is clear: We are family members; we have a direct stake in what happens. This is not a liberal cause; this is a life-and-death cause. Our own flesh and blood are suffering from these illnesses. It strikes liberals and conservatives and Republicans and Democrats; it

is not a respecter of persons. Our members tell their representatives, "We've got to make mental illness a priority." Each year we make some progress.

The day of deinstitutionalization is over. It is time to quit saying, "Either we're going to serve mentally ill people in the hospital or we're going to serve them in the community." It is time to talk about providing *comprehensive* services that include hospitals, job training, housing — whatever people need.

We have won an important symbolic change. The state no longer defines success in terms of getting mentally ill people out of the hospital. It defines success in terms of whether or not people are being served. There are over 84,000 people who suffer from severe mental illness in our state, and only a third receive services. There is a tremendous unmet need out there.

I get a lot of credit because I'm in the press, but I don't really do the lobbying. I simply inform grassroots families of what's going on and make suggestions about what they can do to see that the legislature gets the job done. They're the ones who do the effective lobbying — the citizens of the state.

It is not easy to take institutions that have been around a long time and change them. Families and primary consumers need to be involved in any policy that's being made. We did get

past the legislature a bill that ensures there is at least one family member on the governing boards of local mental health centers.

As family members, we are stuck with the problem. We aren't going to go away. We're going to continue to grow, to be stronger — and the legislature is going to continue to pay more and more attention to us. □

Grace Nordhoff is a graduate student in social work at the University of North Carolina. Eric Bates is managing editor of Southern Exposure.

*This is
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Drop In

They call themselves “consumers,” and they are at the forefront of a civil rights movement for the mentally ill.

By Robin Epstein

“One day there was a person down here who wanted to die. She didn’t want to go to the hospital, but I called 911. And we made arrangements for someone to pick up her son at school. The police and the ambulance came. I told the police officers it was a possible overdose. She had two bottles of medication, and she took five more pills than she was supposed to take in one hour. They took her to Central State, but she got out.

“I was really shook up. That was the first time I ever saved somebody’s life after being suicidal myself. I tried to commit suicide about 25 times in my past life. I took all my anti-depressant pills. I tried to cut my wrists. It started when I was 16 or 17, when I was raped by my brother.

“Sometimes I couldn’t handle life. Part of me wants to die, and part of me wants to live. I fight it every day. About two years ago I was in the cardiac care unit with two heart attacks. I was very down, in the lowest depression you can possibly go to.

“If it weren’t for the Drop-In Center, I’d probably still be there. Coming down here and doing all this work brings me up again. As long as I’m busy, I’m happy. I still have a lot of work to do on this earth before I go.”

— Jack Parker

LOUISVILLE, KY. — In many ways, the Downtown Drop-In Social Center looks like any other gathering place in a church basement. People come and go, sipping coffee, shooting pool, talking in small groups. There are some books and a computer and a few sofas in front of a television set. Near the door, there’s a little area that doubles as a kitchen and an office.

But there are two things about the Downtown Drop-In Center that set it apart from any other community center in the South. Most of the folks here have been hospitalized for mental illness at least once — and they run the center themselves, with no staff psychiatrists, psychologists, or social workers.

Working together, a handful of men and women at the Drop-In Center have placed themselves at the forefront of a nationwide “consumer” movement for

decent mental health care. They have shunned terms like “mental patient” or “client,” working instead to empower mentally ill consumers to participate in their own care and to take responsibility for themselves and each other.

“We are a civil rights movement,” said John Basham, a state advocate for the mentally ill and a mental health consumer. “We are as much a civil rights movement as the movements of the ‘60s. People always say, ‘What do consumers want?’ Consumers want jobs. Consumers want education. Consumers want the same things everyone else wants. It’s just a whole lot harder to get them when you got that psychological label hanging over you.”

Basham, a Vietnam veteran diagnosed with manic depression, serves as director of a statewide consumer group known as ATAK/MI — Advocates Taking Action in Kentucky Against Mental Illness. The year-old group is headquartered at the Drop-In Center, which also serves as home to the *Consumer’s Gazette*, a monthly newsletter published by Jack Parker.

But first and foremost, consumers say, the Drop-In Center provides a place for those with severe, long-term mental illnesses to be who they are, untroubled by the stigmas they encounter everywhere else. Many



who come to the center are poor or homeless. They help each other find food, clothing, housing, and jobs. They counsel each other, read up on their diagnoses, learn about their legal rights, and sometimes form lasting friendships. Some even try their wings at volunteering for the center, eventually seeking further education or employment.

"If you want to sit here and talk to the wall, you can come and sit and talk to the wall," said Glenda Castle, coordinator of the center and president of ATAK/MI. "People accept you. Everybody needs a place where they can be themselves. You don't have to wear a facade, and that's why friendships work."

Castle, a talented and energetic woman of 39 and the mother of four children, saw 47 professionals — public, private, and theological — before she was finally diagnosed with multiple personality disorder, a mental illness that generally affects those who were physically or sexually abused as children.

"There's a sense of empowerment people get by being who they are while they're here," Castle said. "No one is here to diagnose them, to treat them. It gives them someplace they feel they're safe. What makes it different is we're not governed by professionals. The people who use it run it."

COFFEE AND SELF-RESPECT

The Drop-In Center opened in 1984 and moved to its present location in the basement of an Episcopal church two years ago. Castle was hired as part-time coordinator by Seven Counties Services, a non-profit agency that contracts with the state to provide community mental health services to 3,000 people in the Louisville area. The center scrapes by on a budget of \$10,000 a year, including Castle's meager salary of \$5 an hour.

Most Drop-In Center members are referred by Seven Counties staff, but some simply walk in off the street. Between April and June alone, consumers signed in on the center's clipboard 1,794 times. More than 650 consumers

used the center for the first time during the past year.

The center is basically one long room with a checked floor, a pool table, a piano, and some furniture. Members keep it running by answering the phones, cleaning up, producing the newsletter, and selling coffee and soda to pay the phone bills. They also serve on local and state advisory boards, attend national conferences, and run a consumer job pool.

Castle said the center got started because several Seven Counties professionals recognized the importance of the consumer movement and managed to get

Castle's supervisor at Seven Counties is Theresa Watson, a psychiatric nurse who works with the homeless mentally ill. "As an agency we're moving in the direction of more consumer-driven treatments," Watson said. "Because who else has the answers? We don't. We're so primitive in what we know about the brain."

At first, Seven Counties hired a professional to coordinate the center, but Watson called the experience "disastrous." Too often, she said, professionals find it difficult to work with consumers without taking on too much responsibility — and thus taking power away from the very people they are trying to help.

Watson said it would be hard for her to work with consumers at the center the way Castle does. "If I wasn't careful, I'd get into a counseling role because of their expectation that I'd solve their problems," she said. "I don't even know the subtle ways I disempower people."

"A person like Glenda — who's been there — is much more tuned in. She can challenge people to do better as a peer, not a professional with a treatment plan," Watson added.

Dale Bond, director of adult services at Seven Counties, agreed. Consumers "believe their own more than they believe us," he said. "In a way we're the oppressors telling them what to do."

Most "clubhouses" run by professionals have strict rules requiring consumers to attend regularly, participate in therapy, and remain on their prescribed medication. Bond said that when he got the idea for a consumer-run center at a national workshop several years ago, he envisioned a place that would give consumers greater freedom in their daily lives.

"These are folks who tend to be withdrawn, dependent. They're told they have severe problems. Everything is telling them they're not capable. Professionals until very recently told them and their parents not to expect much. Society was very unaccepting. If you got kind of bizarre, we'd



Photos by Robin Epstein

GLENDIA CASTLE (CENTER) CONFERS WITH A FELLOW MENTAL HEALTH "CONSUMER" IN THE CHURCH BASEMENT THAT HOUSES THE DROP-IN CENTER.

"Our area is probably more progressive than any area in the state," she said. "We've been fortunate here in Kentucky that we've had people willing to work with consumers, to bend, to allow them to do things other states wouldn't be willing to."

put you away and that was it," Bond said.

"We want to spark some basic self-respect and hope. Hope is what keeps most people going. And that's what they tend to be very short on."

Referring someone to the Drop-In Center is a little like "throwing somebody into a swimming pool," Bond said. "If no one plans any activities, there are no activities. They see others with just as bizarre thinking processes and behavior *doing* things, socializing, taking the initiative, making things happen ... and they decide maybe they can, too."

OFF THE STREETS

Hugh Kennedy is one consumer who decided to help make things happen at the Drop-In Center. Working as a volunteer, he said, makes it less likely that he will "go home and shut the door and stay put. Instead of closing in, I come here for support. If this wasn't here, I don't know of any place I'd feel comfortable going. Down here nobody cares if you've been sick last week. They welcome you back. You're not 'forever ill' as society puts it."

For consumers coming out of mental hospitals, especially those who are poor or have never held jobs, there are few non-clinical settings to turn to. Many feel like outsiders, and are unlikely to be drawn to churches, malls, or athletic centers.

After months or perhaps years of having others make all their decisions for them, they suddenly find themselves on their own.

Joe Wise, a tall, mohawked young man who is quick to joke, got into lots of trouble before discovering the Drop-In Center. Now he's been clean and sober for five weeks, he said. A week ago he found a place to live after being homeless for three and half years. And he plans to join the Marines.

Before he found the Drop-In Center, he hung out in bars, often getting into fights. "My nose has been broken four times." He also got himself permanently barred from a day treatment program. But at the center, he said, "drinking is not allowed. Most of the time that's what's causing a fight."

The center "helped me to get my nerves calmed down," he said. "It gives me more time to think in a quiet atmosphere, instead of bars, which aren't very quiet."

For two hours, three days a week, Wise sweeps the floor, makes coffee, and empties ash trays. Volunteering at the center "gives me some responsibility, some way to grow up," he said. "It's like a job. It's a thing I have to do to stay in the Drop-In Center."

Wise almost lost that chance, too. After breaking too many center rules he was barred for 30 days. He would have been barred for 90 had he not negotiated for probation.

"I wrote out the contract and we all signed it. If I come in drunk or high, use too much vulgar language, or treat anyone with no respect, I could get banned indefinitely," he said. "I don't want to get barred out. That would ruin everything again."

Wise said that when he has a problem, he can usually find someone to talk to at the center. "We talk three to four hours at a time about problems we have in common and work out ways to deal with them. We set goals."

His own goal, he said, is to "get off the streets and stay off the streets. And to choose something I can look forward to, something in my future."

MORE THAN ADVICE

For people who are hearing voices or experiencing multiple personalities, consumers at the center say, something as simple as being able to talk to other people and make friends can be a life-changing experience.

