

Kentucky

Fall 2018
Kentucky Humanities

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INSIDE: 2018 Kentucky Book Festival Catalog



Improving Lives

The Kentucky Colonels, through our Good Works Program, is proud to once again sponsor the

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Fall 2018

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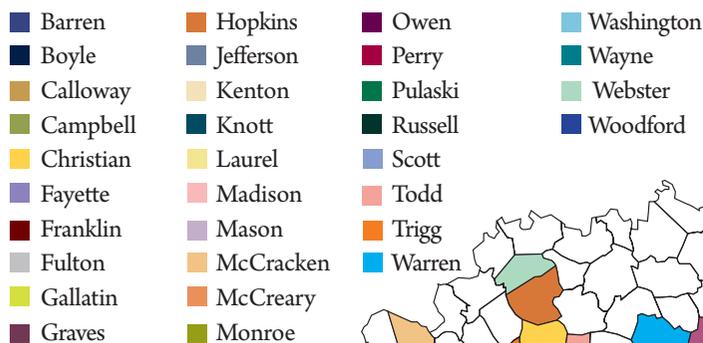
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Celebrating Literacy in the Commonwealth

Since we announced our new statewide literacy initiative Kentucky Reads: *All the King's Men* in Guthrie on April 24th there has been a whirlwind of activity surrounding Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel: three online book club meetings with Dr. Richard Taylor, Professor Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman, and Dr. Jonathan Cullick; Democracy & the Informed Citizen community conversations at Northern Kentucky University and the Market House Theatre in Paducah; scheduled 25 *All the King's Men* book discussions in communities across the state; and welcomed Pulitzer Prize-winning author and renowned presidential historian Jon Meacham to the University of Kentucky for the Bale Boone Symposium. It has been a fantastic adventure and there is so much more to come! Check out pages 6 and 7 for upcoming events and book discussions coming to your community.

While best-known for *All the King's Men* and his award-winning works of poetry, the University Press of Kentucky published Warren's essay about his father in 1988. Turn to page 8 for an excerpt from *Portrait of a Father*.

We continue to highlight Kentucky writers as Linda Elisabeth LaPinta gives us a glimpse of Bobbie Ann Mason's latest work, *Patchwork: A Bobbie Ann Mason Reader* on page 12. Bobbie Ann Mason is one of the 180-plus authors joining us for the 37th annual Kentucky Book Fair on Saturday, November 17th at the Alltech Arena at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. In the center of this magazine be sure to tear out and read all of the details about authors attending, schedule of events, and all the important information about our capstone event of the year!

Edd Applegate takes us on his visit with Bentley Wells, author of *The Question and Other Stories*. Learn more about the Maysville native and his collection of short stories on page 14.

We are once again delighted to have poet Jeff Worley share his work with us in his charming poem, "Sometimes It's So Easy." You can find it on page 17. You can also meet Jeff Worley at the Kentucky Book Fair.

Author Joseph G. Anthony tells of his experience leaving New York in 1980 to begin teaching in Hazard, Kentucky. This unique work compares his experience to Gertie's in Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*. The story of his journey begins on page 18.

WKU's Nancy Richey takes us back to 1903 to tell the story of Cousin Emmy. She may have grown up in a small town, but her musical talent took her across the country and her legend endures in her ever-popular songs. Find out more on page 24.

Last, but not least, Georgia Green Stamper shares her love of reading and the tranquility that can only be found in her library. "My Library" is on page 30.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Kentucky Humanities* magazine and the Kentucky Book Festival Catalog included inside. Telling Kentucky's Story is our mission and we are happy to share these stories with you, our friends and supporters. Have a Kentucky story to share? Contact our editor, Marianne Stoess, Marianne.stoess@uky.edu.

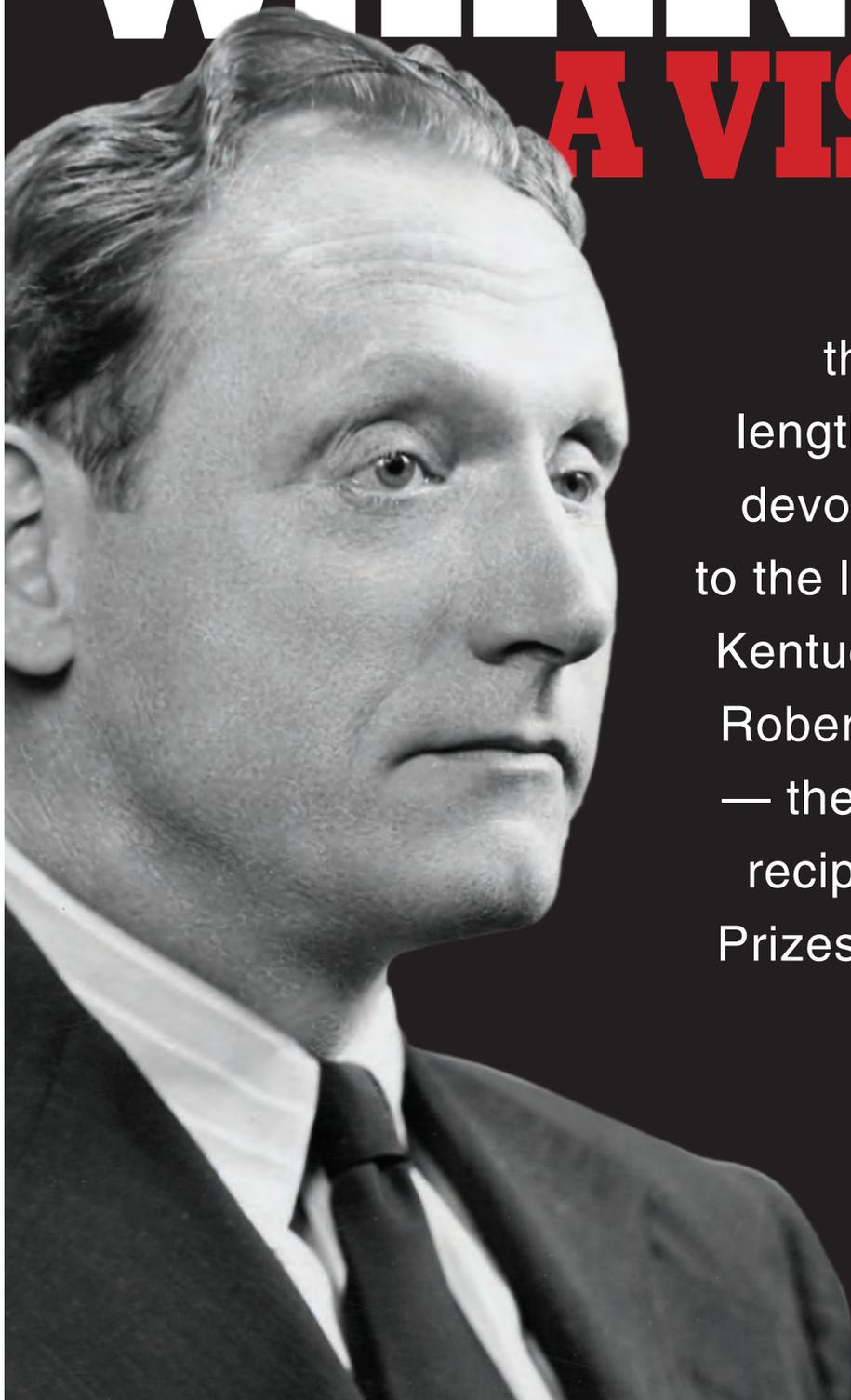


Bill Goodman

Executive Director
Kentucky Humanities

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Goodman".

ROBERT PENN WARREN A VISION



KET presents
the first feature-
length documentary
devoted exclusively
to the life and work of
Kentucky-born writer
Robert Penn Warren
— the country's only
recipient of Pulitzer
Prizes in both poetry
and fiction.

KET
WHERE LEARNING
COMES TO LIFE



Democracy & the Informed Citizen

On April 24th at the Robert Penn Warren Birthplace Museum in Guthrie, Kentucky, Kentucky Humanities launched a new project, Kentucky Reads: *All the King's Men*. The literacy initiative uses Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel to guide a statewide conversation on contemporary populism and political discourse and their relationship to journalism. With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as cooperation with valued partners, Kentucky Humanities is hosting a series of community discussions and events centered on Warren's celebrated and timeless work and what it can teach us today.

