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By Reynolds Price
plus short stories
and tall tales from
Lee Smith &
Allan Gurganus

ALSO

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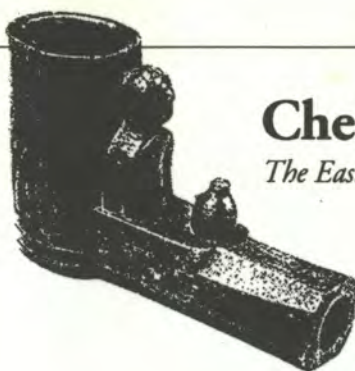
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DATELINE: THE SOUTH

ROME, Ga. (Nov. 27) — A group of conservative Christian parents pleaded with the state Board of Education today to cancel a planned course on interdisciplinary values, saying the course would teach students to develop tolerance for customs and practices different from their own. "The very nature of Christianity is that we are intolerant of other belief systems that are against the Bible," explained Janice Peulask, a mother of two pre-schoolers.

CANDOR, N.C. (Dec. 3) — Ralph Bostic made history today when he became the first black member of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. His election gives blacks, who make up 25 percent of the county, their first voice in local government. The county redrew election districts after the NAACP threatened to sue officials for maintaining boundaries that diluted the black vote.

NEW ORLEANS, La. (Dec. 3) — The Reverend Glenn Jeanmarie, a Roman Catholic priest, publicly broke with the Vatican today to form an all-black congregation in New Orleans. Citing race and sex discrimination by the Catholic Church, he predicted that his African-American Catholic Congregation will have more black members than the official church within a decade. The new order will encourage ordination of women, allow women to make their own decisions on abortion, and accept the use of contraception.



ATLANTA, Ga. (Dec. 3) — Forty demonstrators celebrated the Environmental Protection Agency's 20th birthday by presenting federal officials with a

giant birthday cake topped with smoke-stack-shaped candles emitting a strong, sulphur-like odor. The demonstrators accused the agency of allowing toxic pollution to increase over the past two decades, and criticized officials for giving companies incentives to build toxic incinerators instead of encouraging them to reduce their hazardous waste.

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (Dec. 6) — Green Beret Sergeant Michael Tubbs was ordered held without bond on federal charges that he stockpiled stolen military weapons — including mines, grenades, machine guns, anti-aircraft weapons, and 60 pounds of dynamite. An informant told authorities that Tubbs planned to use the arsenal to launch a "race war" against blacks and Jews. "He wanted to make sure he was prepared for that battle," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles Truncale. "This is truly the type of material that is only used in actual war."

BASTROP, La. (Dec. 11) — Twenty-one years after Bastrop High School was desegregated, students narrowly approved a referendum to begin holding integrated school proms. One junior who supported the referendum said, "This is like something we should be learning upstairs in history class." But School Board President Carl Long frowned on black and white students dancing together. "It's a good idea — in another place," he said. "People aren't ready for that in Bastrop. It's not our custom."

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (Jan. 4) — The state Supreme Court established an experimental "drug court" to hear the overflow of felony drug cases in Shelby County, which tripled its number of arrests on drug charges to 11,000 last year. Governor Ned McWherter has provided \$250,000 in state funds for the project, and Tennessee has applied for a federal grant of \$500,000.

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (Jan. 9) — Blaming single mothers for crime in public housing projects, City Housing Authority Director Cary Wood proposed evicting unmarried mothers who refuse to

MIRAMAR, Fla. (Feb. 6) — Undercover officers on a stakeout at a Mr. Grocer convenience store handcuffed and strip-searched the clerk, Elaine Ott, when she sold a *Playboy* magazine to two teenaged boys. "I feel so dirty," said Ott, a grandmother. "They made me feel like I killed somebody." The next night, as her husband Richard worked at the store, he was robbed at gunpoint. The police made no arrests.

undergo family counseling. More than 80 percent of families living in city housing projects are headed by single women. Hedy Weinberg, director of the state ACLU, called the proposal "a blatant violation of an individual's right to privacy."

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Jan. 10) — City commissioners voted 4-1 today to exempt General Dynamics from the city's anti-apartheid ordinance, allowing the military contractor to remain in a city-owned building despite its ties to the white-minority government of South Africa. Commissioners also agreed to review its anti-apartheid law, one of the toughest in the nation, after General Dynamics threatened to take its business elsewhere.

MESQUITE, Texas (Jan. 11) — White officials at Vernon Price Elementary School suspended fifth-grader Donvannah Brown for sporting a haircut which they deemed "startling and unusual." Donvannah is the only black male in

his class, but officials denied the issue was one of race. "We are trying to encourage this child to use everything at his disposal to fit into society," said Dixie Parris, a school spokesperson. "If we accepted different standards from this child, that wouldn't be fair to him."







OXFORD, Miss. (Jan. 11) — In an effort to keep students from competing for Valentine's Day cards, the Oxford school board voted to cancel the holiday this year. The board banned the exchange of flowers or other gifts among students or staff on February 14 after a high school principal said the expressions of sentiment would disrupt classes and create peer pressure among students.



TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Jan. 16) — State Representative Frances "Chance" Irvine stunned her fellow lawmakers again this year by introducing a bill making it legal for public school teachers to use stun guns to defend themselves. The proposed legislation has failed four years in a row. "This is a bill to protect teachers who work late at night or come in early in the morning," Irvine said.

ATLANTA, Ga. (Jan. 17) — State Representative George Brown proposed that the state end its own private Cold War by dropping its anti-Communist loyalty oath for lawmakers. Legislators taking the oath at the start of each term must "solemnly swear and affirm that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of Georgia, and that I am not a member of the Communist Party." Brown's bill would strike the last clause.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (Jan. 24) — Jimmie Naifeh, speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, announced new "guidelines for decorum" that specifically forbid lawmakers to bring cans of Donald Duck orange juice spiked with vodka onto the House floor. "Donald doesn't need to be around," Naifeh said of the cocktail, a time-honored favorite during late-night sessions. Yet the speak-

		
SEX	LOVE	CONCEPTION
		
LIFE	ART	PORNOGRAPHY

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (Dec. 7) — A local theater group changed a brief nude scene in the play *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* after police said it violated indecent exposure laws. The Spirit Square arts center refused to stand behind its Playworks Series production, so director Steve Umberger instructed two actors to cover themselves during a bedroom scene. "It was an odd thing to have to deal with," Umberger said. "This is a serious play, and they treated it like some kind of pornography."

er insisted that lawmakers can get along without a dress code. "Everyone knows what's appropriate," he said.

CHANNELVIEW, Texas (Jan. 30) — Police charged Wanda Webb Holloway with attempting to hire a hit man to kill the mother of her daughter's rival in a cheerleading tryout. Authorities said Holloway offered an undercover officer \$2,500 to kill Verna Heath, hoping that the murder would cause Heath's 13-year-old daughter to drop out of cheerleading tryouts at the local high school. A detective described Holloway as "the ultimate stage mother who would go to almost any length, apparently, to further the career and popularity of her daughter."

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Jan. 31) — The state Supreme Court has made it easier for minorities to obtain a fair trial by making it tougher for prosecutors to remove minorities from juries. The court ruled unanimously that prosecutors who attempt to remove even one minority from a jury must "give reasons that show a valid, non-discriminatory purpose for the excusal." Previous decisions had said prosecutors only had to prove they weren't discriminating if they blocked

more than one minority from jury duty.

CECIL FIELD NAVAL AIR STATION, Fla. (Feb. 10) — More than 900,000 gallons of highly volatile jet fuel spilled from a fuel tank today, flooding earthen ditches filled with water. Officials said the leak went undetected for hours, and were unsure how much environmental damage had been done. "We don't know if the fuel can leak into groundwater," admitted a spokesman on the base.

CHILDRESS, Texas (Feb. 14) — A federal grand jury charged Sheriff Claude Lane with distributing marijuana he seized in a drug raid last fall. Lane had been featured in a page-one article in the *Wall Street Journal* that described how understaffed sheriffs were having a hard time catching rural drug dealers.

Compiled by Robin Donovan. 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.

AIDS EPIDEMIC SPREADS IN SOUTH

Anyone walking into Diana Diana's hair salon in Columbia, South Carolina should expect more than a wash and cut from the woman who runs the shop. Diana Diana has spent the past five years plying her customers with shampoo, conditioner, nail polish — and facts about AIDS.

"I do it while I'm doing their hair," she explains, saying she passes on information about AIDS prevention because the state has done little to educate people about how to avoid getting the disease.

There is reason to be alarmed by how slowly Southern states have responded to the AIDS epidemic. Although the South has not been as hard hit by the disease as

other regions, the latest report from the national Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta shows that the virus is beginning to spread more rapidly in the South.

The CDC report shows that since the disease was first diagnosed in 1981, the South has reported 40,545 cases of AIDS — 25 percent of the national total. But in each of the past two years, the region reported a growing share of people with AIDS — including 30 percent of the cases diagnosed in 1990.

According to the CDC, the AIDS rate in eight Southern states increased by more than the national average of 22 percent last year. Arkansas reported the biggest increase of any state in the nation last year — 161 percent — followed by an 86 percent rise in Virginia and a 71 percent jump in Mississippi.

Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Louisiana all ranked among the 10 states that reported the highest rates of AIDS in 1990.

Although Southerners are increasingly vulnerable to the disease, many states and communities continue to ignore the threat to public health. In South Carolina, Diana Diana says her attempts to talk openly about sex and AIDS prevention have made her unpopular with some in her area.

"Here in the Bible Belt, we have a big problem in teen pregnancy," she says. "And yet parents don't want to discuss sex with their kids."

Blacks and Hispanics have been particularly hard hit by AIDS. Although slightly more than half of all those who have died from the disease have been white, minorities are roughly three times more likely to die from AIDS. In North Carolina, 54 percent of all diagnosed AIDS cases are among blacks and Hispanics.

Dazon Dixon, director of the AIDS self-help group SisterLove based in Atlanta, says "taboos" about homosexuality make people of color less likely to share information. In addition, she says, poverty and drugs put minorities at greater risk. "Most people of color affected by HIV are low-income, and most are long-time drug

abusers who already suffer from suppressed immune systems."

The region has also experienced a dramatic increase in AIDS among women. In Texas, the number of women with AIDS last year increased 60 percent more than cases diagnosed among men. In Tennessee, the state health department reports an "alarming" increase in the number of black women testing positive for the HIV virus after giving birth — more than three times the level of infection for all mothers in the state.

Dazon Dixon says she founded her organization to serve black women because most local and state agencies simply don't address the needs of her clients. "I realized that women were caught in a hit-or-miss fashion. In every aspect of services, there was nothing specific for women."

The lack of services and prevention programs in the South will only accelerate the spread of AIDS in the coming years. The CDC estimates that one million Americans are currently infected with the HIV virus, and that the disease will kill more people in the next two years than in the previous eight years combined. "The impact of AIDS in the mid-1990s," the CDC report concludes, "will depend on present efforts to prevent and treat HIV infection."

—Laurie Udesky

THE STATE OF AIDS

Eight Southern states reported that their AIDS rates — the number of cases per 100,000 residents — rose faster than the national average last year.

	# of cases	Rate per 100,000	% Increase
Alabama	239	5.8	11.5
Arkansas	208	8.6	160.6
Florida	4,047	31.2	13.4
Georgia	1,223	18.8	9.9
Kentucky	189	5.0	61.3
Louisiana	703	15.8	37.4
Mississippi	279	10.6	71.4
N. Carolina	558	8.4	23.5
S. Carolina	342	9.8	4.3
Tennessee	342	6.9	27.8
Texas	3,361	19.2	37.1
Virginia	738	11.9	85.9
W. Virginia	62	3.3	13.8
South	12,291	16.0	21.9
U.S. Total	41,595	16.6	22.0

Source: Centers for Disease Control

NIGHT COMES TO KENTUCKY AUTHOR

The mountains of eastern Kentucky have lost a good friend. Harry Caudill, author of the influential *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s, committed suicide last November after struggling for years against Parkinson's disease.

Caudill was known to his Letcher County neighbors as a man who focused an unrelenting fury against the giant strip miners who ravaged the Appalachia he loved. Born in 1922, Caudill witnessed



Harry Caudill embraced his Kentucky roots and exposed the big coal companies that exploited the land and people of Appalachia.

some of the harshest times in eastern Kentucky. As the nation increased its dependence on oil, coal companies owned by out-of-state investors abandoned many of their mines, leaving behind barren mountains, polluted streams, and stark poverty.

While some may have felt too defeated to speak out about the destruction and neglect, Caudill was enraged. Using his skills as a teacher, lawyer, storyteller, and former legislator, he put his thoughts on paper. The result was *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. Published in 1963, the book presented a vivid portrait of how big coal companies had systematically exploited the land and people of Appalachia. The account is often credited with having helped prompt President Lyndon Johnson to launch the War on Poverty.

Many local residents, however, did not take kindly to Caudill's revelations, particularly his graphic descriptions of Appalachian poverty. "For weeks and months I was constantly bombarded with demands that we denounce Caudill and publish stories that would print 'the real truth' about the mountains," recalls Tom Gish, editor of *The Mountain Eagle*, the weekly newspaper in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Caudill had touched a raw nerve in the mountains, but he spurred many to join him in making eastern Kentucky a better

place to live. "It was not merely a book showing the exploitation of the region," said writer Wendell Berry. "It was a book that showed how to be a Kentuckian, how to be a citizen."

Among his accomplishments, Caudill helped establish strip mining regulations and increased safety measures to protect mine workers. As a Kentucky state legislator in the 1950s, he played a key role in improving public education. More recently, he helped campaign for sweeping reforms in the public school system.

Caudill had as many critics as he did admirers. But even those who disagreed with him acknowledge that his courage and contributions to the region cannot be discounted.

"I always thought it was kind of glib for people to criticize Harry Caudill's candor," said John Egerton, a fellow writer and Kentucky native. "It always seemed to me there was about the man such an unflinching honesty and commitment."

GE HALTS PINELLAS WEAPONS PRODUCTION

The company that claims to "bring good things to light" will no longer be bringing nuclear bomb triggers to Largo,

Florida. General Electric, the nation's third-largest nuclear weapons producer, has decided to cancel its \$150 million contract with the U.S. Department of Energy to operate its sprawling Pinellas plant in western Florida.

The canceled contract was hailed as a victory by INFACT, the grassroots organization that launched a nationwide boycott of GE products four years ago to force the company out of the nuclear weapons business. "They saw clearly that our campaign is not going away," says Ruth Shy, national director of INFACT. "The boycott has cost GE millions of dollars in profits."

Even though 1,600 residents of Largo work at the Pinellas plant, local support for the boycott has been growing. "When we started out here in 1982, people would drive by and give us the thumbs down," recalls John Stewart, a teacher who organized weekly vigils outside the plant gates. "Now a lot of people are giving us thumbs up, waving, honking, smiling."

But there are other reasons why GE decided to bail out of Pinellas. The Department of Energy (DOE) is now forcing producers of nuclear weapons to shoulder the costs of liability insurance and waste cleanup. A GE spokesperson told one reporter that the new policy "would have exposed the company to increased legal and financial risks."

The company may have good reason to be concerned about the cost of cleaning up its mistakes. Last year, a DOE report on the Pinellas plant cited 60 "areas of concern" regarding the environment and 93 regarding safety and health. The report also noted that GE's performance at Pinellas indicated "a lack of attention to environmental management."

"For the past four or five years, we have understood that that plant is extremely dangerous," says Ruth Shy of INFACT. "The ground water is contaminated. There is a tremendous cleanup bill, as well as dangerous effects on the health and lives of people surrounding the plant."

Citing health risks to the community, INFACT is hoping to prevent another weapons producer from taking over the Pinellas operations. Instead, it hopes that GE will retrain employees to perform peacetime work.

"GE has always prided itself on its creativity and its ability to develop new solutions," says John Stewart. "If there's a will, the expertise and training exist."

For more information about the GE boycott, contact the INFACT National Field Campaign Office at P.O. Box 3223, South Pasadena, CA 91031. Or call: (818) 799-9133.

STATE REOPENS EVERS MURDER

It has been more than 25 years since Byron de la Beckwith walked out of a Mississippi courtroom a free man. Beckwith was tried and acquitted twice of the murder of Medgar Evers, the civil rights leader who was shot in the back outside his home in Jackson, Mississippi on June 12, 1963.

But Beckwith may soon find himself back in court. Last November, a Mississippi grand jury indicted him in the murder of Evers based on new evidence. Prosecutors then began proceedings to extradite him from his home in Tennessee to stand trial for a third time in Mississippi.

Civil rights activists and black officials in Mississippi hailed the revival of the case as evidence that the state is trying to resolve one of the most notorious slayings in the history of the civil rights movement.

At the time of his death, Evers was working as an NAACP field secretary, registering blacks to vote and struggling to integrate the University of Mississippi. Beckwith, now 70, was an avowed white supremacist and member of the local White Citizens Council. Two all-white juries failed to convict him, even though his fingerprints were found on the murder weapon.

After the trials, allegations surfaced that the state had secretly investigated the backgrounds of prospective jurors to determine whether or not they would be sympathetic to Beckwith and had given the information to defense attorneys.

"The fingerprints on the gun, the tampering with witnesses — these were matters not all of which were in evidence before," says Earl Shihoster, Southeast regional director of the NAACP. "If they were, they were ignored."

Ironically, Evers himself had been investigating cases of unsolved murders of blacks in Mississippi. He disguised himself as a sharecropper to interview frightened witnesses, and once hid a witness in a coffin and smuggled him to safety in another county.

Although it has taken more than 25 years to reopen the Evers case, many in Mississippi doubt that such a move would have succeeded earlier. New voting districts in Jackson have enabled blacks to elect local officials, putting pressure on the district attorney to bring Evers' killer to justice.

"To be honest with you, if an effort had been taken any time before now, it would have been fruitless," says Bennie Thompson, a Hinds County Supervisor. "You wouldn't have had an indictment."

Thompson adds that a conviction of Beckwith could close an ugly chapter in the long and violent defense of segregation. "If we are successful in getting a conviction," he says, "it will rewrite some history that many Mississippians and other right-thinking people have been ashamed of for all these years."

GOVERNOR HALTS VIRGINIA EXECUTION

Virginia witnessed an historic moment on February 19, as Douglas Wilder became the first governor to halt an execution since the state reinstated the

death penalty in 1977. Wilder commuted the death sentence of Joseph Michael Giarratano just three days before the 33-year-old was scheduled to die in the electric chair.

It is no secret that Wilder advocates capital punishment; he made it a key issue in his bid for governor. But the governor was apparently swayed by a groundswell of grassroots support for Giarratano — and by strong evidence suggesting that the state was about to execute an innocent man.

The events that led Giarratano to death row began one night in 1979, when he awakened from a drunken sleep to discover that his two former housemates — Barbara Kline and her 15-year-old daughter, Michelle — had been murdered. Giarratano, who had a history of substance abuse and memory lapses, became convinced he had killed the women, even though he had no memory of it. He turned himself in to police, who took five separate confessions.

Based on his confessions, Giarratano received the death sentence in 1979. But legal experts and forensic specialists maintain that the confessions contradict the physical evidence:

▼ One of the victims had been stabbed by a right-handed assailant. Giarratano is

Photo by F&E Schmidt



Joseph Giarratano was saved from the electric chair, but he has not received a new trial on evidence that suggests his innocence.

left-handed, with a neurological impairment that weakens his right side.

▼ Numerous hairs, fingerprints, and a drivers license were found at the scene of the murder — none of which belonged to Giarratano.

▼ Bloody bootprints were found near the body of one victim, but they did not match the boots worn by Giarratano.

"He has no memory of the murders, and there is no physical evidence that links him to the crime," says Bart Stapert of the Virginia Coalition on Jails and Prisons.

Certain of his own guilt, however, Giarratano attempted suicide and was medicated with Thorazine for his first four years on Death Row. "I was convinced I was evil," he told a reporter. "All I wanted to do was die."

But that changed in 1983. After receiving counseling and refusing to take any more Thorazine, Giarratano decided he wanted a new trial.

Governor Wilder commuted Giarratano's sentence to life in prison, with the possibility of parole in 13 years. But whether Giarratano gets a new trial depends on Attorney General Mary Sue Terry, who reportedly opposes reopening the case.

Those who believe Giarratano was wrongly convicted say they will continue to fight until he has received a fair trial. "The governor received 7,000 calls and letters, and 20,000 petitions from us asking for his intervention in the case," says Stapert. "Now, we have to convince Mary Sue Terry that she has to change her position."

—Laurie Udesky

For more information on the Giarratano case, contact the Virginia Coalition on Jails and Prisons, 4912 W. Broad Street, Suite 201-A, Richmond, VA 23230. Or call: (804) 353-0093.

REGION VOTES FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

When voters in Corpus Christi, Texas went to the polls on January 19, they were asked to consider seven issues in a special city election. The first issue on the ballot had to do with utility rate increases. The second item was a bit more far-

reaching: It asked Corpus Christi residents to declare that "human life begins at conception and continues until natural death."

Voters overwhelmingly rejected the amendment, which was placed on the ballot at the urging of the Catholic Church and local anti-abortion groups. Even if it had passed, opponents said, it would have been superseded by a state law that protects a woman's right to an abortion.

But pro-choice activists see the defeat of the amendment as another sign that a growing number of Southerners are joining the ranks of those who support *Roe v. Wade* — the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion 18 years ago.

Voters sent that message loud and clear in legislative and gubernatorial elections last November. Recognizing that the Supreme Court has given state lawmakers the go-ahead to limit abortion rights, pro-choice activists turned their attention to electoral politics. They surveyed candidates about their views on abortion, studied their voting records, and mobilized voters to get to the polls on Election Day.

The strategy worked. As newly elected officials took office in January, abortion rights advocates counted major victories in several Southern states, including the election of pro-choice governors Ann Richards in Texas and Lawton Chiles in Florida.

"Southern lawmakers have gotten the message their constituents have been sending," says Loretta Ucelli of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL). "It's individuals who make the deeply personal decisions about abortion, not politicians."

Some politicians who refused to

acknowledge the strength of the pro-choice vote are now looking for new jobs. Paul Stam, a North Carolina state representative who led a fight to cut abortion funds for poor women, was replaced by Larry Jordan, a pro-choice Democrat. "Stam was the ring leader for anti-choice," says Ruth Ziegler, director of North Carolina NARAL.

A tally of Southern political races shows more legislative support for choice today than before the elections. Florida and Georgia now have pro-choice legislatures. Both the South Carolina and Texas legislatures, which were adamantly opposed to abortion, are now equally divided on the issue. No Southern legislature turned anti-choice as a result of the vote last November.

With political races behind them, pro-choice forces in the region say they still have a lot of work ahead. The state legislatures in Alabama and Louisiana remain predominantly anti-choice, and both have attempted to curb abortion rights. Last year, Louisiana lawmakers passed one of the most restrictive pieces of anti-abortion legislation in the country, but Governor Buddy Roemer vetoed the measure.

"The more challenges there are to *Roe*, the more likely it is that *Roe* will be overturned," says Loretta Ucelli of NARAL. "We're in this for the long haul."

—Barbara Barnett

Compiled by Laurie Udesky.

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

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FOWLING

The poultry industry pollutes fields and streams with 14 billion

THE NEST

pounds of manure and 28 billion gallons of waste water each year.

GREEN FOREST, ARK. — Steve Work first noticed that his family's well water tasted slimy back in 1983. "Everybody got sick," recalls Work, a glassblower in the Ozark Mountains of northwest Arkansas. "When we'd make coffee, we'd get an oily scum on top. We finally figured out it was chicken fat."

Catfish died in farm ponds, and Dry Creek was choked with dark, greasy sludge. When state inspectors tested drinking water in the area, they soon discovered the cause of the trouble: Raw sewage had polluted groundwater across 60 square miles. The governor declared it a disaster area, and ordered the National Guard to haul safe drinking water to thousands of families.

There was little doubt about who was fouling the water supply. Tyson Food, the largest poultry company in the nation, operates a huge "processing plant" in Green Forest. The slaughterhouse dumps so much blood and chicken fat and chemicals into the water every day, the town had to build a bigger sewage plant to handle it all. The expanded treatment facility, completed in 1988, is big enough to

provide clean water for a city of 75,000. Green Forest has a population of 2,050.

Steve Work and his neighbors complained to Tyson about the sewage, but the company responded by threatening to close the plant and lay off workers. Angered, 110 residents sued — and won a partial victory. In May 1989, a jury ruled in their favor, but U.S. Judge Oren Harris levied a fine of only \$254,680 — just enough to cover their property damage and pay for new wells.

The citizens say they are pleased with the jury verdict, but stress that it will take much more to force Tyson and other poultry companies to clean up their act. "The industry does research on reusing waste," Work says. "But they'll only do what's profitable. If there's not profit in stopping pollution, they won't stop unless someone makes them."

THE FARM

What happened in Green Forest is scarcely an isolated incident. Once a scattered backyard business, raising chickens and turkeys has become a mas-

sive agricultural industry concentrated in half a dozen Southern states (see "Ruling the Roost," *SE* Vol. XVII, No. 2). Thousands of poultry farms and processing factories churn out millions of birds every day — along with carcasses and chemicals that contaminate the land and poison the water with toxic wastes.

The numbers are staggering. Industry studies indicate that every bird sold leaves behind 2.5 pounds of manure and 5 gallons of waste water. With the industry turning out 5.7 billion chicken broilers annually, that comes to nearly 14 billion pounds of manure and 28 billion gallons of waste water each year.

"It's a serious threat," says Sam Ledbetter, the attorney who represented the Arkansas citizens who sued Tyson. "Poultry waste is usually 11 or 12 times stronger than raw domestic sewage. It can devastate rivers and streams. Ultimately, we're talking about jeopardizing groundwater throughout entire areas."

The pollution starts on the farm, where thousands of birds are packed into chicken houses. During their brief stay, the birds drop tons of manure that mix with feathers

BY DENISE GIARDINA AND ERIC BATES

and wood shavings — a smelly mess the poultry industry likes to refer to as “litter.” After six weeks, the poultry company retrieves the birds, leaving the farmer to dispose of the litter.

Poultry manure contains high levels of nitrogen and other nutrients that can fuel the growth of aquatic plants and use up oxygen, choking streams and killing fish. The manure can also contain metals, bacteria and other pathogens, cancer-causing pesticides such as heptachlor, and residues of arsenic used to control parasites in the chickens.

Farmers have traditionally spread the manure on fields as fertilizer, but the sheer volume of waste is using up the available land. Studies indicate that farmers need nearly four acres of land to safely dispose of a ton of poultry manure — and Arkansas alone produces 2.11 million tons of litter each year. Disposed of properly, the waste would cover more than eight million acres — almost a quarter of the entire state.

“More and more agricultural facilities are being opened up,” says Don Morgan, an inspector with the Arkansas Department of Pollution Control. “There’s just more litter generated than there is land to handle it.”

And not just any land will do. The waste must be spread on flat ground to prevent runoff, kept away from streams and wells to prevent contamination, and surrounded by trees or shrubs to prevent leaching. In addition, litter should not be applied during a rain, and should be cut into the soil with a disk.

“We at this very minute are cleaning out our houses and spreading the litter on our fields,” says Benny Bunting, a poultry grower in Martin County, North Carolina. “We’ve got about 40 loads from three chicken houses — about 450 tons of litter in all.”

The problem, Bunting says, is that more and more growers don’t farm, which means they have nowhere to put their manure. “If you don’t have farmland, the litter usually stays stacked in piles all year. That means you’re going to have rain on it, and you’re going to have nitrates running off straight into ditches.”

In truth, nobody knows how much chicken waste is improperly spread or dumped by farmers. Most Southern



The poultry industry slaughters billions of turkeys and chickens each year — and discharges billions of gallons of sewage.

states grant agriculture a variety of exemptions from environmental regulations, and virtually none regulates or even monitors on-farm practices.

To make matters worse, farmers also have to find a way to dispose of dead birds. Poultry operations raising 20,000 birds lose an estimated 1,000 a flock, most when they’re under a week old. Based on current production, that’s nearly 285 million carcasses each year.

With limited land available to dispose

of manure and bones, industry officials are touting composting as the solution. Composters transform litter into clean fertilizer, and model systems have been built on farms in Alabama, Arkansas and Virginia. But building and operating composting units costs more than \$100,000 — an unmanageable financial burden to poultry growers already deeply in debt.

Mary Clouse, a former grower and editor of the *Poultry Grower News*, says

farmers themselves are the hardest hit by poultry pollution. "The growers are the first to suffer," she says. "They don't want to pollute their environment. But if there's no money, forget it!"

THE FACTORY

The pollution intensifies when poultry companies truck the birds from farms to factories to be slaughtered, gutted, and packaged. The chickens arrive caked with dirt and feces, and flow along an assembly line that repeatedly soaks, sprays, and rinses them with water. They are dipped in tanks of scalding water and defeathered by machines that fill the air with a fine mist. After they are gutted, they are chilled in large water tanks. "At the beginning of the day the chill-tank water is clear and clean," one inspector told *The Atlantic Monthly*. "But as the day goes on, it becomes murky, dirty-brownish, and bloody."