"For me, treatment or therapy comes from within a person," Castle said. "If people have an opportunity to talk, they can work things out themselves. And that's what we try to do here. If someone wants to talk, there's someone to listen."

Castle recently arrived at the Drop-In Center early, around eight a.m., to catch up on some work. Instead, she got into a conversation with two members who showed up.

"A guy who was wandering around because he couldn't sleep saw the light on and came in," she explained. "We spoke about school. He wants to go back to college, and his therapist is dragging her feet, saying he should work for a year first. We encouraged him. We said if this is what he wants to do, go for it. We told him there's financial aid available. So he went and got the application and filled it out and will be taking two fall classes. He'll start going regularly in the spring, studying sociology and anthropology."

But consumers find more than helpful advice at the center — they also find work. One of the most successful and in-

novative programs that members have initiated is a job pool. Any member who volunteers at the center on a regular basis is eligible after two months. Jobs range from contracting with a case manager to help a newly-released consumer learn how to ride the bus or find affordable housing, to mowing lawns and doing clerical work. Consumers receive \$3.75 an hour, paid by Seven Counties.

The job pool offers many consumers the first chance to earn money on their own. Hugh Kennedy works for the job pool keeping track of other participants. "It makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something," he said. "It keeps me in the mainstream."

His therapist told him to keep busy, Kennedy said. "Until I did, I stayed sick. I've had friends here push



JOE WISE USED TO HANG OUT IN BARS. HE SAYS THE CENTER "HELPED ME TO GET MY NERVES CALMED DOWN. IT GIVES ME MORE TIME TO THINK."

me ... to start to get back into the swing of things as far as society goes. It's helped me a lot."

Like other consumers, Kennedy has found it almost impossible to find a regular job. "They want to know where those four years went. And if you say you had depression problems, that's it."

The center often comes up with creative ways for members to work. With help from Castle, for example, Jack Parker wrote a grant proposal and got \$3,000 from the National Institute for Mental Health to start the *Consumer Gazette*.

"I wrote the whole mess out myself. I felt great," he said. "My goal is to inform as many mental health consumers in the state of Kentucky as possible about what is really going on."

Castle said the job pool helps everyone, especially when it involves consumers helping social workers assist other consumers. "The case manager is not as overloaded. The patient is meeting another person like themselves and developing a healthy relationship with somebody other than their case manager. The consumer is building self-esteem and showing that they have something to offer."

Watson, the psychiatric nurse, also praised the job program. "They're not doing busy work. They're doing solid, important work," she said. "I believe in it, and I am still amazed at what incredible potential people have."

COMING OF AGE

Consumers are also able to employ themselves. Connie Starcher has a part-time job as coordinator of ATAK/MI, the grassroots consumer group. She is setting up a speakers bureau of professionals and consumers willing to talk about mental health issues, and is planning a fall conference.

"I love working here because I think the community needs to know that people with mental problems or emotional problems have talents to offer," she said. "They can be successful if given the proper therapy and treatment. We can be well educated, and we can function as viable parts of society."

Founded by 50 Kentucky consumers and ex-patients late last year, ATAK/MI is already working to create more drop-in centers and consumer-oriented club-houses and to advocate better housing, jobs, and education by and for the mentally ill.

The group's purpose, as stated in its bylaws, includes "the promotion and self-determination among mental health clients and the advocacy of client dignity, community integration without discrimination, and freedom of choice on behalf of mental health clients through public education."

As is evident from its acronym, ATAK/MI doesn't stick to safe issues.

The group had its first major confrontation with the state last July when members planned a conference and invited two prominent critics of conventional psychiatry to speak — former psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson and Dr. Peter Bregin, who had voiced opposition to electroshock and drug therapy on the Oprah Winfrey television show. When federal officials learned of the plans, they directed the state to withdraw funding for the conference.

ATAK/MI officers blasted the move as censorship and said the state had undercut their goal of allowing consumers to make their own decisions. But they cancelled the conference, afraid it would jeopardize federal funds the group relies on.

Bond, the Seven Counties psychologist, said he was surprised by the formation of ATAK/MI and its openly political agenda. "I did not predict or expect this ATAK/MI type of a movement. It's out of our typical framework. Though I had some progressive ideas, it wasn't part of our professional culture. No one taught me about it in school."

Bond said the group could have an impact on decision-making in the mental health community, "if we're comfortable giving them a shot." The consumer movement seems to be "coming of age," he noted, saying consumers he meets at national conferences "seem to have specific, positive strategies to bring about change."

Yet some professionals remain skeptical about consumers in ATAK/MI, Bond said. "They think they'll get in over their heads and hurt themselves." For example, the group has taken a fairly strong stand against electroshock treatment, even though most professionals insist that a small number of extremely withdrawn consumers could be helped by it.

Many politicians outside the mental health community also refuse to take ATAK/MI seriously. Bond predicted there will be "reticence about accepting them as a legitimate group because they don't think the way the rest of the world does."

John Basham, the director of ATAK/MI, said many mental health professionals miss the point of the consumer movement. "For many people I work with, the movement is a good idea," he said. "To me it means much more. It means pride."

Basham acknowledged that consumers who gain more freedom through the movement may make some wrong decisions at first — but that, he said, is an essential step on the road to independence.

"Empowerment means allowing people to learn by a natural process," he said. "Maybe the first time you give them their social security check, they'll blow it, but that's how people learn — by mistakes." □

Robin Epstein is a reporter for The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky.



JOHN BASHAM LEADS ATAK/MI, A STATEWIDE CONSUMER GROUP THAT HAS TAKEN ON THE MENTAL HEALTH ESTABLISHMENT IN KENTUCKY.

Bird Wars

By Robert Morgan

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hen Matty saw the first dead blackbird under the walnut tree she thought nothing of it. There was talk that birds were being killed by pesticides and this might be the victim of all the beandust and orchard spray used in the valley. She had seen a news program on TV about all the damage to wildlife from the poisons put on weeds and crops, and had just read in the paper about the balsams dying on the tops of the high mountains from acid rain.

The grass and weeds under the walnut tree were lush in the shade and from the recent rains. You wouldn't think they would grow so thick under the two trees, but the ground was deep in crabgrass and ragweed. Of course this used to be the chicken yard, thirty years ago when she still kept chickens, before she went to work in the new instrument plant, and the soil must still be rich. Every time she took a step her foot seemed to turn on a walnut buried in the grass thatch from last year. She hadn't had time for years to gather and crack them for cakes and cookies, the way she did when the children were growing up.

The special thing about the old chicken yard was the way the mulberry tree had volunteered and grown right up into the branches of the walnut. Most trees wouldn't grow in the shade of a black walnut, but the mulberry had thrived there, almost unnoticed, until it reached into the limbs of the walnut and mingled its branches with those of the nut tree. Now they seemed meshed and mutually supporting, walnut leaves among the mulberry leaves crowding to the light.

It was a paradise for squirrels in fall and birds in summer. The trees were filled in the hot months with the songs of birds feasting on the berries. It was thrilling just to hear the chatter and chiming. But as you got close to the trees you realized many of the birds were fighting, threatening and chasing each other away from the ripe harvest. They fought over clusters and twigs, over sections, over hemispheres of the tree, sometimes flying out and circling in a chase like tiny Spitfires and Messerschmitts diving sideways and chattering their threats. You would have thought they had nests in the trees to protect, or that they had chosen sides according to their different colors.

And right beside the base of the mulberry she saw the goldfinch, its chest feathers torn away. Had the quarreling over the fruit got so rough the birds were actually killing each other? Had a cat gotten into the tree? Or a blacksnake? The blacksnake

would certainly have eaten the birds, not left them to rot. And then she saw another blackbird in the weeds by the old chickenhouse. Bending closer she adjusted her glasses and saw the blood on its breast. It must have been shot.

At almost the same instant she remembered her sister's grandson, Willard, had gotten a new rifle for his birthday.

Not wanting to accuse anyone falsely, she talked it over back at the house with Art who said he had heard shots just the day before. Matty felt a coldness in her arms and stomach. Jerry, Willard's father, had had so much trouble since his wife left him, and with a lawsuit over the property, that she didn't want to burden him with yet another worry. And Willard's grandmother, Matty's sister Alice, was recovering from a stroke in the nursing home, and it would not be fair to involve her in whatever mischief Willard had done. She would have to be careful. She would listen for any more shots and talk to Willard herself.

"You be careful with him," Art said. "He's just a boy but he's bitter after the divorce. And he's took all them lessons in karate and thinks about nothing but his bow and arrow and now the rifle."

"He's still our kin."

Next morning while she rinsed and dried the breakfast dishes they heard the shots coming from the old place. Not loud reports, but more like puffs and hammer blows. Tying her houserobe more securely she rushed outside, and once she reached the field above her garden she heard the shots distinctly, coming from the walnut tree. She hurried across the dew-heavy grass, getting her slippers soaked.

Willard was standing under the mulberry aiming straight up.

"Why on earth are you shooting the birds?" She kept her voice calm.

He whirled around but didn't point the rifle at her.

"The birds are our friends, Willard. They eat insects and sing for us."

"I was target practicing," he said. "Moving targets."

"There must be something better than birds to practice on. Besides, it's illegal to shoot songbirds."

He did not answer her again. And she walked back to the house getting her feet even wetter.

The next day she found two more dead birds on the roadbank below the walnut tree, this time a wheatbird and a mockingbird.

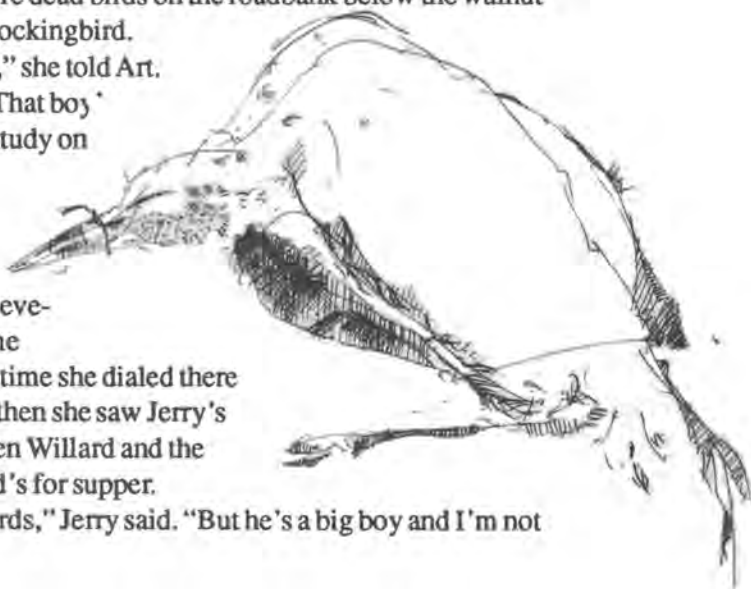
"I'm going to have to call Jerry," she told Art.