Kentucky Reads centers around community discussions taking place in five cities across the Commonwealth: Bowling Green, Highland Heights, Lexington, Louisville, and Paducah.

Those discussions began on Thursday, September 13th at the Otto Budig Theatre at Northern Kentucky University. Following a keynote address from NKU's Dr. Jonathan S. Cullick, a panel including Judith Clabes, publisher and editor of KyForward.com and the NKyTribune; Trey Grayson, former Kentucky Secretary of State; and Dr. Cullick engaged the audience in a discussion about the critical role of journalism in maintaining democracy and an informed citizenry, using Warren's classic novel as a jumping-off point. Jay Stowe, former editor-in-chief of *Cincinnati Magazine* served as moderator for the discussion. We were delighted to partner with the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement at NKU to bring this important community event to Northern Kentucky University.

Five days later, we were in Paducah, at the Market House Theatre. This edition of Democracy & the Informed Citizen began with a reading of cuttings from the stage adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* featuring local personalities. A panel including Dr. Duane Bolin, professor emeritus of history at Murray State University; Steve Wilson, executive editor of *The Paducah Sun*; and Judge Thomas Russell, a United States District Court judge for the Western District of Kentucky, led attendees in a lively discussion. Constance Alexander, adjunct professor at Murray State University, served as moderator for the evening.

Three more Democracy & the Informed Citizen programs will take place in October. These events are free and open to the public:

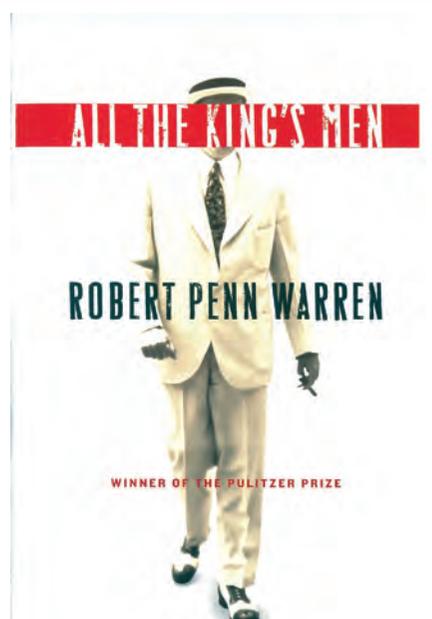
- Monday, October 15th at 6:30 p.m. at the Pamela Brown Auditorium at Actors Theatre of Louisville
- Tuesday, October 16th at 6:30 p.m. at the Carrick Theater at Transylvania University in Lexington
- Tuesday, October 23rd at 6:30 p.m. (CDT) at Jody Richards Hall at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green

On Monday, October 22nd at 7 p.m. (CDT) at Van Meter Hall on the campus of Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky Educational Television (KET) will premiere *Robert Penn Warren: A Vision* a documentary by filmmaker Tom Thurman. Following the film, Rosanna Warren, poet and daughter of Robert Penn Warren, and filmmaker Tom Thurman will participate in a Q&A with the audience. This event is free and open to the public.

Additional Kentucky Reads: *All the King's Men* Programs

In addition to the five Democracy & the Informed Citizen community conversations, Kentucky Humanities is funding 25 *All the King's Men* book discussions across the state. Selected scholars will travel to communities throughout the Commonwealth to lead thoughtful and insightful discussions about the themes in Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *All the King's Men*. Programs were awarded on a first-come first-served basis and are free and open to the public. For more information about the book discussions, including how to participate, visit kyhumanities.org.

Kentucky Reads programs are brought to you by:





All the King's Men Book Discussions

<p>July 23, 2018 Lexington <i>Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UK</i> Scholar: Dr. Jonathan Cullick</p>	<p>October 4, 2018 Danville <i>Boyle County Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Mark T. Lucas</p>	<p>March 18, 2019 Lexington <i>Kentucky Authors Book Club</i> Scholar: Dr. Richard Taylor</p>
<p>July 30, 2018 Frankfort <i>Thorn Hill Book Club</i> Scholar: Dr. Richard Taylor</p>	<p>October 9, 2018 Mayfield <i>Graves County Public Library</i> Scholar: Constance Alexander</p>	<p>March 21, 2019 Frankfort <i>Kentucky Historical Society</i> Scholar: Dr. Tracy Campbell</p>
<p>August 15, 2018 Lexington <i>Tates Creek Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Kay Collier McLaughlin</p>	<p>October 11, 2018 Warsaw <i>Gallatin County Public Library</i> Scholar: John "Spike" Wright</p>	<p>April 5, 2019 Somerset <i>Somerset Community College</i> Scholar: Dr. Jonathan Cullick</p>
<p>September 11, 2018 Fort Thomas <i>Campbell County Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Michael Baranowski</p>	<p>October 18, 2018 Lexington <i>Eastside Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Melanie Beals Goan</p>	<p>April 29, 2019 Georgetown <i>Scott County Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Richard Taylor</p>
<p>September 11, 2018 Madisonville <i>Madisonville Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Scott D. Vander Ploeg</p>	<p>October 22, 2018 Louisville <i>Pageturners Book Discussion Group</i> Scholar: Dr. Richard Taylor</p>	<p>May 23, 2019 Maysville <i>Nomads Book/Study Club</i> Scholar: Dr. Richard Taylor</p>
<p>September 22, 2018 Covington <i>Roebing Point Books and Coffee</i> Scholar: Dr. Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman</p>	<p>October 24, 2018 Paducah <i>West Kentucky Community & Technical College</i> Scholar: Constance Alexander</p>	<p>October 1, 2019 Versailles <i>AAUW Bluegrass Central Branch</i> Scholar: Dr. Melanie Beals Goan</p>
<p>September 24, 2018 Murray <i>Calloway County Public Library</i> Scholar: Constance Alexander</p>	<p>November 10, 2018 Hindman <i>Hindman Settlement School</i> Scholar: Richard Taylor</p>	<p>October 21, 2019 Springfield <i>Washington County Public Library</i> Scholar: Dr. Melanie Beals Goan</p>
<p>September 27, 2018 Dixon <i>Webster County Historical Society</i> Scholar: Dr. Scott D. Vander Ploeg</p>	<p>January 3, 2019 Lexington <i>Good Shepherd Episcopal Church</i> Scholar: Dr. Jonathan Cullick</p>	
<p>October 3, 2018 Berea <i>Kentucky Artisan Center</i> Scholar: Dr. Richard Taylor</p>	<p>January 14, 2019 Fulton <i>Fulton County Public Library</i> Scholar: Constance Alexander</p>	



PORTRAIT OF • A FATHER

Reprinted with permission from the University Press of Kentucky

By Robert Penn Warren

In tiny casual scraps I picked up from my father a little information about his early life. When I was grown and had been to the battlefield of Shiloh he did remark that his father and an uncle had fought there and that the uncle had been wounded. I somehow forgot to ask whether the wounded Confederate had been the brother of his father or of his mother. So I do not know now.

My father was not secretive, but somehow he had sealed off the past, his own past. In a strange way he was depersonalized. I cannot remember that he ever in his life said, “I feel bad,” or “I feel good.” Never in any fashion, did he remark on a purely personal feeling. Not even in an extremity of grief.

I must go back to my father’s only remark about his mother. He and I were in an automobile driving west from the town of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, toward the village of Cerulean Springs, near the farm where each year I spent many summer months with my maternal grandfather. I must have then been about twelve years old and was at the wheel — legally so in those times. I remember the episode with enormous clarity, for even then I must have been vaguely aware that my father was

sealing off the past. We were driving by what then seemed a rather large and, at the distance, handsome house, yellow with white trim, two stories in the central section with a wing of one story on each side. The house was set well back, some seventy yards, it must have been, from the road as it then ran, before modern highways came in. The land toward the road was fenced off and seemed to be a pasture well grazed, but there was another fence, more substantial and decorative, around the lawn of the house — a fence white in my recollection. I have never seen the place since that moment.

My father told me to slow down, and scrutinized the place. He then said: “Your grandmother was born there. A long time ago.” I may have asked him if he meant his mother—as it was bound to have been. That girl who had lived in that yellow house and who had married a young man coming back from four years of war suddenly became for me a single totally isolated mystery in the big mystery of my father’s life.

For many years after I was grown I kept telling myself that I would go and find the records in the Christian County courthouse. But I never did (and have never consulted such

records on any topic). I am now not even sure that I remember her given name. After fifteen my life became very full and self-centered, and I never really lived at home again, at the best just making long visits. The episode, however, stuck in my mind, and as late as the period of 1966-67, while living in France, I foolishly began a novel about a young Confederate officer back home in 1865 and a girl. But I threw it away after two or three chapters, thank God, for it was turning into a costume piece.