By the end of each day, millions of gallons of water have been transformed into a "fecal soup" of chicken droppings, blood, and grease teeming with bacteria, parasites, and viruses. The companies also release tons of ammonia, phosphoric acid, and other toxic chemicals directly into the environment. But according to a recent industry survey, many companies have failed to report chemical discharges as

required by federal law, and have failed to train their employees to fill out government reporting forms.

"Who knows what all goes on in these plants?" says Tom Aley, a hydrogeologist who directs the Ozark Underground Laboratories. "We know they spread things like salmonella and other bacteria in the groundwater. There may be more dangerous things with long chemical names, but in reality the most imminent health threat is just regular old sewage, like the waste from poultry plants. It may not sound glamorous, but it's a significant danger."

Some poultry plants have their own pre-treatment facilities to clean up contaminated water, but the process produces waste problems of its own. Sludge that settles in specially constructed lagoons must be monitored for leaks and spread on nearby fields.

When Tyson Foods built a storage lagoon near the town of Clifty, Arkansas, local residents were dismayed. There had been no public hearing, no warning the lagoon would be built. Soon the company began applying the sludge to fields and selling it to local farmers for fertilizer.

"The odor was terrible," recalls Jo Cox, who lives half a mile from the lagoon. "The sludge was put on so thick the buzzards flocked, and flies were a problem, too."

But the worst shock came when residents tested their well water and discovered dangerously high levels of streptococcus and coliform bacteria. Residents complained to state environmental officials, but Cox says they received "very little cooperation." Tyson had received a state permit for its waste lagoon — located on a flood plain — but regulators were making no effort to ensure it was properly maintained.

Tyson was also unwilling to listen to residents — until they decided to sue. "Then Tyson decided they wanted to talk," Cox says. The company agreed to clean out the lagoon, fill it with earth, and stop spreading sludge. In return, the citizens dropped their suit.

"INTERIM" POLLUTION

Although most states require poultry companies to obtain permits before they dump waste, enforcement of environmental safeguards is generally lax. Even when companies are repeatedly cited for violating water quality standards, state officials often grant them "interim permits" that allow them to continue polluting for months or even years while they "work to correct the problem."

When Perdue Farms built a plant to treat waste at its slaughterhouse in Accomac, Virginia in 1973, it waited

FLOATING FEATHERS

SILER CITY, N.C. — Connie Allred lives along a creek about 300 yards from the Rocky River, downstream from the town's sewage treatment plant. She was one of the first to spot the fat and feathers floating on the water.

"We would continually see foam, grease, and oil slicks," Allred says. "The river smelled bad. Sometimes it would turn dark brown, other times it would turn green."

Two years ago, Allred and her neighbors formed Friends of the Rocky River (FORR). They took photographs of the pollution, documented it on video, and submitted water samples to a lab for independent tests. The results? High levels of oil, grease, and detergents in the river.

FORR complained to the town and state, but so far officials have done little to identify and punish the

polluters. Why? Some citizens suggest that the authorities don't want to point the finger at the two local industries that produce the most waste — the Mid-State and Townsends poultry slaughterhouses.

Together, the two processing plants swallow an average of 830,000 gallons of water every day — almost as much as everyone else in town combined.

"We are the biggest users," acknowledges Ralph Seabreeze, manager of the Mid-State plant. "But people have to look at the money we put into the community."

Town officials apparently are looking at the money. The poultry plants provide 1300 jobs in this city of 5,000, and the town fathers seem reluctant to fault their wealthiest children.

"This town is not upset with the chicken plants in any way," says Town Manager Tim Johnson.

State officials are equally loathe to fix the blame on the poultry plants. "Siler City

occasionally has oil and grease problems," says Tim Donnelly, state water quality supervisor for the area. "I can't address whether or not the problems are caused by the poultry companies. Those plants have pre-treatment facilities, and restaurants and households also generate oil and grease."

Yet reports submitted to the state Division of Environmental Management show that Mid-State exceeds waste limits almost monthly. And a 1989 memo from the division says "stricter limits for oil and grease" are needed for the poultry companies' pre-treatment systems to control what the town sewage plant receives.

Although the state won't tackle the polluters, it continues to blame the city for its inability to properly treat all the waste. State officials say the waste treatment plant in Siler City has "routinely" dumped untreated sewage into the Rocky River during heavy rains. In 1989, when inspectors found an

until construction was complete to apply for permission to dump waste into nearby Parker Creek. Given the go-ahead by the state, Perdue began discharging chicken grease and bacteria into the water.

Once a pristine habitat for fish and crabs, Parker Creek grew gray and slimy, clogged with algae and other plant life. Except for the overabundant plants, aquatic life disappeared.

Despite the destruction, Perdue complained that the limits on pollution were too strict. State officials responded by relaxing the regulations, issuing an "interim permit" that allowed Perdue to continue dirtying the creek.

But even the interim standards proved too tough for Perdue. In May 1989, storage lagoons overflowed and discharged massive clumps of sludge into the creek. Finally, when the company discharged illegal levels of ammonia into the water in January 1990, the state fined the company \$75,000.

Because many poultry plants are located in rural areas like Accomac, they often dump their waste directly into nearby lakes and streams. In northeast Georgia, a special grand jury has been working since 1986 to investigate poultry companies that discharge wastewater into creeks that empty into Lake Lanier, a popular swimming resort and a major source of drinking water.

In 1989, college students testing the water at Lake Lanier discovered extremely high counts of fecal coliform bacteria at three of the lake's most popular beaches. The Army Corps of Engineers was so alarmed it asked that the beaches be closed, but the state Environmental Protection Division refused to act.

Fieldale Farms, a poultry company that processes 2.5 million chickens a week at three slaughterhouses in the area, dumps waste directly into creeks that flow into Lake Lanier. Last October, a local resident noticed a foul discharge running from Fieldale's Murrayville plant through a ditch to Gin Creek, and used a citizen hotline to notify state officials.

When state inspectors visited the plant, they discovered wastewater pouring from a pipe into a ditch that leads to Lake Lanier. Former Fieldale employees said the illegal discharges were standard procedure. "We knew what we were doing was wrong," said Brian Gaut. "But we had to get rid of the waste."

The state slapped Fieldale with its fourth citation for water-quality violations in four months, and fined the company \$135,000. It was the first time in Georgia history that a company received the maximum penalty for a water-quality violation.

For now, Fieldale is being allowed to

continue operating while it applies for a new permit. "We could revoke all permits and not allow production," says Larry Hedges, manager of the state industrial wastewater program. "But the offshoot would be a severe economic fallout, because the community would lose jobs."

"AWFUL LENIENT"

Blessed with such cooperation from state officials, poultry companies often take a high-handed attitude when asked to clean up their pollution. One of the most blatant and unrepentant polluters in the region is the House of Raeford, which operates chicken and turkey slaughterhouses in eastern North Carolina.

According to a 1987 memorandum in the files of the state Division of Environmental Management, the history of pollution violations by the House of Raeford "indicates a total disregard for compliance with environmental law." The memo recommended criminal charges be brought against the company's officers.

The state repeatedly cited the House of Raeford turkey plant in Rose Hill for polluting nearby streams. But instead of adopting the memo's get-tough approach, regulators allowed the company to continue dumping waste under an interim permit.

Frustrated by the lack of action, the city

"unknown" sewage line funneling waste directly into a creek leading to the river, the state placed a ban on all new sewer line extensions in Siler City.

"Siler City has had about every problem that a sewer plant can have," says Doug Rader, a biologist with the North Carolina Environmental Defense Fund. "I've been down there five times. Four times I found excessive foam. I found sludge on the banks of the river. I've also seen a veritable sheen of fat on the surface of the river."

The pollution has gotten so bad that the city now plans to build a new sewage plant with twice the capacity of its current facility. The plant will be financed with a taxpayer-subsidized federal loan, which will be repaid through increased fees to local businesses and residents.

Although industry produces most of the waste, it pays the same rate as Siler City residents for sewage treatment. Even though the current plant is flooded with more waste than it can treat, it bases its

water fees on a decreasing rate structure — in other words, the more water Mid-State and Townsend use, the lower the rate they pay.

Friends of the Rocky River aren't thrilled with the idea of a bigger waste treatment plant. When the city announced plans to discharge dangerous levels of waste from the new facility, FORR forced officials to conduct a study which proved the need for stricter limits on discharge.

Tim Donnelly, the state water quality supervisor, says he would like to do a better job of enforcing pollution standards in Siler City, but lacks the staff. "We don't have the resources to get to any except the worst cases."

And that, says Connie Allred, is the problem. "I question the enforcement," she explains. "Siler City monitors its own effluent and its own pre-treatment because the state doesn't have enough manpower. It's like the fox guarding the hen house."

Photo by Betty Joyce Nash



Connie Allred on the Rocky River.



A poultry farmer spreads chicken manure on his pasture. Disposed of improperly, the waste can contaminate streams and wells.

of Raeford decided to take on the company itself. After citing the poultry firm with 100 violations last spring, the city threatened to stop treating company waste at the municipal sewer system.

"We've been awful lenient with them for years, giving them plenty of chances to comply," said City Manager Tom Phillips.

But the company fought back, and Superior Court Judge Craig Ellis ordered the city to continue providing water and sewage service to the company. "I'm right, and right is supposed to win," crowed House of Raeford President Marvin Johnson after the ruling. "I'm not cocky or anything. I just want to show my side. If they want me to leave, I'll shut it down."

When local officials filed criminal charges against the company, the courts again sided with the House of Raeford. A judge dismissed the charges, saying the company could not be accused of violating a permit it didn't even have. He fined the firm \$15,000 for misdemeanor pollution charges — and suspended the fine for five years.

Outside the courtroom, Johnson and company attorney Henry Jones were jubilant. "Until state lawmakers make it unlawful to violate a permit when you

don't have one, that's the way it is," Jones told a local reporter.

"Come by the office," Johnson laughed. "I'll give you a turkey."

DON'T DRINK THE WATER

Like the town of Raeford, some communities are starting to insist that poultry companies and farmers clean up their mess. Rockingham County, Virginia, one of the biggest poultry centers in the nation, now requires all new growers to submit a plan to dispose of all waste produced. Existing growers don't have to submit a plan until 1994.

But for the most part, regulation of poultry waste remains lax. Few growers in the South are required to come up with waste management plans. Arkansas, where poultry firms make 44 cents of every agricultural dollar, doesn't have any safeguards regulating dry waste from chicken farms and factories. In North Carolina, only two percent of all animal-growing facilities are inspected each year.

Some states are even considering eliminating the few environmental safeguards they do have. In North Carolina, the state agriculture department recently backed a bill that would exempt poultry

manure and other byproducts of food processing from state regulations. The result: Like growers, processors would not have to get a permit before they dumped waste on fields and streams.

"They will be free to disperse the greasy junk on open land as fertilizer, process it as animal-feed supplement, or put it to 'other beneficial agricultural uses,'" the *Raleigh News and Observer* editorialized. "The state agriculture department is once again on the wrong side, blandly hewing to its standard line that whatever agribusiness wants, agribusiness should get ... leaving Bre'r Fox in sole charge of the hen house."

As pollution from the poultry industry increases, citizens who have grappled with poultry companies say there is a better way. Companies must be required to take responsibility for all the waste they produce, from the farm to the factory. States must insist that firms build composters,

recycle manure, conserve water at slaughterhouses, and properly dispose of processed sludge — and officials must back up those regulations with regular inspections and strict enforcement.

Steve Work, the Arkansas glassblower, still remembers how sick he got every time he drank water from his well. "They say you can't drink the water in Mexico," he laughs. "Hell, I went there on a business trip once, and I felt *better!* The water quality there is better than it is here."

"Poultry companies are trying to shift the responsibility off onto the government," Work concludes. "They say, 'We pay our sewer bill, it's up to you to take care of whatever comes downstream.' Now, I'm not anti-industry by a long shot; we need business and jobs. But I do think it's time these polluters start acting like responsible citizens — before more damage is done." □

Denise Giardina is the author of the novel Storming Heaven. Eric Bates is managing editor of Southern Exposure. Betty Joyce Nash, a writer in Greensboro, North Carolina, also contributed to this story.

Research for this article was supported by the Institute for Southern Studies Poultry Project. If your community has a poultry waste problem, please contact the project at P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

SHORT STORIES & TALL TALES

All too often, fiction written about the American South by Southerners has been lumped together as one large stewpot of turgid romance and “local color” — a strange brew of moonlight, magnolias, and collards. It is as if we must expect to endure the nightmarish specter of repeated sequels to *Gone With the Wind* and *Tobacco Road* with each newly printed page. According to novelist Pat Conroy, his mother once reduced all Southern literature to a variation on a single story: “On the night the hogs ate Willie, Mama died when she heard what Papa did with sister.”

Such formulations tend to dismiss Southern literature and its creators as “regionalist,” as if to suggest a narrowness of vision, a lack of “universality” of experience. “If you are a Southern writer,” Flannery O’Conner said, “that label, and all the misconceptions that go with it, is pasted on you at once, and you are left to get it off as best you can.”

Yet it remains inescapably true that this region, more than any other in the country, has produced modern writers of unusual depth and talent, whose individual visions have spoken for entire generations of Americans, whose consistently outstanding achievement has received recognition worldwide. Nobel Laureate William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, Katherine Anne Porter, and others wrote extraordinary fiction in what came to be known as the “Southern Renaissance” of the 1930s and ‘40s. After them came Flannery O’Connor, Elizabeth Spencer, Reynolds Price, William Styron, Ernest Gaines, and Walker Percy, writers of remarkable power and range.

Today, the South is still producing immensely talented writers at an astonishing rate — Jill McCorkle, Larry Brown, Alice Walker, Tim McLaurin, Kaye Gibbons,

Dennis Covington, Clyde Edgerton, Harry Crews, Cormac McCarthy, and Dori Sanders, to name but a few. It’s as if there were something in the water or fertile ground that continually nurtures and sprouts these storytellers, that compels them to speak.

The diversity and vitality of Southern fiction spring from the traditions of the region itself — a strong sense of place, both geographical and spiritual; an age-old respect for storytelling, a love of metaphoric and colorful language, a singular appreciation of humor and wit; a preoccupation with the past, both personal and regional; a strong identification with community and family; a keen knowledge that violence, oppression, guilt, and pride command a significant part of the individual and collective psyche.

These traditions comprise a rich inheritance for modern Southern writers. Storytellers in the region draw upon great resources from their own experiences in their families, from stories and myths handed down through generations. Mingling fact, fantasy, memory, and desire, they create unforgettable stories about people who actually lived — and about fictional characters who come to life through the telling. Southern storytellers take the tales they hear from childhood on — overheard from the back seat of the car, in the grocery line, in the church parking lot, at the end of the tobacco row, at the fire station — and through their imaginations and keen observation of everyday events, they transform them into fiction with the power to reveal and to alter the course of our lives. As Eudora Welty observed in *The Optimist’s Daughter*, it is memory and its attendant grief and yearning, not the literal past, that forever haunts us. “It will come back in its wounds from across the world,” Welty writes, “calling us by our names and demanding its rightful tears.”

In recent years, as the region has become less distinct, some say this inheritance is in danger of being obscured or lost altogether. With its bleak proliferation of shopping malls and mobile homes, fast food franchises and high-tech office buildings, the modern Southern landscape has begun to look like any other. With the impact of television and interstates, the Southern rural life of distinct, tightly-knit communities is in peril.

But as the region has become more assimilated into the country as a whole, Southern writers have continued to grapple with the vexing character of the region they have inherited. For writers growing up in the South today, the region is still an ultimately confounding place. On the one hand, its communities nurtured them, providing close ties to neighbors, to church, and to agrarian traditions of reverence for family and fierce identification with local history. Relatively removed from mainstream industrialization, communities encouraged a love of storytelling, family mythmaking, and home-grown music and dance.

On the other hand, immersion in such strong cultural currents is not without its price. For thoughtful Southerners, the region's history of oppression, violence, poverty, and racism cannot be rationalized away. Nor can the region's extremes in religious fervor and politics be long ignored. Such intense contradictions in culture and upbringing demand a deep attention, require a painful struggle for identity. One simply must come to terms with the past, both personally and culturally. "The writer's attempt to understand the region," publisher Louis D. Rubin Jr. has written, "is an attempt to understand oneself."

As Ben Forkner and Patrick Samway point out in *Stories of the Modern South*, Southern writers have a need to write, to describe the world in which they live, "a world of change and contradiction — the slowly embroidered, front-porch legends of The War suddenly juxtaposed with the hurried forward march of the Chambers of Commerce, and all this under the deep shadow of racial discrimination."

The anguished relationship of Southern writers to their past and present has yielded distinctive, powerful, unforgettable fiction, as rich and varied as the many subcultures that make up the South itself. Like Southern music — which ranges from New Orleans jazz to old-timey mountain fiddle tunes, from cajun zydeco to urban rhythm and blues, from Mississippi Delta blues to gospel and bluegrass — Southern fiction is gloriously diverse and unpredictable.

The stories that appear in this special section of *Southern Exposure* reflect a deep appreciation for the past — and the ways it continues to haunt and enliven the present. Nanci Kincaid explores the subtle, yet forceful strictures and mores of race in a small Alabama town through the eyes of its children, both white and black. Lee Smith gives us the clear, unmistakable voice of a bitter mountain woman who reveals more than she realizes about the timeless themes of passion, jealousy, and loss. Tom Bailey examines one man's futile efforts to overcome enormous, yet subterranean barriers created by his own fears and obsessions. Ron Rash speaks quietly of two young men's search for dignity amid a growing awareness that their destinies are shaped by invisible shields of class. Reynolds



Price weaves memory and imagination together, transforming history into myth to create, as he puts it, a "coherent story that is at once both fiction and confession." And in a delightful essay on the origins of his own fiction, Allan Gurganus ponders the sometimes intractable nature of "true" stories in an anecdote handed down to him from his great grandfather and given renewed liveliness over generations through embellishment and repetition.

The only problem (if it can be called that) that we experienced in selecting stories for this section was an almost overwhelming wealth of creative work to choose from. What this special section came to be about, then, is celebration — of the diversity, strength, endurance, and triumph of Southern voices today. In this culture of transition and seemingly inevitable homogenization, these fictional voices remain genuine, arresting, and true, as unexpected and engaging as the region itself. □

—Susan Ketchin
Fiction Editor

NONNIE & THE MELUNGEON

Told By Zinnia Hulett

By Lee Smith

I never did know what ailed Nonnie. Don't know to this day! But she had ever chance for happiness, *ever chance* in the world mind you, which it is not given to all of us to have, and stomped ever one of them chances down in the dirt like a bug. It seemed that Nonnie was bent on destruction, from the womb.

Why, the very first thing she ever done was kill Mama!

I will not forget that night as long as ever I live. It was a cold snowy night in the middle of wintertime. Old Granny Horn had been with us going on a week, Daddy had went up her holler to fetch her when it commenced snowing to where you could not even see the boxwood bush by the front steps, nor that big huge rock there by the gate, nor yet the gate itself nor the fence neither, the snow had blowed hither and yon to where it had covered up what ought to have been, and made new hills and valleys all around.

I stood on the porch looking out, as I recall, while Mama moaned inside of the house and Daddy chopped wood out back even though it was the middle of the night. Granny Horn had sent him out

there finely, she said he was naught but a bother in the house. I stood still on the porch and looked out at the snow.

It was a new world out there! I didn't know nothing I saw. And white — Lord, it was white! So white it stayed kindly light all night long, and all the shadders was blue. It was scary. It would be days and days before a soul could get in or out through Flat Gap.

And I looked at that snow and felt glad for all them mason jars of tomaters and applesauce and greens and such as that which me and Mama had put up last summer, and for the sweet taters down in the grabbling hole under the porch, and for the shucky-bean leatherbritches hanging up in the rafters over the loft, and the chest full of cornmeal — *cornmeal enough to last till the baby is toothing*, Mama had said.

The first time I heerd about this baby was back last summer when Mama and me was out in the yard putting up butter beans. We had boiled the jars and lined them out in the sun, and the sun looked real pretty shining off of them. Mama stirred the butterbeans with a wooden paddle and wiped at her face with her apron.

Lee Smith was born in Grundy, Virginia and lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She is the author of seven novels, including Oral History, Family Linen, and Fair and Tender Ladies, and two collections of stories. This story is excerpted from her novel-in-progress, This World Is Not My Home.



Honey you don't have to stay out here and help me, she said. You can go over and play with Mickey if you've got a mind to.

No Mama, I said then. I like to help you. And it was true. For I was the best little girl! And I loved nothing more than helping my Mama, her voice was a song in my ears.

Zinnia, she said that day, straightening up, now I have some news for you. Come wintertime, we will have a baby in this house.

Where are we going to get it? I asked, for I did not know. I had heard that you found them under a cabbage leaf, or that a great owl bring them.

Mama smiled real nice and stroked my hair. God will bring

it, she said, and so I didn't think nothing of it when she grew so fat and got so tired, not until this neighbor girl come up and told me after meeting that the baby was in Mama's fat stomach, and then I hated the baby, for it had made my sweet Mama grow so big and sick, she wouldn't hardly play with me no more, and she cried all the time.

I had heard her crying at night and saying No Claude and They is something the matter and such as that. He said, It is God's will, Effie, which is just like him, he bowed always to the will of God.

And Mama bowed always to Daddy's will, which is how the Bible says it should be. In fact the only time I ever recall Mama

acting any way but dutiful was when that baby was in her, and I say it was all due to the nature of the baby.

For Nonnie had a troublesome nature from a child.

Things was never the same after that day we were out front canning, so that as I stood on the porch that winter night six months later and heard Mama screaming out in the house behind me, I was not surprised to look out and see the world all different, all changed before my eyes, nor to feel the wind blow offen the snow and chill me to the bone.

Granny Horn would say something, and then Mama would scream, and then Granny would say something else, and then Mama would scream again. Out back I heard Daddy, CHOP CHOP CHOP. I went back through the breezeway to see him. *Daddy*, I said. *Daddy*. But I couldn't see nothing out there but his big dark form in the pale blue light. I could see it when he raised the ax, black against the snow. I heard it when he brung it down. CHOP. CHOP. CHOP.

Daddy, I said, but he kept right on. CHOP. CHOP. CHOP. I stood out there wrapped up in a coverlet, hugging myself. Wasn't nobody else going to hug me, that was for sure! They was all too busy borning the baby to care about me.

And yet I had done all the work, for Granny Horn had said her old self was wore out, and axed me would I be her extry hands, and like a fool I said yes, so she had set me to fetching and carrying for her, what all she needed — the scissors, the string, the borning cloths, water a-boiling in the big black pot. While I done all this, Mama just laid up in the bed staring out over her great stomach at me with her dark eyes real big in her thin face.

Now come here Zinnia, she said. This was right before the sun went down. And I went over there, and Mama smoothed back my hair and touched the mark on my face real gentle, the way she always done, and pulled me down to her, and kissed me.

Now you be a good girl, Mama said, and so I was, and did not cry.

But it galled me standing out there in the freezing cold in the middle of the night, why I could of froze to death for all they knowed, or cared! I was just a little girl. Too little to see what happened next, which was awful.

Claude, Granny Horn called out real sharp. *Claude*.

I ran back to the edge of the breezeway. *Daddy*, I hollered. *Granny Horn wants you*. I hollered out many times before he come, and even then he said nothing to me, but pushed me out of the way as he passed by. Now this was not like Daddy, but the Devil was in the house that night and had got into Daddy so it was not his fault.

I follered him in the open door.

Firelight was jumping everywhere. Mama was supposed to be laying on the borning quilt but she had kicked it ever whichaway and wadded it all up, she was thrashing so. Her long

black hair streamed all across the bed tick and her shift was jerked up so her big white belly and her private parts were visible. Granny Horn was a huge old woman, as big as any man, but it was plain to see that even she was having trouble keeping Mama on the bed. Mama's eyes was rolled back in her head and her hands was just clutching at everything, and you could not understand a word she said.

Now this awful sight did not jibe with my sweet Mama, you can be sure. I knowed she would be terrible ashamed to act so. I mean, iffen she was in her natural mind a course, which she was not. For Mama was a God-fearing woman with the nicest, quietest way about her as a rule.

Claude, bile me a good knife, Granny Horn said.

Daddy made this awful noise in his throat.

Go on now, Granny Horn said. *Time's a-wasting. This is a bitches-baby*, she said. *Hit aint going to come by hitself*.

Now I did not know what that meant, and didn't nobody tell me neither. I sat down in my little canebottom chair and waited to see what would happen. I looked at the fan pattern quilt on my own little bed tick, at the snow out the open door, at the leaping fire. I looked everyplace but at my mama.

Now you hold her. Hold her shoulders down, Granny Horn said in a loud voice to Daddy, who done it, and then I looked, but all I could see from where I sat was Granny Horn's wide back as she leaned over Mama, and Mama's skinny white legs poking out on either side.

Push, Effie. Push! Granny Horn hollered. I seen the flash of the knife in the firelight. Then Mama screamed out once, a high thin sound so pitiful it has stayed in my ears forever, and then blood was everplace, a river of blood it seemed like, soaking Granny Horn from the waist down and turning the borning quilt and bed tick red.

Lord God in Heaven, Granny Horn said, but she was not praying. She was grunting and heaving, pulling and pulling, and then I seed the flash of the knife again, in and out, in and out, and Granny helt up the baby, now this was Nonnie, by its feet. But it looked so awful, I didn't have no sense that it was a baby. But Granny slapped it until it cried. Then she flung it down in the cradle that they had there, *my cradle* mind you that Daddy had made for me, and left it squalling while she worked on Mama, and this gone on all night, them packing ever cloth they could find in in there, and even using snow finely to try and stop the bleeding, but nothing worked.

Daylight come and the whole cabin was a wet bloody mess and Mama was going, she did not know us. The baby whined in its cradle but Mama did not appear to heed it. For a long time her hands was still clutching and clutching at the air, but then she stopped that. Her hands closed up, her fingers curled like fiddlehead ferns. Her eyes was wide and staring until Granny Horn closed them. Granny Horn stood up then, finely. I know she was six feet tall.

Claude, where is yer likker at? she said, but Daddy would not leave Mama, he was laid acrost her bosom weeping like a child.

Claude! Granny Horn said sharp.

I'll git it, I said then, for I knew where he kept it in the loft, and I clumb up there and found a jar and brung it down to her. Granny Horn took a big swig of it, it was white likker, and looked at me directly for the first time.

Honey you go and lay down now, she said, and I done it. No sooner did I hit the bed tick then I was fast asleep, the soundest sleep in the world I reckon, for I slept all that day until night again, and when I woke it was dark and the fire was going and Mama was not there, nor Daddy, and Granny Horn was cleaning with a great pot of water and the baby was crying hard. Granny Horn gave me some johnnycake then and said to eat it and then said to go back to bed, and I done so, and when I woke again it was morning, another day, and the sun was shining offen the snow all around, but it would be some several more days afore you could get in or out through the gap.

I do not remember these days too good, to tell the truth. They seem to me now as a blaze of light, sun offen the snow. I know what happened, though.

Granny Horn laid Mama out on a plank they rigged up in the springhouse, and we kept her there until it thawed enough to bury her. So Mama was laid out and froze, finely and factually, in the springhouse.

When it got to where Granny Horn could get through the gap she done so, taking the baby, as Daddy would not leave Mama. She took the baby to a woman that had one, so it could get some titty, and while Nonnie was gone, I played like she had never been borned. I played like I was the baby.

Then Granny Horn came back, which I hated, for she was so big and rough, she was the furtherest thing in the world from my sweet mama.

Sometimes I would go out to the springhouse and see my mama, although they had said not to, but I had figgered out the latch and sometimes I'd steal out there, and talk to Mama laying on the plank. They had covered her face with a camphor rag which smelt terrible, in fact you could not stay in the springhouse long because of it, you'd start choking. Once I picked up Mama's hand but it was so cold, I laid it back acrost her bosom where they'd had it.

I don't have no memory now of exactly how long Mama stayed in the springhouse, but it was a good long while. I got used to having her there, in fact, and was sorry when it thawed enough to where the neighbor folks come up and they buried her.

Now Daddy acted awful all this while, he would not look at

nobody, nor talk to them, and when the neighbor folks left, he would not talk to me either, not for the longest time. Then one time when I brung him some food, he said, *Well, Zinnia, I reckon you will have to be the little wife around here now,* and I said I would, and I have done for him the best I could, ever since. Nobody could have done better.

But now it seems to me that the one who is *there* all the time, the one who is cooking and mending and fetching water and just doing in general what needs to be done, well *that* one gets precious little attention. It is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease every time. And I have gotten mighty little appreciation over the years, all because of that hateful little Nonnie.

I say hateful. And she *was* hateful, but she had everybody else fooled but me. She had them all eating right out of her hand, by acting so sweet. I know acting when I see it. And I was the one that had to go around picking up after her and saying *Did you eat yer supper Nonnie* and *Don't play in the rain Nonnie* and such as that.



For Nonnie was the silliest, mooniest child you ever saw, not one grain of sense in her head! She would of starved to death or killed herself a hundred times if it hadn't of been for me. She would have killed herself over and over doing the crazy things she done, such as swinging on grapevines and playing with snakes. She never had a thought in the world for what might happen to her.