"I'd go ahead and call the law. That boy's dangerous with all his karate and study on killing."

"He's still family."

Matty called Jerry that evening after he got home from work. The first time she dialed there was no answer. And then she saw Jerry's Camaro pass and knew he had taken Willard and the younger children out to McDonald's for supper.

"I keep telling him not to kill birds," Jerry said. "But he's a big boy and I'm not here to watch him."



"Well, Art's awfully worried about his birds. I'm afraid he'll have a heart attack."

After the call Matty felt as though she had accomplished nothing. She sat out on the porch with Art and watched the mist rising from spring hollows on the mountain, in places where the hollows were otherwise impossible to see. They had sat on the porch on summer evenings ever since the children were little, after the milking was done and the eggs gathered. When Rachel and Johnny were growing up they used to sing, as the mist rose off the creek and out of the folds of the mountain. The air was cool coming up the valley, after the long work day in the beanfields. Just at dark the whippoorwills would start calling from the pines down at the end of the pasture. The whippoorwills had disappeared years ago, killed by crop dust it was said. Because of his heart Art hadn't put in a crop for several years, but kept a nursery of pines and hemlocks and boxwoods. Every two or three weeks he mowed out the shrubbery with the garden tractor.

The evening still was broken by the buzz of a hornet. They looked around the porch and saw no insects. There was not even a hummingbird around the feeder.

"Where is that thing?" Matty said. "They must have built in the ceiling where I saw that one go in a hole."

But even as she spoke the sound got louder and broke into a deep roar, and she realized it was coming from a distance. Art adjusted his hearing aid and leaned over the porch railing. Matty recognized the noise was coming from around the hill toward Jerry's house. And then they both saw the motorcycle emerge from the trees behind the barn and sweep into the field of white pines. Willard was riding it, leaning low over the handlebars. In the late sun the cycle spurted blue smoke that hung in a tattered trail behind him as he raced up and down the rows Art had kept mowed. The noise was harsh as twenty chainsaws, grating the evening air and echoing off the ridge, filling the valley end to end.

"Where you reckon he got that?" Art said.

"His daddy bought it on credit like everything else I would guess."

"That boy's a criminal; you mark my word."

"He's just a boy, not halfway raised."

"He better not run over my pines. That's all I can say."



The motorcycle continued its laps across the field. Willard took off from one end and accelerated in a blast of smoke and popping barks until near the other end where he braked and slid sideways on the dew-wet grass, coming to a stop already turned around to head back down the next row. He was threading every middle of the two-acre field, running like a shuttle back and forth as the evening advanced. It was after dark when the engine coughed out.

"I never thought that boy had over half sense," Art said as they went inside.

"Well he's our own blood kin."

Next morning Art found only three little pines that seemed to have been hit by the motorcycle, all near the ends of rows where Willard had skidded into his turn. "I expected worse," he said.

"At ten dollars a tree that's still thirty dollars," Matty said. "I'll just have to call Jerry again."

That afternoon when Matty called, Jerry said he didn't think Willard had damaged any trees, but he would tell him to stay out of the nursery. "He's awfully careful," he said before hanging up.

They had not finished supper when they heard the buzz again. Art fiddled with his hearing aid as they walked out to the porch. There was no sign of the motorcycle in the nursery field. The noise grew louder, then waned, and revved louder again. They looked from the barn to the garden to the creek road. Suddenly the bike burst out of the pines in the pasture and shot up the hill. As the slope got steeper it slowed, roaring and smoking, and came to a stop just below the brow. The cycle turned over and both it and Willard rolled over a few times. But in seconds he was back on and coasting down to level ground.

Again and again he roared up the hillside. Even from the porch they could see the red scars where the grass had been torn away by the tires.

"It'll wash away in no time," Art said.

At that distance through the evening air the machine sounded like a maddened gnat bashing itself on the hill, swooping up and then down. They could see the smoke boil up and the bike start moving, before the sound of the revving motor reached them.

"He's angry because his mama's gone and left him," Matty said. "I hate to think of somebody that unhappy."

"He's unbalanced."

"He may outgrow it."

"The pasture may not if it comes a big rain. I've a good

mind to go over there and put a stop to it.”

“You’ll do no such thing. With all that jujitsu training he’s liable to kill you.”

“I could take my gun.”

“You’ll do no such thing.”

“That boy will end up in the pen.”

Art turned down his hearing aid and went inside. Matty was worried about the way he walked lately, as though his legs were uncoordinated with his upper body, giving him an odd twist and lurch as he took his steps. Had he had a light stroke? He turned eighty-five in February. She worried she might die before him and then who would take care of him? He had never been able to look after money, and the children had their lives so far away. She thought of him in a nursing home, ignored and lonely on a long hall smelling of urine and rubbing alcohol.

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he next Monday was check day, the third of the month. They drove to the post office where many other older people also waited in their cars and trucks for the mail truck to arrive with their Social Security checks. They could wait a few hours for delivery to their mailboxes, but then it would be too late to drive up town and cash them at the bank and have lunch at Ralph’s cafeteria in the mall.

“I hear that McCall boy’s been tearing up your field and pasture,” Willis Stamey said quietly from his pickup parked next to them.

“He’s just a boy,” Matty said.

“I hear he’s going into the service, into the Marines,” Willis said.

After they had gotten groceries, they headed for home. Later, Matty stopped by the barn to leave a sack of side-dressing for the garden in the shed. Willard and another boy were standing under the walnut tree as they drove around the curve by the arborvitae. The other boy ran off through the field, but Willard stood his ground, gun in hand.

Matty rattled her car-keys as she walked up the bank toward him. “Willard, what do you think you’re doing? We’ve asked you twice not to kill the birds and here you are again.”

“We wasn’t shooting birds. We was just target practicing. And this is not even a gun; it’s just an air rifle.”

Sure enough, she could tell from the size of the barrel it was not a .22 but a pellet gun. It looked almost like a toy.

“Well we don’t want no trouble. We want to get along.”

Willard followed the other boy through the field, the air rifle on his shoulder. She watched him disappear into the woods, and had started back to the car when she saw the mockingbird under the hawthorn bush. Looking close, she

saw there were four or five other birds there, of different colors and sizes, pushed back almost out of sight.

“I’m not going to call the law,” she told Art. I’m not going to call the law on kinfolks.”

“That boy needs a whipping.”

“He needs his daddy to discipline him.”

“I just might do it myself.”

“You’ll do no such thing. You’re too old.” She only called him old in moments of belittlement, when he was being foolish. At eighty-five he should be beyond such assertions.

“I just might,” he said again.

“And get your fool self killed.”

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atty did not call Jerry again. She thought about it all day and decided it would do no good. She wondered if there was any truth to Willis’s rumor that Willard was joining the Marines. She hoped to God it was so. It would be a blessing to Art and her to have a little peace in their old age. But he must be too young to join up. Maybe Jerry had signed for him. Or maybe he had lied about his age.

A day later they heard the popping of the motorcycle on the mountain behind the house. There was a trail over the ridge and down by the chicken yard that had at one time led from the field on the north side of Fairfield Mountain. The field had long since grown up in poplars but the trail was still used by hunters and dogs and anyone climbing the ridge. Because the path threaded the slope it had not washed, but drifted full of leaves each fall and then was packed by the intermittent traffic.

Again they had trouble placing the source of the racket. Matty was just finishing the dishes when she saw Art start from his chair on the porch. He looked around the horizon as though scanning the sky for a cropduster or helicopter. Once she got out to the porch she understood the difficulty of locating the noise. The roar and crackle seemed to come from the ground itself and then from the sky, and again from the trees across the valley. They looked down into the shrubbery patch, and over to the pasture hill. It was as though something was on fire but they couldn’t see the flames.

Gradually she realized the motorcycle was on the mountain behind the house. That was why the noise seemed to be in the tops of the trees. The engine was roaring on the straight places, then quieting on the turns and drops in the trail.

“What will that fool think of next?” Art said.

It sounded as though he was coming right down through the trees onto the top of the house. Then the motorcycle flashed out of the trees beside the chickenhouse, and

smoked along the garden edge toward the barn.

"Well ain't this a pretty come off," Art said.

There was an uproar inside the chickenhouse. The hens, which settled down clucking along the roostpoles as dark approached, were cackling and flogging around as though ten foxes were among them.

"We won't get no eggs for a week." Art usually gathered the eggs from the pinestraw nests after supper as the chickens were settling down for the evening. They were used to him coming in, and though they might protest with a cackle when he pushed one aside to get her eggs, they soon quieted. Now they would be upset all night.

But even as they stood listening to the layers in their pandemonium, they heard the motorcycle ascending the ridge again and coming around the slope with its hysterical chatter. Art hurried with his lurching gait toward the chickenhouse, and Matty followed him.

As the awful sound increased, working nearer through the trees, Matty wondered what they could possibly do, just standing there by the chickenhouse. Willard burst out of the trees, and Art stepped into the path. Whether he was trying to flag him down to talk, or strike the helmeted rider, Art himself was not sure; but he reached out toward the figure as it blasted past in a gesture that was like waving. Perhaps surprised by seeing Matty and Art beside the chickenhouse, and thinking the movement a blow, Willard jerked the motorcycle aside and went into a skid on the wet grass. The engine kept revving though the wheels left the ground as he slid sideways and around on his leg, at the edge of the garden. The engine coughed out and there was no movement from the rider.

Matty and Art began walking toward the overturned machine. But before they reached the garden Willard jerked himself up, righted the cycle, and began pushing it across the garden, through the rows of tomatoes, squash and okra.

"We didn't mean for you to get hurt," Matty called.

But Willard did not look around or answer. He kept walking the motorcycle through the vegetables, trampling and knocking down row after row.

"Well ain't this a pretty come off," Art said again, and twisted the little knob on his hearing aid.

Almost as soon as they reached the house Matty heard

the phone. Out of breath she answered it.

"I never thought you'd try to hurt Willard," Jerry said.

"We didn't . . ."

"I'm taking him to the doctor and if his leg's broke it will be your fault."

"Listen Jerry, we didn't mean . . ."

"As if I didn't have enough to worry me already." The phone clicked. As Matty hung up she could still hear the racket in the henhouse, though it was almost dark.



Matty did not sleep much that night, or the next. She felt as though she did not understand how things worked anymore. The elements of her life, of family and community, had been twisted and would not return to their patterns. The ties of fellowship and work were gone. Art thought of nothing, and talked of nothing, except Willard and his doings, even while watching television.

"I always said he wasn't normal."

"He would be normal if he had been half raised."