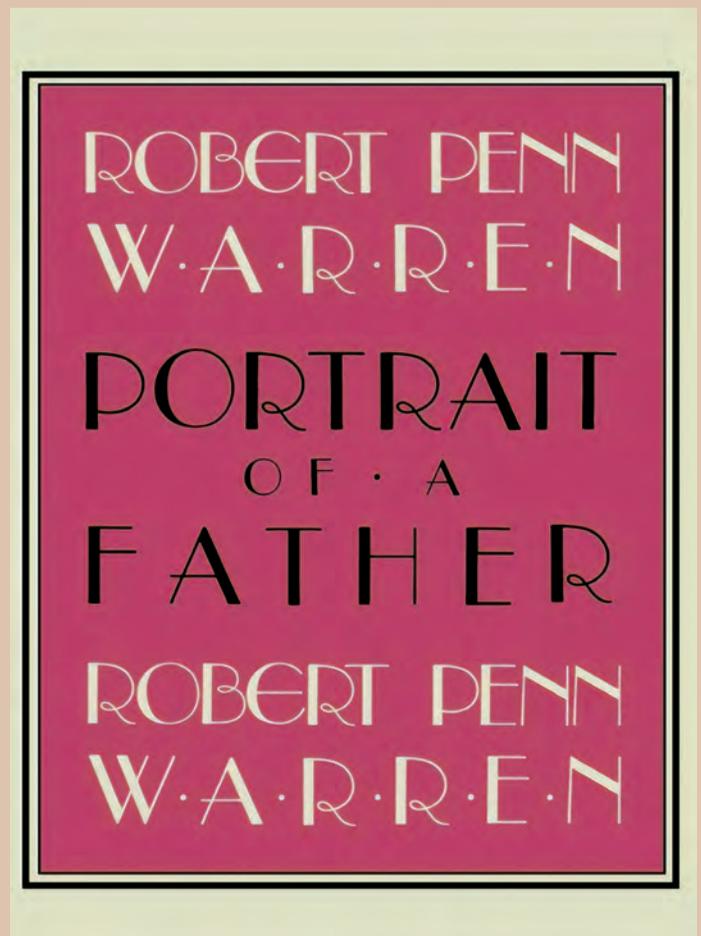
As for the girl in the yellow house — if indeed it had then been yellow or had the wings — I always assumed that she had died soon after marriage, presumably a little after the birth of the third child (my father or the brother Cortez, I never knew). In any case whatever assumptions I had made were wrong. Very recently, in 1986, a friend has surprised me with a Xerox of my grandmother's marriage license. The name of her family was Pursely, a name which I happen to remember from some mailbox in the country around Cerulean Springs, but which I had never heard pronounced.

It was strange enough that the name had never been uttered by my father, but more strange that, as I have recently learned from the same friend, she had not died in the babyhood of my father but after some ten years of marriage. My father, who had certainly been old enough to remember distinctly that mother, not only never referred to her, but presumably had as little pious interest in visiting her grave as he had for visiting that of his father. Certainly, this fact is in marked contrast to the respect, concern, and protection which he always showed for Grandma Jenny, the widow of a father whom he never, beyond two or three casual times, ever mentioned.

In sharp contrast, my father often referred to his brother Sam. He admired, looked up to, and loved Sam. The feeling seemed beyond any ordinary affection for a brother. As for Cortez, his other brother, I was always puzzled that he did not feel repulsion. My father, though he never introduced the name of Cortez into conversation, did pay an annual visit to him, a visit which, as far as I could know, was never discussed. Cortez was, in my view then, and now, a truly monstrous man, proudly ignorant, cheaply cynical, mean-spirited, cruel. On the one occasion when I, then grown up, gave my opinion of Cortez, my father merely replied: "That is probably because he cannot help it."

Whether Cortez could help it or not, he managed to reduce his wife to a cringing hag, and his only child, a beautiful and seemingly intelligent girl, into a totally stupid, totally uneducated, helpless creature, who had never been allowed, even when grown, to spend a night, or even a full day, away from him (I say "from him" for the cringing hag was long since dead).

I could never understand why my sister, who was extremely intelligent and soaked in books, would spend days with the daughter of Cortez and Cortez himself. After the death of Cortez, I allowed myself to tell her my opinion of the man. She merely



Born in Guthrie, Kentucky, Robert Penn Warren is one of the nation's most revered writers. Although he is perhaps most well-known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *All the King's Men*, Warren produced fiction, poetry, history, and criticism, including this essay about his father.

said to me: "You should have seen him in his coffin. He looked so little." He had been a rather tall man, beginning long back to collapse into fat.

The end of the daughter might have been predictable. At the death of her father she turned her inheritance into cash and disappeared for years. She was finally found by relatives of her long-dead mother, I seem to remember, in the world of the riverfront of Paducah, Kentucky, the wreck of a drug addict. Now rescued, and returning from a hospital, she was simply a sort of gray blob of nothing in a white silk dressing gown. Thus I once saw her. Briefly. The hand offered me felt like a dead fish.

Sam must have been the opposite of the monster Cortez. About the time of some serious and mysterious event in my father's family, an event about which my father never uttered a word and I never uttered a question, Sam was old enough to disappear. All I ever heard is that he went first to Texas and then to Mexico, where he became a "mining man" and where he prospered enough to send to my mother (whom he had never

seen) a handsome set of rubies ready for mounting to make a brooch, a ring, and the pendant for a necklace. There was my mother's exclamation of happy surprise, and the pleasure, not in words, of my father at Sam's act. I remember that fact.

I am pretty sure that the rubies were never used as directed. My mother already had several good diamond rings (one from her mother, I think) which she rarely wore except when she was sitting with my father. She must have sold the rubies along with the diamonds when the Depression first struck and he was feeling the pinch.

My most vivid memory concerning Sam is my coming, in daylight, into a shadowy room where my father, who should have been downtown at the little bank, was sitting in his big black leather chair, his head bowed on his chest, and the arm nearer me hanging limply over the chair, with a sheet of paper hanging from the obviously loose grip of fingers. I don't know how long I stood there before my father slowly lifted his head and stared at me before saying "Son, Sam is dead."

My father had obviously been weeping. I had never seen him weep. It was a real shock to me to know he would weep at all, at anything. I was to remember the reddened eyes.

Later I was told that Pancho Villa had raided the mine and that Sam, his wife, and son had escaped to New Mexico, where Sam died. I seem to remember that he had been wounded, but am far from certain. Many years later on a trip by automobile to California, I stopped at Albuquerque and tried to find the grave. There was a record of some sort at the office, but I can't remember anything beyond that point.

I do remember that Sam's widow (with a Spanish name, which now escapes me) was almost penniless then and that my father began to help her, and almost certainly put her son into a preparatory school, for there was in my family a photograph of the young man wearing some sort of school military uniform. The photograph was inscribed by Sam's son to my father. In the late 1930s, long after my mother's death, my father on one of his wandering automobile trips, alone, drove west and saw his nephew for the first time. Sam's son was at a mine in Montana, where he was an engineer, and took my father on various tours. My father told me every detail. As a kind of footnote to the story of Sam, I add that decades later I received a letter from the wife of the grandson of Sam with a clipping from a newspaper in Chicago or perhaps Minneapolis or Madison, a clipping, very long, the upper half or so of an inner page concerned with the national meeting of the Association of Mining Engineers — or something of the sort. Part of the clipping was a photograph of the recipient of a medal of the Association to a mining engineer for research and invention fundamentally important for the safety of mines. The recipient was Sam's grandson. My father was dead by that time.

Somehow I have usually assumed that my father considered his behavior in relation to Sam's family perfectly normal. As to what

he would consider "normal" I usually have only my mother's accounts, my eavesdropping, or my logical deduction. But there is one instance which I clearly encountered.

Once, on one of the automobile trips with my father after my mother's death, we were driving in a section of Kentucky unfamiliar to me. He looked up from the map and directed me to take a certain road. We found, in the country though near a village, a newish brick building of some size, clearly not a dwelling. It proclaimed itself to be a clinic.