And was lazy to boot! If you asked her to churn, she might start out a-churning, then she'd be churning and singing, then she'd just be singing, and wander off singing, and allow the cream to clabber in the churn. Many's the time she done that, and many's the slap I give her for it. Oh I done my duty, rest assured of it, but I just couldn't get through to her, so it done no good in the end. As a littlun, Nonnie was all the time a-singing, and different folkses would come by the house and learn her new songs, for she took to it so.

I could not carry a tune in a bucket myself, and don't give a damn to. For, what good does it do you in the end? What good did it do Nonnie? As a girl, her favorite song was

The cuckoo she's a pretty bird
She sings as she flies
She brings us glad tidings
And she tells us no lies.
She sucks all pretty flowers
To make her voice clear
And she never sings cuckoo
Till the spring of the year.

And to this day, that song reminds me of Nonnie and how

silly she was. But Daddy was plumb fooled by her, and when she was little he used to carry her to town on the front of his saddle and then set her up on the counter in the store to sing to folks. Daddy never took me to town on his saddle, I might add. Of course I would not have cared to be displayed thataway nohow, but you ought to treat children equal I say, and not favor one over the other so.

Well in all fairness, I know that Daddy did not favor Nonnie because of Nonnie her ownself. No, he favored Nonnie because she was the spitting image of Mama. Everybody said so. So it was not Nonnie's fault, in a way, but she got spoiled rotten all the same. And she was not all that pretty neither, never mind what folks said. She was kind of dreamy and dish-faced if you ask me. Not to mention contrary. Now, we all know what a woman's lot is, but Nonnie wouldn't have no part of it! We'd be sitting by the fire of a night, for an instance, and I'd be doing piecework on my lap, but Nonnie she'd have flung herself flat down on the floor and be a-staring and a-staring into the fire, and not doing a blessed thing with her hands. When you'd call her, it was like she was off in the clouds someplace.

Nonnie, I said one time, then *Nonnie* real loud and sharp. Oh she looked up then.

Nonnie, what air ye a-looking at, anyway? I axed her, and do you know what she said? She said she'd seen figures a-dancing, dancing in the flames!

Of course later I remembered her answer real good, in light of the awful thing that would come to pass, but at the time it just hit me as more of her foolishness.

And as she got older, she got worse. She started in a-wanting to go to play-parties with the big gals and fellers when she was not but about twelve years old, just ragging Daddy to let her go, and of course he done it finely, for he always let Nonnie do exactly what she pleased.

Zinnia, you go with her and watch out for her, Daddy told me the first time he let her go, but I would not do it.

I don't care to go, was all I said. Hadn't Daddy seed that I hadn't never gone to a play-party myself in all them years? For I am no fool. And I knowed them boys would pass me by, a-stepping Charley, and I refused pint-blank to give them the satisfaction.

I didn't care for boys then, and I don't care for men now. They are nothing but a vexation and a distraction, and can't none of them hold a candle to Daddy anyhow.

But Nonnie, she'd go or die, and then she'd be mooning around over first one and then another. She used to sing this little song

Oh I wonder when I shall be married
Oh be married

Oh be married
Oh I wonder when I shall be married
Or am I beginning to fade?

It was the dumbest little song I ever heerd, and she was the dumbest little girl I ever saw to sing it, and I said so. Didn't faze Nonnie, though. She'd swat away my words like they was flies.

And when we would go anyplace, if it was meeting or the store or anyplace at all, why she would flirt with the boys till it was shameful. But didn't none of them come up here, for Daddy had said that they was not to, and most folks was kindly afeared of Daddy. Daddy thought none of them boys was good enough for our Nonnie, she had really pulled the wool over his eyes.

Anyway *Zinnia must have a husband first*, Daddy said at the table one night just to devil us, but I just laughed and said, *The last thing in the world I need is a husband. I need a husband like I need a hole in the wall*, I said. And whatever would you all do without me anyway, if I was to leave? I axed them, for we were eating supper which I had cooked, mind you. *You-uns would starve to death*, I said.

And do you know what Daddy done? Why he reached over across the table and took Nonnie's hand. *Why Nonnie will be the little housewife then*, he said, grinning, he was just funning her because he would not have let me go for the world, mind you, but silly little Nonnie busted into tears and ran out of the house a-blubbering.

Oh I will never get married, she wailed. *You all won't let me*, she wailed. *If I have to wait for Zinnia I'll be an old maid*, she wailed out in the yard while Daddy and me sat on at the table and finished eating supper.

The truth of it was, Daddy wanted Nonnie to stay in school as long as ever she would, I believe he had kindly a hankering for Nonnie to make a teacher like one of Daddy's aunts done, over in Tennessee. Oh, he wanted the world for our Nonnie! And she could of had it too, it was hers for the taking. And it was all right with me, mind you, for Nonnie to get all that schooling, as I couldn't get nothing at all done with her mooning around under-foot day in and day out, I was plumb glad to see her go flouncing out that door to school. She used to ride her little pony down to the schoolhouse every day, this was a white pony that Daddy had bought for her over in Sparta, that she named Snowy. I had not took to school too good myself, truth to tell. It seemed like a waste of time to me. But Nonnie she liked it fine, and the school-teacher, Mister Harkness, set a big store by her. She had him wrapped around her little finger too.

I recall one time when our preacher, Mister Cisco Estep, was questioning Daddy about Nonnie's schooling and what did Daddy mean by it, for the Bible itself says that too many books is a sin.

I will not forget what Daddy answered him.

Cisco, he said, *Nonnie is a soft girl, like her mother. I do not*

want her to get all wore out by hard work like her mother done. I feel real bad about her mother, Daddy said.

This is the only time I ever heard Daddy say anything about Mama, or saw him look so mushy in the face.

I want Nonnie to have a better life, Daddy said.

But Nonnie, she didn't care nothing about that, all she wanted was a feller. Nonnie was just a fool waiting to happen.

And one day sure enough she came back from going down into Cana with some of the neighbor people, looking like she had a fine mist of moondust laid all over her. Her black eyes was as shiny as coal.

Well, who is he? I axed straight away, for I knowed immediately what was up.

Nonnie would always answer you right back, and truthful too. She was too dumb to do otherwise. *Oh Zinnia,* she said, *I was just standing in the road talking to some folks when this man rode in on a gray horse. He was a man that none of us had ever seed before, and not from around here. He is real different looking, real handsome, like a man in a song. Anyway, he looked at me good as he rode past,* she said. *I looked at him and he looked at me,* Nonnie said all dreamy, and I said *So?* for this did not sound like much to me. *Well then he got off and hitched the horse up at the rail there and come right over to where I was standing in the road talking to Missus Black, and he takes off his hat and kindly bows down like a prince, you never saw the beat of it. Then he says, What is yer name? and I told him, and Where do you live? and I told him that too.*

Oh Nonnie, I said. *He can't come up here. You don't know a thing about him.*

Nonnie flashed her eyes at me and bit her pouty lip. *He has got some money from a previous venture,* she said, *real high falutin. And he aims to settle in these parts.*

Well, sure enough, here he come, and sure enough, Daddy run him off. He met with the man, whose name was Jake Toney, in private afore he run him off. Nonnie sat on a chair out in the yard, just tapping her foot, while Daddy talked to Jake Toney. Then she saw fit to keep quiet for the length of time it took Jake Toney to get back on his gray horse and ride out of sight, but as soon as he was gone, she just threwed herself on Daddy like a wildcat from Hell, crying and clawing at his eyes and hitting at him, and Daddy just held her out at arm's length and let her fight till she either calmed down or wore out, one.

Now listen here, girls, he said, when Nonnie had finely quit fighting. *That man there is a Melungeon, and he won't be coming up here again. I knowed it as soon as I saw him,* Daddy said.

A what? Nonnie said, and then Daddy told us about the Melungeons, that is a race of people which nobody knows where they came from, with real pale light eyes, and dark skin,

and frizzy hair like sheep's wool. Sure enough, this is what Jake Toney looked like all right.

Niggers won't claim a Melungeon, Daddy told us. *Injuns won't claim them neither.*

The Melungeon is alone in all the world, Daddy said, and at these words, Nonnie ran off crying. She was so spoilt by then, she couldn't believe she couldn't have anything she wanted.

Well, Nonnie cried for some several days after that, but then Daddy made her go back to school, and just about as soon as she started back, she cheered up considerable. In fact she cheered up *too* fast, and I don't know, there was just something about her that made me feel funny, not funny ha-ha, but funny peculiar. They was something there that did not meet the eye. So one day when Nonnie rode off to school, I determined to ride over toward Cana myself, not an hour behind her. I told Daddy I was going to the store.

I can't say that I was surprised when I come riding around the bend there where that little old falling-down cabin is, that used to belong to the widderwoman, and seed the gray horse and the little white pony hitched up in front of it. I got off my horse and tethered her back there in the woods and then walked kindly tippytoe over to the cabin, but I need not have gone to the trouble. For they were making the shamefullest, awfullest racket you ever heard in there, laughing and giggling and moaning and crying out, and then he'd be breathing and groaning at the same time, and then he hollered out, and then she did.

School, my foot!

You had better believe I told our Daddy what was going on in that cabin!

So he was waiting on the front porch that afternoon when Nonnie came riding home on her little pony. He did not let on, though.

Evening, honey, Daddy says.

Evening, Daddy, says Nonnie as sweet as ever you please.

How was school? Daddy axed and Nonnie said, *Fine, sir,* and when he axed her what did they do today, why she commenced upon some big lie about geography, but before she got halfway done with it, Daddy had struck her on the shoulder with his riding crop, knocking her on the ground, and then he beat her acrost the back with it until she cried for mercy with her hands before her face. I did not lift a finger to help her neither, for she deserved it. Nor did I comfort Nonnie when she lay crying in the bed, not until way up in the night when finely I brung her some tea and some biscuit. Which she did not touch, hateful as ever.

And in the morning she was gone.

She had lit out in the dead of night on her pony, gone down to find her Melungeon at Mrs. Rice's boardinghouse where he stayed, and I couldn't tell you what passed betwixt the two of them when she got there, but the next day he was up and gone.

before daybreak, alone. And then what did that silly Nonnie do? Why, she locked herself up in Jake Toney's room all broken-hearted, wouldn't come out for nothing. Mrs. Rice had to send up to the house for me to come and get her.

Jake Toney left owing money all over town as it turned out, one jump ahead of the law. He owed a lot of people due to the poker game he had been running regular in the back of the livery stable. Mrs. Rice was fit to be tied, as he left owing her considerable, also old Baldy McClain that ran the livery stable and was supposed to have gotten a cut on the game.

They all liked to have died when they found out that Jake Toney was a Melungeon to boot, which I told Mrs. Rice first thing when I went down there to get Nonnie. Mrs. Rice's jaw dropped down about a foot. The news was all over town inside of a hour.

As for our Nonnie, she was mighty pale and mighty quiet, riding home. For once she had nothing to say. She was not a bit like herself after that, and would not go back to school for love nor money, but stayed at home not doing a thing but crying and looking out at the mountains from time to time. This like to have killed Daddy, for deep down in secret, he is real soft-hearted. He brung Nonnie everything he could think of to cheer her up, including a silver hairbrush and a silk scarf.

Iffen I was to go off in the bushes with every Tom, Dick, and Harry that come along, I axed Daddy, do ye reckon I could get me one of them scarves?

Whereupon Nonnie turned right around and gave it to me, of all things! I was not too proud to take it neither. In fact I felt gratified to take it, after all the trouble she had put me to. For Nonnie owed me, and that's a fact.

Well, we never seed hide nor hair of the Melungeon again, but Nonnie continued grieving him for months on end, and laying up in the bed all day long doing it. Then one day I looked at her good, and all of a sudden it come to me that she was going to have a baby.

No I aint, she lied to Daddy, flashing her eyes, but we sent for Granny Horn who found out the truth of it soon enough.

And then here comes Preacher Cisco Estep, hat in hand, a-knocking on the door.

I'll tell you what's the truth, he said to Daddy, when the two of them had set down. *I would send her off someplace if hit was me.*

But whar'd she go? She belongs here, Daddy said real pitiful. His eyes was all red from crying and staying up late.

Well now Claude, think about it, Preacher Estep said. *If she tried to come to meeting in her condition and unwed, I'd be forced to church her, as ye know. And around here, everbody knows who she is and what she done, and won't nobody take a Melungeon's leavings around here neither, not to mention the child. This is the long and short of it*, Preacher Estep said. *But if*

she was to go somewheres else, say, she might have a chance for a new life. In fact, Preacher Estep said real forceful, *In fact, Claude, I have got a proposition for you*. Preacher Estep took out a hankerchief and wiped at his big red fleshy nose, that looks like a sweet tater.

Well what is it? Daddy said without no hope.

Well they is a man I heerd about at the past Association meeting that needs a wife the worst in the world, Preacher Cisco Estep said. *He is in a fair way to come into quite a parcel of land over at Mossy Branch, what is now Preacher Stump's place, but he don't have no wife, nor no children to work it. He is a elder in the Chicken Rise Church too. So Preacher Stump has let it out to all and evry that he hisself aint long fer this world, and he would like to see this feller settled down regular on his land. Hit's a nice piece of land*, Preacher Estep said, *and I don't believe this feller is too particular neither.*

Daddy looked at him. You could tell he was considering it.

I wouldn't see no reason to mention the Melungeon, Preacher Estep said.

Done, Daddy said.

And so this is how Nonnie come out smelling like a rose one more time, and got a great prize for being bad. For that land over at Mossy Branch turned out to be among the prettiest I have ever seed, and hit turned out to be a fine big double cabin over there — finer and bigger then our own, I might add — and I was further surprised to find out that Ezekiel Bailey hisself was not so bad to look at neither. He come out to the wagon grinning when we drove up, and he was just as nice to me as ever he was to that silly Nonnie who done nothing but cry and cry, and he did not even appear to notice my face none. I remarked upon how tight he held my arm when he helped me down off the wagon, and how much he appeared to like the fried apple pies we had brung them — which I had made! — and I knowed in my heart of hearts that Ezekiel Bailey preferred me over Nonnie. Yet I resolved not to act on this, nor to tell no one, for I would not disappoint Daddy by leaving him, he needs me so.

Daddy said as much too when me and him was driving back through Flat Gap late that night after leaving Nonnie over on Mossy Branch with old bent-over Preacher Stump and Ezekiel Bailey her husband to be.

It was too dark for me to see good even though the stars was out, because of how the mountains rise up there directly in the gap. It was black as tar in the gap, but I could tell that Daddy was crying, and when he spoke, his voice was irregular. *If I ever lay eyes on him again, I'll kill him*, Daddy said after a while, meaning the Melungeon. Then after another while, he said, *Well, hit's jest you and me now, aint it Zinnia girl?* and so I took his old work-hard hand and held it in mine, and so it has been ever since, just me and him, the way it ought to be, ever since that very night when we was riding home through Flat Gap in the pitch-black night, the night so dark I didn't have no birthmark, and I was just as pretty as Nonnie. □



ANY CRAZY BODY

By Nanci Kincaid

Annie didn't have a mean bone in her body.

Walter said it looked like bones were all she did have as skinny as she was.

She was about twelve when we moved in next door. Right off she acted like she'd been knowing us. Her sitting outside looking after a yard full of boys who hardly minded a thing she said, and from the beginning she did Roy and me just like them, saying motherish things to us too, like the queen of backyards, her skinny self dashing around, looking into everything that goes on.

"Don't eat nothing until you wash your hands. Keep away from that hornet's nest. Go ask your Mama do she have any more boiled peanuts and see can we have them? Why that boy always wearing them hot boots?" Like that. Me and Roy liked Annie right away. She was bossy exactly like a real mother and she was only twelve. If I was her I wouldn't claim those wild brothers of hers, especially not Skippy, who was dedicated to starting trouble.

Once he put a snake down the back of Annie's shirt when she was out in the yard. She screamed for one hour. She screamed long after that snake fell to the ground and scrambled off. Nobody could get her to stop. Melvina and Mother went tearing up to Melvina's

house to see what was wrong and then Melvina whipped Skippy with all of us watching. She whipped him hard. "If you ever do that again you're going to jail," Melvina said. "You can be sent to jail for causing somebody to have a heart attack."

Skippy didn't cry, but Annie kept crying the whole time. Just thinking about that snake touching her skin made her flinch and jerk her shoulders. Mother felt so sorry for Annie that she let her come down to our house and eat Vienna sausages and a banana popsicle.

Skippy said it wasn't fair and tried to make me go get him a popsicle too. "As soon as hell freezes over," I said.

It seemed like Melvina being our maid was not enough. She wanted Mother to get Annie to hang out the wash or do the ironing. Something Annie could get paid for.

"Annie's got enough of a job watching after that yard full of children while you come down here and work, Melvina," Mother said. "If Annie needs to be doing something, she needs to be going to school."

Me and Roy knew Mother's education speech by heart, how the educated person

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didn't have to be afraid, how the educated person can change things. When she started talking about education is the answer to everything she got on everybody's nerves — bad. Me and Roy and Melvina hated it. Everybody hated it.

"I can't keep the girl in a pair of shoes," Melvina said.

"If Annie had an education she could buy herself all the shoes she wanted," Mother said. Me and Roy gagged and rolled our eyes. "If Annie had an education she could change the world."

"You educated," Melvina said to Mother. "I don't see you changing nothing. If it's the same to you I'll let somebody else's girl change the world."

Mother thinks it is pathetic that Melvina cannot see the value of a good education. "Lack of education is what's holding the colored back, Melvina. Can't you see that? I swear, you can't see the woods for the trees."

"I ain't trying to see no woods," Melvina said. "I'm trying to get out the woods. Chopping down one day at a time."

"What about the big picture, Melvina? What about tomorrow?"

"I got today standing in the way of tomorrow," she said.

Which is why it was a paying job Melvina wanted for Annie. Nothing less. We are just regular white people, but Melvina acts like there is no end to the money we got. She wants Walter to pay Skippy to mow the yard, and Alfonso Junior to clean pine straw out of the gutters, and Orlando to pick up the pecans in the yard. Walter never will do it though. So Mother is Melvina's only hope. Since Mother went to FSU for two years she is more educated than Walter and acts accordingly. Walter says Mother majored in changing the world when secretarial school would have done her more good. But Mother takes her education seriously and Melvina knows how to make her prove it.

Melvina hit on the idea of Annie babysitting me, Roy and Benny some night when Mother and Walter went out. But Mother and Walter never went out. Not without taking us. Every blue moon they might go eat at the Elks Club. Once, right after they got married, on Mother's birthday, Walter took her all the way to the beach at Alligator Point to the Oak's Seafood Restaurant, and our granddaddy came down from Alabama to stay with us.

But once the idea took hold Melvina started saying, "A man like Mr. Sheppard ought to take his wife out once in a while." And Mother started to believe it too. "Mr. Sheppard makes good money, don't he?" Melvina asked. "He can afford it, can't he?" and pretty soon Mother had taken up the cause — Annie babysitting for us one night while she and Walter went someplace nice.

Nobody asked me and Roy and little Benny what we thought about the idea, but Walter didn't think much of it. "Annie's no babysitter," Walter said. "She don't have sense to come in out of the rain." So Mother argued with him. "I'm not sure that girl is

all there — not entirely," he said. And Mother argued. "She doesn't even know how to use the telephone," he insisted.

"I'll show her," Mother said. "I'll write down the fire department, and the police, and the hospital numbers and set them right beside the telephone."

"I don't like nothing about this," Walter said and then gave up.

And you never saw such a to-do made over anything like Annie babysitting us. "She's not going to boss me around," is all Roy said. "She can babysit if she wants to, but I don't have to mind a colored girl, do I, Walter?" Walter made a noise in his throat and left the room.

Mother made Annie come down to our house and practice on the telephone. About one hundred times she called the Tallahassee Bank and Trust to listen to their recorded advertisement and get the correct time. Finally Annie said she could dial the number with her eyes closed and Roy, Mother, Melvina and me stood around and watched her, and sure enough, she COULD dial it with her eyes closed. Then Mother wrote out the emergency numbers and scotch-taped them beside the telephone. She drew a little fire beside the fire department number and a little bullet beside the police number. "Just in case," she said.

When Skippy heard about Annie babysitting us he got one of his stupid ideas. He said as soon as Mother and Walter left home for us to let him and Alfonso Junior and all the rest of their brothers come in the house to look at television. He said they will watch for Walter's car to go off down the road, then they will come down to our house and for us to let them in.

Annie got mad and said she was not going to do any such thing. "Babysitting is a paid job and I'm going to do it like a paid job," she said.

"We ain't gon hurt nothing," Skippy said.

It was the craziest idea I ever heard. We cannot have a house full of colored people with Mother and Walter not home. Not colored boys all up in our house.

"No sense in you keep asking," Annie said to Skippy.

"We ain't gon hurt nothing," he said again.

"That's right," Annie said. "You ain't gon hurt nothing because you ain't gon be there."

"One colored person is all right," I explained to Skippy, "but it can't be a bunch of them. Don't you see? A colored girl is all right, but colored boys cannot go around in people's houses."

Skippy ignored me. "Tell him, Annie," I said.

I stood there thinking about it. I do not even know how colored boys look on furniture. How do they look in an indoors room? I tried to picture it, me and Roy sprawled out to watch a little television with Annie and a room full of moving around colored boys, stepping over us on the floor, sitting here one

minute, there one minute, picking up everything we have to look it over, setting their bare feet up on everything, handling everything. What if they decide they will go off with some of our stuff, like they unplug a nice lamp and walk out the door with it, or Skippy shoves Walter's favorite chair across the floor and squeezes it out the door and hauls it off. Who will stop him? Who will say, "Skippy, you put that chair back. You know better than to go off with a chair that doesn't belong to you."

So it won't do. Annie has to tell him.

"We are just as sorry as we can be," Annie says, her hands on her hips, "but you cannot come in that house to watch TV." Annie turns into the Queen of England telling it. Her part is grand. Yes, I will be in those white people's house eating some of their supper, drinking their cold drinks, bossing their kids, watching TV, and making all matter of important decisions. "You mize well forget it," she tells Skippy.

"You gon be sorry," Skippy says.

"If you come around, I'll let you in," Roy tells Skippy. "I don't have to mind a colored girl."

Roy needs his mouth taped shut. I tell Mother that all the time.

On Saturday night Mother and Walter get all fixed up and go off with some friends of Walter's that work at the highway department with him. They go to eat catfish at a new catfish place close to Lake Jackson. Mother has Benny asleep in bed before they leave so Annie just has to watch Roy and me. Mother says for us to turn on the TV and sit in the living room and watch it. She kisses us and says, "Go to bed when Annie says to and behave yourselves." We say 'yes ma'm' and she hurries out to where Walter is sitting in the car waiting, with a necktie on.

Annie is just smiling and smiling. Us too. Annie gets us like that just by doing it herself, smiling. Melvina has plaited Annie's hair real nice. And Annie has promised she is going to put braids in my hair, she's good at it, making me crazy-looking hair-dos. Plaits everywhere, like colored girls.

It isn't dark yet when she first gets there, but we stay inside anyway and watch TV like Mother said. It was the Jack Benny night, with Rochester. Annie sent me for a comb and sat there combing through my hair, getting the tangles out.

"Your hair don't want to do nothing but lay down flat on your head," she said.

"I know that," I said.

After a while Annie fixed us some peanut-butter crackers and everything was going good. Roy was lying up on the sofa in his boots and cowboy hat eating his crackers Roy Rogers style. I

was sitting on the floor and Annie was sitting on a chair behind me starting on my hair-do and saying my hair is too slick to do nothing with — when the doorbell rings.

It was the first we had noticed it was dark outside.

"Go see who it is," Roy said.

Now even though there was a street light out by the road, all the way around the house was just woods in every direction.

"Who's at the door?" Annie asked us.

"We don't know," we said. "How should we know?"

But the truth is we were all three thinking the same thing. We were thinking it was Skippy and Alfonso Junior and every other colored boy in Tallahassee lined up out there to get in our house and watch Jack Benny.

"Answer the door," Roy said again.

"I'm going to kill Skippy," Annie mumbled. She slowly

opened the door that led out to the porch. We couldn't see a thing. Me and Roy were one step behind Annie while she walked all the way to the porch door, rattled it, and said to us, "You ought to have a latch on here." Rattled it some more and said, "Nobody's here." We filed slowly back into the house. Jack Benny was joking with Rochester on TV. We felt kind of glad to see him.

About the time Annie got the door closed good the doorbell rang again. "Who's there?" she yelled real loud.

No answer.

"Who is it?" she yelled again.

Still no answer.

"It's Skippy," I whispered. "You can't let him in, Annie."

"Skippy?" she hollered, "You get away from here."

Roy and me were getting excited. We snuck over to the window and poked our heads out the curtains, our noses pushed up against the glass. It was too black to see anything.

"Lock the door, Annie," we said. "In case they try to bust in."

Annie looked at us like we were stupid. "I already locked it."

Then Roy bellows out the window, "Skippy, if you want in this house come around to the back door and I'll let you in."

There was no answer so Roy hollered again, "You can come in this house if you want to." But there was silence for the longest time until Roy gave up and sheepishly turned to face me and Annie. "He can come in this house if he wants to," he said.

"Shut your stupid mouth, Roy," I said.

We waited what seemed like a long time for something to happen.

"Why don't he come?" Roy whispered.

"Because," Annie said. The way she said it gave me and Roy the creeps. She looked so serious, like she knew more than she was telling. "We got to turn off the lights so they can't see in,"



she said, and right then she snapped the TV off. Me and Roy grabbed her hands. The three of us shuffled over to the one small lamp that was still on, but Roy and me clung so tight to Annie that she couldn't get a hand loose to turn it off. "Let go, you fool," she whispered. Roy let go of her hand just long enough for her to flip the switch.

Then complete darkness. That darkness that has little spurts of color shooting through it. Quiet. We listened until the quiet started blaring. It sounded like crickets surrounding the house had gone hysterical.

"Go lock the back door," Annie told Roy, but he was too scared to do it, so we all three moved to the kitchen like a stuck-together statue. Our feet did not lift up off the floor. In the kitchen Annie pried loose from us and while we clung to her clothes she turned the lock on the back door. Relief went over us.

Then we heard footsteps and a sudden pounding on the back door. KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! right at our faces. All the air went out of the room like it does at a swimming pool when you go under.

"Make him quit it, Annie," I said.

"It's Skippy," Roy said. "Let him in," and he reached to unlatch the door.

"Wait!" Annie ordered. She tilted the edge of the kitchen curtains to look out. Nobody was there. Nobody. "It's not Skippy out there," she whispered.

"It's got to be," I said. "Who else ...?"

"It ain't him," Annie said. Me and Roy tried to make out Annie's face in the dark. "Skippy would not be messing with his chance to watch TV," she said. "If it was him he'd be in this house by now. Nobody wouldn't have to ask him twice." Her face was serious.

Me and Roy froze. We like to know EXACTLY what it is we are afraid of.

"But it's got to be him ..." I said.

"No such thing as got-to-be," Annie said. Her voice was very quiet. "How do you know it ain't white men heard I'm keeping y'all by myself and come to get me? How you know it ain't some crazy body seen us in the window? It could be any crazy body out there."

Me and Roy listened. Annie made good sense in complete darkness.

"It could be drunk niggers trying to break in this house," Roy said, wild-eyed.

"It might be somebody escaped from Chattahoochie," Annie said.

"Or broke out of jail," Roy said. "Convict off the chain gang. Or anything."

"We got to hide," Annie told us.

"Yes," me and Roy whispered, "let's hide. We got to hide."

"Call the police first, Annie," I whispered.

"You think I'm crazy?" Annie said. Her voice was scaring me too.

"Please," I begged. "Mother wrote the number ..."

Annie clamped her hand over my mouth, her eyes shooting right into mine. "I may be scared, but I ain't crazy," she said. "Not that crazy." Her words were sharp as a pocketknife.

At Annie's command we caravanned into my bedroom and crawled up under the bed — all three of us — with Annie in the middle. We lay on our stomachs, flat and still. Twice Annie caught one of her plaits on a wire hanging from the bed springs. Both times her head was caught from the back, she couldn't turn to either side. She was stiff necked until me and Roy fumbled around in the dark and unhooked her from the rusty wires. It hurt, but Annie didn't cry. "It's okay," Roy told her, "just keep your head down like this." He rolled his head from side to side on the wood floor.

The bed skirt hung down and covered us up. There is something nasty about lying underneath a bed skirt in the dark. "Can't nobody see us now," Annie said.

We lay there in silence a few minutes. Then I start thinking about the world coming to an end. Anything could happen. The Russians could drop a bomb on Tallahassee. Lightning could strike the house. Poisonous snakes could slither out of the hall closet and bite us. And I am suddenly aware I have never been the good person I always meant to be.

"I love you, Annie," I said. "You know. In case we die. I love you too, Roy." Then Annie said out loud that she loved me and Roy too. It was easy to say, lying under a bed in the dark. But Roy wouldn't say it.