"From the time he was a kid you could tell he was unbalanced."

"Oh, hush up. He's as normal as anybody, except he's angry his mama's gone."

On the third evening, as they sat on the porch, they heard the motorcycle again. Matty was relieved that Willard must not have broken his leg. The snore grew louder as it came popping along from the direction of Jerry's house. Willard turned off into the weeds along the garden and came roaring across the field into their driveway. Instead of going up on the mountain trail he slid to a stop in the gravel and sat there, both feet on the ground, revving the engine. The smoke boiled up around the machine and drifted across the yard smelling of burned oil. He beeped the little horn on the handlebars, and gunned the engine again, looking straight at them.

"I'll get a baseball bat and run him off the place," Art said.

"No you won't; he'd kill you in a minute. His hands are deadly weapons he likes to say."

"I ain't afraid of him."

"You come in the house with me. Let him go on." Matty practically pushed him back into the livingroom. Art was shaking.

"Nobody is going to come up and insult me in my own yard," he said.

"Just calm down; there's nothing you can do. I'll get your heart pills." The windows rattled with the roar of the engine as Willard gave it gas and let off, juiced it and let off. He beeped between every third or fourth rev.



"I'll get my gun and shoot the devil."

"He may have his own gun with him; I'll call the law."

She was afraid to go to the phone, for Art might lunge out into the yard. He was shaking so she dared not leave him, even to get the pills from the kitchen.

After what might have been minutes but seemed like hours the motorcycle backed around and roared down the driveway and out the road.

Art was flushed and shivering as she handed him a glass of water and a pill.

The next afternoon they drove to town for groceries. It was Friday and the Community Cash was crowded as

Matty pushed her cart into the close aisles. Art always stayed in the car while she bought the groceries. If brought inside he would try to choose the most salty and fattening items, so she made sure he remained in the car. She was deciding whether or not to get a picnic ham when she saw Jerry turn into the aisle at the other end. Matty wanted to back around and get out of the store, but Jerry had probably already seen her. She would not let her own nephew think she was afraid of him. And this might be as good a time as any to have it out with him. Matty placed the ham on the upper rack of the cart and pushed ahead, tightening her stomach muscles to keep panic down. Jerry had apparently not seen her, or at least acted preoccupied with choosing a can of coffee.

"Listen Jerry," she said. He turned around in surprise and blushed slightly. He was wearing a wide western belt and a T-shirt cut off at the chest showing his weightlifter's muscles.

"Listen Jerry, I never wanted no trouble in the family."

"We don't want any trouble either," Jerry said, putting the coffee back.

"And we didn't want for Willard to get hurt."

"He's OK, except for some bruises."

"I'm glad to hear it." Matty felt sweat accumulating under her armpits. "Art has been so worried over this I'm afraid he'll have another heart attack."

"He's joining the Marines; that's what he came out to tell you all last night. But you wouldn't talk to him."

"He just set there in the yard roaring his engine and beeping that little horn."

"He was too shy to come in."

"We wish him well in the service."

"You all come see us," they both said as they parted and continued shopping.

Matty was weightless as she pushed down the other aisles, stopping and selecting almost unconsciously. She felt easier than she had in weeks, in a year, as she paid the cashier and led the grocery boy to the car. Art got out to help him load the bags in the trunk. When she told Art about her meeting with Jerry he said, "That boy needs the discipline if anybody ever did."

"It will all turn out; blood is thicker than water."

They stopped to eat, as they always did on Fridays, at Ralph's Cafeteria at the mall. For once she let Art pick the steak and onions that he liked, and the strawberry shortcake with whipped cream which he was not supposed to

have. They might as well celebrate once in a while. She herself indulged in french fries and chocolate pie, along with the chopped steak. They saw sev-

eral of their friends in the cafeteria, and everybody seemed to be feeling neighborly.

After she took the groceries to the house Matty drove on down to the barn to leave the rye seed in the shed. They were going to sow a cover on the garden for the winter. It was a fifty-pound bag, and it took both her and Art to lift it out of the trunk and drag it across the weeds into the shed. At one time Art had been able to lift two two-hundred pound bags of fertilizer and carry them, one under each arm. It was near dark, but as she opened the car door she saw something under the bank under the walnut and mulberry trees. It looked like empty feed sacks or fertilizer bags thrown there. "Who could have left them there?" she said, jangling her keys. She climbed the bank by the hawthorn, watching her footing in the weak light, on the damp grass. She was right over them before she recognized the row of dead birds. There must have been dozens, sixty, seventy, a hundred, lying in the wet evening weeds, red-birds, robins, blackbirds, mockingbirds, sparrows, wrens, bluebirds, joreets, a meadowlark, and a rare indigo bunting. Even in the failing light she could make out the colors, the yellows beside the blacks, the oranges and mottled grays and iridescent blues. The bodies were stacked neatly as kindling wood. □

Robert Morgan grew up on a small farm in the North Carolina mountains. He has published several books of poetry. His first collection of short stories, The Blue Valley, was published by Peachtree Publishers this year.



Cajun Land

By Barry Jean Ancelet

These days the buzzword in Louisiana is "diversification." The ultimate goal of most discussions on the subject is to figure out how to get around the carcass of big oil, which is sprawled across the road to the future. True to our state's track record, the first thought on everybody's mind seems to be "Let's throw a party." Well over 100 fairs and festivals are held each year in southern Louisiana alone. This is lots of fun, but unfortunately not very lucrative in the long run and not even always such a good idea. The 1984 New Orleans World's Fair, for example, not only lost big money, but almost strangled the cultural life out of the city for a very simple reason: It stayed open until ten o'clock. Tourists saw and heard and tasted everything they wanted on the fair site and didn't need or want to visit any museums, nightclubs, or restaurants. There is already an abundance of festivals in Louisiana. I wonder if creating a bunch of new ones is really going to give us the new shot in the arm we all want and need. After all, festivals come and go and when they

come, they are a mess, and when they go, they're gone.

Tourism is hot on the list of prospects for diversification because tourists don't just recycle old dollars, they bring in new ones, just like oil companies used to do. A good idea, but not as easy as it seems at first glance. Tourists come to a place because they feel there is something worth seeing, hearing, tasting, and doing there, something they can't do at home. Why else would they bother leaving? Now, there's lots of that sort of thing where I live in south Louisiana. Cajun cooking, Cajun music, Cajun French, Cajuns, swamps, alligators, and so on. The trouble is how to get to it. Visiting south Louisiana is like a safari. There aren't many orientation points for visitors, so they have to make their own way most of the time. Consequently they often leave the area feeling frustrated and disappointed because they didn't see what they wanted to see or hear what they wanted to hear. Or they end up visiting us in our living rooms, which is just as bad.

We don't have the proper conduits to handle the primary flow of casual visitors who want only a brief brush with the Cajun experience, so they end up in real places. When a whole busload of tourists arrives at one of the area's dance halls, for example, regulars are pushed to the walls. Their weekly renewal ritual of Saturday night dancing is disturbed to serve the passing interest of the tourists. Next Saturday night, the tourists are gone, but things are not quite the same. It might take weeks before the dance hall owner gets over his new idea of a successful night, based on the extra business the gang of tourists brought, and before some of the shyer regulars feel it safe to return to their cultural haven. The soaring prices in restaurants and the proliferation of water skiers and alligator sight-seeing tour boats in the Atchafalaya Swamp Basin are further evidence of the uncomfortable changes brought about when tourists are allowed to visit real places unchecked.

But there is a solution. What we need is a conduit. The American Indians have understood the concept of conduits for years and are quite serious about the business of protecting real tribal life from the standard tourist. Many tribes run visitors through a "reservation" where they can meet "authentic" (which, in current usage, has come to mean "authentic-like") Indians, see "authentic" dances and, especially, buy "authentic" tribal crafts. And a few miles down the road, they have a real village, financed by the tourist trade, where their traditional life remains largely undisturbed. Both sides are happy because both get what they want from each other. This kind of setup could serve as a model to present and preserve our own real Cajun folklife. One alternative which looms large on the horizon, whether we like it or not, is CajunLand, a full-blown theme park that someone is going to get the idea to develop someday, probably somewhere near the corner of Interstate 10 and Interstate 49.

Before dismissing this alternative as crass commercialism, let's consider the possibilities for a moment. A slick theme park could give some visitors most of

what they think they came for and get them back on the road before they know it. It could have alligator and pirogue rides through a reconstructed swampland environment. It could serve either Pop-eye's or Bojangle's Cajun Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut's New Orleans-style Cajun pizza. Visitors could wash it all down with the new cayenne-laced Cajun Beer (conceived and brewed in Milwaukee). Nashville-based Cajun fiddler Doug Kershaw could be in charge of musical shows, and self-described "half bleed" Cajun comedian Justin Wilson could be honorary mayor. Workers could run around barefoot, dressed like Evangelines and Gabriels, and speak broken English while demonstrating just exactly how to let the good times roll. Souvenirs could include "coonass" T-shirts and Crawgator mugs. For smaller children, the park could have rides like the Mardi Gras Merry-Go-Round, which would feature a chicken, instead of a brass ring, to catch. For older kids, it could have rides with names like "Top of the Derrick," "The Crawfish Hold," and "Le Grand Boudin" (which would squeeze riders out of a giant sausage tube and back into their cars). And best of all, there would be easy-off/easy-back-on access to the interstate. There could even be a drive-through feature. Think about it; the possibilities are endless. Why, I might even do it myself if I could keep my tongue out of my cheek long enough to present the idea to the right backers.