At the desk my father asked for a certain doctor. Very quickly a man, probably toward fifty years old, appeared. He literally seized my father's outthrust hand, uttering an exclamation of pleasure. It turned out that he was Doctor So-and-So — a name my father had never mentioned. He wanted to show my father the new clinic and called for a younger colleague to join us. He himself fell behind the colleague talking to my father, and joined me. He said he wanted to tell me something. His being there in that clinic, even having an education, he said in secret haste, was due to my father. My father, he said, had helped him years before when he had no hope. That must have been, I later decided, in the years when my father was trying to establish himself to marry my mother and when he was also playing father to the youngest of his step-siblings, my Uncle Ralph.

I cannot remember, perhaps never caught, the doctor's name.

I again have wandered from chronology. It must have been well into the 1880s when Sam took out for Mexico. I had somehow always assumed that Sam took out because his father, WH. Warren, had died. Even in a book-length narrative poem published in 1953 this is assumed by a character in the poem, "R. P. W., "who refers to the death of his father's father as at a certain time. This is not only bad calculation, but ignorance. Actually WH. Warren died in 1893 and was buried in the cemetery of Cerulean Springs, Kentucky. The date of his death is given on the tombstone. Only lately a friend has told me this. I have never seen the stone.

Although my father, even if in bits and fragments, had told me something of Sam, he had never told me of his own father, WH. Warren, the returned veteran. He is officially recorded as from Tennessee (actually from Kentucky, a divided state), and this fact distinguishes him from another WH. Warren (a major) who earned fame by surrendering to an emissary of Sherman. For my grandfather Warren, a captain, there is no record of combat experience, but this fact, an experienced researcher has told me, could be regularly accounted for if he was in ordnance, such commands having been shifted as need required, with no record. Or he may, as another researcher has volunteered, have been on the staff of General Bragg, a poor place to be. But my father did once tell me that his father had fought at Shiloh — which was also an uncomfortable place to be.

Whatever his military record, one nonmilitary matter has been coming to my mind for years. During one of my boyhood

visits to his widow, Grandma Jenny, I had been prowling, out of loneliness as much as curiosity, in an attic or “lumber room,” as a place for discarded junk was called. There I found some strange-looking books. They seemed particularly strange in a house where there were no other books except the Bible and the local telephone directory. The strange new item was a translation, as it announced itself to be, from a writer whose name I had never heard of and did not know how to pronounce. It was spelled “D-a-n-t-e.” This book had some strange pictures, and the name of the artist was again one which I did not know how to pronounce: “Dore.” The other book was clearly *Paradise Lost*. I happened to know the name of the author, but the pictures, I seem to recall, were by the same man who had done the illustrations for the first and more mysterious book.

I puzzled over my discoveries, and finally took them to Grandma Jenny. She said: “Oh, those old books, they belonged to your grandfather. When he died, I just threw away such stuff with the other old stuff.”

More than once I have wondered about the ownership of those old books. I have always been sure of what Grandma Jenny said. But did she really know that the books had belonged to her husband? I know of no additional evidence that he was a bookish man. Since her husband had died in 1893, my father, who would have already been embarked on his literary ambitions in Clarksville, may have brought such things with him when back to visit a dying father. Then, if he had forgotten his books on going back to Clarksville, his stepmother may well have thrown such items aside with the “stuff” left around by her dead husband. In any case the most recent edition of Carey’s *Inferno* would have been available, even at secondhand. As would have been the *Paradise Lost* with the Dore illustrations. And the little town of Clarksville was a bookish place. I know that the work of Melville, before the publication and failure of *Moby Dick*, was widely read and discussed by the Gentleman’s Literary Society of the town. In fact, at the Houghton Library, at Harvard, I have seen a letter to Melville from the secretary of the Clarksville Literary Society.

The event of my showing the books to Grandma Jenny may well have been the last time I was ever to visit her, years before the death of my mother on October 5, 1931. That day my father and I had stood in the hall outside of the operating room, not talking, simply waiting. Eventually the doctor came out. Not the surgeon. He was carrying something on a pad of gauze in the palm of his right hand. He offered it to my father’s sight. My father looked studiously at the little blob of something on the gauze. It was streaked with blood. “There it is,” the doctor said.

Without any words, my father and I walked back to the hospital waiting room (“parlor” it was called). There, my brother and sister were waiting. Wordlessly, we waited until the patient was returned from the recovery room. We were finally beckoned to go into her room.

After the stretcher had been wheeled in but before the patient

had been placed in bed, she had been able to lift a hand in the briefest of greetings before it fell back. Then, transferred to the bed, she managed to smile. During the period thereafter — an indeterminate period — our father sat by the bed holding her right hand. Small and irrelevant facts may become vastly significant. I remember which hand. She was lying on her back.

Now and then she smiled at our father. He, except for those moments of the smile, sat erect as usual but with head bent a little toward her. I remember how the light shone on his bald head. When she smiled he managed what could then be his version of a smile. That version, however fleetingly, reminded me of the boyishly embarrassed smile he used to give when, at his birthday breakfast, she would pause in passing behind his chair and kiss him on top of the bald pate and call him her “comic valentine.” At such moments he had always managed to say, “Oh, shucks.”

He said nothing now.

He had never been, in fact, a man to express his feelings in words. I know that even as a child I had never felt any need of words from him beyond what an occasion of human pleasantness suggested. I am somehow sure that neither my sister nor brother ever felt differently. Off and on for years I have speculated what words he must have laid tongue to for Anna Ruth Penn when she was a girl, or a young wife.

Now in the hospital room I became aware that the doctor, with fingers on the patient’s pulse, was nodding significantly to our father. The doctor wished to spare us the view of the last throes. If there were to be such.

Our father rose and leaned to give our mother the good-bye kiss. Then each of the children, in order of age, approached the bed. Her eyes were open, the face upward and smiling, momentarily bathed in a lost youthfulness.

I could not at that instant have seen the face when our father leaned, but I saw the face when I leaned, and then looked back as each — my sister, then my brother — came in turn.

When we four got back to the parlor, there was Grandma Jenny. Had she been there earlier? I cannot remember. In any case, there she was, sitting to one side, in a straight chair, erect but with head slightly bowed, seemingly unchanged by time, wearing the Sunday dress of black silk, with the faint glistening on it from electric light, turned on by now and not well shaded. Under the black skirt the black kid shoes, scarcely visible, were set side by side on the floor, as though in a showcase.

After my father, jerking himself erect, had walked to his seat (on an armless sofa, I think) Grandma Jenny came to him and laid a hand on his shoulder. No, I am not sure. Perhaps this event came only after the doctor, entering, had nodded his head to my father. Two things here blur for me. The most vivid recollection is that, when the doctor entered to give the fatal nod, my father stared at him and then, with unbending spine, suddenly collapsed sidewise. Was it then that the old lady came to reach down and lay a hand on the shoulder of the fallen man?

Patchwork:

A Bobbie Ann Mason Reader

By Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

Even for folks who have savored Kentuckian Bobbie Ann Mason’s pitch-perfect fiction for the four decades since she started publishing short stories in *The New Yorker*, *Patchwork: A Bobbie Ann Mason Reader* offers a stunning perspective on the writers’ astonishing range. What’s more, her remarks on her life and work that precede each chapter offer spot-on critical comments regarding the writing process itself. In his preface to this 2018 University Press of Kentucky collection, professor and author Jonathan Allison states, “It is precisely ‘the insides of history’ and of lived experience that Bobbie Ann Mason recovers in her fiction, portraying with consummate artistry the relationship between the world she observes and her characters’ inner lives, with all their hopes and dreams.”

In his introduction, author and writing professor George Saunders expands on Allison’s comment by stating that Mason’s “stories exist to gently touch on, and praise, even mourn, what it feels like to be alive in this moment, or in any moment, and her representations of American life are beautifully compressed and distorted, as all great art must be — to purpose — and that purpose is to embody an organic beauty that melds sound, sense, and substance.”

All true. But it is Mason’s own words about her work and her explanations of her world view in the interview excerpts concluding this brilliantly curated book that permit each element of *Patchwork: A Bobbie Ann Mason Reader* to complement each piece, just as blocks in a patchwork quilt combine in stunning patterns.

Many readers know Mason for her short story “Shiloh” or her novel *In Country* because they study these works in school. While rural southern and midwestern readers often respond to the fact that Mason’s characters seem as ordinary and approachable as family and friends, readers raised in regions far flung from the



Photo by Gary Mendes

western Kentucky territory in which so much of her prose is set can find her fiction foreign. But as the writer herself explains, “Fiction takes you on an adventure into a world you thought you knew but that you find out is both familiar and unfamiliar.... I don’t want fiction to pacify or congratulate. It shouldn’t confirm your prejudices or simply mirror your own life.”