After the floor started to get hard Annie made Roy scoot out from under the bed and get us a pillow so we could lay our heads down better. She got him to do it by telling him how brave it would be and how it would mean he had more guts than both of us — him being a boy and us just being girls. At first he said he wouldn't. He said why didn't Annie make me do it since I was older. But then we said, "Would Roy Rogers make Dale Evans climb out and get the stupid pillow?" And Roy did it.

We lay there in terror. The dizzy kind. The kind that feels like a bird is set loose in your belly, flapping its way through your insides, I'm scared because I think a bunch of colored boys might get in the house and do who knows what. I think of drunk niggers in the flower beds looking in through the windows, and carrying knives in their pockets and wearing scuffed up, raggedy shoes. They try to kill me with smiles on their faces and their white teeth showing.

Annie is mostly scared of white men. It doesn't have to be a bunch of them, it can be just one. One crazy white man lurking around in the night, looking for a colored girl he has heard is babysitting white kids for the first time in her life, and him coming after her with soft pink hands and a red face and prob-

ably a tattoo on his white belly. And in his pocket he has got chewing tobacco and keys to his tore up pick-up truck. Tears go down her face telling it.

"I heard about this colored girl walking down the road one time, not bothering anybody," Annie says, "and a white man stops his truck and says does she want a ride?" Annie is telling this slow and quiet. "The girl got in that truck and vanished from sight," she said. "Nobody ever saw her again until they found her body floating face down in Lake Jackson."

Me and Annie hold hands now. Tight.

"That's nothing," I tell her. "I heard about this colored man that killed a white girl and didn't know what to do with her body. He didn't have time to dig a deep grave. So he got a saw and sawed off her arms and legs, sawed her all up into manageable pieces and just scattered them out all over the place."

"He did not?" Annie said, squeezing my hand.

"He did too," I said.

"People are still finding her pieces. And she couldn't get a decent funeral since all her body wasn't collected. And nobody could prove nothing, so the man is still on the loose." My voice shook.

"The police didn't catch him?" Annie whispered.

"No," I said.

"And he was colored?"

"He sure was."

"Then why didn't they catch him?"

"Don't ask me," I said.

Then Annie said, "One time I knew this real pretty girl that white men got ahold of.

They doused her with kerosene and set her on fire. She started running and everything she touched caught fire too. She caused an entire house to burn down and left two white men burned so severe they went crazy and had to check in at Chattahoochie."

"Is that the truth, Annie?" I said. "Do you swear that's true?" It scared me so bad just to hear it because I am more scared of fire than anything. That's the main reason I don't want to go to hell. Because you just keep burning in a fire forever and nobody comes to put it out. "Do you swear to God that's true?" I said again.

"It's as true as this world," Annie said. "It's so true they made the girl's Mama pay for the house she burned down. She's got to pay on it the rest of her life."

I pictured myself in flames, running through a dark Tallahas-

see night when everybody is asleep, going through yards like a blazing torch, dogs after me, barking and trying to bite. I pictured colored men pouring bottles of whiskey on me and laughing at the way the flames shoot up, while I run in circles.

"You know what some white men will do if they get ahold of a colored girl?" Annie said very quietly.

"What?" I say.

"Take her clothes off."

"Then what?" I ask.

"They bother her," Annie whispered.

"SHUT UP!" Roy says. "Y' ALL SHUT UP!"

It got hot up under that bed with our heads bunched together on the pillow. It was like an oven, our breath heating things up,

making us sweat, but even so the three of us lay with our legs tangled together, Annie's skinny arms wrapped tight around me and Roy. And ours around her. We were quiet for a long time.

Our fear carried us just as far as it could before flipping itself over. Soon we were all dead asleep.

I was dreaming about Rochester. It was dark and he was chasing me through the woods behind my house, smiling. I knew if I could just get home to Jack Benny he would save me, so I was desperately running to the TV

set in my house. But when I got there Roy tried to lock me out. He had tied Annie up on the sofa and she was crying. He tried to kick me with his Roy Rogers boots, but I pushed him out of the way and ran to turn the TV on. I was safe. I was safe. But no Jack Benny. Instead, Skippy was on the screen. He was sitting in a chair exactly like Walter's favorite chair, lighting matches and blowing them out. He smiled at me and then I heard Rochester's footsteps coming in the house after me...

I woke up to the hammering of feet on the hardwood floor and the sound of voices ricocheting through the dark house. "What the hell?" The voice set off an alarm in my blood. It was Walter's booming voice. Walter and Mother were home. I scrambled out from under the bed. Annie did too, but Roy stayed put, asleep as a rock.



"What the hell?" Walter shouted again, as Annie and me groped our way to the hall just as Mother switched on the light. A flood of yellow poured over us as we rushed toward Mother's voice. At the sight of us she let out a shriek, "You scared me to death hiding like that. All the lights off."

Walter went in and dragged Roy out from under my bed by his leg and carried him to his room and put him to bed. Roy never woke up.

Annie and me wanted to explain to Mother, but she just kept saying things like, "Always leave on a light."

"Yes, ma'm, but..."

"At least one light," she said. "The front porch light at least." Mother walked around the living room switching on all the lights as if we needed the example to know what she was talking about.

Walter walked back into the living room and Mother said, "Walter, pay Annie and let her get on home."

"Do what?" he said.

"Pay her, Walter. We have to pay her."

"I'm never babysitting for y'all again," Annie said.

"Well, now," Walter said. "That sounds like something worth paying for."

"Nobody is safe over here," Annie said.

"Somebody was trying to get in the house," I said.

Walter looked at Mother like he had won a bet and she owed him money. "Is that right?" he said. "And I suppose you don't have the foggiest idea who it could be?"

"We thought it was Skippy," I said. "But it wasn't."

"Scaring you and Annie is Skippy's idea of fun. That's all," Mother said.

"But it wasn't him," I said.

"Walter, you need to talk to Skippy tomorrow and put an end to this foolishness," Mother told him.

"It wasn't Skippy," I said again.

"I'm going to tell Melvina first thing tomorrow morning. She'll get Skippy straightened out," Mother said.

"But it wasn't Skippy," I repeated.

"It could have been any crazy body," Annie said.

"It could have been white men coming after Annie," I said, "or..."

Walter's eyes slapped my face. "Say what?"

"White men," I said.

"Don't let me hear you talking nonsense," Walter said.

"Lucy, don't be silly." Mother reached for Annie's hand.

"You need to be getting home, Annie," she said. "We'll get this straightened out tomorrow."

Annie pulled her hand away from Mother's and folded her arms across her chest like a roadblock. "I'm not walking through the woods by myself," she announced. "I had a scary night and I'm not going through them woods."

We all looked at Walter.

He did his jaw like he does right before he spits tobacco juice. "Oh hell," he said, stomping out of the room. "Let me get my flashlight."

"You forgot my money," Annie yelled as Walter went down the hall. "You gon pay me, ain't you?"

Annie grabbed my arm and squeezed it when Walter came back with the flashlight. "Come with me," Annie whispered. "You got to. Please."

"Annie, there's nothing to be afraid of," Mother said.

"Lucy, you go to bed," Walter ordered.

"I want to go with you."

"You heard what I said," Walter barked.

"Lucy, you mind Walter," Mother said, pulling me back from the door. "He's mad enough already," she whispered.

Mother and me stood at the picture window and watched Walter and Annie walking through the night, flashlight bouncing in front of them as they went. Annie's hand was on Walter's elbow. If Annie had had on a dress they might have been going off to the prom. Twice Annie looked back at the house trying to find my face in the window.

Walter is not as mean as he acts I wanted to scream. I'm pretty sure of it. But the night was so black. Walter's flashlight seemed like a tiny sword of light slicing sharp and useless, making nervous zigzags in the darkness.

"This is not a safe world," I told Mother.

"If you get a good education you can change the world," Mother said.

"Why can't I go with them?"

"Because," Mother said, "Walter said you couldn't, that's why."

"Why are white men after Annie?" I asked Mother.

"That's crazy," Mother said. "Walter's a white man. Your Granddaddy is a white man. They're not... Lucy? where are you going? Lucy, come back here!"

I was on the porch, down the steps, and halfway across the yard before Mother quit calling me back. I ran after Walter and Annie who were nearly to the road. They stopped and turned around to face me, Annie's arm was looped through Walter's now making them look like a couple of people about to walk down the aisle together. Walter shone the flashlight right in my face.

"Where do you think you're going?" Walter said.

"With you," I answered.

I know deep down that Walter is not that mean. If he was mean, would Mother have married him? Would he take Mother to eat catfish wearing the necktie she gave him for his birthday? Would he pull Roy out from under my bed and carry him to his

room? Or pay Annie fifty cents for babysitting us? Walter is just a regular white man. He does not go around hurting people on purpose. Not even colored people. I am almost certain of it.

"I guess if I want you to mind me I'm gon to have to start talking with my belt," Walter said, holding the flashlight right up to my face making me close my eyes.

"No, sir," I said.

"Didn't I tell you to stay home?"

"Yes, sir. But I have to go with you."

"Why?"

"Because, you're a white man ..."

"What?"

"And Annie ... she don't ..." I looked at Annie who nodded me on, "and Annie is scared of white men."

"At night," Annie said. "I ain't scared of nobody during the day when I can see good."

"And you're mean to her," I said.

"Mean?" Walter said. He shined the light in Annie's face now. "Gal, have I ever been mean to you?"

"Yes sir," she said. "All the time." And she grabbed my arm and started running up the road to her house pulling me along with her. "Hurry," Annie said, "before he comes after us."

And we ran hard, but Walter didn't follow. He stood in the road yelling, "Lucy, get yourself back here right now if you know what's good for you," and painting us with flimsy strokes of flashlight.

"He's liable to get a gun and come after us," Annie said, panting as she ran.

"No, he won't," I said. I wanted to say he didn't even have a gun. But the truth was he had a revolver on the top shelf of his closet. Me and Roy had climbed up there and looked at it, but we have never seen him use it for anything except once when he shot a stray cat that bit Roy.

"You can't be sure," Annie said.

And she was right. None of us had ever seen Walter take a drink, but we all knew he kept a bottle of liquor in the glove compartment of his truck. We just pretended we didn't know it. And he pretended he didn't drink it. The same with his gun. Except for the day he shot the cat everybody in the house pre-

tended the gun was not there. What else did we pretend Walter didn't do?

"Lucy, don't make me come up there after you," Walter shouted. He had all but forgotten about Annie. "I'm counting to ten and you better be back here. One ..."

We were in front of Annie's house now. Melvina opened the door to see what all the noise was about. She was wearing a faded pink nightgown that she had cut the sleeves out of and her hair was tied up in a rag. I had never seen Melvina in her nightgown. She stepped out on the porch and fixed her hands on her hips. "What you think you're doing running around this time of night?"

"Nothing," Annie said.

"I got to go," I said, turning to leave.

Then Skippy comes out of Melvina's house too, stands on the porch, laughing.

"Hush your mouth,"

Melvina says to him.

"Two ... Three ..."

Melvina looked at Walter standing out in the road. "Girl, you better RUN home!" she said. "Don't let that man stand out there calling you."

"Don't go," Annie said.

"He'll whip you for sure."

"He won't," I said.

"Four."

"Walter's not that mean, Annie," I said. I looked at her face for some sign that she believed me. I want her to believe he is different from other white men — so I can keep believing it myself.

"Five ... Six ..."

"Get home," Melvina hollered. "Don't let that man come up here after you." She was waving me on with her hand.

"I'm pretty sure he's not that mean ..." I said. I looked at the three of them standing together on the porch. "Hurry," they kept saying, "before you make him mad." They feel sorry for me. I can see it. And they scare me because they act like they know things.

"Seven, goddammit," Walter shouts.

"Run!" Annie screamed.

I turned away, running as hard as I could toward Walter who stood in the middle of the dark road aiming the flashlight right square between my eyes. □



FICTION

THE WAY
THINGS ARE*By Ron Rash*

The second we walk in I know it's all wrong. The two girls riding the bikes, the others trapped in the machines, they're trying too hard not to look at us.

"Shit," Johnny says out the corner of his mouth. "I didn't know we was suppose to wear a costume."

Johnny's trying to make a joke, but like me he's looking in the mirror that covers the back wall. He sees what I see—two guys getting a little too big in the belly wearing t-shirts and cut-off jeans, with mortar on our arms, some in our beards. They don't put mirrors in port-a-johns.

"Damn if I don't believe these people shower before they work out," Johnny says.

Two guys wearing tight shirts with Nautilus written on the front are within spitting distance. The older looking one, about our age, helps a woman do some negatives. The younger guy sits on the free-weight bench, doing nothing. We wait.

"Let's get out of here," I say finally. Johnny shakes his head, like a bull starting to madden up.

"I paid five dollars for that coupon book," he says. "All I got so far is a half-price hamburger at Hardee's and a free salad at Quincy's."

I know Johnny. We played six years of junior high and high school football together, most of the time side-by-side on the offensive line. I know there's no use in saying anything else. He ain't leaving.

And they realize it too, the coaches, the trainers, whatever you call them. The younger one gets off his ass, comes over and asks can he help us, like maybe we're just lost and come in to get directions.

Johnny takes out the book and tears out the coupon. He's got muscles, this guy, the kind that you can see right through his

clothes, but when he opens his hand to take Johnny's coupon you can tell the hardest work he's ever done with his hands is jack off. He reads the coupon.

"OK," he says, "but you understand this coupon is good for only one workout. A year's membership is three hundred dollars."

I almost say that we're not stupid. And then I almost say we can read, too. But I end up not saying a damn thing. He starts Johnny on the first machine, but not before he goes and gets a towel so he can wipe each machine when Johnny finishes. They start down the line, him talking to Johnny, explaining the machines, but he ain't looking at Johnny, like if he keeps looking away maybe Johnny will disappear.

I walk over to where Johnny's pushing about a ton on the leg machine, sweating and stinking and grunting till he finally can lock his legs.

I tell him I'm going out to the car. Johnny lets the weights clang back down, rubs his knee.

"But the coupon's for two people," he says, trying to catch his breath.

"I done sweated enough today just making a living," I say, then walk out into the heat.

The air conditioner's been broke for a year, so I roll down the window. Johnny comes hobbling out thirty minutes later.

"Sorry you had to wait," he says. He's gritting his teeth when he says it, flexing his leg. He don't have to tell me he's rehurt the knee the doctors cut on after our senior year.

"No problem," I say. "I ain't got nothing better to do."

"I showed that candy-ass a thing or two," he says. "Asked him what he did on that leg machine, then did ten more pounds."

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Johnny reaches into a paper bag he's got his work clothes in, pulls out two cans of Gatorade.

"Little treat," he says. "Got 'em out of the machine right before we punched out."

Even warm Gatorade tastes good when you been working out in the sun all day. It takes about two swallows to empty the can, and I'm wishing I had another.

"Don't think I'm going to join," Johnny says, crushing his can and putting it in the bag. "It ain't like when we lifted for football. Hell, it don't even smell right in there — no Atomic Balm, no Ben-Gay. Nobody yelling. Nobody sweating. It just ain't for me."

"Me either," I say, getting my keys out.

"Those girls on the bikes were good looking, though," Johnny says. "College girls, I reckon."

"I reckon," I say, cranking up the car, not wanting to talk about it no more. "Where we going?"

"You got something else to wear in the trunk?" Johnny asks. I nod.

"Let's go over to my apartment then," Johnny says. "Get something to eat, then go to the Firefly. Hell, I'll even let you take a shower provided you ain't got any cooties."

Bocephus is singing "The Pressure is On," so I turn it up and burn some rubber leaving the parking lot.

I almost feel decent by the time we turn into Johnny's apartment. A couple of black guys are out front drinking Schlitz Malt Liquors. They got their backs to us but they can see me and Johnny because one of those mirrors that lets you see around corners is right above them. They're in Johnny's yard, if you can call dirt and weeds a yard, but they move on out into the parking lot, their backs still to us, keeping their distance. L.J., the black guy who works with me and Johnny, he swears the only white guys black people are scared of is guys like us with long hair and beards. Too many motherfuckers that look like that is dangerous crazy, L.J. says, like Charlie Manson and the one in Philadelphia that cut women up in little pieces then ate them. I don't know if that has anything to do with it or not, but the black guys keep their distance, don't even look our way.

We get a shower, eat a couple of TV dinners apiece, then head over to the Firefly.

It's Tuesday so Freeda's working the bar by herself. We come in and it takes her a little too long to get up from her stool. You can tell she's bone-tired, but ain't we all. She knows what we drink so she opens two long-neck Buds, puts them on the counter. Johnny gets his and limps over to the poker machine. His leg's starting to stiffen up, and I hope like hell he hasn't messed it up bad, because he don't have a dime's worth of insurance.

Freeda sits back down on the stool. She's filling out some kind of government form, like what they give you for taxes, but it's probably something to do with her kids. She's got three of

them, and no husband, at least not any more, so she lives with her mother and works here two-to-two, six days a week.

I used to think Freeda was a lot older than me and Johnny, but she says she saw us play ball in high school, screaming for her school, Burns, to kick our asses. Johnny likes to remind her they never did.

I'm thinking about all this when two necktie types come in, sit in one of the booths in the far corner. Instead of going up to the bar, they make Freeda come to them, then start giving her shit for not having any imported beers, like she owns the place and decides what beers to carry. But that's the way things are. If you work there's always somebody giving you shit about something. And if you're like Freeda and you got three kids and an ex-husband who won't pay his alimony, you smile while they rub your face in it. And that's what Freeda is doing, smiling, hoping for a good tip.

They finally order and Freeda brings their beers. The one closest to the door says something to Freeda but I can't hear what it is since Johnny's cussing the poker machine. Then he grabs one of her breasts. I can't believe it. It's dark so maybe I'm just thinking I saw him do it. But Freeda's coming back toward me and her head is down. She's trying not to let them see she's crying.

I'm off the stool and in his face. "What can I do for you?" the necktie closest to the door says. He talks smooth, like a lawyer.

"Give me a chance to kick your ass," I say, loud, right in his face. He's as big as me but soft, and not just in the belly. I can take him. Johnny's coming up behind me. Even with a bum knee he can take care of the other one.

"I don't want any trouble," the necktie says.

No, I'm thinking. You just want to give it. Freeda's beside me now, with their drinks. She heard enough to know what's going on.

"It's OK," she says. "He didn't mean nothing by it."

The necktie finally catches on, understands why I'm pissed off.

"The lady's right," he says. "I didn't mean anything."

Freeda wedges between me and him, puts the drinks on the table.

"Please," she says to me. "You're making trouble for me."

She turns to Johnny.

"Help me, Johnny," she says.

Johnny don't know half of what's going on, but he's ready to fight, at least until Freeda says that. He untightens his fist, backs off a little.

"Come on back to the bar," she tells me and Johnny. "I'll get you boys a beer, on the house."

Freeda takes my hand like I'm a little kid, leads me back over to the bar. She gets our beers then goes back to the booth. She's talking soft but I hear enough to know she's apologizing. Johnny loses some more money playing the poker machine while I sip my beer and try not to look in the mirror behind the bar. □

THE WELL

By Tom Bailey

We keep digging. It's hot. Goddamn it's hot and the sweat keeps getting in my eyes. But we keep digging. Me and Halsey, mindless with these shovels. I already broke one shovel. Broke it off at the handle. Johnson, he went and got it fixed though before I had the chance to take a smoke. I wonder about Johnson. I mean he's my boss and been my boss for the past seven years, but I still wonder.

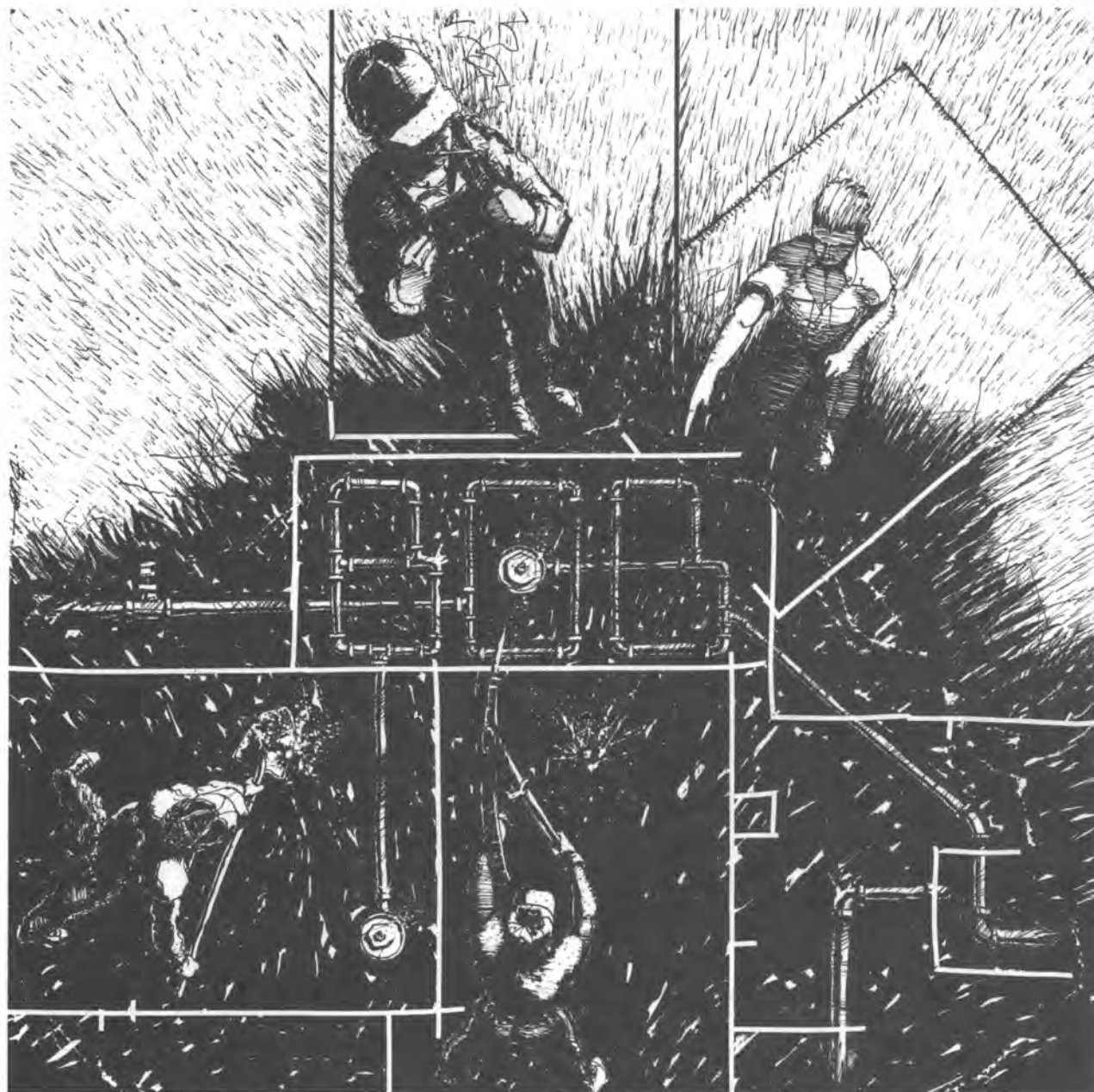
The well we're searching for, digging up half the damn delta for, is an artesian well. That's pure drinking water that flows up of its own pressure. They say it's seventeen hundred and forty-two feet deep. Mr. Nick says that. He's retired now, but he used to work for City Water and even though this ain't City Water Mr. Nick knows what he's talking about. He says the well was first drilled back in 1904 and it's been going ever since. Now Miss Mary is getting gaps of air in the water up to the house and so we got to find the well before we call the plumbing men in to drill it back out. The well's down next to the bayou. It's on the bank of the bayou and the mosquitoes are awful. And we're working so hard and wiping sweat we don't have time or energy to be slapping every one of the little sons of bitches that decides to suck out our blood. I'll tell you they're hell. God fucked up when he made mosquitoes. But the well, it's covered by a plywood kind of roof. In

fact, it looks like the doors to one of them storm cellars you see out in Kansas. But this ain't Kansas and that ain't really the well. It's just the works that go to the well. Mr. Nick says the well has to be close though. And we're digging. The mosquitoes are biting like hell. Mr. Nick is standing above us on the bank with a smoke and Johnson is squatting down looking hard at every shovelful of dirt we bring up. He's eyeing an old Coke bottle and rusted broken pipe and cinderblocks that were dumped in as filler. Saying, "Come on, boys, let's find that bitching well." And Halsey is sweating bad. I look over and the sweat is just pouring out on his black ass. He looks up and shakes his head and drips of sweat shake off his kinky hair out from under his green cap.

"When Mr. Bob put this plumbing in," Mr. Nick says, is saying, "it was just before he died, just before the cancer took him." Mr. Nick scratches his morning beard. I see Johnson glance up at Mr. Nick. He don't like nobody talking about how

Mr. Bob done things when he was alive. When Mr. Bob died Miss Mary had hired Johnson on temporarily to oversee the farm until she could find herself a permanent manager, but then Johnson had made good crop and she'd hired him on again. Then they'd married that second winter right after the harvest. After they'd married we'd had to change everything so it wouldn't be like Mr. Bob had done it. He

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changed the time we came to work from seven o'clock to six o'clock. He changed the poison we sprayed with to Poast. He even went so far as to change the color of the shop from a rust red to an off-yellow. Johnson fired the rest of the labor that Mr. Bob had had working for him, but I was a third cousin to Miss Mary and so my job had been pretty safe. That was seven years ago. He changed everything. It wasn't that the changes were bad, just that they were changes.

"Yes, sir, some of the damndest plumbing I ever seen," Mr. Nick says and flips away his smoke. "Don't get me wrong, Bobby knew what the hell he was doing, he just had his own way of doing it." I hear Mr. Nick chuckle and then cough and spit.

"That Bob was a hell of a man, a hell of a farmer." Mr. Nick goes to laughing then hacking again. "I don't guess there wasn't nothing that old boy couldn't do."

And Johnson says, "Find that bitching well, boys, come on now."

My shovel clangs metal and Halsey stops digging. I slap at the damn mosquitoes. Every time we hit metal I pray it will be the well so we can stop digging. I bend down and brush the dirt away. It's another pipe. All around us is this tangled mess of pipe, the hum of the big bullet-shaped pump set right smack in the center of them. We've already found the rust-colored overflow tank. We've already dug out from that and followed these

pipes that shoot out or lead back into it. And every time we start a new direction the first thing we've got to do is dig straight down over four feet and then widen the hole and search out from it. We've already done that, plenty.

Johnson's rooting around in the dirt at my feet. He'd hopped right down into the hole as soon as I struck metal. He isn't big. He's skinny and grub-white looking with thin blonde hair. He has on khakis and a short-sleeve button-down and he never wears a cap. Mr. Bob had always worn a cap, but he was going bald from those treatments. But even before those treatments he always wore a cap. He had been a big man, heavy, and he'd get right down in a hole with you and grab up a shovel or if we were irrigating the cotton he'd be in the mud and the water lifting pipe and splashing right alongside us.

"It's just another goddamned pipe," Johnson says.

Mr. Nick laughs. "Yes, siree. Damndest plumbing I ever seen." He slaps his arm.

Johnson stands up and puts his hands on his hips and kind of glares at Mr. Nick. But Mr. Nick is lighting up another smoke and he don't see him. Johnson scrambles up out of the hole to squat on the edge again. He looks like a toad squatting there. "Follow that pipe," he says.

"Yes, sir," I say. I look at Halsey and Halsey looks up at me and then he shakes that sweat free again and I wipe my face with the back of my glove and we start digging again. My shoulders are starting to ache with the steady *thunk thunk thunk* of the shovel and then having to lift that dirt up high to dump it out on the bank. Mr. Nick comes over and looks closer into the hole. He pulls the smoke from his mouth and stares at it while he thinks. The thumb of his other hand's hooked under the strap of his overalls, his hair oiled back and these thick-rimmed black glasses with a wide strap around his head to hold them on for him.

"Boys," he says. "I do believe that's the wrong direction."

We stop digging and lean on our shovels. Halsey lights up a smoke quick and passes me one. God it's good. I blow a cloud of smoke at the black dots hovering around me.

"I remember the day Bobby sunk the bulk of this in, I remember that like it was yesterday, but I sure as hell can't remember exactly where that well is." He slides a hand through the slick of his hair and rests his palm against the back of his neck. "But it seems to me, the well ought to follow that pipe," he says and points to one of the pipes that comes out of the overflow tank, "and go to right there." He picks up a pebble and tosses it into the hole right near the pump itself. It follows one of the pipes from the overflow tank and disappears into the dirt and part of the old cinderblock wall which is left surrounding the pump.

Johnson stands and stares at the place almost under the pump where the pebble has landed. It made good sense to me. I look at Halsey and he shrugs. Johnson says, "I don't believe

that's it, Mr. Nick." Halsey looks at me and I shrug.

"Well," Mr. Nick says and drops the cigarette butt into the hole, "you can dig all day if you like, but I believe the well is there."

Johnson kind of nods. "It may be, but I got this feeling. . . ." He don't finish it.

Mr. Nick looks at his watch. "I'm going to go get myself some lunch over to Nadine's. These mosquitoes are like to drive me crazy. I'll stop by this afternoon some time if I get a chance." He looks at us. "See you boys later."