But there are more palatable and serious alternatives to this type of abuse and

self-exploitation, alternatives that include carefully planned visitor's contact points. For example, in my hometown of Lafayette, local government is joining forces with private industry to develop the Bayou Vermilion project, which would clean up the bayou and develop its

appropriate and elegant statement based on sound research. By carefully preparing these facilities and activities, we could finally have a place where tourists could be sure to get the story they came for, and we could be sure that tourists are getting the right story about where the Cajuns

Illustration by Steven Cragg

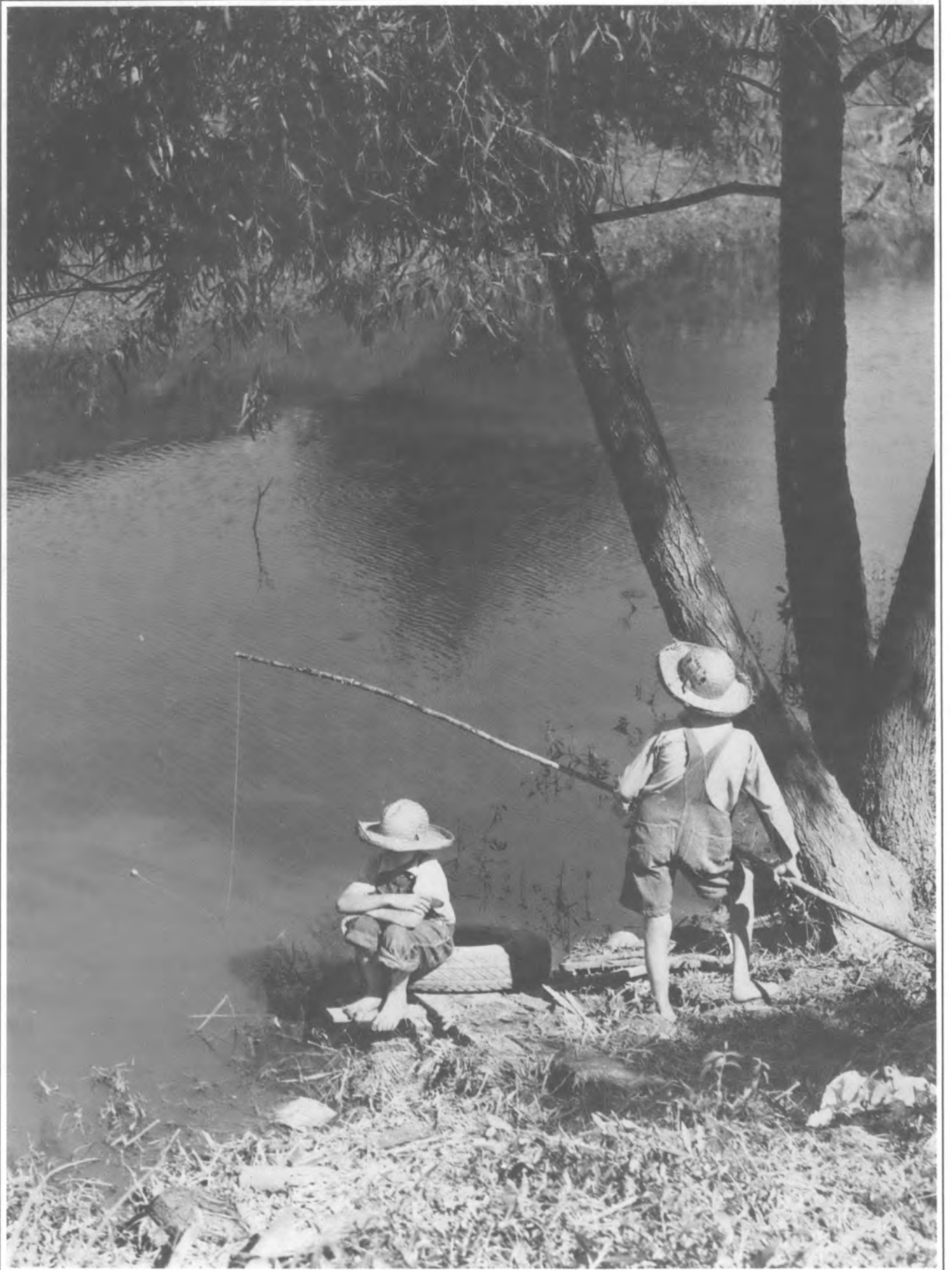


potential for recreation and tourism. The ecological importance of preserving the bayou is admirable enough. But there is also a proposal to build a cultural and historical interpretive center called "Vermilionville" and to organize forays into the swamps and bayous of the area.

If projects like these were done wrong, we could end up with a cheap imitation of Cajun culture, like CajunLand. In the Bayou Vermilion projects, however, organizers have the opportunity to work in cooperation with Louisiana's new Jean Lafitte National Park to build an appro-

come from and why we are the way we are, going beyond typical media stereotypes of the Cajuns as barefoot, belligerent, swamp-dwelling drunks. Tourists would leave their dollars with us and take with them accurate information about the Cajuns to balance the scales next time they see Cajun culture slandered in a film, television documentary, or magazine article. □

Barry Jean Ancelet is a folklorist at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette.



All Things Southern

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SOUTHERN CULTURE

Edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris

University of North Carolina Press, 1,650 pp. \$49.95.

Question: What was conceived in Mississippi, labored over by more than 800 people for 10 years, and finally delivered in North Carolina, weighing eight pounds and embracing just about everything from armadillos to zydeco and everyone from Hank Aaron to Babe Zaharias?

Answer: *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, an astoundingly diverse and comprehensive 1,650-page volume that is a creation of the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture and a product of the University of North Carolina Press.

At a time when fifty bucks may no longer be enough for dinner at Antoine's or a room in a Holiday Inn or a pair of Orange Bowl tickets or a two-year-old country ham or a half-gallon of sour mash whiskey — to name a few perishable Southern indulgences — the \$49.95 price on this South-facing book that will last a lifetime seems like the best deal since Thomas Jefferson engineered the 530-million-acre Louisiana Purchase for two cents an acre.

The scope and dimensions of the encyclopedia are mind-boggling: close to 1,000 articles, 400 illustrations, perhaps as many as 5,000 items indexed and cross-referenced, a like number of sources cited.

Entries are organized alphabetically under 24 topical headings that are in themselves interesting and revealing, to wit:

Agriculture, Art and Architecture, Black Life, Education, Environment, Ethnic Life, Folklife, Geography, History and Manners, Industry, Language, Law, Literature, Media, Music, Mythic South, Politics, Recreation, Religion, Science and Medicine, Social Class, Urbanization, Violence, Women's Life.

This categorical approach to the organization of so much information leads occasionally to some peculiar placements — catfish and collard greens under Environment, for example, and gumbo under Folklife — but the book's index is so complete and useful that these alignments are inconsequential.

What matters most is the wealth of material — biographies of history-shaping Southerners, chronicles of important events, profiles of industries and institutions and places, descriptions of natural phenomena, accounts of movements, explanations of ideas. In these pages, Southern culture is given the broadest possible application, and the result is a reference book that embraces practically anything and everything relating to the region.

Kudzu and Spanish moss, air conditioning, Lumbees and Gypsies, bottle trees, Jelly Roll Morton, crackers, Boss Crump, Silas Green from New Orleans, voodoo, dogtrot houses, the Natchez Trace, James Audubon, sharecropping, Coca-Cola, Atticus Finch, William Faulkner, bluegrass music, chitterlings,

Ty Cobb, Tallulah Bankhead, suffragettes, Hatfields and McCoys — the catalog rolls on, and little of any visibility and importance escapes notice.

Inevitably, of course, there are some omissions and emphases that every reader will wonder about or object to. I looked in vain for biographies of President Andrew Johnson, Governors Earl Long and Happy Chandler and Leroy Collins, and writers such as Harriette Arnow, Wilma Dykeman, Cormac McCarthy, Larry McMurry, and James Still. Duncan Hines is not here, and John Lewis the civil rights figure is only mentioned in passing, as is John L. Lewis the labor organizer. Jerry Clower is profiled but Minnie Pearl is not, and there's no article on the South's 19th-century utopian communities, nor one on groups of mysterious origin such as the Melungeons. The rivers of the South get short shrift, it seems to me, and politics, our leading blood sport, is one of the shortest sections in the book. Writing, perhaps the most positive of the South's collective talents, deserves a lot more space than the encyclopedia gives it.

But so much *is* here, and it's so well done, that the pleasures easily overwhelm the regrets. Total comprehensiveness is an unattainable ideal; acknowledging that, the editors have nonetheless tried to stretch their net to the limit, and the overall catch is exceedingly great and impressive.

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture at Ole Miss, picking up on an idea of staff member Sue Hart, started working on the encyclopedia in 1978. Director William Ferris and one of his associates, historian Charles Reagan Wilson, served as co-editors of the project. When they began casting about for a publisher, the quickest and strongest response came from Iris Hill, acquisitions editor of the University of North Carolina Press, who saw the volume as the type of outstanding regional study on which UNC has built its publishing reputation since early in this century.

With grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and several private philanthropies, the editors and their publisher carried out their decade-long mission. Now, at last, the first printing of

15,000 copies is in the marketplace, and *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* is drawing an enthusiastic response across the land.

The praise is certainly well deserved. This is the kind of book that remains popular and in print for years, never seeming to wear out its welcome or to go out of style or out of date. It should be around to give us pleasure and enlightenment for many years to come.

—John Egerton

John Egerton is a freelance writer based in Nashville, Tennessee and the author of *Southern Food*.

LOOKING SOUTH

THE RAINY SEASON

Haiti since Duvalier

By Amy Wilentz

Simon & Schuster.

427 pp. \$19.95.

MERCI GONAIVES

A Photographer's Account of the February Revolution

By Danny Lyon

Bleak Beauty Books.

63 pp. \$17.95.

For most Americans and other outsiders, Haiti is a nation in the mind, of the psyche. As author T.D. Allman put it,

"Everyone who comes to Haiti, for whatever reason, is and always has been a sailor lost on a darkening shore." It is on that note of disorientation, so frequent in writing about Haiti, that Amy Wilentz ends her *The Rainy Season*, an engrossing and vivid picaresque portrait of the country and its inhabitants since the uprising in February 1986 that sent dictator 'Baby Doc' Duvalier packing. Wilentz's profound feeling for the country brings her characters to life — Waldeck, the errant-delinquent street kid running with the other ghetto children who surrounded Father Aristide, Gangan Pierre the voodoo painter, Max Beauvoir the oily Duvalierist voodoo priest, Harry the English journalist, the gaggle of newsmen and photographers at the Hotel Oloffshon, immortalized in Graham Greene's *The Comedians*.

If the familiar exotica of sights and sounds, the unique and strange erotic appeal some have found in the island and voodoo lore resurfaces in Wilentz's book, so does a strong understanding of the popular, grassroots political struggle, reflected in her fascinating and empathetic, if ambivalent, portrait of the fiery liberation theologian Jean-Baptiste Aristide. By the end of *The Rainy Season*, Aristide has been expelled from his order and is riding around Port-au-Prince in the bottom of a jeep, in perpetual hiding. It is a melancholic anecdote on which to end her account, tinged with sadness; Wilentz

claims she has learned to restrain any optimism and take the "long view" of "our troubled island neighbor," of the time it will take for a true and lasting *dechoukaj*, or uprooting, of the evil there.

Wilentz doesn't want to fool herself or her reader. "This much I learned," she writes. "The women walking down the road with water on their heads, the man coming down my hill wrapped in cellophane — these are not icons from the Third World, or mysteries, but rather women walking down the road with water on their heads, a man wrapped in cellophane against the rain."

Similar to the kind of travelogues that have made the literary reputations of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, *The Rainy Season* may help demystify this black star of nations for the American public.