She adds that “a story with an ambiguous ending is a reminder of the uncertainty and mystery — and hope — we live with, an ending that isn’t there yet. A definite ending would be final, with nothing left to treasure.” So when Mason’s character Norma Jean reaches the bluff at Shiloh, turns to Leroy and waves her arms, whether she is beckoning or rebuffing her husband is not as significant as is the powerful mystery inherent in either possibility.

Just as this collection embodies Mason’s better-known work, it also includes her *New Yorker* and *Virginia Quarterly Review* articles about her teenage role as National President of the Hilltoppers Fan Clubs and about her Mayfield, Kentucky, youth

(and more), respectively. Also, excerpts from Mason's 1999 memoir, *Clear Springs*, and a sampling of the literary criticism Mason calls "a foreign language" but executes with exquisite empathy and insight highlight the writer's experiences, as well as the scope of her talent. In her introduction to the 2004 edition of Mark Twain's *The American Claimant*, Mason could be referring to her own work when she states, "By artfully working the rhythms and sounds of real speech into his writing, Twain emphasized the dignity and complexity of people often dismissed as illiterate. Their heritage is an oral tradition, based on sound and not print, so the language has nuances and textures that formal written English lacks. The language is biblical, historical, musical, close to elemental experience. Twain's genius enabled him to plow this language into other forms of expression: standard English, literary English, even medieval and Shakespearean English. He plowed it in, turned it under, and allowed it to fertilize the growing American language. He brought the storytelling art form from the frontier into the written language in such a bold way that American literature was defined by it."

In *Patchwork*, it is clear that Mason's fiction has done the same. Throughout this reader she insists that diction matters. The creative expressions of her childhood familiars focus her own creative expression. In preserving regional oral traditions that illuminated her childhood, she gifts them and the genius of their creation to the larger world. Her powerful prose focused on plutonium contamination at a uranium-processing plant in western Kentucky, her poignant novel inspired by her father-in-law's narrow escape in World War II, and her wildly entertaining recent online journal contributions, such as her August 21, 2013 feature "Whale Love" co-written with Meg Pokrass for *The Nervous Breakdown*, prove her jaw-dropping range. "Whale Love" begins, "Louisa, who tucked up her skirts and went running every day or she would go mad, was confounded and smothered by the whales of Concord, like Mr. E., on whom she had a crush when she was a child and left him flowers under his window, flowers found and laughed at by Mrs. E., who had to put up with all the giggly acolytes, who arranged themselves prettily at his feet."

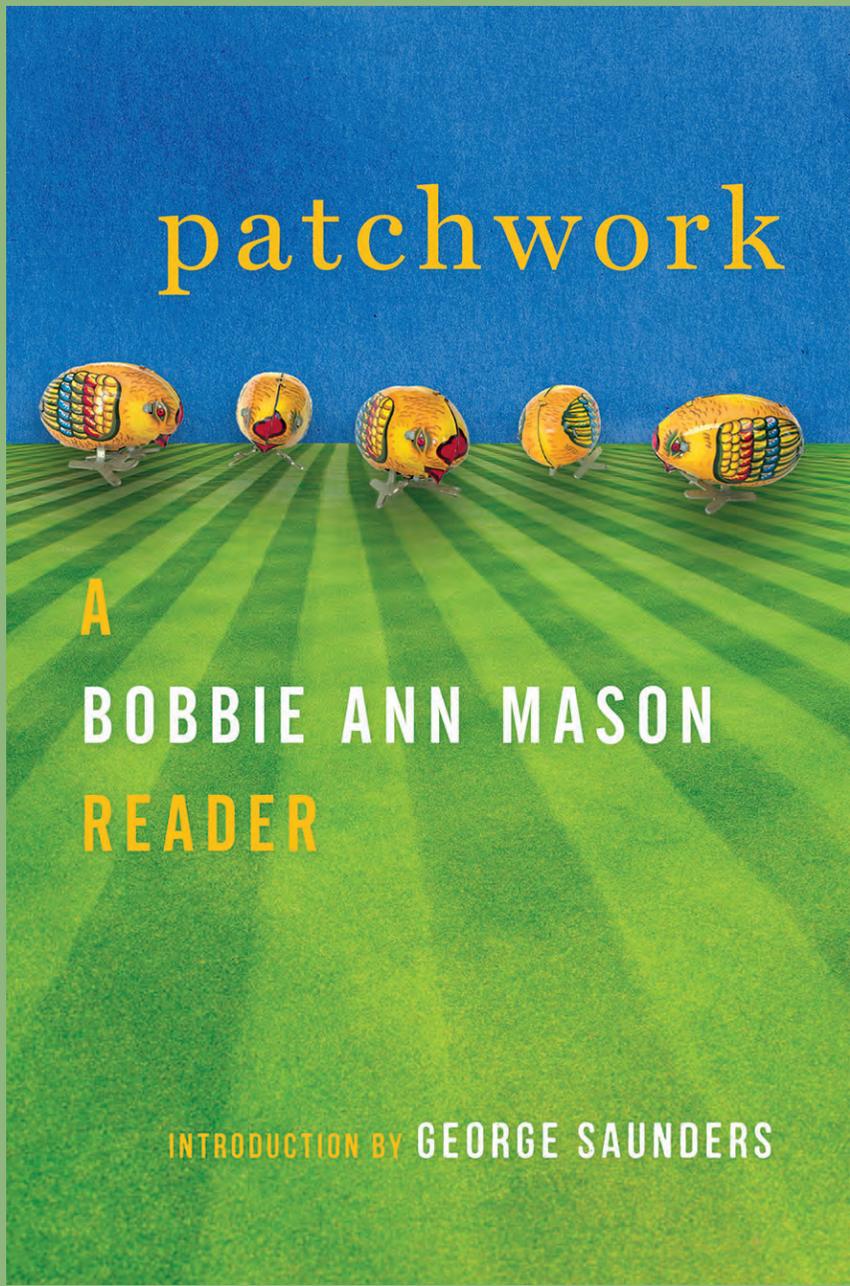
Author James Reston refers to *Patchwork* as a compendium that highlights the "wellspring" of Mason's writing life. That wellspring, the people and landscape of the rural mid-20th-century Kentucky in which she was raised, become her readers' people — and her readers themselves — as she simultaneously respects her characters' individuality and reveals their transcendent humanity. Writer Jayne Anne Phillips sees it this way: "Bobbie Ann Mason is an American master, an American original, and a (sly) American treasure. Funny, as sleuth-

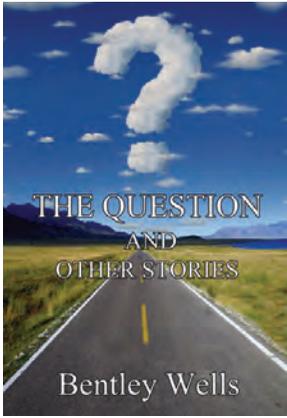
smart as Flannery O'Connor, and as Southern, Mason is also courageously godless. Her work is utterly contemporary in its deadpan attunement to the far-off tremors of that apocalypse bumbling toward us."

Her colleagues are right. *Patchwork* proves that Mason, an enigmatic author who aims to preserve the past while approaching the present from cutting-edge angles is among the Commonwealth's most astute and nimble writers.

About the Author

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta directs Spalding University's doctoral program in leadership. Under her maiden name, Beattie, she published three books related to Kentucky writers and a fourth book about intimate partner abuse. In addition, she has published numerous book reviews and magazine articles in local newspapers, magazines, and journals.





An Interview with Bentley Wells

*Author of **The Question and Other Stories***

By Edd Applegate

*Bentley Wells stopped writing fiction years ago and began concentrating on nonfiction writing. Several years ago, after he retired from teaching, he returned to writing fiction. *The Paradise Coven*, his first mystery, was published last year. Now, his first collection of short stories has been published. *The Question and Other Stories* includes several stories that feature young people who deal with hard-nosed teachers, fickle girlfriends, and the death of a family member, among other topics. Other stories concern adults who confront loneliness, rejection, and mental illness. Three of the 13 stories included in the book were published in literary magazines decades ago.*

Q: *Why do you write fiction under a pseudonym?*

A: I use a pseudonym for my fiction and I use my legal name for my nonfiction. Another reason is I wanted to pay tribute to my mother. She enjoyed reading novels, including mysteries, all of her life. The pseudonym is actually two of the names given to her by her parents.