"I appreciate your help, Mr. Nick," Johnson says.

"Okay." Mr. Nick shakes his head as he walks over and gets in his truck. He beeps his horn and then he roars off not even glancing sideways at us.

Johnson stares down into the hole for a long time after that, rubbing his chin. He cuts his eyes at the sun, checks it against his watch. "Let's break for lunch. Be back here at one o'clock and we'll find the bastard."

We lean our shovels against the walls of the hole and climb out. I'm covered with dirt where the sweat has made it stick.

"Mason," Johnson says to me, "take the red truck and pick up the rest of the men. Remember to be back here at one o'clock." I nod and me and Halsey get our coolers and carry them to the truck. Johnson still stands over the hole. It reminds me of a man looking down into an opened grave.

I start the truck and back it onto the road. I look beside me at Halsey. He's lighting a cigarette.

"Damn!" he says.

"I'm telling you what." I turn on the radio and we don't say much else as we drive through the green rowed cotton fields and pick up the rest of the labor.

Johnson's already at the well when we get back there at one. Maybe he didn't even go to lunch. He looks down at his watch but doesn't say anything. We climb back down into the hole. I pull on my gloves and get my shovel.

"There," Johnson says, "dig there." He points back toward the overflow tank to the other pipe that pokes out of it. I look at Halsey but Halsey is looking up at Johnson. I sigh and step over the tangle of pipe and red and blue valves and stomp my shovel into the dirt. It's clay. I stomp again and pull it up. It's heavy. Halsey is working beside me as best he can. We have to start by widening the hole again. I get the pick and that works a little better in the clay. Johnson stands on the bank and watches. I start to sweat again. We hit more broken-up cinderblock. I think how it might not have been so bad to have been fired. "Come on, Mason, dig." I look up at Johnson who's now squatting on the edge and is leaning out over it to see even deeper into the hole. A cloud of mosquitoes hovers around his head, swarming him. To me, this sure as hell don't

look like the pipe to the well. But I don't say word one to him.

Raking the sides with the pick, I let the dirt slide down into the hole around the pipe and Halsey shovels it out. I bite the pick in to pry off a wall and a thick gel like snot shoots up into the air. I hear Johnson give a loud, "What the!" and see him stagger back from the hole. He trips on the rough clods and tumbles over backwards down the slope. The dirt he's kicked up slides down the face, leaving thirteen white snake eggs in a little hollow place tucked away in the earth. They were hiding there.

I poke one with the sharp end of the pick. It's soft and white and they're all stuck together like marshmallows in the heat. The one I'm poking at spurts out a greenish gob.

"What in the hell was that?" Johnson yells, stumbling back over the pile to the hole, dusting off his palms and elbows. He frowns down at his front shirt pocket which is shiny-slick where the green goop got him and pulls a handkerchief out of his back pocket to wipe at it.

"Snake eggs," I tell him.

He stops and looks down at his handkerchief. "Are they poisonous?" He looks right at me, but I just shrug. Halsey's touching them with his shovel. He scoops them out and flips them up on the bank near Johnson's feet. Johnson leaps away.

"Watch it! You goddamn idiot!"

You can't tell it by just looking, but I know Halsey got a kick out of that.

Johnson peers close at the eggs still glued together and nasty-looking. "Give me your shovel, Halsey."

Halsey hands the shovel up to him and Johnson takes it. Halsey looks at me. We both watch as Johnson presses on the eggs and rolls them about. Pokes them. He pries a couple of them apart. Bending down, he touches one with his finger. It presses in with that pressure. Soft as anything. Johnson takes a giant-step back and we watch him as he swings the shovel up high over his head. "Watch it!" I yell as he flails it down with a hard flat slap against the eggs. Shit spits out everywhere from under the shovel. As I turn away I feel some of it spurt hot and wet on the back of my neck. I hear Halsey yell, "Goddamn!" Johnson stands up over us, above us, breathing hard, the shovel all smeared with that green stuff. He peeks under it. All of the eggs are squished out. Just the skins, wrinkled flat, remain.

Johnson scrapes the shovel against the dirt, wipes it as clean as he can and hands it back to Halsey who takes it back at arms-length. He don't say nothing. We don't say nothing neither. Halsey turns toward me, arching an eyebrow up, and then we start our digging again. We dig on that one pipe for a long time. Finally, Johnson tells us to start digging where Mr. Nick showed us.

By now it is late afternoon. The sun's long-angled through the cypress in the bayou and the crickets are going strong, the cicadas too. We don't talk much. I'm too damn tired to talk at all. My shirt's soaked through with old sweat and new sweat. It chills me. My whole body feels like one big itch.

Johnson stays squatted over the edge and watches. I don't believe he blinks or ever looks away. The hole is now over twice the size it was when we started that morning. The dirt is piled high all around us, making the hole even deeper. Pipes lay exposed that haven't seen air for maybe eighty years or at least since Mr. Bob fooled with them. They crisscross each other and strike out into the ground in every direction, carrying water up to Miss Mary's house and God only knows where else. The pump goes on with its even hum. Valves with blue and red and black handles poke up over the pipes they control. We keep digging.

Halsey strikes metal again. He looks at me, leaning his elbows on his knees, then up at Johnson.

"Dig it up," Johnson says.

Me and Halsey take turns at it. Both of us can't work directly on it because of the pipes that run over it and the closeness of the pump. It's a big pipe, thick. We shovel out the dirt and then I get down on my hands and knees so I can brush and scoop out the dirt around the turn in the neck of the pipe with my hands. I see the "W" on the big bolt in the valve where it turns straight down.

I look back at Johnson. He's squatted there.

It seems he's hovering over the hole. His eyes stare at my hands on the well. They're wide-open and unblinking. He sways with his intensity. I nod, "It's the well, Mr. Johnson." He still stares, staring, and then he lets out this big breath. He breaks his eyes from the well and blinks out over our heads. Then he looks off toward the house.

"Right," he says. "All right. That's a day. Go on and pick up the rest of the men. I'll call the plumbers tonight and tomorrow, first thing, we'll rip this entire mess out and do it right."

Me and Halsey collect the shovels and the pick and climb up out of the hole. We lug all of the tools to the truck and throw them in the back. I watch Johnson still squatting over the hole. I start the truck and back out onto the road. I turn back in time to see Johnson jump down into the hole and disappear. I look over at Halsey and he's sucking on a smoke, watching too. He leans back and blows smoke. "Um," he says and flicks his ash out the window. "It's Miller time," I say to him and he nods. I'm betting Mr. Nick will be waiting for us at Nadine's to hear. *Sure, we found it*, I hear myself say — and worn out as I am from it now I can feel myself shaking my head for him then — telling Mr. Nick, *The poor sonofabitch*. I put the truck in gear and drive out slow till I hit the corner, then I stomp the pedal to the floor. □



THE GOLDEN CHILD

By Reynolds Price

If she were alive, she'd be sixty-seven. But she died at nine, in agony. And so while she lives in a few minds still, she lives by the name she was always called in family stories — Little Frances. The stories were few and remarkably sketchy, as if my endlessly tale-telling kin knew they must use her but could hardly bear to portray her fate on the bolt of wearable goods they wove from the lives of all our blood and neighbors.

We knew she was “both her parents’ eyeballs,” a local expression which meant “their all.” Her father was “Stooks” Rodwell, my mother’s youngest brother. Her mother was “Toots,” from Portsmouth, Virginia; and all their married life, the two lived there. By the time I knew them, Frances was dead; and they showed how badly scarred they were. Stooks was roughshod and raucous, the family cynic. Toots was acid and managerial, though both craved fun and were as loyal in trouble as good sheepdogs.

Before I was five, I knew nearly all I'd ever know about Frances. She was blond and fine to see. She fell while skating on the concrete sidewalk and scraped a leg. The scrape got infected but seemed to heal. Then a few weeks later she ran a high fever that wouldn't break. The doctor diagnosed it as osteomyelitis, a deep bone infection. In 1931 there were literally no effective internal antibiotics. The only treatment was to scrape or saw out the affected bone, crippling the patient.

But with Frances' fever, surgery was impossible. Infection roared through her. The relentless fever triggered convulsions.

My mother told me more than once how “Little Frances' head would bend right back and touch her heels — she spasmed that hard.” The child suffered dreadfully for several days. Her lips dried crusty, her voice went hoarse, but she still pled for mercy. Everybody hovered and prayed; nothing helped in the slightest but death. It came at last, though nobody left alive was the same ever again, not at the thought or mention of Frances — Little Frances, welcome as daylight, tortured to death as a lovable child.

When I was born two years later, it was touch-and-go from Mother's slow labor well on into my third year. Inexplicable convulsions would seize me, a long spell of whooping cough, skin eruptions that left me bloody. No infant had died, in either of my parents' families, in forty years. But the recent fact of Frances must have appalled them night after night, as they watched me suffer too, helpless and pleading. From the year I retain my first strong memories, between three and four, I can call back vivid pictures of her still. Mother had a hand-colored picture of her, framed on the bedroom dresser.

It's a bright warm day. Little Frances stands outdoors in a pale dress, four-feet tall and half-turned away. But someone holding the camera calls her name; and she turns to look, turns forever in fact. Her blond curls reach almost to her neck and are blurred by the move. Her eyes are crouched against the sun, so I have no sense of their color or size. But her lips split open on a smile so strange that, even

Reynolds Price was born in Macon, North Carolina and lives in Durham. His twenty-first book — The Forseeable Future, three long stories — will appear this spring.

then, I guessed the smile was a clue to some big secret she kept. This girl, my tortured cousin, knew something big and kept it hid.

In a few more years, when I'd seen two or three old kinsmen's bodies, dead and still and cold as dressed chickens, I thought I'd caught the heart of Frances' secret. *She knows she'll never get old like this, this cold and smelling like celluloid. She'll stay there smiling, in a handmade picture.* But I took little comfort in my discovery. I still had most of childhood to travel before penicillin and sulfa drugs were widely sold; and Little Frances would be brought to me, again and again in Mother's voice, at any chance of physical harm.

Touch football, running, sledding in snow, my first roller skates — as I left for every innocent game, Mother was liable to cloud and mutter "Little Frances would be here, strong today, if she hadn't fallen and scraped her shin." And I just now recall that, since Frances came from Mother's family, her name was absent from my even-more-direful father's warnings. With no such terror in his bloodline, and though a staunch Democrat, Father resorted to President Coolidge's son, who blistered a heel at tennis and died of infection swiftly thereafter.

Yet for all the use of my dead first cousin as a somber omen, I never came to resent her name or to gloat in private on the early end of a family saint. I can no longer hope to explain my logic; but somewhere long before puberty, I told myself I loved my cousin Marcia so much I would marry her, down the road. I also guessed there was something skewed in the plan, some kink. I'd do my research in cool disguise, concealing my hope for Marcia under a different name. So one afternoon — age seven and back in the kitchen with Mother — I chose my best absent-minded voice and said "If Little Frances was living, and we loved each other, could we get married?"

Mother said "No."

"Why?"

"She'd be your first cousin."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Son, it's against all kinds of laws. You might have two-headed babies or morons."

"Why?"

"You just might. It works that way." (We lived in medieval oblivion to sane genetics. Years after, when Mother was bearing my brother, a neighbor stopped by with a live lobster somebody had shipped him, on ice, from Maine. Lobsters were as rare in the South in the thirties as antibiotics; and when he was gone, my mother said "I hope this baby won't come here wearing feelers and claws" — she was only half-joking.)

First cousins were out then, unless we eloped and deceived the Law. But there might be hope — Marcia and I were first cousins once-removed. I'd try that next. I started to say "What about once-removed?"

Mother's eyes had filled though. She said "I think Little Frances loved me more than anybody else before you. I used to take her horseback riding, when she came down with Toots on the train."

I'd never quite heard that before, how I had overtaken Frances in strength of love for someone as easy to love as my mother. It thrilled me right at the roots of my scalp because I loved her with a depth so dark it hurt more than not.

But before I could think of envy or pride or ask more questions, Mother painted one of her oldest pictures. "Little Frances walked down the aisle at my wedding, ahead of me, and scattered rose petals to guide my path. Toots had made her a dress with Belgian lace; and when I walked toward that altar behind her, I prayed to have a child that fine — she was five years old, smart and sweet as the day. I can see her hair right now, in candlelight."

I said "Did you get it?"

"Get what?"

"A child," I said, "that fine and smart."

But though Mother often said God chose wisely in sending her a boy (she was half a boy herself, many ways), at that strange moment her tears poured free; and she left the room.

Her unpredictable bondage to the past, always a grim past, was one of the few sad facts about her — her parents had died long before she was grown, and she marked their birth-and death-days yearly with a taut brow and full eyes. But that one time stuck in my mind as the worst of all, the day she chose Little Frances over me. It became the day I began to cross the wide threshold that waits for us all; I began to see my own death, ahead.

At the moment I didn't think to follow my mother and ask more questions, on Frances or me or the aim of life. Like most young children, I had mostly assumed the world was one enormous breast, full and generally trusty. Its purpose was feeding and caring for me. How had this dreadful door swung open — a good child wrenched into burning hoops; then dragged out of sight, in screams, forever. I almost certainly went to my room and played with my soothing menagerie of toys — elephants mostly, friends to man, but also a pride of treacherous cats.

And before many nights, I started the dream that rode my sleep for years to come. In the past I'd occasionally waked up scared from a nightmare and run to Mother and Father's bed, my safest harbor. Hard as this new dream was, however, I kept it secret and paid the tolls it took on my peace. It sometimes changed the setting and lights, but it always told the same cruel story. *I'm lying in bed or maybe outdoors in my new tent. Sometimes Marcia sleeps beside me; sometimes my black friend, John Arthur Bobbit. But whoever's with me, they sleep on peaceful throughout my trial. What happens next is, I wake up suddenly in the dark and find I can't move — not a muscle, a cell. I can't even blink my open eyes. All I can do is somehow draw light shallow*

breaths. I tell myself I'm dead like Little Frances; and though I am scared and hate my stillness, I also think 'Well, at least it didn't hurt.' Soon after that my backbone twitches, then spasms gently, then hard hard. My head and heels draw backward slowly toward each other. Then pain like nothing I've known or dreamed jolts through me like current. I understand that I'm not dead yet, but I cannot speak to ask for help or even for company. My partner, Marcia or black John Arthur, has not cared enough to wake and watch. This may not end. I wonder if Frances is trapped like this, or has she gone on somewhere free?

The dream came back maybe two dozen times throughout my childhood till I left home for college and the world. Then I thought it stopped. And I thought I knew why. My mother had died; nobody was left above ground, near me, who'd known my pitiful cousin and could bring her pain back toward me in words. Bad as it was, I went on keeping it secret from others because it gave me a serious *size* in my own mind. I would someday stop. Something was loose in the world, or inside me, that watched my moves and sooner or later would seize my legs and lay me down forever. From knowing of Frances Rodwell's fate, I understood that much before I even started thinking of eternal life, much less hoping for it.

I was so lonely and my life was so calm, till I was near grown, that such a grim prospect was not unwelcome. It dramatized my days and nights, all the risks I took in playing alone. It illuminated the faces of friends I made at school. Each year I'd fix on some boy or girl, as if he or she were the light I needed to move and grow. But at some unpredictable point in my passion, the picture of Frances would stand beside them as an actual threat when I studied their eyes or the strength of their arms and envied their laughing ease, their power. Overnight they could be clawed down in pain and die with no rescue.

For instance, in the fourth grade I knew a chubby and very shy girl who would talk to no other boy but me. She was never a target of my adoration; but the spring we were ten, she suddenly died of diabetes. She got home from school one afternoon, while her parents were still at the hosiery mill; she lay down to take her usual rest on the living-room couch before putting on the potatoes for supper. But by the time her father walked in at half-past four and called her name, she had drifted off — so gently, he said, that "not one hair of her head was wrinkled."

Mother and I went to pay our respects; and there she was — her name was Hallie — laid out in a short white coffin, dressed in white with a white carnation in her bloodless hand. No star in all the movies I'd seen held my eyes like Hallie. She seemed both stiller than any rock mountain and also trembling like a gram of radium, pouring out rays. I understood that her luck was awful; but I also envied the pale allure that drew us toward her and would keep this final sight of her face as clear as a stab, in our minds forever. I knew better than to say it to Mother. But stand-

ing there and later at the funeral, I more than half-planned a rival attraction — my own death soon.

And I almost got it. That same summer my family and I made a weekend trip to mine and Mother's birthplace, the Rodwell home. Little Frances' parents were there on a visit; and with all the joy my mother took in each of her kin, there was no way not to drive up there and see Stooks and Toots. Already I'd secretly turned against them. Stooks was loud and a mean joker. Toots was gentler but would still ask scalding questions in public, like "Don't those knickers smell a lot like pee?" And the two together, once Frances was gone, had fallen deep in love with Marcia, my first cousin once-removed and Stooks' great-niece. At the age I was, I could see no reason for their favoritism except that Marcia was a light-haired girl and was born nine months after Frances died (the fact that I too loved Marcia only raised the pitch of the tension I felt).

The first night there, the house was full of siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. Marcia and Pat, her younger sister, and I had been shouldered out of the living room and were playing cards in the long dim hall. Our skills were limited so the game must have been either fish, slapjack or maybe old maid. Anyhow I recall I was cheating to win. Marcia and Pat were loudly complaining, though with no great rancor; they'd soon have curbed me back into line.

But Stooks, in the living room heard the debate and came out to check. He was always trying to barge in on us with rough dumb jokes to make us like him, when I understood that his principal aim was guarding Marcia from worldly harm. That night when he learned I'd cheated at cards, he lit into me with what I remember as unearned meanness — *Who did I think I was, some prince? Didn't I know a cheat was the lowest scoundrel on Earth? Who would ever love me? I'd better get myself honest, right now.*

With the passion for justice and fine proportion that all children share, I knew he was way out of line and hateful. I also knew he was Mother's brother, old and loud, and would get away with it. So I said not a word but fought back tears long enough to stand and retreat, by the dark back way, to the west bedroom where we would be sleeping and where I was born. For once I took a reckless course and shut the door behind me. I was truly alone now. *That* would show them.

Then in savage misery I fell face-down on my narrow birthbed and actively wished hard luck on Stooks. I waited long minutes for Mother to come and ease the pain, for anyone out of that crowd of laughers to take my side and stand for the right — it had just been a *game*. When nobody showed up and laughter continued elsewhere without me, I pulled my mind back into my skull and relied on *me*, my only friend. In fairly short order, I found two facts I'd ignored till then — that Frances died to punish her father and that I was glad. The truth was no more

mysterious than that. And I said it over time and again with a merciless smile in the thick black air till I finally dozed.

What woke me, whenever, was a dry *tap tap*, hard and inhuman. I was not much braver than the average child, but at first I lay still and tested the sound. It was not the shut door, no knocking hand. It came from the far west side of the room, entirely dark. I'd already read *Treasure Island* and stored the news and sight of Blind Pew, tapping on the road with his walking stick and bent on vengeance. So at once I guessed this was no kind gift, aimed toward me in recompense for my mistreatment. Then it tapped again, harder still.

I propped myself on both elbows and looked toward the farthest tall window, moonlit. In the lower right corner, the size of a bucket, was a long black head with upcurved horns. The Devil, who else? *For me*, why else? He had heard Stooks blame me and was here to gloat, if not to haul me off to Hell. Like most boys then, I had a general notion of Hell, useful in sorting through life's million choices and oddly appealing, as a balance for Heaven, to a child's ruthless hunger for symmetry.

Tap tap again. His horns were knocking the glass to break it. In another minute he'd be in on me, choking or pressing me down to death. Upright in bed then, I set up a howl. The tapping went on and nobody came. I didn't think that, with the door shut and an empty room between us, nobody could hear me. With every second I grew more desperate; but addled by sleep, I never thought to stand and run toward light and my family. Maybe my anger and shame also stalled me.

Whyever, I stayed there staked to the bed, crying in terror and the worst self-pity I'd yet indulged. I thought hours passed and it helped not at all that eventually the tapping stopped and the head disappeared. It was surely lurking just out of sight, for my next false move. The bitterest word of all I thought in the eye of that storm was *abandonment* (or whatever form of the word I knew). I never felt a trace of guilt for cheating at cards — what were cards but a *game*? — and before much longer, I passed the black point at which I expected rescue or even life itself.

Then rescue. The shut door opened quickly, grown bodies poured in; and one of them strode to the midst of the room, found the hanging cord and switched on a light. It was my parents with Stooks beside them. Later I learned that the next-door neighbors had heard my cries and alerted my parents. I'd never been gladder to see anybody; the concern on their faces was almost enough. The thing that muddied the rescue of course was Stooks there, grinning and saying "You're *fine*, nothing wrong with you."

I raced to tell of the Devil's head and the butting horns.

My father especially heard the news grimly. He believed in the Devil and God more than most.

Mother said something like "Whoever you saw, he's fargone now."

Stooks had to wade in with a quick line of jokes, "The old

Scratch loves little tender white meat" (*Scratch* was the Devil's local nickname).

When he kept on laughing, I'm sorry to say I told him I knew why Little Frances left. I hesitate to guess my actual words, but right now I know they meant to be Satanic.

I wonder still if Stooks really heard me. My memory is dim on the aftermath, but I think he said "Well—" or some such lifeless baffled word. I know his face fell in on itself; and though he kept standing there, he said no more.

I can't believe my mother didn't hear; but then or later, she never responded. With her adherence to the laws of family love, I know she'd have made me beg Stooks' pardon. But next she told the men to leave us. Then she went to the pitcher and bowl on the dresser (there was no bathroom). She wet a cloth with cool water and, old as I was, she washed my face and finally asked for details on the Devil.

I pitched in, telling it all again and scaring myself almost as bad as the moment I saw him.

Then the door reopened and Father was back. I've said that I saw, right off, he believed me. Far more than anybody else we knew, he saw the powers of Good and Evil as utterly real and always ready at the tips of our fingers, the crack of our lips. He said "Son, that was a cow you saw — Buck Thompson's cow. I went out there with Ida's flashlight. There's a pile of manure and some deep hoofprints. Buck's out there right now, tying her up."

I let them think that news relieved me, but I also knew it would cause much laughter in the living room (what Reynolds' overheated mind had made from a cow). But then and now, half a century later, I have long spells of knowing I saw the pure condensation of evil that night — no comic Scratch but the cause of all hate toward children and beasts, the personal manager of Frances' torture who reached toward me in the stifling night and helped me strike my uncle Stooks Rodwell a cruel blow.

Stooks lived on another ten years. I know he was back home many more times, but I've kept no memory of his face or voice after that bad night. Maybe my mind was too ashamed, of what I'd thought and said in meanness, to store later pictures of his final years (I know he never taunted me again). I also have no recollection of Mother mentioning Frances after that, in the twenty-four years she lived. The obliterating mercy of time is widely praised; but Mother was not the woman to bury thoughts of a loved one — surely no child that died in innocence, gnashing her teeth.

Yet when Mother died and I winnowed the tons of paper she left, I found no trace of the old framed picture of Frances Rodwell with the close-held smile, on death's doorsill. And so I lived for nineteen years past Mother's death, four decades past the Devil's visit. The merciful time, in one of its notable

lightning-changes, donned a monster face and struck me with a spinal wound that consumed four surgeries and 4,000 rads of blistering X-ray.

By then Little Frances was gone more than fifty years; every member of our family who had known or seen her was also gone. And I'd thought of her only when passing a friend who limps a little from childhood osteomyelitis, in the 1930s. So it came as a shock to meet her once more but a shock that calmed into one of the actual helps I gave myself, or was given, in my own bad times.

In the first night after my third surgery, which spent nine hours inside a foot-long stretch of my spinal cord with lasers and knives, I was on morphine; but it helped very little. My previous times on strong doses had all been dreamy womblike days of absolute safety and dreamless nights of deep brown rest. Only when the drug was withdrawn after three or four days would I dream again, mostly nightmares as though my mind must suddenly splurge on terror after its long pause. But this third time, the opiate flew on through me helpless as fruit juice to touch my pain. And all that night I woke fairly often and told my tape recorder the dream I just had. Most were stories.

Listening now to the halting tape, I can still be held by two of the dreams, both thoroughly pleasant. The first was a poem about a piece of music that, more than once, had helped me survive.

*One of the palpable reproducible pleasures of the race—
To lie in a dark room and hear Bach's third orchestral suite
Build and destroy, assail and regale its golden pavilions
In the air of one's ears;
The healing light of utter power,
Utter content, actual promise,*

In the second dream my mind took the urinary problems of a bedridden paraplegic and wove them into a full-dress imitation Bible-story. On his deathbed an aged patriarch bade farewell to his grieving sons by explaining the useful symbolism of the shape of a large pee stain on the sheet. The name of the stain, he said, was *Djibouti*; and somehow to me that seemed good news, worth storing at least.

But then as the pain continued to mount, sometime near dawn I underwent my old boyhood dream of total paralysis. I noticed two big differences at once — *I'm now a grown man on a hospital bed, not a boy in a tent; and at first I seem entirely alone. The fear of my body's total stall is as high as ever though. I don't give a thought to Little Frances; she left my mind too long ago. Yet when I fail to wake myself, my frozen eyes begin to catch a rising light on the bed to my left. I do my best to watch it, and what I finally manage to glimpse is a woman my age in a standard-issue hospital gown—blond hair but streaked with gray. Her eyes are clamped shut; can it be my cousin Marcia?*

But then as I watch, her whole body gives a terrible shake as

though an awful fist has struck her. Next her fine head jerks back hard; and still not opening her eyes or turning, whatever afflicts her draws her whole shape up from the bed till she makes an awful hoop in the air. I hear the sickening crack of bones as her head and heels meet beneath her. Then she turns one slow revolution above me till her face meets mine. Her eyes split open and of course it's Frances—grown, even older and worse off than me.

I try to think of a way to thank her, to beg her pardon for using her name to punish Stooks—his face sweeps past me for the first time in years, falling in on itself as it did when I hurt him. No way I can reach out and bring him back. I only think that maybe here, in my own ordeal—if I bear it more bravely—I can somehow reach back and lighten Frances' own long crucifixion. Someway I can suffer, here and now, to lighten her pain all those years past.

But when I find that my lips can open, my tongue can move, Frances starts to fade above me. Not before she speaks two words. Just as she's almost gone from the room, her parched lips move; and she says "Stay here." I understand she's heard my offer, silent as it was, to suffer for her. So I stay as she goes; and then I try to draw my mind back down inside me and wait in dignified calm, if not peace.

In general I'm readier than most of my friends to share the ancient human belief that some dreams may well come from outside us, as warnings or omens or practical aids from whatever made us and watches our lives. So even now I'm not prepared to swear that Frances didn't really arrive in my mind that night, on a useful mission. Likewise I stay open-minded on what her two words meant. "Stay here" — stay where? In a hospital bed in driving pain? Or stay on Earth till she comes back and leads me again? But where to and how? Is part of the trouble I've recently known intended to do what I guessed in that dream — to give some backward help to Frances; some sharing and thinning of her ordeal, her dreadful knowledge?

Whatever it meant and goes on meaning, I obeyed her. I stayed, that night and till now. When I woke at daylight after she'd gone, the upper half of my body could move. My legs were still frozen, useless as logs screwed onto my hips. But three years later my hands still work and have told this story. When Marcia and I and all our generation are gone, at least this picture of one good child's burning death will stay behind us.

No one could help Frances Rodwell back then, even there at her bedside with cool compresses. How much less can I reach her now, a boy cousin not even born when she died. But strangely now I can hope to save her simple name a few years longer by fixing her fierce ordeal in words that may or may not move a few readers to look her way in their own short spans — a golden child raked down by the dark but ready to live again any year, in a patient mind that pauses a moment and gives her room. □

OLDEST LIVING CONFEDERATE *Really* TELLS ALL

By Allan Gurganus

Allan Gurganus cut the following anecdote from his best-selling novel, *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1989). He explains why.

E.M. Forster shows the gap between an anecdote and a story by telling one of each.

Anecdote: "The King died and the Queen died."

Story: "The King died and the Queen died of grief."

Two added words. One of them the merest technocratic preposition. And yet those monosyllables provide motive, history, pathos, and the greatest of subjects: life and its limits, love and its limits. Two words, words that only connect.

"Anecdote" might seem the larval stage of "Story." But, in fact, certain anecdotes cannot be dressed up and taught the forks. With these, the annals of the outtake must abound.

I tried to build my novel, *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, only of stories, pure protein, no filler, no cornstarch, no MSG anecdotage anywhere in

the book. I figured if Forster could, with two words, transform journalistic fact into narrative motion, motive and emotion, why shouldn't my novel's every fillip and furbelow evoke a larger question, a set of complications worthy of its own short novel?

The work's 719 pages, its forty main characters, fountain forth with stories earned and invented and saved. "Myth," the work's epigraph runs, "is gossip grown old." Lucy Marsden, our hostess and widow in question, repeats with authority her husband's gory lore from the War Betwixt the States (though she herself was not born till 1885). Lucy has, over time and via time, become her missing loved one's living archives.

"Stories," she says, "only happen to people who can tell them." She clearly means herself. She never mentions Anecdote, a subspecies of epic narrative that Lucille fails to respect or even quite notice.