Wilentz puts her finger on the pulse of the land, offering a hint as to why the popular movements for literacy, the peasant cooperatives, the tribunals and calls for justice have not been swept away, despite brutal repression:

"Fires burned down the airless shacks and rains swept them away, and then the residents set up houses under the shards of tin roofs for a month, while with no help from the outside they built the whole rotten place up again so that they could wait again for it be wrecked again ... This was more than hope amid wretchedness, the tiresome cliché of missionaries and development workers. This was energy, a force that, if channeled into something greater than endurance — which is already a great thing — could move a nation."

Wilentz has done a valuable service in making this reportage available. She is well aware of the distortions spread by the mainstream media. During one period of popular outcry, photos of "Smokey Joe," a charred, castrated torso of a Macoute, the dreaded secret police, received big play. Such images were popular with the American mass media, conveying the horror of a revolutionary mob's frenzy.

"When I saw these pictures in American news magazines later," Wilentz writes, "what shocked me most was the fact that killings by gunfire look so much less vicious than killings by people with-

Photo by Danny Lyon



out guns... Three slum-dwellers lying in small, decorous puddles of blood, however, look much less offensive than poor Smokey Joe, and thus the people look much more brutal than the armed forces. The reverse is true."

Photographer Danny Lyon, impressed with the restraint and sense of justice of the Haitian people, and disgusted with the American government's role in propping up the various juntas, demonstrates by strength of example just how hard it is to get another, dissenting message out.

Three university presses and the prestigious Aperture Books all refused to publish his most recent work, *Merci Gonaives*. Lyon, suggesting that "Haiti is not the only place crying out for change," reports that "the University of Florida Press preferred to do a picture book of horses, because they thought it would make more money."

With the optimism that "the power of the camera undermines the power of the State," Lyon set out to document the upheaval of February 1986, when the power of the people's movement was at its height. Lyon's first book of photographs, *The Movement*, appeared when he was a worker with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the South, and the images of blacks in Haiti risking life and limb for the right to vote and other basic political rights could not help but bring back memories.

"Both movements," Lyon relates, "were well connected to the church. In the South, many leaders were ministers and most meetings took place in churches. In Haiti the church and the church radio had been central to the revolution... Often, listening to the radio, I would hear in French and Creole the exact same songs that were sung so often in the South, because they were old religious songs of freedom and revolt."

The revolutionaries of Gonaives, the home of the February revolt, reminded Lyon of the revolutionaries two decades before in Albany, Georgia—their non-violent nature, the spontane-

ity, the leaderless, anonymous quality of the rebellions, which moved so fast that the established organizations had a hard time catching up. He does not underestimate the difference—the Haitians, after all, faced a total military dictatorship.

Merci Gonaives is presented in a reportorial, diary form, coupled with bitter reminiscences of the aftermath. Perhaps because of Lyon's utter seriousness, the striking photographs in *Merci Gonaives* also lack the poetry present in some other of Lyon's work, such as *The Bikeriders*.

Before leaving for Haiti, Lyon would visit Chrystie Street, a slum on New York City's Lower East Side, watching the kids play basketball. "I was lost in looking at them, as if I were drawn out of myself into another world, and I was happier there," Lyon writes. "I think somewhere in that sentiment lies what is best of my photographs. It is as if my whole being becomes what I am looking at, as if for a moment I do not exist and I become just the vision of things as I see them. In my written text I do exist, which is one reason, besides information, that it is there."

Lyon, too, ends his chronicle of Haiti on a dire note: "It seems that in order to maintain a democracy in our country, Haitians will lose the chance to have one in theirs." In their deep, profuse love for their subjects evident in these books, both Lyon and Wilentz provide stellar, if frustrated, alternatives to the "good American" who continues to ignore the conse-

quences of U.S.-sponsored violence. If, as Lyon writes, "the power of the camera, the recorder, and the typewriter is in our hands, yet we give it away without a protest," it is good at least that these two artists did not. Certainly it is good for the almost one million Haitians who live in exile in the United States, in New Orleans, in Miami, in cities where they are subjected to a racism even more virulent than that still facing American blacks. *The Rainy Season* and *Merci Gonaives* never fail to make the relevant connections between Haiti and our own political problems at home. In different ways they are both models of committed work; they both make a strong case for the revolutionary value of truth.

—Jay Murphy

Jay Murphy edits Red Bass magazine in New Orleans, which is preparing a special issue on Haiti for publication early next year.

Merci Gonaives can be ordered for \$17.95 plus \$2 shipping from Bleak Beauty Books, R.D. 1, Box 150, Clintondale, NY 12515.

WOMEN ON THE LINE

HOLDING THE LINE

Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983

By Barbara Kingsolver

ILR Press, Cornell University.

228 pp. \$26 cloth. \$10.95 paper.

This book should be of interest to anyone concerned about the current state of organized labor in the South. Arizona, the locale of the Phelps-Dodge copper strike, is a "right-to-work" state. The strikers were largely Hispanics from a traditional, rural culture who have faced a history of discrimination similar to that of Southern blacks. And author Barbara Kingsolver is a native Kentuckian whose fiction and journalism capture the dislocations and the beauty of both Southwestern and Southeastern culture.

Following Ronald Reagan's successful union busting during the 1980 strike by air traffic controllers, the Phelps-Dodge copper strike set the tone for the destruction of workers' organizations in this decade. Phelps-Dodge owned its southern Arizona copper towns lock, stock, and barrel, reminiscent of Appalachian coal towns with company houses, doctors, and stores. In 1983 the company broke ranks with other copper companies and demanded concessions from work-

Photo by Danny Lyon



HAITI REMINDED PHOTOGRAPHER DANNY LYON OF THE SOUTHERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

ers, including cuts in medical benefits, dual wage scales that would discriminate against Mexican employees, and the elimination of cost-of-living allowances. From the beginning, the aim of Phelps-Dodge seemed not just to win concessions but to break the local Steelworkers and Machinists Unions.

Throughout the strike, workers were characterized in the state's largely conservative press as unruly, even violent, and—in a play on stereotypes of Hispanics—drunken. Arizona's supposedly liberal governor, Bruce Babbitt, quickly intervened on the side of the company, sending state police and, on several occasions, the National Guard, into previously peaceful towns to escort strikebreakers and intimidate pickets. Injunctions limited the right to assembly, and troopers used tear gas on strikers, including pregnant women and the elderly.

Kingsolver sets the scene well: "Clifton's front doors have gone for generations without being locked. Four men comprise the police force. . . . How does it feel to someone who's at home in a neighborhood of unlocked doors— who calls

every police officer in town by his first name— when the governor marches in four hundred armed state troopers, armored personnel carriers, Huey helicopters, and seven units of the National Guard?"

The strike lasted for several years. Scabs, some of them union members who crossed the line, took the jobs of strikers. The unions eventually offered to accept the original contract they had rejected, but the company was unbending. Still, the strike damaged Phelps-Dodge economically, and the company finally closed all its operations, throwing the scabs out of work. The strikers, who had already found other employment, often in far-away towns, considered this a moral victory, though it seems a hollow one.

This is in some ways a story with no winners, but Kingsolver tries to paint a positive picture. That she is successful is due to the book's focus on women in the strike, both wives of miners and women who worked for Phelps-Dodge. This is both the book's strength and its weakness. The mining communities pre-1983 were towns where women, save for a

handful of Phelps-Dodge employees, stayed home and cooked, did not often venture outside the home, and never frequented bars and other social gathering places. When women wanted to do something, they typically asked their husbands' permission. The copper strike changed all that forever, and the personal growth of women trying to find and accept their own strength without destroying the fabric of family, community, and Mexican heritage makes a powerful story. It is this focus which allows Kingsolver to make the important and encouraging point that strikes may be lost, that social movements may fail, but that the empowerment of people can go on nevertheless.

On the other hand, men's voices are almost entirely absent save as foils for their wives, who are either supported in their growing militancy or rejected by husbands whose male egos are threatened. What the men learned, how they changed, can only be inferred. Also largely missing is a discussion of union strat-

egy. The tension between the increasingly militant women's auxiliary and the cautious male leadership is covered. But the book leaves unanswered the question of whether national leaderships of the two unions put themselves wholeheartedly into the strike or viewed it as an unwinnable situation involving marginal, dispensable people. One hopes the latter is not true, but Kingsolver hints that this may have been the case.

Such a discussion is difficult in a time when unions are under attack from all sides, and perhaps belongs in a different book, one outside the scope of Kingsolver's purpose. In any case, the book we have is cause for gratitude. It gives voice to women who have been largely ignored. And it captures an underreported moment in the nation's recent past—one which is now being replayed in the Appalachian coalfields and the nation's airports. It is a story that is still largely ignored, a story that will become increasingly crucial as people face the almighty power of multinational corporations. Southerners unused to labor struggle would do well to take heed.

—Denise Giardina

Denise Giardina is the author of the novel, Storming Heaven.

HOSPITALS ON STRIKE

UPHEAVAL IN THE QUIET ZONE
A History of Hospital Workers Union Local 1199

By Leon Fink and Brian Greenburg
University of Illinois Press.
298 pp. \$24.95 cloth. \$9.95 paper.

The 20th anniversary of the 1969 hospital workers strike in Charleston, South Carolina has been recognized this year by local newspaper articles, church meetings, and long discussions about what the strike accomplished. The conclusions are mixed.

The strike, organized by the nation's leading hospital workers union, Local 1199, and supported by a massive campaign of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was one of the major events of South Carolina's civil rights movement. Armed National Guard troops filled the streets, more than 1,000 arrests were made, and the city was shut down by curfew. Before the strike virtually no blacks held office on political or social boards; after the strike there was a dramatic increase.

But of the two major demands—reinstatement of 12 fired workers and union representation—only the first was

Photo by Ron Chaff



A LABOR DAY MARCH IN THE PHELPS-DODGE STRIKE SHOWED THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN THE CAMPAIGN.

achieved. Though salaries were raised, the hospital administration managed to curtail the effectiveness of both the grievance and checkoff dues systems. National union representatives visited Charleston only intermittently, and local members succumbed to feuding and frustration.

But though it was hardly a full victory, the South Carolina strike did show the union's willingness to take on any hospital administration, no matter the odds, and to work closely with the civil rights movement. Since the 1950s, 1199 had waged community campaigns that included political pressure, expert media manipulation, the support of a broad range of labor groups, and the involvement of such black leaders as Martin Luther King (who called 1199 "my favorite union"), Malcolm X, A. Philip Randolph, and Andrew Young.

The authors of *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*, a new book on the union with a chapter devoted to the Charleston strike, call 1199 "one of the liveliest, stormiest organizations on the recent American labor scene." At a time when many unions were complacent and meek, 1199 was loud and demanding. Leaders were not

hesitant to challenge New York Mayor Robert Wagner Jr. or Governor Nelson Rockefeller. The Charleston strike was settled partially because the union was able to involve the Nixon administration.