Q: *Where did you grow up?*

A: In a small town in northern Kentucky (Maysville). My wife and I left about a year after we married. She was teaching elementary school and I was completing two masters' degrees at the time. Over the years we lived and taught in Arkansas, Illinois, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. We retired from teaching several years ago.

Q: *You mentioned writing nonfiction. Have you written a lot of nonfiction over the years?*

A: Yes. I've written articles based on research for academic journals, chapters for academic books, entries for encyclopedias, and several books for academic and reference publishers.

Q: *Do you still write nonfiction?*

A: Yes. Although I don't write as much as I used to, I still write an occasional academic article or review of a book.

Q: *Your first book of fiction — a mystery — was published last year. Correct?*

A: That's right. I enjoy reading mysteries. Several years ago I thought I would try to write one. Well, I tried, but it was extremely difficult. I had to change gears, so to speak. I was used to researching and writing nonfiction — not fiction. In fact, I had not written anything remotely resembling fiction in decades. To say the least, I struggled. I found myself asking all sorts of questions as the plot moved along. Were the characters real or authentic? Would they act this way or that way? Were the situations in which the characters found themselves realistic? Etc., etc., etc. Now, I understand what writers of fiction go through — at least, to a certain extent. I haven't written that much fiction, so I'm certain I haven't experienced as many hurdles as other writers of fiction have. Unlike writers who have been writing fiction for years and who seem to have it down, I'm still learning the ins and outs of the craft.

Q: *How many years did it take to write *The Paradise Coven*?*

A: I believe I wrote the first draft in a year. Then I went through it again and again. After that, I had another person go through it. When I thought the manuscript was ready, I sent whatever numerous publishers desired. Generally, most wanted a synopsis and three chapters. After months and months of rejections, a small publisher accepted it, but for some reason — I don't remember what — I didn't sign the contract. After that, I sent several chapters to other publishers. Eventually, another small publisher offered a contract. However, there

were one or more clauses in the contract that I didn't like, and the publisher wouldn't budge. Needless to say, I didn't sign the contract. I sent several chapters to other publishers. Finally, another small publisher accepted it. I signed the contract.

Q: *Regarding your latest book, **The Question and Other Stories**, what is it about writing short stories that you enjoy the most?*

A: I believe it is the attempt to depict authentic characters in a realistic situation or situations in fewer words than typically found in a novelette or novel. Of course, an author doesn't necessarily include as many characters or situations in a short story as in a novelette or novel. Still, a short story — like a novelette or novel — should have a logical conclusion.

Q: *Do you remember the first story you wrote?*

A: Do you mean the first story that's in *The Question and Other Stories*? Or the first story I ever wrote?

Q: *The first story you ever wrote?*

A: Considering that was decades ago, unfortunately, no, I don't remember the first story I wrote. However, the first story in the collection was the first story that was published. Titled "The Question," the story was published in a literary magazine in the 1960s.

Q: *This is the title for the collection, correct?*

A: Yes.

Q: *What's the story about?*

A: It's about a young male college student who sees the current campus queen and wonders what it would be like to be with her, you know, on a date. Well, he expresses as much to his roommates. They tease him and then suggest that he call her to ask her out. Of course, they don't believe he will do it, but he does.

Q: *What are some of the other stories in the collection?*

A: Another story concerns a veteran of Vietnam who returns home after his tour of duty and grows disgruntled about what the government is doing. In short, he's confused about his place in the world. Unfortunately, he ultimately robs a bank

primarily to capture attention and, later, refuses to be arrested by the police by firing a rifle at a couple of officers, injuring one. The other officer fires several times and kills him. Another story concerns a small-town bank president, a widower, who enjoys reading a local magazine, especially the ads under "Personals." Although he has never responded to any of the ads, he reads one that sparks his interest and responds. A couple of weeks later he receives a letter from the woman. Well, each writes to the other until eventually he asks if she will meet him. The woman agrees and invites him to her house for dinner. He enjoys the dinner, but he compares her to his late wife. Meanwhile, the woman compares him to what he wrote about himself in his letters. Both realize they are not meant for each other.

Q: *What genres are most of the stories in the collection?*

A: The stories vary. Indeed, several stories contain humor, other stories contain suspense, and a few contain romance.

Q: *What topics do the stories deal with?*

A: Several stories concern young people who have to deal with hard-nosed teachers, fickle girlfriends, or the death of a family member, among other topics. Other stories concern adults who have to confront loneliness, rejection, and mental health.

Q: *Who published the collection?*

A: Black Opal Books, which published *The Paradise Coven*, a mystery, last year.

Q: *Where can readers find the book?*

A: Well, they can purchase the book from the publisher, Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, Books a Million, iTunes, KOBO, Scribd, and Smashwords.

About the Interviewer

Edd Applegate taught undergraduate and graduate courses in advertising at several colleges and universities, including Middle Tennessee State University, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He retired from teaching several years ago. Applegate has written articles for academic journals, book reviews for journals and newspapers, chapters for nonfiction books, and several books of nonfiction.

In the spring of 1948...



◀ Airmail parcel post is introduced to Paducah. The Jaycees ship the first package by sending **Kentucky 31 Fescue** grass to a similar club in Salzburg, Austria.



The Paducah Bus Company raised fares to **TEN CENTS!**

▼
A record city of Paducah budget is introduced at \$681,839, up \$76,000 from the year before.

▼
The first full test run to install the flood wall gates took place.

**IT TOOK
90 MEN
SIX HOURS.**



▼
Kentucky Employment Services advertises for 16,000 people to harvest the **strawberry crop!** The job lasts for five weeks, and the crop is expected to beat the previous year's 484 train car loads which generated \$1.2 million!

▶ **ROYACUFF**
and the Grand Ole Opry Gang performed in Paducah.

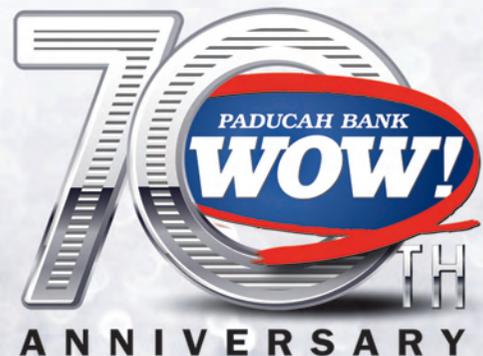
▼
The first contract for construction of the West Kentucky Baptist Memorial Hospital is awarded to lay the foundation.

▼
Magnavox's first production line in Paducah goes live making radio speakers.

...and Paducah Bank opened on Broadway!

www.paducahbank.com

MEMBER FDIC



Sometimes It's So Easy

By Jeff Worley

A neighbor is walking his daughter,
her red hair wind-lashed, on a leash
though our city doesn't have a leash law
yet for toddlers. When Leslie pauses to sniff

the wild hydrangea and Virginia sweet spire,
I notice Randy clutches a plastic Kroger bag.
Is he ready in case Leslie decides to take a small
dump on someone's thick lawn? They meet

another Dad and leashed daughter shuffling along
Aurora Avenue. The kids circle as if sniffing
each other out. A stray dog, mutt mixed with mutt,
joins the party. He seems to realize he's the King
of Butt Sniffing, so there's more circling

and squeals of joy while Randy and the other child-
walker become entangled in a lasso of leashes
and fall into each other's arms. The dog pees

on my neighbor Marilyn's roses, a Niagara
of relief. The girls clap their hands in delight.
Sometimes it seems so easy
for the world to get things right.

About the Author

Jeff Worley has published six books of poems and was editor of *What Comes Down to Us: 25 Contemporary Kentucky Poets* (University Press of Kentucky). His newest collection, *Lucky Talk*, was published last summer by Broadstone Books in Frankfort. He and his wife, Linda, live in Lexington and spend as much time as possible at their Cave Run Lake cabin.

A Foreigner's Experience

Parallel Trips: *The Dollmaker's* Gertie's to Detroit, the New Yorker's to Appalachia

By Joseph G. Anthony

When I landed at Lexington's airport in August of 1980, the pretty white fences of the Bluegrass were the first things that caught my eye. "Is Hazard like this?"

I asked Dr. Marvin Jolly, Hazard Community College's President, who had come to pick me up.

"Not really," he replied.