I worked hard at helping the following example pass from its own translucent fetal anecdotage toward some shaggy rangy independent Storyhood. There's a reason it refused: This recorded event is

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merely and literally true. For me, that constitutes a stubborn limitation. You find that Life has put a lien on certain material, however good. You know how some seashells look exquisite at the shore but fade to lumpen grayness even in the beachfront parking lot. And certain details — too local, too often retold — will just not budge beyond their native turf. The following anecdote, so vivid in my life, hated travel, would not — despite my coaxing, my compliments, my bullying — even pack an overnight bag, never really made it past the porch.

During the Spanish-American War, this incident befell a certain plucky young Private Thomas Alfred Morris, my maternal grandfather. Maybe I felt overattached to the literal truth. Maybe that impeded my noticing or inventing a further metaphorical life, a larger use. Something prevented the premise from evolving a luxuriant middle, then a startling if inevitable end. The literal episode had, during fond family retellings, grown so layered and rich. It concerned a tight-lipped fellow who rarely confessed his own mistakes, a man who — as a civilian husband decades later — never once saw fit to cook again. A yearning toward Mythic meaning is heard, I think, in Lucy's voice at the end of the short passage; this plainly mirrors my own attempt to push a real-life fragment toward some imaginative wholeness that it simply will not bear.

For me, autobiographical fiction often smacks of Forster's flat first example. In seeking to honor literal and gorgeous inherited details, I feel corseted and staid. It's more fun to begin with nothing, or a mood's coloration, some scrap garnered from dreams or skilled eavesdropping; it's more fun to furnish and construct an event from the ground up, chair by wallpaper by drawer pull by facial tic by sidestreet weather. Those writers whose every work of fiction is thinly veiled memoir have both my pity and my respect. For me, the great inward delight and outrushing adrenaline of writing still springs from free-fall invention — "If this is true then that might be, and if that is..." We all know what total license still bobbles in the wake of that grandest phrase, "Once upon a time..." My novel's heroine is Once Upon a Time's options and drawbacks embodied. She could, half-blind, ninety-nine years old, make partial sense of everything, she could make myth of most lived deeds — most all except my literal granddad's literal and endearing wartime mistake.

So, this good-enough looking passage never survived that crucial transubstantiation. It never "took," the way a transplanted heart must, to live anew in that superior body where two words, "of grief" — award humanity — even to a king and a queen, otherwise unknown and unloved.

Here then is a nugget that remains so literally true it never felt the need to leap beyond being a homebody Anecdote and on toward the motion of emotion, on toward that highly mortal immortality we call Story.

Sometimes we'd get a stubborn batch of State University history majors visiting the house. They'd come to see my old man — the last vet to live or breathe on either side of that old moldy war. They wouldn't leave without my husband, bearded and in bed, telling them at least one. At least one war one.

"You ain't concentrating," I'd scold my Willie, sounding stern but just to get his attention, don't you know. "Think back. Maybe do 'The Soldier That Loved His Wife Too Much'? Or 'The Death of the Harpsichord.' Or 'When the Colors Switched.' What's shortest? Look, I know — do your 'Rice' one, darling. Listen up. These people ain't clearing out till you say something. Study my mouth, honey. 'Rice.' I say 'Rrice.'" Well, he finally whispered the word. A dozen pencils scribbled that down. And for this, folks get Doctor Degrees!

Finally I spied some old mischief flare back of my man's cataracted eyeballs. Captain toyed with bedclothes, he stared at his own ruind hands, he acted shy as a child made to do elocution lessons for company come clear from New York City. Then, slow, out it came in dribs and drabs till it steadied into meaning something.

Was eighteen and sixty four, said he. Seems like the company cook was doling out corn-on-the-cob, saying, "One for you, and one for you, and one..." Cook was a large overaverage friendly fellow, he called the troops "my boys," he just loved to see them eat. This same cook falls backward. He looks embarrassed like somebody's complained about his grub, he still clutches the tongs.

— See, the poor man'd been shot betwixt the eyes by a sniper and, still in his apron, laying there, mackerel-dead already. Others dodge to cover, quick. They lug that pot of corn — still scalding — to a nearby grove. Somebody brings the tongs. Though feeling sad, soldiers eventually chow down anyway. — People always do. The worse things get, the more your next meal means.

My Willie, a Reb private, he'd not yet gone fourteen. He was made the new chef. That boy knew nothing about cooking except the expert eating of it. Will was a sum total of cowlicks, sunburn, homesickness, excess wrists and ankles. Feeding one hundred men scared him. He recalled his mother's grand dinner parties prepared by expert house slaves who really suffered over company's coming, who endured his mother's fingerbowl fussiness. Young Will now stood off to one side, fretting.

A nice lieutenant stepped over and hinted as how rice might be a good start, plus real easy to do, rice. So, after the others marched out of camp, young Marsden found himself a twenty-pound sack in the rations wagon. With all that dry rice, he filled a ten-gallon iron pot to its very lip. Willie Marsden then dumped in many a tin cup of water, he lit the fire under its tripod, said, "That's that" (or something like it — his exact words have been

blotted out by time, and frankly, worse things've happened, child). Willie wandered off to gather kindling.

When the boy dragged back, a big group stood being rowdy all round the fire. Wee Willie Marsden pressed forward, arms piled with wood. Supper won't seriously started yet but, off in the woods, he'd begun feeling like he might have some hidden cooking talent. (Imagine someday baking scones for Lee!) It sure hurts a boy's feelings to see other fellows bunch — cackling — at your first night's cookfire.

Great gobs and hunks and pounds of rice were pouring over flames. Behaving like lava nearabout, wet rice nuzzled close to men's boots, this whole tide of it now moved downhill, steaming, pushing along every twig and smallish rock. A tin ladle was borne along upon uncurling white goo. The pot and tripod were so sticky, they hid under the gunk like ... well, maybe a snowman made of wallpaper paste or something, maybe. This part, I made up just now.

Men laughed, "Some cook, Marsden." Soldiers thanked the Almighty that their last dedicated chef hadn't lived to see this type of mess. At first, Marsden frowned and turned away, arms still heaped with sticks. Then somebody decent clapped him on the back, told my Willie to cheer up — he'd get it right someday.

"Well ...," the boy commenced shy grinning. "I didn't know. — How do you people always know stuff?"

One red-haired company clown ran around in front of the advancing mush. He laid down before it — pretending that his hands and feet were hogtied. Squirming like a virgin roped to train tracks, he squealed, "I'll do as you wish, sir. Just please, don't get any ON me!" Everybody considered this as funny as the world ever managed being. When some rice did smudge onto the funny man's hair, when he grew honestly peeved at this, then soldiers really slapped their knees. — All these months of being sure you'd die the next day, next minute — that strain switched so fast into laughing till you cried. Felt just excellent to.

Well, rice jokes became a type of fad. Caught on, they did. Some wag would say, "Just think, pals, the Chinese invented warfare's two wickedest weapons: gunpowder and rice." Then the yuks and hollering'd start.

A few campaigns later, some corporal was chef. But young Private Marsden, pinned down during heavy fire, might hear another Southerner call, "Quick, boy, Mr. Yankee's gaining on us — boil the secret weapon, fast. Rice for everybody. Wash them back to Maryland!" And — from all them holes and ruts where soldiers hid like security-minded rodents, much chuck-

ling rocked toward the safe civilian sky. Over rifle reports, laughing'd lift. Cannon blasts made trees shiver sideways, whole meadows get Swiss-cheesed with craters, but one hundred men in mud stayed busy with low-grade giggles that lasted and lasted. Rice jokes made about as much sense as anything else out there — more.

After Surrender, rice never seemed as funny to my old man. He could only grin over how hard they'd all turned it into something extra, something else and something fine.

"Strange," he told me back in the days when he could still remark a story, not just tell it, "That was the best twenty pounds our side ever spent. The goodness we wrung out of that one sack! Sometimes, mistakes are the finest things that'll ever happen to you—you know, Lucy?"

"I sure hope so," says I, casting a thought back over one shoulder at my life, so-called.

And so his tale is done. But students still stand around watching. I hold Cap's hand, I grab it a little harder. My man's glaze-fronted eyes are watering with joy recalled. "Just goes to show you," he says and then — shaking his whole head and whole beard to one side — you can see him slipping back into fog — his usual home and foxhole. I yet clutch his paw

but can feel how even his grip ... loses ... its ... way.

"That's all, folks," I tell young history-minded strangers back of me. One boy says he's still hoping to hear a Robert E. Lee one. Claims my husband told the best of his Lee ones to a group flown down from Harvard College not six months back. "The Captain here, he actually saw Lee, or so one hears," this lad thinks to inform me, wife of Mount Rushmore here.

"That's right, darling. — But six months is a while ago for a man my Captain's age and, believe me, he's not holding out on you a-purpose. Rice'll have to do for you today, thank you. This ain't a juke box we got going here. Thanks for coming." Grumbling, out they file, not sure what rice has to do with the winning of a war. Off they wander, mumblish, studying their notes.

"Just goes to show you," my husband had ended. But Captain never explained exactly what them rice jokes showed. — Maybe how what's funny gets people through! Maybe the merciful way what's pathetic sometimes strikes you as nearabout hilarious and saves the day? I don't know yet.

That part, child, I'm still working on.

See? "The King died and the Queen died." So what? Therefore, cut it. □

Illustration by Jacob Roquet



No Joy in Mudville

Pete Rose and Ty Cobb shared hitting plays, gambling ways, Georgia days — and enough clout to challenge the monopoly control of major league baseball.

By Neill Herring

Photos courtesy National Baseball Library



Accused of betting on games, Ty Cobb used his political muscle to beat the charges.

I lived with my wife and daughter in Macon, Georgia for three years during the mid-1980s, and one reason we selected the town for my wife's medical residency was the presence of the Macon Pirates, a South Atlantic League baseball club. The doctor was soon working the insane hours of a resident, leaving my daughter and me alone most evenings, so we went to the ball games, for hot dogs and entertainment.

We attended over 50 games in a single season, and one clear memory from that time is of my three-year-old crying bitterly over a rainout. The society of chalk miners, cigarette factory workers, drunks, foresters, morticians, and railroaders which we enjoyed at Luther Williams Field was as fine as I have known anywhere. That same kinship can be enjoyed every season in Asheville, or Chattanooga, or Birmingham, or Savannah, or Jacksonville, or hundreds of other parks.

Most minor league towns have histories of organized baseball dating back to the early years of this century. Each town has seen the passing of some legendary player in the lore of the game — if not on the hometown, then perhaps as an opponent or as a visitor when a major league club played an exhibition. Macon's big star had been Pete Rose, who spent a season there in the 1960s. Augusta, where the Macon club recently relocated, was where another famous player, Ty Cobb, got his start.

Rose and Cobb shared more than their minor-league origins in Georgia. The similarities between the two men are striking, and a brief look at their careers provides some insight into the troubles in baseball today — and unveils the monopoly power that increasingly dominates every aspect of the national game.

Rose and Cobb collected more base hits than any other players in the game. Both played aggressively, gained fame with a single team, then managed that club after retiring from regular play. And both were embroiled in gambling scandals, although with dramatically different outcomes.

WORKING-CLASS KID

Rose's case is recent news. He has just served time in a federal prison for failing to report gambling income. Prior to his tax difficulty he was banned from baseball for conduct the baseball commissioner found to be "not in the best interests of the game." The common understanding of that euphemism, based on accusations prior to the ban, was that Rose had bet on ball games, including those of his own club, the Cincinnati Reds.

In 1989, A. Bartlett Giamatti had just succeeded Peter Ueberroth as Commissioner of Baseball. The former president of Yale University, Giamatti enjoyed extraordinarily good press. Having a certifiable intellectual at the head of the game seemed to improve baseball's tone in the eyes of sportswriters, who hailed Giamatti as the "thinking man's ballfan."

Rose, on the other hand, was under attack by the press from the start for his smartass attitude, spiky hairstyle, and unsavory associates. After all, a mill worker's son accused of gambling by drug dealers, race track touts, and petty criminals is not going to look good up against an Ivy Leaguer — at least not in the "Gold Card" America of Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

In short, Rose had an image problem, despite his unarguable skills in the game. A working-class kid from Cincinnati, Rose had always shown a tough exterior: when he tied, but failed to break the National League record for hits in consecutive games, he was asked to comment on his failure. "At least I won't have to put up with you assholes any more," Rose confided to reporters on national television.

It didn't help Rose's image when some of his supposed friends accused him of betting on ball games, hoping to win lenient sentences for themselves in drug and gambling prosecutions. Giamatti launched an investigation, and Rose responded with an aggressive stance reminiscent of his days at the plate. He hired excellent lawyers, including Watergate counsel Sam Dash, and mounted an unexpectedly shrewd attack on the commissioner. Rose challenged the National Agreement — the contract that gives the owners complete control over where players are assigned and sets strict rules of behavior that all players must follow. In effect, Rose was saying that whether or not he had gambled was irrelevant if he had been

forced to agree not to gamble as a condition for playing baseball.

The Lords of Baseball seemed to jerk with the awareness that there was suddenly more at stake than the reputation of a single ballplayer. At risk was their control over players' contracts, hence their monopoly power over the game — a power which television revenues have rendered more valuable than ever.

BASEBALL CZAR

Rose's case against the owners made me think of Ty Cobb, the Georgia-born player who had also been accused of betting on his own ball club by the commissioner. Indeed, the Office of the Commissioner owes its very existence to gambling. Before 1920 baseball was controlled by the presidents of the rival National and American leagues, feudal chiefs who presided over warring groups of team owners united only by the threat of would-be rivals trying to start a third major league. When an attempt to fix the 1919 World Series threatened to turn public opinion against the game, the owners acted swiftly to hire a "czar" with absolute power over the game.

They chose Kennesaw Mountain Landis, a Chicago judge, as the first Commissioner of Baseball.

A Republican appointee to the federal bench, Landis never attended law school, but the baseball owners admired the numerous anti-strike injunctions he had issued from the bench on behalf of large financial interests. They were not disappointed. The dapper, pint-sized autocrat brought his anti-labor sentiments to baseball, promptly throwing eight players out of the game for life for

gambling on the Series. He exacted no penalties on any of the owners.

In the early 1920s, Landis heard charges that Cobb, then the manager of the Detroit club, had bet on opposing teams and then thrown games in order to win his wagers. Landis summoned Cobb to an interview, but the fiery manager struck back. Unlike Rose, Cobb was well-connected politically, and he used that influence against Landis. Both U.S. Senators from Georgia announced that they were disturbed by the economic monopoly of major league baseball and that they thought it warranted a Congressional investigation. Landis quickly abandoned his case. Tough on labor unions and illiterate ballplayers like Joe Jackson, Landis was not so bold when the owners' monopoly — the source of his own power — was placed on the table.

That monopoly — which lies at the very heart of baseball's economics — was made possible by the National Agreement. Signed as a peace treaty to stop the two big leagues from raiding each other for players, the Agreement created a "reserve clause" in player



Pete Rose outhit Cobb — and took a swing at the monopoly control over the game.

contracts that "reserves" the right of player assignment to the team owners. Although the clause has been modified to allow certain players to act as "free agents" and choose their own clubs, those rights can be, and have been, subverted by collusion among the owners.

Cobb mounted a political challenge to this monopoly through Congress, and Rose commenced a legal attack through the courts. In effect, both were suggesting that the National Agreement is a "combination in restraint of trade" prohibited by the Sherman Antitrust Act, and that any contracts made under such an illegal combination are invalid since they are inherently coercive. Anyone wishing to play baseball must sign the Agreement, since the owners enjoy a monopoly on major league play.

Sportswriters, oriented to spectacle, failed to understand Rose's legal strategy, and the issue was entirely ignored by the business press, which has forgotten even the concept of antitrust law during the past decade and a half of deregulation. Baseball owners, however, seem to have understood the issue quite well, and pressured Rose to quit the game. That pressure was intensified by his looming prosecution for income tax evasion, for which he was jailed.

Having moved from Macon to a small town an hour and a half from the nearest ballpark, I have become a devoted fan of baseball on the radio, the medium best suited to the game. One night last year, as I drove home from a Savannah Cardinals game with my daughter, I listened to Rose on WLW, the Red's hometown station, as he recounted his surrender to the commissioner.

His relief was palpable, even as it faded in and out over the airwaves. Rose had jumped at a settlement offer, pleading guilty to a minor offense, rather than attack the firmament of the institution to which he had devoted his adult life. That he got the chance to settle was testimony to the power of his bargaining position. Rose, a man with a teenage punk's social skills, knew his strength instinctively. On the radio that night, he recited each of the more important charges made against him by the Commissioner, then exulted, "He didn't get me for that one!" He sounded like a youthful offender who had copped a plea to a lesser charge in the principal's office, even though the plea meant he would be expelled from school for life.

MINOR-LEAGUE MONEY

Commissioner Giamatti died soon after the resolution of the Rose case, and some sportswriters blamed his passing in part on the hapless Rose. But the owners had survived, and having disposed of one troublesome employee, they immediately turned their attention to other labor issues.

In contract talks before the 1990 season, the Players' Association accused the owners of conspiring to subvert their union contract by secretly agreeing not to hire free agents. The owners responded by launching a class war, locking players out of the ballparks and delaying the start of the season. But taking on the union proved tougher than banning a single player from the game, and an arbitrator ruled in favor of the players. It was somehow appropriate that such a troubled season should end in a World Series unpredictably won by the Reds — yes, Rose's team, members of which gave him credit for their success.

Following the fight with their employees, the owners turned on their minor league affiliates. Over the years, an arrangement has evolved between the majors and minors in which the major league clubs provide players to minor league operators and pay their salaries. The minor league clubs then house the players, provide a ballpark, belong to a league of similar contractors, and make money (they hope) by selling tickets, concessions, and advertising.

In recent years, however, minor league operators have been able to turn quicker profits by selling their franchises (the Birmingham, Alabama club went to a Japanese interest). Like a lot of other properties in the overheated economy of the 1980s, minor league franchises have dramatically increased in speculative value. The major league owners decided they should cash in on the minor league boom.

Following their historic preference for an "all-or-nothing" method of negotiation, the owners threatened to wreck the game unless they got a bigger cut of the minor league action. They promised to create an entirely new minor league structure to compete with the existing clubs, which would be stripped of their players. To render the threat real, the majors bolted from the 1990 winter meetings in Los Angeles and conducted a rump of their own in Chicago.

The players are familiar with this strategy, and are not so easily cowed by it,

but the minor league operators can boast no such experience. After brief resistance, the minors surrendered. Monopoly power is real power. The majors got the minor-league share of the television money, forced the small clubs to pay more of the player expenses, and tightened their control over how players are managed.

BASEBALL BAILOUT?

Such cut-throat business deals will mean little to those of us sitting in the stands watching the action this spring. The game's great strength remains its appeal as sport, as play. My daughter and I, joined by a new baby sister, will be back in Macon on opening day this season. The Atlanta Braves have moved a minor league club to Luther Williams Field, remodeled after three seasons without baseball. We won't worry overmuch about who is getting how much money out of our fun once the pitcher starts to throw. But this momentary unconcern is akin to the apathy drivers feel on the highway, even when they know the road was built by contractors who rigged bids and paid off politicians: Using the road does not imply any approval as to how it got there.

Baseball has long been a matter of money, but that aspect of the game is coming more and more to dominate every aspect of its character. While sportswriters keep the public whipped up about player salaries, the big money — from television and ever-soaring ticket prices — has continued to go to the owners, who are now so embarrassed by riches that they can't even juggle losses out of their books.

Perhaps the economic hard times just now settling some of the looser accounts of the 1980s will have an effect on baseball as well. After all, deregulation is no longer regarded as an unqualified success. As one of the oldest deregulated businesses, baseball may come to mirror industries that have more recently abandoned antitrust protections — like the bus lines, the airlines, the savings and loans, and the banks and insurance companies. □

Neill Herring, a lobbyist in the Georgia state legislature, lives in Jesup and roots for the Macon Braves.

Fifty years after the publication of *The Mind of the South*, historians and journalists are still arguing about what it means.

OF DIFFERENT MINDS

By Eric Bates

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Dr. David Hackett Fischer stood at the microphone before 500 people looking very uncomfortable. A professor at Brandeis University, he was trying his best to defend the author of a book on Southern history.

“When we judge him by the standards of his own time, he was a liberal,” said Fischer. “He spoke out against the Ku Klux Klan, against lynching, when it was not merely unpopular, but dangerous to do so. That liberalism may pale when we measure it against our standards, but I think it was very real nonetheless.”

Dr. Nell Irvin Painter was quick to respond. “I’m sorry, I have to disagree profoundly. There were people in his world, black and white, who stood for the things that he mouthed. He only looks good because there were so many people saying so many awful things in his world. But he lived in the same world as Lillian Smith and Jesse Daniel Ames, a world in which other people were actually *doing* things.

You don’t have to be a black reader or a woman to see the patronizing language that he uses.”

At first glance, the exchange seems unremarkable. After all, what could be more commonplace than a white man and a black woman disagreeing about Southern history? Such is the stuff history conferences, if not the South itself, are made of.

What was unusual about the exchange was the subject. Fischer and Painter were speaking to hundreds of people at Wake Forest University, including some of the leading Southern scholars and journalists of the day, all of whom were devoting an entire weekend to discussing a single book. Not *Gone with the Wind*, not *The Sound and the Fury*, not anything by Faulkner, for that matter. These academics and writers had come from all over the country to mark the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Mind of the South* by Wilbur Joseph Cash.

When W. J. Cash finished his first and only book in 1941, he could scarcely imagine the enduring impact it would

Photo courtesy University of Texas



W. J. Cash



Cash in March 1941

To Cash, the South was a society built on class, but lacking any class consciousness.

have. Fifty years later, it remains a source of controversy and contention among those who study the South.

Cash himself never lived to see the debate he sparked; drunk and despondent, he hung himself in a hotel room in Mexico City shortly after the book appeared. But his work survived, and over the years it has taken on a curious life of its own. The book has never gone out of print, and continues to sell as steadily as many Faulkner novels.

"I would venture to guess that no other book on Southern history rivals Cash's in influence among laymen, and few among professional historians," said Dr. C. Vann Woodward, professor emeritus at Yale.

"It changed my life," agreed Dr. John Hope Franklin, professor emeritus at Duke. "I never write a word without thinking of *The Mind of the South*."

ONE SOUTH?

Why have some of the most prolific historians lavished such praise on a book written by a reclusive, brooding, little-known journalist of the 1930s? Because Cash artfully shifted the focus of Southern history, examining how the region was shaped by the forces of race and class.

Drawing on Marx and Freud, Cash probed the ego of the white Southerner from frontier days, through the rise of the plantation and the bloodbath of the Civil War, to the rule of cotton and lynch law. Why, Cash wanted to know, did

common whites ignore their own social and political interests and follow the master class of planters and their descendants? Or, as Dr. Richard King put it at the conference, "Why had the South of Thomas Jefferson become the South of Nathan Bedford Forrest?"

To Cash, the South was a society built on class, but lacking any class consciousness. Simply put, poor whites followed the wealthy because they identified with the culture of white supremacy. Southern society crushed them into the ground day after day, yet they cherished it, yielded to it, marched off to die for it. The underlying reason: the triumph of racism.

Rich planters created loyalty among "white trash," Cash argued, by directing their fears and hatred against blacks. "Add up his blindness to his real interests, his lack of class feeling and of social and economic focus, and you arrive, with the precision of a formula in mathematics, at the solid South."

But Cash was not looking for some simplistic formula. On the contrary, he reveled in contradictions and searched for multiple causes and motivations behind every development. Cash wanted to capture the mentality of the South, its "folk mind," its values and ideas, feelings and moods — in short, its very consciousness.

It was a remarkable undertaking, and the rich prose and imagination Cash brought to the task remain magnificent half a century later. Yet Cash also had a love of generalizations, and his emphasis

on the essential unity of the Old South — and its unbroken continuation into the modern world — flawed his theme in two fundamental ways.

First, as C. Vann Woodward and others at the conference pointed out, Cash was so bent on proving that the New South remained virtually the same as the Old, that he overlooked the dramatic changes and conflicts that shaped the region.

"He denied that there was any significant break between the Old South and the New South," Woodward said. "Any changes brought about by secession, civil war, defeat, abolition of slavery, reconstruction, redemption, or industrialization were to his mind 'essentially superficial.'"

Thus, Cash overlooked diversity and underestimated dissent. He ignored the masses of white Southerners who opposed the Civil War, paid little attention to the Populist movement that rocked the region, and never mentioned his contemporaries who were struggling to right the wrongs he so eloquently condemned. "If it can be said there are many Souths," Cash wrote, "the fact remains that there is also one South."

And therein lies the second flaw in *The Mind of the South*. To Cash, the "one South" was the South of the white man. "W. J. Cash was fettered by the very conventions he sought to describe," said Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, professor of religion and culture at Duke University. "He labored under the illusion that the ruling mind is the only mind."

By excluding blacks and women from "the South," Cash ultimately prevented himself from ever fully understanding the region in all its richness and diversity. Worse, he sometimes descended into outright racism, as when he described the Negro as "notoriously one of the world's greatest hedonists. . . a creature of grandiloquent imagination, of facile emotion, and, above everything else under heaven, of enjoyment."

Cash, in the final analysis, was no hero. He did not join in the struggles being waged to change the region for the better. He sat at his typewriter, brooding, writing, depressed at all he saw, while all around him the ordinary Southerners he ridiculed and the blacks and women he ignored were risking their lives to make the region a better place to live.

But to accept that Cash was no activist

misses his place in the history of Southern thought. As a work of the imagination, *The Mind of the South* remains an essential component to any understanding of the class dynamics of the region — of the ways in which ruling whites continue to wield race as a whip to keep other whites in line.

“It is far easier, I know, to criticize the failure of the South to face and solve its problems than it is to solve them,” Cash wrote in the final paragraphs of his book. “Solution is difficult and, for all I know, may be impossible in some cases. But it is clear at least that there is no chance of solving them until there is a leadership

which is willing to face them fully and in all their implications, to arouse the people to them, and to try to evolve a comprehensive and adequate means for coping with them. It is the absence of that leadership, and ultimately the failure of any mood of realism, the preference for easy complacency, that I have sought to emphasize.”

“SIX FEET OF DIRT”

Dr. Bruce Clayton, professor of history at Allegheny College, is the author of a new biography of Cash published by LSU Press. He spoke about the world Cash knew as a boy:

No one, I am sure, would be more surprised than W.J. Cash to learn that anyone, let alone academics, would be gathering to say happy birthday to *The Mind of the South*. Think of all those nasty things he said about the region — its narrowness, sentimentality, stubborn blindness to its faults, its violence and inherent racism.

Thus Cash, born and bred in the South and one of its loyal sons, rejected — rudely, but oh so artistically — the very world of his mother and father and those who were bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Born in 1900 in Gaffney, South Carolina, in the heart of the Piedmont mill country, Cash knew the folk culture of the South intimately. His parents were good country people, sturdy, unassuming, uncomplaining and hard-working. Cash’s father clerked in a local mill and watched, admiringly, as his ambitious older brother climbed the business ladder.

The Cash brothers, one or two rungs above the mill hands, did not hold with unions, abhorred strikes, and embraced the owners’ oft-trumpeted assertion that they had built the mills to bring jobs to the needy whites — a view seconded with numbing frequency by the town fathers.

In religion, the Cashes were staunch Baptists, as were the majority of their neighbors — “fundamentalists,” in today’s

parlance. “Foot-washin’ Baptists,” Cash called them. Mama and Daddy Cash looked with alarm at Gaffney’s deserved reputation as a hard-drinking, violent town. But no more than their neighbors did they question white supremacy. Gaffney was in the center of a virulently racist culture where segregation was the unquestioned rule and racial violence, often brutal, abounded.

Gaffney’s whites ex-

tolled the virtues of the “old-time” Negro and issued dire warnings against the black rapist. In this they were egged on by the state’s race-baiting political leaders, Benjamin Tillman and Coleman Blease. On one occasion in Gaffney, “Coley” Blease shouted to an admiring throng that “when a nigger laid his hand upon a white woman, the quicker he was placed under six feet of dirt, the better.”

In such an atmosphere, terms like decency and humanity could be stretched to the limit without embarrassment. In 1906, the year Cash was six years old, a massive mob in a nearby county took an accused Negro rapist from jail, tied him to a tree, and riddled his body with bullets. Only the pleas of a well-known moderate, said the local newspaper approvingly, prevented the crowd from burning the man alive and prompted a “humane man” to “pull the doomed negro’s hat over his face before the crowd started shooting.” Then the victim’s head “was literally shot into pulp, his brains covering his hat and face.” Such was Cash’s boyhood world.

“A SPECIAL ALIEN GROUP”

Dr. Nell Irvin Painter, professor of history at Princeton University, spoke about what Cash left out:

The publication of *The Mind of the South* and this symposium are separated by an historical watershed that invalidated much of what Cash assumed about the South: the civil rights movement. The movement engendered fundamental changes in Southern life, which extended to its universities and created the possibility of my being here today.