The union won innumerable major victories. "At the start of 1963 there were 6,000 union members," the authors write. "By the end of the year the union had doubled its hospital division membership." In 1959 workers at many New York hospitals received just \$32 for 44 hours of work spread across six days a week; less than a decade later the union won a contract that "established a \$100-a-week minimum wage, gave those workers who already earned the minimum a 25 percent across-the-board increase, and funded a ... pension plan and a training and upgrading program."

In many ways, this story of 1199 is an exciting tale of unionism at its best: organizing low-income blacks and Latinos together, linking workplace issues with broader community issues, standing firm in the face of massive opposition.

Upheaval in the Quiet Zone documents those victories with sufficient details to allow the reader to feel the drama of or-

ganizing events. It is not just the story of union officials, but includes profiles of individual workers, showing why Southern blacks and Eastern European Jews who had recently arrived in New York turned to the union for strength. Because it spans 30 years, individual workers like dietary clerk Doris Turner and orderly Henry Nicholas can be seen joining the membership and then rising to union leadership.

But the book is hardly the kind of effort that the union's active and creative public relations office would have put out. Though black pride was a hallmark of 1199 campaigns, the union became badly split by internal battles and charges of racism in the early 1980s. The final chapter includes stories of letter bombs, vote fraud, broken friendships, and bungled contract negotiations. The authors present the pain with the glory. It's a balanced, sympathetic, insightful tale of the successes and failures of a fascinating 20th-century union. □

—Steve Hoffius

Steve Hoffius is director of publications for the South Carolina Historical Society.

Talk is cheep.



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SEVA

Massacre in Honea Path

By Jim DuPlessis

It was a time of martial law and concentration camps in the South. Fifty-five years later, one town still remembers.



HONEA PATH, S.C. — There is no historic marker to record the place at the Chiquola Mill where seven strikers were shot to death on September 6, 1934. Although it was the bloodiest event of the largest single labor conflict in American history — the General Textile Strike of 1934 — today few but the town's older residents remember.

R.A. Watkin Atkin was 30 years old when he joined 300 of his fellow workers as they marched on the mill that Thursday morning. The strikers carried sticks. The supervisors and non-striking workers inside the mill were armed with guns.

As strikers gathered around the mill, gunfire burst from the windows. During the massacre that followed, Atkin watched as two union members were shot, then kicked and shot again as they lay on the ground. He saw one of the strike's chief organizers, a 53-year-old weaver named Thomas Rance Yarbrough, shot in the back repeatedly. Afterwards Atkin returned to cover the bodies of the dead.

"Yarbrough got killed over there," Atkin said, pointing to a spot by the mill. "He just tried to get people to join the union."

At least 13 strikers were wounded. Among them was Lois McClain. Now 85 years old, McClain sat in a rocking chair on her porch and rubbed the flesh above her elbow that still contains buckshot that struck her as she helped a wounded worker escape the gunfire.

"It still comes back to us. It does me," McClain said. "But I thank the Lord. I give

my heart to the Lord, and try to forgive it, and pray more than I talk. But you know, there's ugly things still going on in the world."

OVERWORKED AND UNDERPAID

The Great Textile Strike is one of the most important — and perhaps least remembered — chapters of Southern labor history. The walkout was a grassroots union movement of unprecedented proportions, and 55 years later its defeat continues to generate fear of unions and to hamper labor organizing throughout the region.

Before World War I, hundreds of thousands of Southerners lived and worked in small mill towns like Honea Path that stretched from southern Virginia into northern Georgia and Alabama. In many cases the entire village — houses, schools, even churches — was owned by the men who ran the mills.

Entire families worked in the cotton mills; an estimated one-fourth of the labor force were children under the age of 16. They worked 12-hour days and earned about \$6 a week — less than half what the same jobs paid in the North.

As child labor was abolished, mill owners began introducing faster machinery that increased work loads in the mills. Textile workers rebelled. Beginning in the late 1920s, in towns from Elizabethton, Tennessee to Gastonia, North Carolina, workers walked out to protest low pay, heavy workloads, and dangerous conditions.

Then came the Depression, and the election of Franklin Roosevelt. Bolstered by Roosevelt's radio "fireside chats" advocating labor rights, Southern workers began joining the United Textile Workers Union in droves. Membership soared from 15,000 in early 1933 to 270,000 by August 1934.

Although the Roosevelt administration ordered the textile industry to pay a minimum wage of \$12 a week and limit the work week to 40 hours, employers responded by speeding up production lines, firing workers who couldn't keep up, and shutting mills for weeks at a time.

Workers were outraged. "If ain't something done at once," one South Carolina worker wrote President Roosevelt, "there's going to be war."

When the national union failed to confront the industry for breaking the law, workers took action themselves. In July 1934, 40 Alabama locals walked off the job. Union delegates meeting at a convention in August voted overwhelmingly to join them. They called for a general strike to begin on Labor Day — and most of the pressure came from leaders of newly formed Southern locals.

"The union never had more than a handful of paid organizers in the South during the whole strike period," said Jacquelyn Hall, director of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina. "It was really a welling up from below."

Within weeks an estimated 400,000 textile workers were on strike nationwide. The streets of mill towns like Honea Path were soon overflowing with defiant, jubilant workers and their families.

SMALL-TOWN DICTATORSHIP

R.A. Atkin and his wife Ethel remember little about the causes of the strike, but they recall all too well the day the guns turned on them.

Atkin was 19 years old when he quit farming, got married, and went to work in the mill to make more money. Ethel had started work at the mill about two years earlier at age 14.

When the strike came, the Chiquola Manufacturing Company was the only industry in the town of 2,740 people. The mayor was Dan Beacham. He was also the mill superintendent.

By that time, R.A. was working in the weave room "doffing warp," and Ethel was working in the spinning room. The couple had four boys, ages three to eight.

The Atkins each earned \$12 a week,

the newly enacted minimum wage, but they still had difficulty supporting their family. They paid the company \$4.80 a month for their four-room house in the old section of the mill village. Electricity and water were supplied by the mill.

"You had to live tight, do everything you could to raise a dollar then to live when you was raising a family," Atkin recalled.

When unions began organizing at nearby mills about six to eight months before the strike, about half of Chiquola Mill's 600 workers signed up. Atkin refused to join, saying the only thing he wanted to belong to was his church.

the town," said a resident in his 80s who asked not to be identified for fear of making "enemies" at his age. "The company wouldn't recognize the union. That was the trouble. The majority of the people were wanting the union and the company didn't want it."

SHOOT TO KILL

On the day of the shooting, McClain said, the strikers originally planned to have only the male workers march on the mill. But after some women crossed the picket line and entered the mill to work after the 6 a.m. shift change, the strikers

Photo by Susan Shabkie



R.A. AND ETHEL WATKIN SIT ON THEIR FRONT PORCH IN HONEA PATH. BOTH WERE AT THE MILL ON THE DAY OF THE SHOOTING IN 1934.

The union held meetings in a building atop a hill within sight of Atkin's home. "They'd have that thing full over there," he said, pointing to the site from his chair.

Lois McClain attended the meetings. "We had a union. It used to be where I just spoke my piece. When I thought a thing I told it," she laughed.

"We didn't have no money, and we couldn't buy new dresses and things like that. So I got up and told them, I said, 'Now, this one can buy a dress and the other one can buy a dress.' I said, 'How come? I thought we were in this thing together.' I said, 'We can't buy new clothes and got children to feed.'"

Many people in town agreed with McClain. "Back then the town was operated under a dictatorship, because the superintendent of the mill was mayor of

decided they would call on the women who were staying out.

Two women came by and encouraged Ethel Atkin to join the workers at the mill and offered to watch her children and take care of her chores.

"They said if ... there was more out than there was a 'workin' they was going to stop off and settle it. We didn't belong to no union. The day they was going to settle it, I was going to stay home. I wasn't going. I didn't have nothing to do with it.

"Some old women came by beggin' me to go saying, 'Show your colors. You have have to go over there and let them see you.'"

Atkin went. "It was the awfulest thing that ever happened to me," she recalled. "The people on the outside weren't expecting nothing... [They] was wanting

to settle it peacefully, to show their colors that they was honest."

Her husband was near the mill's main entrance when the shooting started. He said Mayor Beacham was inside the mill with loyal workers armed with guns and gave orders to "shoot to kill."

"The non-union was inside the mill shooting 'em outside the window," Atkin said. "If they had guns on both sides there'd have been plenty of killing. It was

Photo by Susan Shabkie



E.M. "BILL" KNIGHT LEFT BEHIND A WIFE AND FOUR CHILDREN WHEN HE WAS KILLED AT THE MILL ...

just like shooting a hog in a pen."

Ethel Atkin said she tried to flee when she saw the guns inside the mill.

"I said, 'This ain't no place for us.' When we turned it commenced to pop-pin'. Well, we didn't go far till we started trying to help those on the ground.

"We pulled pillows out of a woman's window and stuck it under their heads and fanned them. They died. We went on. I said, 'Let's go.' We went on, and there was another man dead on the sidewalk.

"I prayed a lot to forget that," she said.

"Some of them in that window with them guns pointed out had younguns, grandchildren standing down there in front of there. I didn't think nobody was that mean. You can't look at people's faces and tell what's in their hearts."

In the midst of the shooting, Lois McClain saw her friend from the spinning

room, 20-year-old Nell Baucam, sitting on steps near the mill. She had been shot in the arm and was bleeding heavily.

"I told her, 'Nell, you can't sit there... Get up and come on.' And I grabbed her."

Then McClain herself was shot. "She was shot with a bullet. I just had a shot out of a gun, out of a shell. I didn't bleed too much. I didn't know even which way the shot come in. All I knew it was in my arm. But I didn't turn her loose until I got her away from the steps."

"HOW DIRTY IT WAS"

The elderly resident who asked not to be identified also witnessed the shooting. "I had some good, close friends to get killed," he said. Among them was Edgar Matthew "Bill" Knight, a weaver who also ran a grocery store in a wooden shotgun shack on Hammett Street.

Knight was about 43 years old when he was killed. He left behind his wife Eunice and four children. His only daughter, Ruth, 16, was with him when he was shot.

R.A. Atkin saw the shooting begin, saw Knight die. "It lasted about six or seven seconds, and they killed two on the ground there, and there at the door they killed old man Yarbrough. Across the street on the sidewalk they killed Mr. Cannon. Down at the end of the mill Bill Knight was laying there dead. Down about the second house there was another one, Pete Peterson, he was dead."