I knew nothing. I was as ignorant about Kentucky as Gertie was about Detroit, as unknowing as the old mountain lady, Aunt Kate, about Italy. Like Aunt Kate, staring at a map wouldn't have helped. My education had to come slow, like Gertie's, though it wasn't nearly as painful. Like Gertie, I had to learn to see people, learn how to find their faces.

I had read Harriet Arnow's *The Dollmaker* some years before, way before I had even thought of Kentucky, but I

had never thought to try to connect a work of literature, even one I had very much appreciated and read several times, with a real place. Arnow's Kentucky was mostly gone in 1980. If it wasn't as vanished as her Burnside village, entombed under Lake Cumberland, it had gone a lot further toward the industrialization she so detailed and decried in her novel.

My ignorance had a good side: I might have picked up the stereotypes if I had known enough to connect those stereotypes with eastern Kentucky.

But I didn't. I was so ignorant that I neither thought to stereotype or poeticize. My ignorance, my blank-slate-New-York provincialism made me expect that the people in eastern Kentucky (was there a difference in the regions?) would be like people anywhere. Actually, I expected the hills of Kentucky to be peopled by New Yorkers. Only they

called themselves Kentuckians down here. My ignorance, like Gertie's, was a cover for another kind of knowledge. For people were more connected than divided — their accents, their ways, their kinships, their prejudices, and their wisdoms. Of course they were different people than the ones I had grown up with and seen as a young man. Of course, they were the same.

Because my ignorance was basically good-willed and stupid, the kind people of eastern Kentucky usually forgave it. Gertie was stupid in Detroit — stupid in the way you are when the new environment around you yields none of the lessons or clues the old environment gave you. She never again climbs to the magnificent competence of the opening chapter where she maneuvers mule, army, and poplar tree into saving her child. Gertie in her mountains would have seen the danger in a cliff for a small child; Gertie in Detroit didn't recognize a hole in a railroad fence as mortal danger for her own.

I never had such dramatic challenges, of course. Although excitement did come early — my first October in my mountain home with our first fall forest fires when the fellow from the Hazard fire department, which didn't

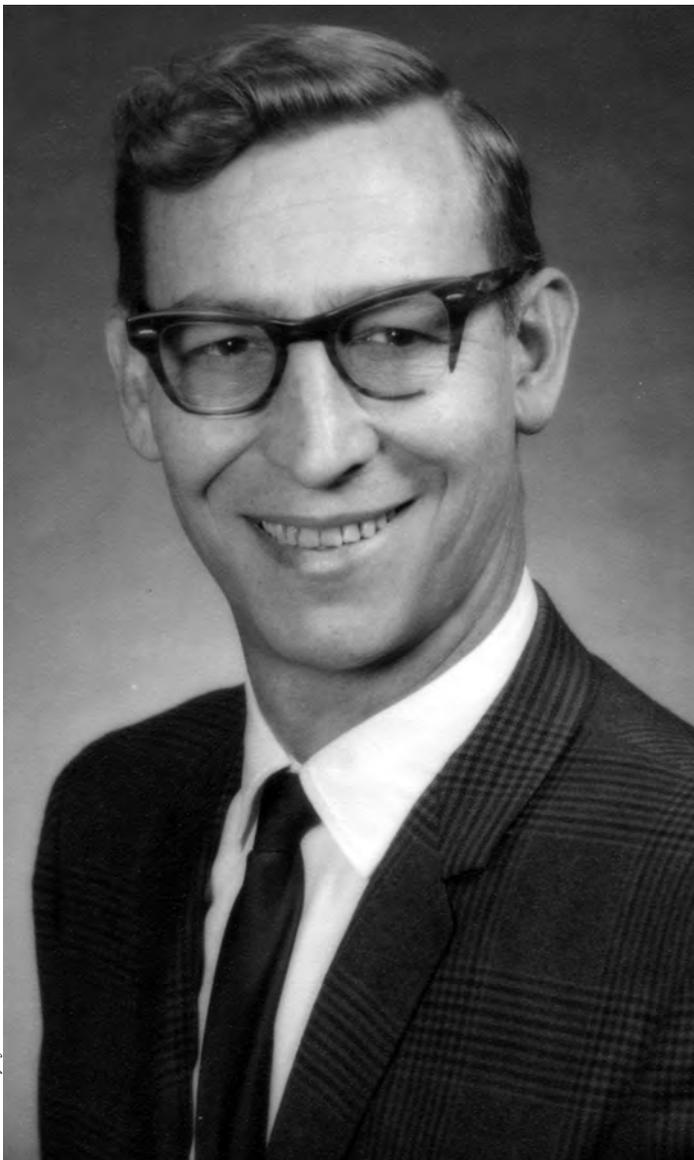
cover the county, told me to go out and build a backfire. I looked at the phone incredulously. I had two questions for him, only one of which I asked. What the hell was a backfire? And. Did he know I was from Manhattan? Backfires in Manhattan were called arson.

Usually my New Yorker lessons came down to certain confusing visual clues: for example, why were people continuously smiling at me? I can't tell you how many times I checked my clothing those first few months. Once in New York when two pretty small town sisters were visiting, I had taken them down to the Village on the subway where they insisted on smiling at everybody despite my warnings. We must have picked up half a dozen smarmy guys whom it was my job to discourage from following us around the rest of the evening. So I wondered what the Kentucky smiling meant — and the constant invitations. You come visit us. Come on and see us. One friend, originally from Pennsylvania, warned us about those invitations early on. He gave a fellow a ride home every day and every day, the fellow asked him to come up to the house to eat. But the day he turned the truck off and started to get out, the fellow looked at him in amazement. Where was he going?



Photo courtesy of UK Libraries & Archives

In August of 1980, Joseph G. Anthony traveled from New York to Hazard, Kentucky. A stranger in a strange land, Anthony had much to learn about the people of eastern Kentucky.



Dr. Marvin Jolly was the first president of Hazard Community College.

One of my first lessons, then. Just because the New Yorker's blank stare meant stay away, the Kentuckian's smile didn't mean come on. The New Yorker had to protect his privacy with every visual tool he possessed; the Kentuckian expected to be private and could afford to be friendly.

But it was more complicated than that. Whereas the New Yorker's stare always meant stay away, the smile and the you-come-visit sometimes meant: you come visit.

If I didn't have many Kentucky stereotypes in my head, I did confront some New Yorker ones. I was continuously tested to draw out those stereotypes. I call those tests the insult traps: was I a snobby New Yorker? (You must think our English is awfully bad.) No, it sounded pretty good to me. I had just come from teaching developmental English in Brooklyn where English to many was their third language, or where the inner city African Americans had a

spin on grammar that was a lot further from standard English than almost anything I heard in Hazard. (Our accents are so funny you probably can't even understand us.) Did I mention I taught in Brooklyn?

All the insult trap-questions were meant to find out if I looked down on them. If I was there to change them. To insult them, exploit them, reform them. I didn't know enough to do any of that. And I knew I didn't know enough. I thought the differences were interesting and fun. And if I were ambushed by my own ignorance, it was funny. And made a good story. Unlike Gertie, whose authority in Detroit is taken away from her, sometimes authority was thrust upon me in Kentucky — as if by being a New Yorker, I was expected to know stuff or feel stuff that I just didn't know — nor feel. They knew that I didn't know as much as they thought I thought I knew. What they only slowly learned about me was that I didn't think I knew anything — especially about their home.

And when, after awhile, they discovered that I was just an ignorant New Yorker, not an elitist one, they were ok with that. They kind of liked me. At least I thought they liked me. They acted like they liked me. My differences were kind of interesting and fun. They made good stories. And once they believed in my good-willed ignorance, they took care of me. They wouldn't think of telling me anything directly, of course, of giving me advice. They would have thought that too pushy, too insulting. When I was thinking of renting an A-frame house in an isolated hollow that was populated, I discovered much later, by a very rough extended family, a family that would have just chewed me up like cheap tobacco, nobody said to me "don't do it." They all just "wondered" if maybe I'd want to be closer to town — or fussed about "that road" — and speculated that the family who lived around there might not be used to strangers and so on and so on. But what's wrong with the idea I kept asking and they kept answering but not in a straight line like the Jersey turnpike but with the twisty curves of their mountain roads. It was all too subtle for my Manhattan directness.

Yet enough of the message got through: I didn't rent the A-frame.