As an embodiment of the changes that undermined so much of what Cash had to say, it strikes me that my commenting on his book represents a clash of generations that allows no graceful exit. Cash wrote of “the mind” of the South without envisioning that women and black people might have a capacity to reason independently.

Like so much writing from the American intellectual tradition before the civil rights and black studies movements, *The Mind of the South* was not intended for eyes like mine. Writing to fellow white North Carolinians, educated white Southerners, and Northern book buyers, Cash never conceived of any but the most informal black or female critics.

Although I respect the book’s persuasiveness for masses of readers and have assigned it in my Southern history courses, I have never been susceptible to its magnetism, as



Bruce Clayton



Nell Irvin Painter

have so many of my white male colleagues.

When I first encountered *The Mind of the South* as an undergraduate in the early 1960s I thought it thoroughly racist. My graduate student rereading of it in the early 1970s revealed it as deeply sexist. Rereading it as a teacher in the 1980s, I was struck by Cash's contempt for the poor of both races and his blindness to the ways in which slavery and racism had distorted the Southern polity. I was shocked that he could speak of an "old basic feeling of democracy"

in the slave South, which I think of as a society in which one-third of the men did not even own themselves, never mind vote.

For Cash, "the Negro" is not part of "the South." He goes so far as to identify "the Negro" as "a special alien group" whose presence assures the fact of an enduring white unity.

Nonetheless, Cash mentions the presence of Negroes as an apparent but not decisive factor distinguishing the South from the North. He also admits that "the Negro" has influenced the way the white man thinks, feels, speaks, and moves. Alien though he may be, Cash's "the Negro" functions as a potent force in the mind of the South.

At the same time, however, Cash is entirely uninterested in the Negro as an independent historical actor. It was as though Cash had created a potent force, then denied it agency. "The Negro" represents a virtually powerless figure. Cash could not imagine black men as political actors who would be a positive force in the South.

"WAGES OF ACCOMMODATION"

Dr. C. Eric Lincoln is the author of The Black Church in the African-American Experience. He related his own childhood experiences to The Mind of the South:

Cash's "mind of the South" is strictly a white mind. Black Southerners are entirely excluded from his concept of this mind; for that reason, his inquiry is limited from the start.

The South was and is about Negroes, blacks, African Americans. They figure with implacable pervasiveness in every area by which the region is defined: economics, law, politics, religion, sex, social relations — the list is endless.

Take away the black component and the whole notion of "the South" collapses. It becomes unimaginable, like Lawrence in Arabia with no Arabs.

I know what Cash was writing about. I know about "black men singing . . . sad songs in the cotton." I know because I was there in the cotton, and I was black. And if I never sang sad songs on such occasions, I heard those who did and cursed them for their resignation.

And if I didn't know that the "po' crackers" and the "white trash" were descended from "convict servants, redemptioners and debtors," as Cash claims, I did know instinctively to stay away from them. Whatever their origins, po' white trash meant trouble — lots of trouble. And to many a black man, that trouble proved terminal.

My grandmother was constant and insistent: "Son, when you have to go into town, go on directly about your business. Don't have nothing to do with that white trash hanging around the courthouse yard. Don't fight with them redneck boys, and don't even look at them po' white gals. Just do your business and get on back home directly." A reasonably effective prescription for survival.

Yes, I knew the po' white trash had an unabated lust for my blood, but at the time, I didn't understand why. Nor did I know for sure that behind the so-called rednecks who so readily laid down their Bibles, quit their revivals, and leaped from their pulpits to go "coon hunting" was all the time the stealthy hand of the "quality white folks," who taught us to hate the "trash" in the first place.

I worked for "quality folk" for 50 cents a week and my breakfast, leaving home at three in the morning to be a milk boy for a small dairy. I washed the steel crates of thick, heavy glass bottles and delivered the milk and cream to the front porches of the sleeping gentry until eight in the morning. Every morning.

My Grandpa milked 18 cows twice a day, every day. And for that the "best people" paid him \$3.50 a week, and praised him for his industry. My Grandma washed and ironed for the same family of five white folks of the very best quality, who paid her \$1.25 and called her "Aunt Mattie" with that peculiar affection and respect quality white folks reserve for their favorite black retainers.

That \$5.25 we managed to eke out together meant survival. It was the wages of accommodation to a system that taught us to work without stinting, hate the cracker, be suspicious of the Jew, and maintain a developed sense of contingency to a recognized family of the ruling class. This was the understanding that put bread and salt and pork on the tables of the "good" — the accommodated — Negroes; insured them against "trouble with the law"; kept the po' white trash at bay; sent the white doctor to see them



C. Eric Lincoln

when they were down sick; and brought the white folks they worked for to their funerals when they could work no more.

At the very time that Cash was being hailed for his disclosure of the traditional establishment "mind of the South," a countermind which was destined to change the South forever was taking on definition in the form of a civil rights revolution. The truth is, there had always been that *other* mind — denied expression, but there nonetheless. There is such a mind within every repressive society, waiting to be heard. Such is the lesson implicit in the disintegration of the Soviet Empire and the dismantling of South Africa, where the ruling minds ran to Communism and apartheid while the counterminds were bent on freedom.

America has changed a lot in the half century since *The Mind of the South* appeared. The industries that brought Progress to the South are now taking that Progress to Japan and Korea. The cotton mills which damned the unions, exploited the poor whites, and disdained the Negroes are gone to Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Ku Klux Klan, that alleged "authentic folk movement," is authentic no longer. It remains nonetheless a public shrine for the rallying of a diverse collection of unrepentant ankle biters unwilling to accept any part of the painfully wrought, still emerging new world.

This new world is symbolized by those same muted black voices who yesterday sang sad songs in the cotton but today, increasingly, share with their erstwhile "keepers" the delicate decisions determining the welfare of all.

This is true Progress. This is as it should be.

"A HABIT OF SERVITUDE"

Howell Raines is Washington editor of The New York Times and the author of My Soul is Rested. He spoke about how The Mind of the South can help us understand the South today:

Cash reminds us that social and class conflict in the South are not simple matters. In the 27 years I've been a reporter, one of the enduring paradoxes of New South politics has been the tendency of Southerners to vote against their own financial and social interests.

Taking my native Alabama as an example, we see a state that has been operated as an economic colony of the Northeast since 1900, when ownership of the coal and iron deposits around Birmingham passed into the hands of out-of-state investors. The 1901 constitution of Alabama, which remains a millstone around the state's neck to this day, mandated that these corporations should pay the same property taxes as individuals.

This meant that for decades, United States Steel, in one of the great examples of corporate social irresponsibility in American history, was able to ship Alabama steel and dollars to Pittsburgh, while poisoning the state's streams, fouling its air, corrupting its politicians, and paying only a pittance in property tax.

Today, Northern paper companies have replaced U.S. Steel as Alabama's principal absentee landlords. But the legacy of U.S. Steel lives on in the form of the region's lowest property taxes. Paper-making corporations that pay \$4 per acre in prop-

erty taxes in Georgia and \$2 to \$3 in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Florida, pay 50 cents to 95 cents per acre in yearly taxes in Alabama.

As a consequence, Alabama has Third World infant mortality rates literally within the shadow of its shiny University of Alabama Medical School in Birmingham. It has a school system so starved for money that even the traditional door-mat states of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas are passing it in education funding and educational quality.

Yet last fall — and here we're coming to the paradox that I think Cash can help us penetrate — Alabama re-elected a governor who has pledged to preserve the tax breaks of the paper companies that are now using the state as one vast tree farm.

Part of the explanation of this tradition of exploitation lies, of course, in the race issue. For 25 years, George Wallace was a loyal protector of the financial interests of the extractive industries in Alabama. He used the race issue to divert the attention of the white voters from the issue of tax equity. Alabama's corporate masters, in turn, funded his national political campaigns.

But if we are to believe Cash, we must also look to the Civil War to explain the attitude of servitude among many Southern voters, particularly white voters, toward candidates and corporate leaders who perpetrate the exploitation of the region.

In a state like Alabama, only about five percent of the white residents at the time of the Civil War owned slaves. Why were the remaining 95 percent of whites willing to die for the economic interests of the master class?

Cash writes: "Out of that ordeal by fire, the Civil War, the masses had brought not only a great body of memories in common with the master class, but a deep affection for those captains, a profound trust in them. . . . there had begun to grow up in him some palpable feeling, vague still but distinctly going beyond anything he had exhibited previously, of the right of his captains, of the master class, to ordain and command."

Dr. Martin Luther King, the greatest leader to breathe the air of the South in my lifetime, told black people across the region that before they could seek to secure their social freedom, they had to evict the attitudes of slavery from their own hearts and minds.

Cash's writing on this point suggests that there is still in all Southerners, black and white, a habit of political servitude, a habit of obedience that is deeply rooted in our psyche, and is influencing the political choices of voters up to this day. If he is right, particularly in states such as my home state, the task of the political liberation of the New South has hardly begun. □



Howell Raines

SQUATTERS RIGHT

NEW ORLEANS, LA. — Eighteen years of moving from apartment to apartment, at the mercy of capricious landlords and real estate agents, had taken its toll on 37-year-old Myrtis Clark. When her last landlord evicted her for complaining about an abusive neighbor, she decided she'd had enough. As a member of ACORN, a grassroots organizing group, she obtained a list of vacant government-owned houses that she was eligible to bid on. Her next move was calculated — and illegal. On October 13, 1990, with the backing of ACORN, Clark tore the planks off a house that had been boarded up for two years and staked her claim. Clark had become a squatter.

With the help of friends and neighbors, Clark got down to work on the house, long ravaged by time and vandals. A dry-wall finisher by trade, she spent months hammering up holes, gutting internal walls, replacing gyprock and broken windows, and ripping out ceilings to expose the rafters for a light, airy look. The interior of the small woodframe house was a riot of planks, nails and cartons, out of which Clark fashioned a place she could call home.

Tall and slim, Clark stretched out her long legs as she sat at her kitchen table on a warm fall day last November. The drone of lawnmowers drifted through the open

window. Clark had already been accepted by her neighbors on Pauline Street, located in a modest, quiet, predominantly black part of New Orleans. They were pleased to see the place occupied after standing vacant for two years. Ugly boards no longer covered the doors and windows, and the small lawn was neat and tidy. More important, the house no longer stood open to drug dealers, as did other

Congress ordered a
federal agency to sell
abandoned homes to
low-income families.

Myrtis Clark got
tired of waiting.

By Katrina Willis

abandoned houses in the neighborhood.

Clark felt lucky. "There are so many people who would love to move in and have a roof over their heads," she said. "I need this place. If I didn't have it, I'd be out in the street."

UNCLE SAM, REALTOR

The house Clark occupied is owned by the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC), the massive federal agency created by Congress in August 1989 to sell off assets from hundreds of failed savings and loans. Now the largest real estate dealer in the world, the RTC says it has tried to sell properties as quickly as possible without disrupting the real estate market. It has been roundly criticized, however, for handing over many valuable assets to large financial institutions at bargain-basement prices, even *paying* some banks to take deposits worth millions.

By the time it's over, the bailout of the S&L industry is expected to cost every taxpayer at least \$14,000. Even worse, the bailout is doing little to hold the industry accountable to its original purpose: helping ordinary Americans buy their own homes. As unemployment and real estate costs soared during the past decade, home ownership plummeted and homelessness reached crisis proportions. Many S&Ls,



Myrtis Clark took over an abandoned house in New Orleans and fashioned a place she could call home.

meanwhile, gambled deposits on junk bonds and other risky investments.

Pressured by the Financial Democracy Campaign, a national coalition of church, labor, and citizen groups like ACORN, Congress ordered the RTC to help ease the shortage of affordable housing by marketing its 37,000 residential properties to those who need them most. The agency has a clear mandate to offer discount prices and special financing to low- and moderate-income homebuyers like Myrtis Clark, and to non-profit groups like ACORN.

But in its first year and a half in the real estate business, the RTC has dragged its feet on affordable housing. Although the agency has given big investors cut-rate deals on real estate, it has shown little interest in providing discounts and seller financing for low-cost homes. (See sidebar, next page.)

The result? "Untold thousands of eligible properties have been sold to speculators," says Tom Schlesinger, director of the non-profit Southern Finance Project based in Charlotte, North Carolina. "Poor and middle-income homebuyers, housing non-profits and public authorities have been locked out of the market."

U.S. Representative Barney Frank of Massachusetts is even more emphatic:

"I've never seen a program administered less sympathetically."

The human cost of RTC stonewalling is apparent in New Orleans, where an estimated 8,000 people are homeless in a city full of vacant homes. Sixty-one percent of the city is black, and the neighborhood in which Clark staked her claim — like most black working-class areas of the city — is dotted with abandoned houses owned by the government. Among them are comfortable homes, architectural jewels built a century ago by German immigrants and sheltered by hundred-year-old oak trees lining the streets.

The housing trouble began when the domestic oil crisis struck New Orleans in 1984 and forced many renting families to move in with friends and relatives to save money. Absentee landlords who had borrowed heavily from savings and loans to get cash for their investments suddenly found themselves without tenants, and with no means to repay their debts. By the end of the 1980s, banks and S&Ls had foreclosed on many homes. Street after street was blighted by boarded-up homes falling into disrepair. New Orleans, the city never too poor to party, was looking mighty ragged.

Then the savings and loan crisis hit. Dozens of S&Ls failed, throwing hundreds of homes into the hands of the RTC.

Only Texas suffered more than Louisiana, where, as of last September, the RTC controlled 19 failed S&Ls with \$2.4 billion in assets. The agency lists 727 residential properties in New Orleans, all but 83 of which qualify for the affordable housing program. To date, only 10 properties in the city have been sold under the program.

Today almost every block of working-class neighborhoods in New Orleans is home to at least one vacant and vandalized property, ultimately owned by Uncle Sam. Sighs city housing official Sheila Danzey: "Everything in New Orleans is 'for sale' or 'foreclosed.'"

HOME SWEET SQUAT

Despite the large number of vacant homes and the far larger number of homeless residents in New Orleans, few people have had the courage to simply take over abandoned houses. The day Clark began her squat, she recalls, the front door yielded immediately to reveal a dirty interior with broken windows and cracked walls. She placed a bid on the house with the RTC, hoping to have the \$13,000 price tag reduced to account for the labor and materials she supplied.

Before long, an agent from the RTC's management company dropped by and

asked Clark if she realized she was trespassing. The house was under contract from a buyer, he told her. She knew, she said. She was the buyer.

The agent told Clark that the police were on their way to throw her out, but a flurry of calls averted the move. Clark was permitted to stay, provided she take out insurance.

For Clark, squatting in the house meant more than asserting her right to a secure shelter. It was also an opportunity to help fix the damage done by wealthy investors who snapped up houses during the oil boom and walked away when times grew tough.

Indeed, the vacant houses left behind are drawing crime to neighborhoods where few people lock their doors. "Not too long ago one of the RTC houses on the corner was being used as a crack house, and a neighbor's little brother was robbed," says Sarah Dave, who has lived on the same street for 14 years. "Some city officials want to tear down the crack houses, but there are a lot of people here who would like to buy those homes. I really get upset, because the city wouldn't allow vacant houses like these to just sit in an elite neighborhood like the Garden District."

But those who need the houses the most may have the hardest time buying them. Seventy percent of New Orleans



The house on Pauline Street

residents are renters, and 30 percent live below the poverty line. "We have a tremendous hidden homeless population — whole families of renters who have lost their homes and have moved in with friends or relatives," says Beth Butler of ACORN. The federally owned properties could help ease the desperate housing crunch, she says, but the RTC has shown little interest in doing so.

ACORN, among the most active groups negotiating with the RTC, sued the agency last August for failing to live up to its affordable housing mandate. The group encouraged Clark to take over an RTC house to call attention to the federal footdragging — a strategy ACORN has used successfully in other cities.

Sitting in the Pauline Street house last fall, Clark was upbeat. ACORN officials,

who were handling the legal dealings on her behalf, told her that the RTC had agreed to "freeze" all sales on the house and 99 other properties nationwide.

As neighbors dropped by, hearty New Orleans coffee with chicory brewed on the stove. Everything seemed fine. Still, aware of the uncertainty surrounding her acquisition, Clark hedged her excitement at the prospect of taking title to her own home.

"There is always that shadow that lingers when you're in negotiations," she said. "You just don't know what can happen."

"LANDLORD STATE"

With the risk involved in squatting, and the glut of rental property around New Orleans, why not give renting another try? Clark has an answer for that: If she buys her own home from the RTC, it will be the first place she will not face the constant threat of eviction.

Sitting amid a clutter of nails, tools, and furniture, Clark recalled the renting nightmare that drove her to squatting. "Everybody in my particular apartment complex got along fine, and then they moved someone in there who would beat his wife to a pulp," she remembered. "I was living right on the other side of the wall and would call and make complaints.

WHERE THE HEART ISN'T

Although thousands of Louisianans qualify for low-cost homes under the affordable housing program mandated by Congress, only a few low-income families have managed to buy homes from the RTC.

A year and a half after the RTC was created, the agency has sold only 114 single-family homes under the program in the entire state of Louisiana. Worse, a total of 759 Louisiana properties set aside for working families may soon be sold to wealthy investors and speculators. Low-income buyers and housing agencies have been given a three-month "right of first refusal" on the homes as required by law, leaving the properties up for grabs.

Why has the RTC sold less than 15 percent of its affordable houses in Louisiana to eligible buyers? "I can't give a concise answer," says Garey Trahan, an RTC official in Baton Rouge.

"It's probably a combination of things: the poor condition of the properties, the soft economy, and the fact that there are few low-income purchasers on the property market. You have to remember, 70 percent of New Orleans residents are renters."

Trahan concedes, however, that the agency's small staff limits its outreach to low-income buyers. "I am the affordable housing program in two states," he says.

A more serious problem, say housing advocates, is that the RTC has failed to provide the special discounts and financing that it gives to banks and big investors. Recognizing this, several agencies in other states are working with the RTC to create a program in which poor and moderate-income people could purchase RTC homes without having to make a large down payment — exactly the kind of plan advocates say is needed in Louisiana.

"The RTC has to be more flexible," says William Quigley, a New Orleans civil rights lawyer. "In this town, poor people are very poor. Why not show them just a little of the flexibility the RTC is showing everyone else?"

Some non-profit groups think things are improving. The RTC has given property to non-profits in Texas and Arkansas, and the director of one neighborhood group under contract with the RTC praises its "wonderful working relationship" with the agency.

But many groups say the RTC has been absurdly slow getting information about available properties to prospective buyers. "Last fall, when I asked the RTC for a list of affordable housing properties in Baton Rouge, the office said it could not supply one, or for any other place in the state," says Allison Kendrick, president of the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency. "To the RTC, the affordable housing program has just not been a priority."

Other neighbors would call, too, but the office didn't care."

When the man fired two shots at another neighbor, Clark called the Realtor and demanded action. She got it. The landlord evicted her, giving her five days to clear out of her apartment.

"I think I bucked the system too much," she said. "I was making too much noise about things."

When the landlord took Clark to look at another apartment, she couldn't believe her eyes. "The ceiling had literally fallen down, the cabinets were hanging, the place smelt like urine, the carpets were filthy — and he still expected me to take it."

Clark said such harsh treatment of renters is commonplace in New Orleans. "Renters don't have any rights. This is a landlord's state here; they have all the power. It's sad how they shift poor people around."

Clark said that she and her friends cannot buy their own homes because they don't fit the profile that banks require when making loans. "You have to keep in mind that you are in the Deep South. The people in power here are white and they tend to get the better jobs. It's hard. You don't make the money you do in California, New York. It's really hard to excel here and it's frustrating."

But Clark has not been discouraged. "If I get my foot through the door, it's

going to open doors for other people. Right now, a lot of people are afraid to take the chance."

A DREAM DEFERRED

In the end, however, Clark's dream of owning the Pauline Street house proved short-lived. In early February, she learned that the RTC had decided to give the house to another low-income family. The agency evicted Clark, ordering her to clear out of the home she had made for herself. "I'm losing this place for good," she said. "It's so disappointing."

To add insult to injury, Clark said, ACORN officials had not called for weeks or offered to help her move. "I feel like ACORN didn't do its homework. They told me that everything was on track, that they had an agreement with the RTC. I assumed they were doing all the paperwork and had a written contract, and now I find out it was only a verbal agreement."

Beth Butler of ACORN said she was shocked that the RTC went back on its word. "A verbal agreement is binding in Louisiana. It was just unbelievable to us that RTC would sell the house to someone else, after the national officials had promised to freeze sales on that property." ACORN is trying to find another RTC house for Clark and has asked the agency

to reimburse her for the time and materials she put into the property.

Muriel Watkins, coordinator of affordable housing for the RTC, said it turned out that the agency had received a bid on the Pauline Street house before it formally froze sales. "We want to provide low-income housing to people," Watkins insisted, saying the agency is working with ACORN to identify low-income buyers. The Pauline Street house, she added, is only "one property relative to all the properties ACORN is getting."

But to Myrtis Clark, the house on Pauline Street was more than one property — it was the chance to obtain her own home, and to reclaim a community asset. The obstacles she faced reflect the bureaucratic nightmare many low-income people confront in trying to buy affordable housing from the RTC. The nationwide cost of the agency's failure, like the cost of the S&L debacle itself, is borne disproportionately by the poor and middle-class, by people like Myrtis Clark — the millions of Americans for whom buying or renting a decent home is a fast-disappearing dream. □

Katrina Willis, a financial reporter, visited New Orleans while an associate of the Center for Investigative Reporting in San Francisco.

Lonie and Frenzella Johnson of New Orleans found out just how low a priority affordable housing is at the RTC when they tried to buy back their own home from the bailout agency last year. The couple bought their Mazant Street house in a black working-class neighborhood in 1971. They never missed a payment, and had almost paid off their mortgage when they decided to take out a second loan from local South Savings and Loan in 1985.

Then back surgery forced Frenzella to quit her job as a proofreader, and the family was forced into bankruptcy. Standing on the courthouse steps last spring, Mrs. Johnson watched, grieving, as South Savings took title to the family home at a foreclosure auction.

Ironically, South Savings itself went bankrupt, and wound up in the hands of the RTC. The Johnsons hoped to repurchase their home from the agency, and made repeated calls to South Savings to arrange the sale. Their calls went unanswered.

Then one day last summer, Frenzella, a volunteer with ACORN, was inspecting a list of RTC properties up for sale when she ran across something unexpected: the address of her own home. It was the first time she had any idea that the RTC might sell the house to someone else.

"I felt sick, disgusted, stunned, humiliated more than anything in this world," she recalls. "When I first saw it, I couldn't even talk."

Afraid they would lose their home, the Johnsons made a formal \$1000 bid on the house through ACORN. The community group faxed the offer to the RTC on August 18. And that, says Frenzella, "is when all hell broke loose."

Several days later a local real estate agent stopped by the house to tell the Johnsons their bid would not be accepted. Then, on September 4, the Johnsons found an eviction notice nailed to their door. South Savings refused to accept their rent check, and the RTC never acknowledged their bid on the house.

The Johnson family, which includes an ailing grandparent, two children, and a grandchild, has moved several blocks away. The Mazant Street home now stands empty, boarded-up, its back door and metal downspouts already torn off by thieves.

"This was a nightmare for me," says Frenzella. "I may look okay on the outside, but it's eating me up inside." South Savings referred all questions to the RTC, which did not respond by deadline.

Critics say that what happened to the Johnsons reflects the RTC's lack of sympathy for the very people it is mandated to serve. "This family had almost paid off their home, and now they can't even rent it," says William Quigley, the attorney for the Johnsons. "It's the great American dream in reverse."

— K.W.

B L O O D

FOR O I L

"Uncertainties in the Middle East pose no immediate threat to the supply of petroleum products for American consumers, nor do they necessitate increases in prices for American consumers."

— Admiral James Watkins
Department of Energy
August 1990

Just days after Iraqi troops set foot in Kuwait, the oil industry launched an energy war of its own on American soil.

As Saddam Hussein claimed control of the hotly disputed Ramailah oil fields, George Bush ordered an embargo of Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil. The president also issued a somewhat less belligerent plea to American oil companies to "do their fair share and ... show restraint."

But no sooner had Bush uttered his appeal

than the price of a barrel of oil jumped from \$20 to \$28, practically overnight. Service station workers across the country pulled out ladders to increase their advertised prices for a gallon of gasoline — by an average of 11 cents nationwide, according to a survey by the American Automobile Association.

By the time President Bush ordered the bombing of Baghdad five months later, American drivers had paid an extra \$22 billion just to keep their vehicles on the road. That means every car-owning

household in the country lost an average of \$220 at the pump between August and January. Since the rural South depends on cars more than any other region, the price hikes cost Southern households an estimated \$175 million more than the rest of the country.

Gasoline prices soared after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Are the oil companies guilty of price gouging?

Gregory Keller was one of those hit hard by soaring gasoline prices. Since August, the 38-year-old carpenter has had to pay an extra \$30 a week to fuel his Ford pickup as he drives hundreds of miles from his home in Swannanoa, North Carolina to Charleston, South Carolina in search of work. He has had to skip meals to make ends meet — and he has even sold his blood for gas money.

"If I'm not totally stressed and my blood pressure is down, I can donate plasma," says Keller, who suffers from high blood pressure. "That's good for \$8 — a quarter of a tank of gas. I've had to do that."

Oil companies don't like to hear that the Persian Gulf shootout boils down to trading blood for oil, either at home or abroad. To them, price increases, if not the war itself, are the product of indiscriminate market forces. "Crude oil and petroleum are commodities and their wholesale prices are determined in commodity markets, just as the price of grain," says Glenn Tilton, president of refining and marketing for Texaco.

BY LAURIE UDESKY

But a review of industry reports, government studies, and congressional testimony suggests that the oil companies used the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as an excuse to raise gasoline prices without justification. The price gouging has forced state governments to cut essential services and has driven many consumers to give up food, medicine, and other necessities to heat their homes and get to work.

"The oil companies have the American public in a stranglehold," says Edwin Rothschild, energy policy director for Citizens Action in Washington, D.C. "Any time there is any kind of explosion, accident, or disaster, we get these kinds of price increases."

PANIC AND PROFITS

Shortly after the Iraqi invasion, oil companies and some media analysts tried to excuse the sudden hikes in gasoline prices by explaining that the invasion threatened Mideast oil supplies. An oil shortage would mean less gasoline, and less gas would fuel higher prices.

Such a shortage never occurred. According to the U.S. Energy Department's Energy Information Administration (EIA), Iraq and Kuwait provide only eight percent of the world's oil and less than five percent of what America buys — and all of it was quickly replaced by increased output from Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and other oil producers.

Even if the Iraqi invasion *had* jeopardized supplies, it would have been a long time before Americans suffered an oil shortage. U.S. oil companies were sitting on a vast stockpile of gasoline. According to an EIA report, "Crude oil stocks at the end of July 1990 were the highest in nine years." The 90 million surplus gallons could have replaced any loss of oil from Iraq and Kuwait for 120 days.

What's more, the federal government is sitting on another 590 million barrels in the Strategic Petroleum Reserves, an underground liquid bank established in 1975 to guard against disruptions in oil supplies. So why did gas prices soar when there was no real shortage, and when Americans had already paid billions for a petroleum reserve?

The short answer is simple: panic and profits. Because oil suppliers and buyers feared there *might* be a shortage if



While soldiers risked their lives defending oil supplies in Saudi Arabia, consumers paid the price back home.

Saddam Hussein bombed Saudi oil fields, the wholesale price of crude shot up. "What we are seeing is that the whole market has been taken over by fear and panic throughout the entire system," says Phil Chisholm, executive vice-president of the Petroleum Marketers Association.

Fortunately for the companies Chisholm represents, retail gas prices — what you pay at the pump — are now pegged to the wholesale price of crude oil sold each day on the spot market. Whenever the wholesale price goes up, oil companies automatically raise the retail price for everything they have on hand — even the stuff they bought and began refining weeks earlier. "The rising price of oil has an instantaneous effect on the market," admits Glenn Tilton, the Texaco executive.

It's as if a grocer suddenly raised the price of all the cabbages in his store because he just learned next year's supply will cost more. According to Edwin Rothschild of Citizen Action, that's exactly what Exxon, Texaco, and others did with the more than 300 million barrels of

oil they had on hand on August 2. Even though that supply cost them an average of only \$18 per barrel, they based its retail price on the post-invasion price of \$28. Rothschild estimates the companies pocketed \$3 billion by using this system of pricing.

Although oil companies are quick to raise prices at the pump when the cost of crude goes up, they're slow to pass the savings on to consumers when their costs go down. It's strictly heads the oil company wins, tails the consumer loses. "Companies use the spot market as a reference point when prices go up," says Rothschild. "The difference is when the price comes down, there is a long, long delay when those spot prices are not translated to consumers."

To further insure their profits, the oil companies also contract for future supplies at a fixed price they believe will beat what they'd have to pay if they waited until the day of delivery and bought the oil on the spot market. Speculators and big oil consumers, such as airlines and chemical firms, play this

futures market with the oil companies. Each party buys and sells contracts, gambling on what the price of crude oil will be on a particular day of delivery.