Atkin also said he watched a policeman and a mill supervisor shoot two men after they had fallen. "Lee Crawford and Ira Davis, they shot them after they knocked them down on the ground. Kicked 'em over and shot 'em again. And when Yarbrough was down there standing up with both hands up, they shot him in the back with buckshot."

McClain said she also watched Yarbrough being shot. "He was trying to get away and they shot him."

Dr. E.R. Donald, who performed an autopsy, later testified that he found bullet holes in the backs of Peterson, Knight, Claude Cannon, Charles Rucker, and Yarbrough.

Donald said that Yarbrough was shot 10 times.

"Me and Doc Don come over to that house right yonder on Kay Street," recalled Atkin. "One boy was shot in the leg, we worked on his leg. We went back over there and pronounced all them dead.

"We covered up Yarbrough, and Lee Crawford and Ira Davis right there on the mill ground."

"It didn't bother me till that night when I laid down. I likely went all to pieces, just thinkin' about how dirty it was."

Two days later, on September 8, 10,000 people gathered in the middle of a field to bury the first six victims of the Chiquola Mills clash: Yarbrough, Peterson, Knight, Davis and Crawford, 26, and Cannon, 39. The seventh striker, Charles Rucker, 39, died the next day. Newsreel cameras rolled and airplanes flew low over the crowd to take pictures.

An inquest was conducted and several non-striking workers were tried for the shootings, but no one was convicted in the deaths of the workers.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Honea Path was not the only town rocked by violence. About an hour after the massacre, a strike supporter was fatally shot outside the Dunean Mill in Greenville, South Carolina. The mayor called for martial law, even though the governor had already called out every unit of the National Guard.

Caravans of strikers called "flying squadrons" faced bayonets, machine guns, and tear gas when they tried to shut down mills. In Georgia, Governor Eugene Talmadge ordered the largest peacetime mobilization of troops in state history and imprisoned 126 strikers in a barbed-wire "concentration camp" near where Germans had been incarcerated during World

Photo by Susan Shabkie



... TODAY HIS TOMBSTONE IN THE HONEA PATH CEMETARY IS THE ONLY REMINDER OF HIS DEATH AT AGE 43.

War I. In North Carolina, National Guardsmen bayoneted two strikers, fatally injuring one, in a confrontation at a hosiery mill in Belmont.

Many mill towns were bitterly divided by the strike. In Honea Path, hundreds of strikers were evicted from company-owned houses. Those who continued to work were jeered by strikers as they filed past the picket lines and into the mills each day.

The anger has lingered for more than half a century.

"I tell you it's made a difference in us Honea Patheans," said Ethel Atkin. "It's been hard to live down. Of course, I know you have to forgive people, but you still think of it."

Her husband remembers that churches wouldn't allow funeral services for the dead strikers. All but one of the dead was from Honea Path.

"People quit going to church," he said. "There was people going to church with one another, and shot them out there on the ground. It just tore the churches up."

GENERATIONS OF FEAR

When the strike ended after three weeks with few tangible gains, it left more than bitterness behind. Few locals were recognized, many strike leaders were blacklisted, and the defeat reinforced a sense of powerlessness among many workers.

Atkin remembered that a few years after the strike, union organizers tried to distribute flyers outside Chiquola Mill. Workers didn't take them.

"They wouldn't pay 'em a bit of attention," Atkin said. "You get burnt before, you'd watch it next time, wouldn't you?"

Ethel also said the strike turned workers against the union: "I wouldn't want to have to kill somebody that way to get it."

"There won't ever be another union," her husband said. "There hasn't been another one since."

A sense of defeat runs strong among those who remember the strike. Joan Carter, an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, said she often encounters horror stories about the strike.

"While out in the field organizing, I run into people who talk about the strike, about the National Guard being on top of the buildings," she said. "This is the thing that sticks out in their minds the most when you say 'unions' — this strike. It's been passed down through generations. . . . It's just left a fear on people about the union."

Some workers overcame that fear and



STATE TROOPERS IN GEORGIA PLACED 126 STRIKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN A BARBED-WIRE "CONCENTRATION CAMP" NEAR WHERE GERMANS HAD BEEN IMPRISONED DURING WORLD WAR I.

kept organizing for better pay and working conditions. Among them was Jesse Mitchell, who worked at the Chiquola Mill for 12 years before being fired several months before the strike on what he later called "a trumped-up charge because of my union activities."

Although his brother-in-law, Claude Cannon, was killed in the Honea Path shooting, leaving behind a wife and six children, Mitchell later helped in an organizing drive at the Brandon Mill in Greenville. During World War II he became president of the union local at Woodside Mills, where strikers had been teargassed by National Guardsmen during the 1934 strike.

At the Chiquola Mill in Honea Path,

however, there is no union. Today the mill is owned by Springs Industries of Fort Mill, the largest manufacturing employer in the state. The factory employs about 590 non-union workers who make industrial fabrics.

Older townspeople remember the strike, but they seldom talk about it among themselves. The story of what happened in Honea Path "is never going to be told," said Norman Hammett, the son of a mill supervisor who was inside Chiquola Mill the day the strikers were gunned down. "You can understand why — because there was brothers against brothers. It was another Civil War." □

Jim DuPlessis is a reporter for The Greenville News in Greenville, South Carolina.

A DECEPTIVE COVER

Four times a year your magazine arrives bringing with it news of home. The Summer 1989 issue reminded an ex-Arkansan of the economic grip of the chicken industrialists on farmers in that state and throughout the South. The cover picture also brought back memories which remain all too vivid of post-midnight jobs catching chickens destined for the slaughterhouse and subsequent years of being unable to eat commercially produced chickens.

However, the cover is basically deceptive, as it conveys the impression that the manslaughter case against Frank Perdue is connected with his chicken producing activities. Perhaps one expects more of one's "friends" and of a magazine which is consistently as well written and informative as *Southern Exposure*. I am certainly not going to do anything rash like cancel my subscription, but do want you to know that I am disappointed in the lapse of judgment.

—Lonnie A. Powers
Boston, Mass.

REMEMBER THE BIRD

When I was growing up in the Ozarks of north Arkansas, there were both free-range and factory-owned chickens, though we didn't use those terms then. Now almost all chickens live out their lives in slave-ship conditions, loaded with hormones and antibiotics to stimulate growth and prevent epidemic disease. Forget about bonding between chicks and mother hen — that's not profitable. Out of frustration, the birds peck each other,

sometimes to death — but that loss is less than the cost of providing more humane conditions. Others die in crowded transport trucks on the way to be hung upside-down by their feet and have their necks slit by a whirring buzz saw.

So how can *Southern Exposure* say (in "Ruling the Roost," Summer 1989) that "the poultry industry treats its chickens better than it treats its workers"? Would you rather trade places with the contract grower, or with the caged bird? With a slaughterhouse worker, or the chicken at the buzz saw? Not a pleasant choice, but an easy one.

Technology and the drive for profits have transformed traditional farm practices into an animal hell. At the same time, nutritional science has shown that a diet of animal products is not only unnecessary but harmful to our health, and that the modern production of meat, milk, and eggs is a plague on the environment and wastes huge amounts of our precious energy resources.

I used to hunt, thinking I needed to eat meat. I became a vegetarian when I was 21. Now, because of the cruelties of factory farming, I've been a vegan, or total, "non-dairy" vegetarian for 12 years. At 43 I feel healthier than I've ever felt. I don't consider myself religious, but it sure seems that the vegetarian Garden of Eden, with the lamb lying down with the lion, reflects the way we were meant to live, the way we live best.

Southern Exposure has done a fantastic job exposing the impact of the poultry industry on the workers, on contract growers, and on our health. But let us not forget the industry's primary victims.

—Billy Boyd
San Francisco, Calif.

THE KILLING FIELDS

Your articles on factory farming of chickens were well-written and informative as far as what horrors the business holds for those who must earn a living in such a way.

It is incorrect, however, to say that owners like Frank Perdue care more about the chickens than the workers. It would be accurate to say that Perdue and others care about employees and chickens equally. Equally, meaning not at all, or only for what money can be made from either.

The mentality that says it's okay to use up workers like inanimate commodities is the same one that says it's okay to eat up animals like inanimate commodities. If it's okay to cut off the chickens' beaks, overcrowd them so they cannot move, so their feet grow attached to the wire cages, throw baby male chicks alive into plastic trash bags, if it's acceptable to "sacrifice" a percentage of chickens to horrid conditions in order to make a profit, then the owners will find it equally acceptable to sacrifice workers' health and limbs to profit the owners.

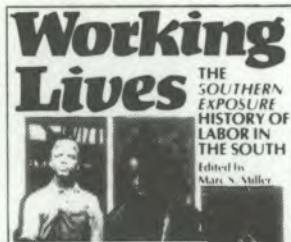
What is important to remember is that it is all part of the same hierarchical mentality. Men over women, adults over children, whites over blacks, human animals over other animals. We cannot change or improve it until we recognize it for the continuum it is.

—Amme M. Hogan
Albuquerque, N.M.

We welcome letters from our readers. Send your comments and criticisms to *The Last Word*, Southern Exposure, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702. Please be sure to include your name, address, and daytime telephone number, and try to hold letters to no more than 250 words. Longer letters may be edited for length.

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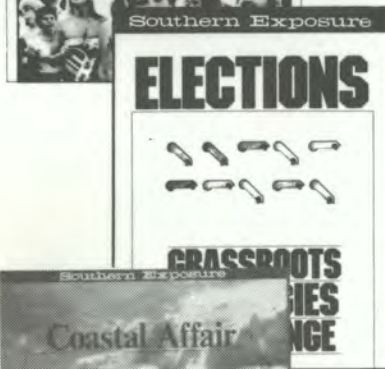


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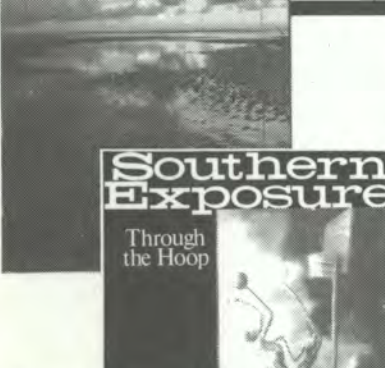
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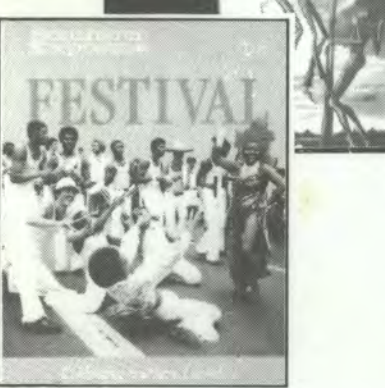
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