Like the pricing system, the futures market allows oil companies to exert more influence over a commodity they can't quite control the way they did before the oil embargo of 1973 and the dawn of OPEC. "If they start buying and bidding up the wholesale price," Rothschild points out, "they are in reality increasing the value of their lower-cost inventories."

The system paid off in a big way in 1990. In the midst of the worst recession in years, the major oil companies announced fourth-quarter profits totaling almost \$2 billion more than their earnings for the same period in 1989. Fearing public outrage, the companies dismissed the gains as a fluke and used a wealth of accounting tricks to hide even greater profits. Kenneth Derr, chairman of Chevron, called his firm's \$481 million windfall "an anomaly."

Other businesses tied to the industry say the profits prove that rational "free market forces" have little to do with the way prices are set. "There is absolutely no competition on the wholesale level—I repeat, no competition," says William McGilacuddy, president of the Virginia Service Station Dealers and Auto Repair Association. "Service station dealers across the country are tied to their refiner to buy the product from that refiner at the price that refiner sets."

Even federal lawmakers, who tend to favor the profitable opportunities offered by free enterprise, were outraged. "The oil industry of this country is plundering us," charged Senator Joseph Lieberman, a Democrat from Connecticut. "Perhaps the time has come for economic sanctions against the American oil industry."

SCHOOLS AND SHORTFALLS

The consequences of price gouging at the pump have been especially hard in the South, where a greater proportion of the population live in rural areas or in cities lacking adequate public transportation systems.

The price hikes have caused budget shortfalls in many states, forcing government agencies to cut corners or seek additional funding for gasoline:

▼ In Louisiana, state agencies have

spent an extra \$2 million on gasoline since August. The state school board is also seeking additional appropriations to compensate for a \$4 million shortfall caused by the price hikes.

▼ In North Carolina, which is already scrambling to cut corners because of a \$360 million revenue shortfall, the state school board says it needs an extra \$3.5 million to make it through the school year.

▼ In Mississippi, Rankin County schools watched their fuel bill double as

As Americans paid more at the pump, operating income for the six largest oil companies shot up an average of 77 percent in the fourth quarter of last year. (Figures in millions of dollars.)

	1989	1990
Shell	264	446
Texaco	382	605
Amoco	387	619
Mobil	412	769
Chevron	320	801
Exxon	1,285	1,555

Source: Company reports

PROFITING FROM THE WAR

they bought gasoline to bus 10,000 children from rural areas each day. "We've had to take money away from other sources," says Kenneth Bramlett, assistant school superintendent. "Now we can't repair the roof of one of the schools, and we have to put off building new classrooms."

"NO GAS IN THE CAR"

Across the region, Southern families have also been hard hit. According to a 1988 report by the EIA, Southerners buy more gasoline than drivers in any other region of the country, consuming an annual average of 60 gallons more per vehicle than Northeasterners.

For working families in the energy-dependent South, gasoline price hikes are more than just an annoyance. The South is the poorest region in the country, and studies show that nearly three-fourths of the Southern poor rely on cars to travel. Price gouging by the oil companies has robbed them of basic necessities, jeopardizing their health and well-being.

Lillie Mae Ervin, 57, knows first-hand

how months of gas price hikes can make it tough just living from day to day. Her family of three already struggles to get by on a meager income of \$366 a month. When gas prices jumped last August, her gas bill doubled to \$20 a week, forcing the Ervins to forgo their prescription medicine to buy fuel.

"Right now we have medicine over there at Super D that we can't buy," says Ervin, who lives 10 miles from Jackson, Mississippi. "There's about three or four prescriptions there for blood pressure and other complaints. It's just a hardship."

If she doesn't take her medicine, Ervin says, her head hurts and she feels dizzy. "I told my doctor, and he said it's dangerous if you don't take it."

The Ervins are not alone. According to a recent report by the National Council of Senior Citizens, 5.8 million elderly households live at or below the poverty line. The report adds that when the cost of housing, food, and home energy are deducted, the average low-income elderly household "has less than \$10 a week for clothing, medicine,

transportation, and other necessities." Rubye Johnson, who founded the Wateree Community Actions center to help residents around Sumter, South Carolina, says the gas price hikes have made it harder for the elderly to take care of themselves. "Believe it or not, a lot of elderly aren't even bothering getting food stamps," she says. "They only would get \$10 or \$15 worth a month, and they would spend that much in traveling to pick them up."

Even young Southerners who are able to work for a living are finding that with the gasoline hikes, they are barely making enough to survive. Susan Oliver runs a day care center out of her home in Shreveport, Louisiana, and her husband is a car mechanic. Price gouging has forced them to put off buying groceries and other necessities—and sometimes they still don't have enough left over to buy gasoline.

"A couple of weeks ago, I had to cancel my son's doctor appointment, because I had no gas in the car," Oliver says. "I didn't want to do it, but I had no choice."

Oliver says she is angered by the huge profits the oil companies have reaped. "I

think they should find some way to give some of it back to the consumer.”

DRILLING DEEPER

To help families like the Olivers and Ervins who have been hurt by unfair gasoline prices, federal lawmakers introduced a bill on February 5 that would keep oil companies from gouging consumers. Under the proposed legislation, large energy companies would have to pay a surtax based on all “excessive profits” that are 40 percent above their average net profits for the preceeding five years. Senator Joseph Lieberman, who co-sponsored the bill, suggested that extra revenue could be used “to help pay for Operation Desert Storm or energy assistance programs.”

But oil companies have a different solution. The problem, they say, is environmental regulations. The industry wants Congress to lift drilling restrictions in environmentally sensitive areas, replacing foreign oil with domestic crude.

“We can permit the production of oil off the California coast,” Charles Dibona, president of the American Petroleum Institute, suggested at a congressional hearing last August. He also proposed that Congress “open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Alaskan oil reserve” and permit drilling “especially in areas

which already have been leased, such as those off North Carolina.”

But some say that the price hikes and war in the Persian Gulf underscore the need for an alternative energy policy that will decrease our dependence on oil, both domestic and foreign. Rubye Johnson, who founded Wateree Community Actions, recalls the gas hikes of the 1970s. She also recalls her response: “I designed a public transportation system and then got it approved. There are bus routes now picking up people in rural areas.”

More mass transit would be one step toward a meaningful energy policy. Some studies even suggest that building fuel-efficient cars might have averted war in the Persian Gulf altogether. According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, requiring automakers to build cars that get 31 miles to the gallon, rather than the current average of 19, “would end the need for any oil from the Persian Gulf.”

A good alternative energy policy would also promote the use of natural gas while developing solar and wind energy for heating and electricity. Such developments would reduce the dependency on foreign oil supplies that have pushed many people close to the edge.

But instead of trying to reduce dependency on oil, President Bush has followed the same line of thinking as his friends in the oil industry. The administration has

called for more domestic oil production in Alaska, California, and the Outer Continental Shelf.

“I think the administration is really looking backwards,” says Jim Price, director of the southeast office of the Sierra Club. “It’s trying the same tired approaches that have led us into the situation we are in now.”

Price and others warn, however, that an alternative energy policy alone is not enough. Without a coherent foreign policy, they say, the war in the Persian Gulf will not be the last time Americans are expected to sacrifice their lives for oil, either at home or abroad.

“The oil companies have us between a rock and a hard place. There’s no way to win,” says Dorothy Brooks, a 23-year-old student in Bunnlevel, North Carolina, whose husband was sent to Saudi Arabia to fight. “My husband swore to protect America and its Constitution. But he didn’t swear to protect money. If he dies over there, I hold the oil companies, the president, and everyone who got us in this war to blame.” □

Laurie Udesky is the associate editor of Southern Exposure. Research for this article was supported in part by a grant from the Gulf Coast Tenant Organization in New Orleans.

“A SACRIFICE ZONE”

	Oil Produced		Energy Consumed		Toxic Pollution	
	Million barrels	Rank	Million BTUs per capita	Rank	Chemical lbs. per capita	Rank
Alaska	738	1	899	1	52	5
Texas	735	2	545	4	49	8
California	355	3	246	42	7	34
Louisiana	165	4	764	2	168	1
Oklahoma	129	5	383	10	16	33
South	979		382		40	
Non-South	1669		284		19	
U.S.	2648		313		26	

Source: Green Index

The South produces and consumes a disproportionate share of the nation’s oil (and coal and natural gas). Texas and Louisiana produce one third of the nation’s domestic supply of oil, and the dozens of petrochemical firms and refineries that stretch from Houston to New Orleans have turned that part of the South into what Jim Price of the Sierra Club calls “a sacrifice zone.”

The sacrifices take place at home and abroad. Although the region is rich in energy resources, it pays the price with twice the amount of chemical pollution per capita as the rest of the country. Southerners are more likely to die prematurely than the rest of the nation, and cancer rates are so high around Baton Rouge that the area has become known as “Cancer Alley.”

Southerners are also more likely to die fighting for oil in the Middle East. Although men and women from the region make up only a third of all reserve and National Guard forces, they represent over half of all civilians sent to defend oil supplies in Saudi Arabia (see page 63).

Photo by John Spragens Jr.



PATRIOTS

FOR PEACE

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. — Beth Seymour had never spoken into a microphone before. She stuttered and cried a bit as she clutched her three-month-old daughter Alexandria and addressed the crowd of workers and military families gathered in the shadow of the smokestacks at the Fieldcrest-Cannon mill.

Her husband, Jack, had never seen their baby girl. Before Alexandria was born, he had been shipped off to Saudi Arabia with the 82nd Airborne Division to fight in the Persian Gulf.

"I look at the baby," Seymour said. "She's starting to crawl and grow teeth. How much is Jack going to miss? The rest of her life? Who's going to explain to her why, why her father had to die for oil?"

"Can you explain?" she sobbed. "Can you?"

BLUE-COLLAR BONUS

In the days after President Bush ordered

the bombing of Baghdad, unleashing the heaviest aerial bombardment in history, millions of Southerners like Beth Seymour began to question the war in the Gulf. Construction workers, students, hairdressers, truck drivers, the husbands and wives and children of soldiers — all groped for an explanation of why their friends and relatives were being sent to die in the oil fields of the Middle East.

Even before American tanks rumbled into Kuwait on February 23, it became apparent that Southern resistance to the war was much more widespread than news reports indicated. Much of the

dissent came from blue-collar families — and from within the ranks of the military itself.

Southerners fought the war at home in part because so many of their own were fighting it in the Gulf.

Many Southern soldiers

and military families

decided to "just say

no" to the Gulf war.

Although men and women from the region make up a third of all reserve and National Guard forces, they represent over half of those sent to Saudi Arabia.

According to a survey of all civilian forces activated for duty, Mississippi sacrificed a greater share of its sons and daughters to the Gulf than any other state in the nation. When the war started, 281 of every 100,000 Mississippians were under fire in the Middle East — almost six times higher than the national average (see sidebar, page 63).

Blacks also shouldered more than their share of the military burden in

Operation Desert Storm. Although African-Americans make up only 12 percent of the overall population, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported that they comprised nearly 21 percent of the "all-volunteer" army. Other reports indicated that as many as 50 percent of front-line troops were black.

Such figures suggest that race and poverty — not patriotism — account for the disproportionate number of Southerners facing

BY LANE WINDHAM

combat. The region endures higher unemployment and a lower per capita income than the rest of the nation, forcing many Southerners to turn to the military just to make a living.

Some recruits simply never thought “Be All That You Can Be” might mean being on the front lines in a war. “When you’re sitting down with this recruiter, and you sign this paper, the thought of going to war never hits you,” said one National Guardsman enrolled at North Carolina Central University. “You think you’re signing up to try to gain some extra money for school, some independence. The thought never crosses your mind that you can be taken out of school to go fight somebody else’s war.”

The Guardsman, who signed up when a recruiter visited his high school in 1989, said he jumped at the chance to make some extra money. Joining the military enabled him to leave a job at Burger King and enter college.

“The reason the front lines are 60 percent African-American is because when they recruit, they tell you about a bonus you can get — like \$2,000 — for going into the infantry. The recruiters also tell African-Americans that they only scored high enough on the entrance test for a gunner or tanker or some other combat job.”

Like many other teenage recruits, the student said he opposed the war — and was thinking about resisting his role in it. “If I had to go to war right now,” he said, “I don’t even know if I would go.”

WEEKEND WARRIORS

If the Guardsman refused to go to war, he would be in good company. According to Michael Marsh of the War Resisters League, 1,500 soldiers declared their conscientious objection to the war between August and January. Once the bombing began, Marsh said, the group was swamped with phone calls from anxious soldiers looking for ways to resist the war. The majority of calls came from North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and Florida.

In the early days of fighting, hundreds of soldiers and reservists across the South left their bases without permission or demanded to be reassigned as conscientious objectors:

▼ Officials at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina reported that



Marilyn Harrison clutches pictures of her son Nicholas — one as a Cub Scout, another in his Army paratrooper uniform.

30 soldiers went AWOL and another 20 applied for CO status in the first month of the war.

▼ Nine Marine reservists refused to report for duty when their unit was called up at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. The “Fox Company resisters,” as they became known, later turned themselves in and were granted CO status, but were thrown in the brig to await court martial for what the Marines called their “unexcused absence.”

▼ More than 150 soldiers and National Guardsmen at Fort Hood, Texas

failed to return after a one-day leave in mid-February, saying they were overworked and inadequately trained for combat. The “weekend warriors” complained that they were given substandard clothing and meals, and one reported that he was denied medical attention when he thought he had frostbite.

“We were just stressed out working 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” said one Guardsman. “Morale was real low. I don’t know if we made the right choice — I think we did. We’re standing for what we believe in.”

Some peace activists who counsel soldiers seeking CO status say early resistance was so widespread that a virtual "underground railroad" was established to shelter those who opposed the war.

Before the war, Langdon Bristol used to get about nine calls a month from conscientious objectors. By January, she was on the phone 12 hours a day, seven days a week, counseling 15 soldiers a day from her home in Virginia Beach.

"One young reservist didn't report for duty when his unit was called," Bristol recalled. "His parents were so proud that he went into the military, but after his unexcused absence his father invited him to their home — with the full intention of turning him in."

Bristol remembered another soldier who was forced into hiding. "There was one case where the MPs were knocking on the front door, and the young man was going out the back door," she said. "This man will turn himself in. He just wants time to articulate his feelings."

Paul Dotson was a reservist stationed in Roanoke, Virginia when he decided he could no longer put on his uniform without going against his conscience. "I decided I didn't agree with the military's solutions to international problems in 1987," he said. "But I felt I could live with going one weekend a month because I had to."

Then, after the Gulf war began, Dotson heard about Jeff Paterson, a Marine who was jailed after he refused to go to the Middle East. Dotson got in touch with the War Resisters League and spent a month and a half filing his CO claim.

"It was a tough decision," he recalled. "I would have been out in four months with a regular discharge. It came down to going to the Gulf and betraying my conscience for an unethical war, or following my personal beliefs."

Dotson and others are following a deep-rooted tradition of war resistance in the South. From the Civil War to the Vietnam War, tens of thousands of Southerners from Texas to West Virginia have defied orders and refused to take up arms.

Chuck Eppinette grew up in a military family on the Marine Corps air base at Cherry Point, North Carolina. Almost everyone he knew was connected to the military. Yet when the Vietnam War began, he returned his draft card to the Selective Service.

Eppinette sympathizes with present-

day resisters. "It's a long, lonely fight," he said. "This war is far more popular than the Vietnam War — it's been hyped up by the media, by the government, and by advertisers using American blood to

war. Last August, as members of the Gulf Coast Tenant Organization began a 1,000-mile caravan through Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to highlight tenant rights, they quickly expanded their focus to protest skyrocketing gas prices.

"By the time we got to Mississippi, we found that people were really being hurt by the soaring prices, and they were upset," said Janice Dickerson, a tenant leader in Baton Rouge. The group organized pickets at gas stations across the region, blocking gas pumps to protest price gouging by the big oil companies. In Baton Rouge, 16 people were arrested, including Louisiana State Representative Avery Alexander.

Many white communities and military families have also voiced their opposition to the war, struggling to support their loved ones in

the armed forces while condemning U.S. aggression. In North Carolina, a multi-racial coalition called the Piedmont Peace Project has worked with the Military Family Support Network to unite those with relatives in the Gulf.

Dorothy Brooks, a student in Bunnlevel, North Carolina, joined the Support Network after her husband's National Guard unit was dispatched to Saudi Arabia. "It had never occurred to me that Mike would be called to active duty. It's amazing how when you're directly affected, it spurs you to act."

Brooks said she continued to oppose the war even when people in her community began to call her unpatriotic. "Being patriotic, I have the right to question the policies of this war and to work to stop it. As citizens, we have the obligation to voice our conscience."

Resisters with loved ones in the Gulf often find their lives torn by conflicting loyalties. When soldiers on the front lines learned that Beth Seymour was speaking out against the war, they dubbed her "the next Jane Fonda" and pressured her husband to silence her. She responded by signing "Jane" on all her letters to her husband — and by continuing to call on President Bush to bring the troops home.

PICNIC PROTESTS

In many Southern communities, early opposition to the war drew community support. Marilyn Harrison, owner of the Sweet Meadow Cafe in Salisbury, North

The South sent more than its share of National Guard and reserve forces to Saudi Arabia. (Rate represents number of soldiers called up per 100,000 residents.)

	% Forces Called	Rate Per 100,000	Rank by Rate
Mississippi	33.9	281	1
Louisiana	35.0	205	3
Alabama	15.8	142	5
S. Carolina	17.7	132	7
Georgia	26.8	126	8
Tennessee	21.6	125	8
Arkansas	15.6	115	10
W. Virginia	14.9	81	12
N. Carolina	18.7	73	14
Virginia	8.7	41	24
Florida	13.1	37	26
Kentucky	9.0	37	26
Texas	10.2	36	27
South	17.8	47	
Non-South	8.8	42	

Source: Omaha World-Herald

OPERATION DESERT SOUTH?

make a sale. There's a long tradition of military service in the South — but there is also a long tradition of resistance."

BAGHDAD JANE

For the most part, however, news reports have focused on the region's tradition of militarism and have ignored its tradition of pacifism. Citing poll after poll, newspapers and television networks have reported overwhelming public support for the Bush administration stance against Iraq.

But a closer look at the polls reveals a region deeply divided along racial and gender lines. According to a survey by *The Atlanta Constitution*, 90 percent of all white men in Georgia supported the use of force in the Gulf. That support, however, fell to 75 percent among white women, 54 percent among black men, and only 18 percent among black women. "I've never seen such a stark difference in attitudes," said Merle Black, professor of political science at Emory University.

Many black communities across the South have united in opposition to the

Carolina, discovered that her customers backed her when she called for the safe return of her son, an Army paratrooper in the Middle East. A leader of the Military Family Support Network, Harrison said she supports the troops but not the war.

"Waving flags and yellow ribbons just works for a little while," she said. "People are making all the preparations in the world to welcome our troops home with parades. We need to make preparations to welcome casualties — dead or alive."

Residents in nearby Yancey County typify the profile of poor, white conservatives. The majority earn only \$10,000 a year, vote for Jesse Helms, and have family members or friends in the Gulf. Yet extensive interviews with 150 residents conducted by Rural Southern Voices for Peace (RSVP) revealed that two-thirds of those surveyed opposed going to war in January.

"People don't have strong support for the war," explained Herb Walters of RSVP, "but they don't know how else to support the troops." To offer alternatives, the Yancey County Gulf Crisis Commit-

tee encouraged children to write letters asking George Bush and Saddam Hussein to stop the fighting, and organized a blood drive for the troops.

As grassroots opposition spread, many Southern communities witnessed war protests that looked more like church picnics than Woodstock. Every Saturday afternoon, Lois Crum joined 10 of her neighbors outside the local shopping mall in Johnson City, Tennessee. The 66-year-old retired credit union manager has three children, including a son in the Air Force. She described herself and her fellow protesters as "mountaineers."

"I don't believe in 'My country, right or wrong,'" she said. "It's just like how I feel about myself. I like me as a person, but I can always stand some improvement."

One Saturday, Crum skipped the demonstration, disheartened by the response the week before. "People come by and give us the finger and shout four-letter words at us." A week later, she was back on the picket line.

"I had questioned if what I was doing

was true," she said. "But I'm for peace. Who can be against peace?"

At the Piedmont Peace Project vigil outside the textile mill in Kannapolis, Beth Seymour also kept up the struggle for peace. She scrawled her husband's name and thumbtacked his photo to a "Desert Shield Memorial Wall" made from sheets from the mill. Looking around at her fellow protesters, she saw others who had loved ones in the Gulf, but had found the courage to oppose the war.

"We weren't screaming and yelling and banging drums and burning flags," Seymour said. "If anyone supports the troops, it's us. They're our families and we love them. We don't want to lose them." □

Lane Windham is an editorial assistant at the Institute for Southern Studies. Robin Donovan, another editorial assistant, also contributed to this story.

For more information, contact the Piedmont Peace Project, 406 Jackson Park Road, Kannapolis, NC 28081. Or call: (704) 938-5090.

WHOSE BLOOD?

From the start, Operation Desert Storm had a deep Southern accent. According to a survey of all National Guard and reserve units sent to Saudi Arabia, nine of the 13 Southern states sacrificed more civilian soldiers per capita than the rest of the nation.

The reason: the military called up a disproportionate share of Southern civilians. The Pentagon ordered 18 percent of all Southern forces to the Middle East, but only 9 percent of units outside the region.

As a result, more than half of all civilians under fire in the desert when the war began were Southern — primarily blacks and low-income whites. Mississippi and Louisiana — two of the poorest and most densely black states in the nation — ranked among the most heavily represented in the Gulf.

Some Southern officials questioned why their states provided such a large portion of the forces. "Now when two percent of the people send 10 percent of the troops, as leader, I have to ask in a sort of friendly way, 'Why?'" Louisiana Governor Buddy Roemer asked in December. "I'm asking why."

Roemer didn't need to go far for an answer. Major General Buddy Stroud,

adjutant general of the Louisiana National Guard, offered an explanation to the *Omaha World-Herald*:

"Stroud said Louisiana's depressed economy in the 1980s made the Guard an attractive option for the state's residents, including students drawn by a tuition exemption program. Of 6,400 Guard members called up, 2,000 are college students."

Many who joined the regular army also signed up for economic reasons. "For black men, there is very little opportunity for jobs in this area," said Oneal Russ, a World War II veteran from Jackson Hamlet, North Carolina with three sons in the Gulf. "My sons joined the military because they wanted to better themselves, and they are proud to serve their country. But I don't want my sons' blood to be spilled for oil and money."

The Defense Department refused to provide state breakdowns for active-duty soldiers in the Gulf. But even if regular troops were called up proportionately, the front lines would still be heavily Southern. Forty percent of enlisted troops list their "home of record" in the South. The region provides 876 soldiers for every 100,000 residents, compared to 677 soldiers for every 100,000 non-Southerners.

The South has a long tradition of losing its children to war. During Vietnam, 31 of every 100,000 Southerners were

killed in battle, compared to 27 of every 100,000 non-Southerners. Poor whites from West Virginia suffered the highest casualty rate of the war — 42 battle deaths for every 100,000 residents.

During Vietnam, the Pentagon relied on a draft to supply troops. But in the Gulf conflict, the military relied heavily on reserve forces — men and women drafted largely by economic pressures.

The reliance on reserves increased the risk to Southern communities. Because entire units from the same area generally go into battle together, small towns can be devastated by a single battle. They also have a tough time getting along while the troops are away. "When National Guardsman Jackie King left for Saudi Arabia," the *Nashville Tennessean* reported, "the town of Chapel Hill, Tennessee lost half of its police and fire departments."

William Tyson, a building contractor in Carthage, North Carolina, watched five brothers leave for the Gulf. "Right now, I'm hurt," he said. "It's causing emotional problems in the families. My mother is pretty torn up. For her, that's five kids who're going to have to be over there dodging bullets, hoping they'll return."

THE LAST WORD

DIVIDING LABOR

I feel compelled to write after having read your issue on labor in the South ("Sunbelt Blues," Fall 1990). I am a white professional who got his start here in North Carolina, and I have experienced all of the conditions you described.

My memories are very strong about the times during paramedic school when I barely had enough to eat. Wages were minimum and the hours — nights and weekends. Hours were never guaranteed, and the working conditions were adverse and demanding.

Upon getting my degree it got no better. I had to deal with the good-old-boy network in attempting to get employment. I saw several of my classmates who were qualified, but were never allowed to get a job because of political discrimination. While I was employed by a large hospital in the Charlotte area I was told, "People who don't work fast don't make it." My attempts to provide good care and to speak up over unsafe working conditions led me to leave the region.

In the industrial Northeast I dealt

with the "agency" game. Many hospitals have hired professionals from outside agencies as growing numbers of their employees resign in the face of low pay, huge workloads, and political favoritism. It was an awful way to make a living. Agency people are treated like a door mat, and the agencies are more concerned with keeping a contract than with providing back-up for their employees.

My concern is that management has long been quite skilled at dividing labor along racial lines to keep the upper hand. Until we forget about black and white, and realize that the name of the game is green, we will continue to be badly mistreated.

I have returned to North Carolina, having seen a trend towards speaking up against the wrongs proliferated by people like Senator Jesse Helms and his cronies. The future of corporate management is bleak unless changes are made to ensure socially responsible treatment of workers. Perhaps we should organize a boycott of companies that have failed to respect their workers!

— Mark Gaines
Wilmington, N.C.

COMING HOME

Thank you very much for the issue on "Law and Disorder" (Winter 1990). I have a graduate student who is working on the topic, and I will immediately pass the issue on to him.

I really think that the Institute should set up a one-time life membership dues for space balls like myself who might forget to renew their membership. That way, the lifetime fee could be used as an endowment.

The only bad thing about *Southern Exposure* is that it heightens my sense of guilt at not being in the South. If there is a God, perhaps one day I can come home.

— Vernon Burton
University of Illinois

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 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.

FUTURE ISSUES

The Institute for Southern Studies relies on our members to help develop upcoming issues of *Southern Exposure*. We'll be exploring a variety of subjects in the coming year — but we need your help.

Some topics being discussed for future cover sections include:

▼ **Workfare.** Most welfare recipients with children three years or older must get a job or lose their monthly checks. How has the program worked in the South? What are the alternatives to mandatory work programs?

▼ **The catfish industry.** Mississippi has been the hub of a booming catfish business — but workers must endure low wages and crippling conditions. How have public agencies helped develop the industry? How are workers fighting back?

▼ **Columbus.** Five hundred years after Columbus

landed in America, the nation is celebrating. What was the South like before white explorers arrived? How are native Americans observing the quincentennial?

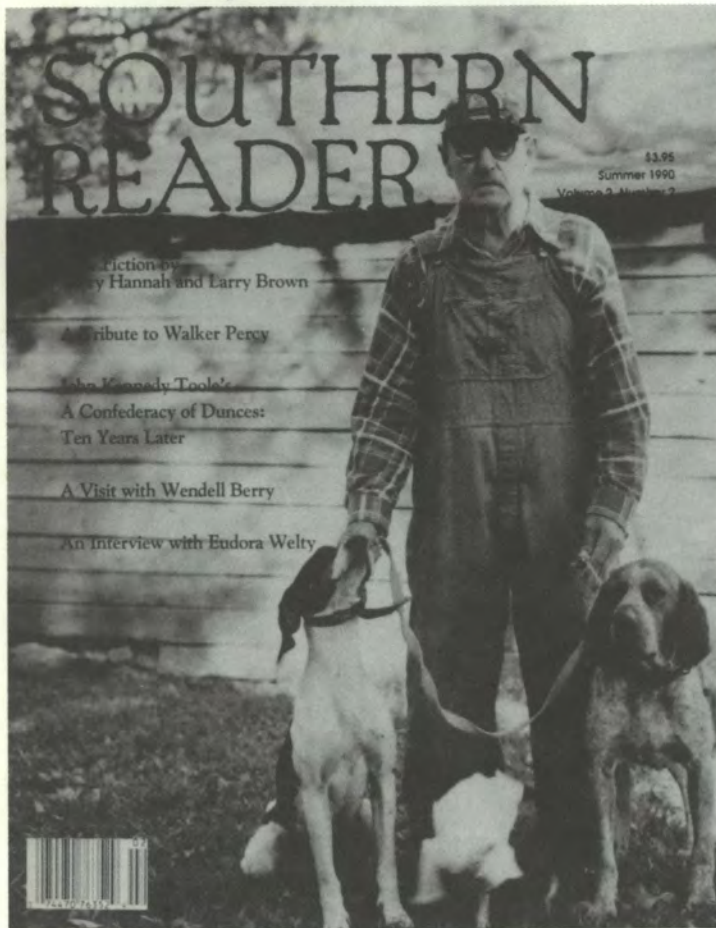
▼ **Nursing homes.** As the population ages, more and more elderly Southerners are forced to live in institutions. What kinds of abuse take place, and what can be done to reform the industry?

▼ **Race relations.** Across the region, segregation has taken on new forms, both formal and informal. How does racism manifest itself in the '90s? What characterizes relations between white and black Southerners today?

There are many ways you can help — write a story, submit photographs, proofread, pass along information, or simply make a suggestion. To lend a hand, write:

Future Issues, *Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

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