Gertie keeps wondering, too, what people mean when they say things, or don't say things. She had learned to listen to the silences in the mountains. Like Sherlock Holmes's dog who didn't bark, she knew that silences can tell a lot. Now she had to learn to listen to a lot of words that sometimes didn't add up to silences' meaning.

I not only had to figure out the silences, but the actual words. My first semester a student asked me if I could change a class time. I could, I was told, if I got everyone already enrolled to agree to the change. I went to each

student and asked if there would be a problem in switching. Let me know, I told each one. If there was, we wouldn't switch. There was no problem, each student assured me, but when I went to make the switch, I discovered that everyone, everyone, had a difficulty. They were dropping other classes, or losing their car rides, or changing their work schedules. But I asked, I wailed, why didn't they tell me? Because they figured you wanted a yes, a colleague finally told me, and they didn't want to be impolite telling you no.

I had to listen more closely to the yeses. Was it a slow yes — a yesssss? Did the yes sound more like a question than an answer? Those yeses were noes.

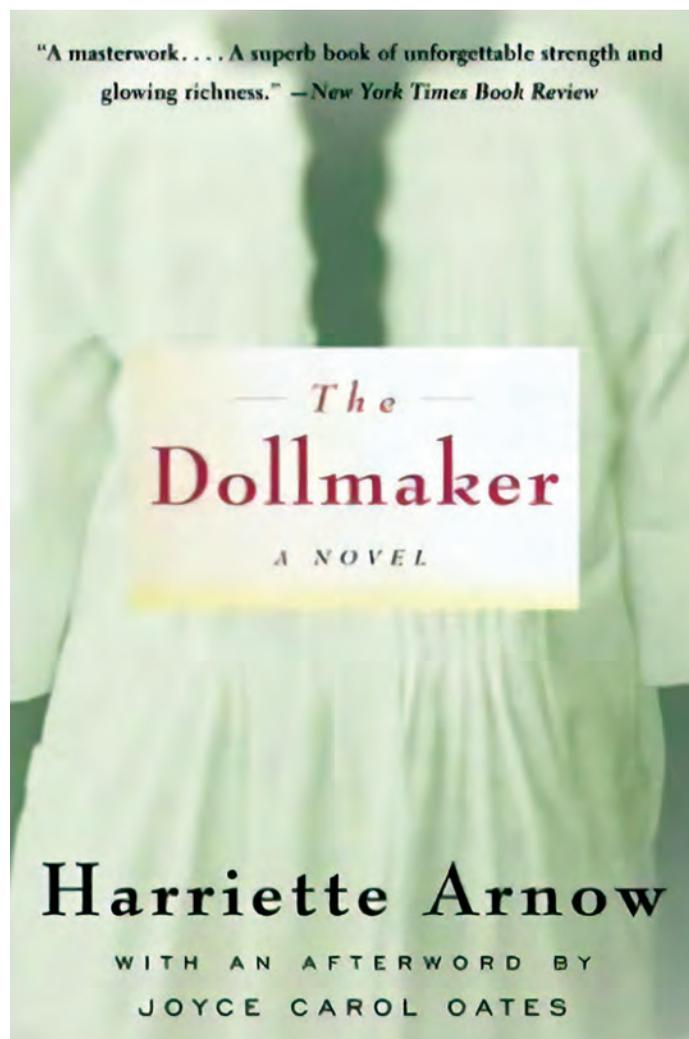
And so like Gertie, I learned to adjust to the new communication style. Like Gertie, I adjusted in my listening, but not in my speaking. My no still meant no; my yes still meant yes. And like people adjusting to my New York accent, after a pause or two, most people understood me. The adjustment wasn't fatal to who we were. We weren't adjusting ourselves out of our identities. I just had to learn to listen better, go deeper for the meanings. They had to learn to listen more on the surface, to accept the literal. When I told students and I did, that they were much more complicated in their communication styles than the New Yorkers I knew, they were incredulous. But they were.

Perhaps eastern Kentucky's elusive communication style was meant to protect them from outsiders, in particular a peculiarly dangerous outsider called the missionary, someone deeply ignorant of real life as many eastern Kentuckians live it. The missionary lady in *The Dollmaker* hides her wealth in old clothes. But the alley ladies spot her lace petticoats and know her for who she is. Life, as they understand it, is much more complicated than the missionary lady thinks it is. They know that hard lives lead to certain decisions — maybe even to bad choices. They know that she's playing at life from a vantage point perspective of many choices. Wanting to change them comes from a point of view that is basically contemptuous of them.

Eastern Kentucky has had a lot of missionaries. Some are wonderful people: people who spend their lives working to make other people's lives better. But some missionaries just played at change. Some of the missionaries came from lives wealthy with choice and were disdainful of people who were poor in choice, sometimes starved of choice.

Who was I? Was I a missionary?

A little bit. I lacked the basic ingredient, however, security in my superiority. But sure I wanted to change people. It was more teacher than missionary. I wanted my students to read better, to think more. And sometimes, I fear, I wanted them to think more as I thought. I didn't understand for a good long time that they had been being told a long time,



As in Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*, Joseph G. Anthony was as ignorant about Kentucky as Gertie was about Detroit.

like Gertie's Reuben, where to walk. And though the path they chose to walk, like Reuben's, might be more dangerous, it was still where they chose to walk. Like Gertie, like Reuben, they wouldn't give in to being like other people. Even to their advantage. That didn't make sense to me for a good long time, and because nobody talked direct to me, sometimes I butted heads.

But because I was basically interested in them, too, I was at least some willing to think like them. I knew all that fried food couldn't be good for them, but I admired their stoicism, their calm acceptance of the fact that life is fairly brief, health food or not. I learned that a little litter on the side of the road wasn't the world's worst problem and that English teachers, addicted to metaphors as they are, should learn to control themselves and bring a trash bag along with them on walks if they want to be useful. I liked the way they said things, good English or not, and I liked their poetry, their songs, their quilts, and their baskets. Some of them had gotten used to not being appreciated,

and some, like Gertie's daughter Clytie had learned to hate the things of home, like Gertie's basket. Some admiration, like the Junior League's admiration of Gertie's carvings, was more insulting than an out and out insult.

But my admiration was more naïve. And my condemnations more personal than ideological. I wasn't a missionary; I was just sometimes obnoxious. And that was ok with most of them. Who wasn't sometimes obnoxious?

I didn't give up all my beliefs and adjust; I never had to be like Mrs. McKeckeran or Mrs. Johnson, two people. I was who I was and people were fine with that, because basically I was fine with them. I tried hard to get them to believe some of the things I believe. I'm still doing that. But I also knew that they had a lot to teach me and I was teachable. And maybe because of that, I almost never got accused of being a snotty New Yorker. Because I wasn't.

Gertie's spirit still lived among Eastern Kentuckians — the spirit of not coming to conclusions about people hastily — of letting people sink in gradually — of finding out who people are and who they aren't over a period of time. Gertie doesn't even judge the missionary lady. Though she mostly rejects her words, she admires her calm.

Gertie learns that the Detroit alley is full of complicated people, not all of them nice. If she were to try to explain to her home folk in Kentucky what the alley people were like, I think she'd probably give it up as too much for any tongue. She'd have too much sense to try. I know that I

won't talk about eastern Kentucky to New Yorkers or even Lexingtonians. I might be tempted, as I was today, to tell a few funny stories and leave it at that. But that wouldn't give the right impression. Gertie gives up trying to carve a face for her Jesus — or her Judas. She knew that any face she chose would be a lie — or at best just one of many faces that would do as well.

Was Hazard like the Bluegrass, I asked Dr. Jolly that first day. Well some, he could have answered a bit more accurately. Some not.

About the Author

Joseph G. Anthony, author, moved from Manhattan's Upper West Side to Hazard, Kentucky, in 1980. Anthony, an English professor for 35 years, regularly contributes essays and poems to anthologies, including a poem and story in *Kentucky's Twelve Days of Christmas*. His most recent novel, *A Wounded Snake*, set in 1900 Lexington, centers around the issues of race, suffragettes, and the conflicts, the violence, and the politics arising from them. It was released by Bottom Dog Press in September, 2018. His previous novel, *Wanted: Good Family* was described by the *Lexington Herald-Leader* as "masterfully written and well grounded in Kentucky history and mannerisms {exploring} race, class, relationship and the potential for change." Anthony lives in Lexington, Kentucky, with his wife of 40 years, Elise Mandel. They have three grown children.



THINK HUMANITIES

ONE STORY AT A TIME

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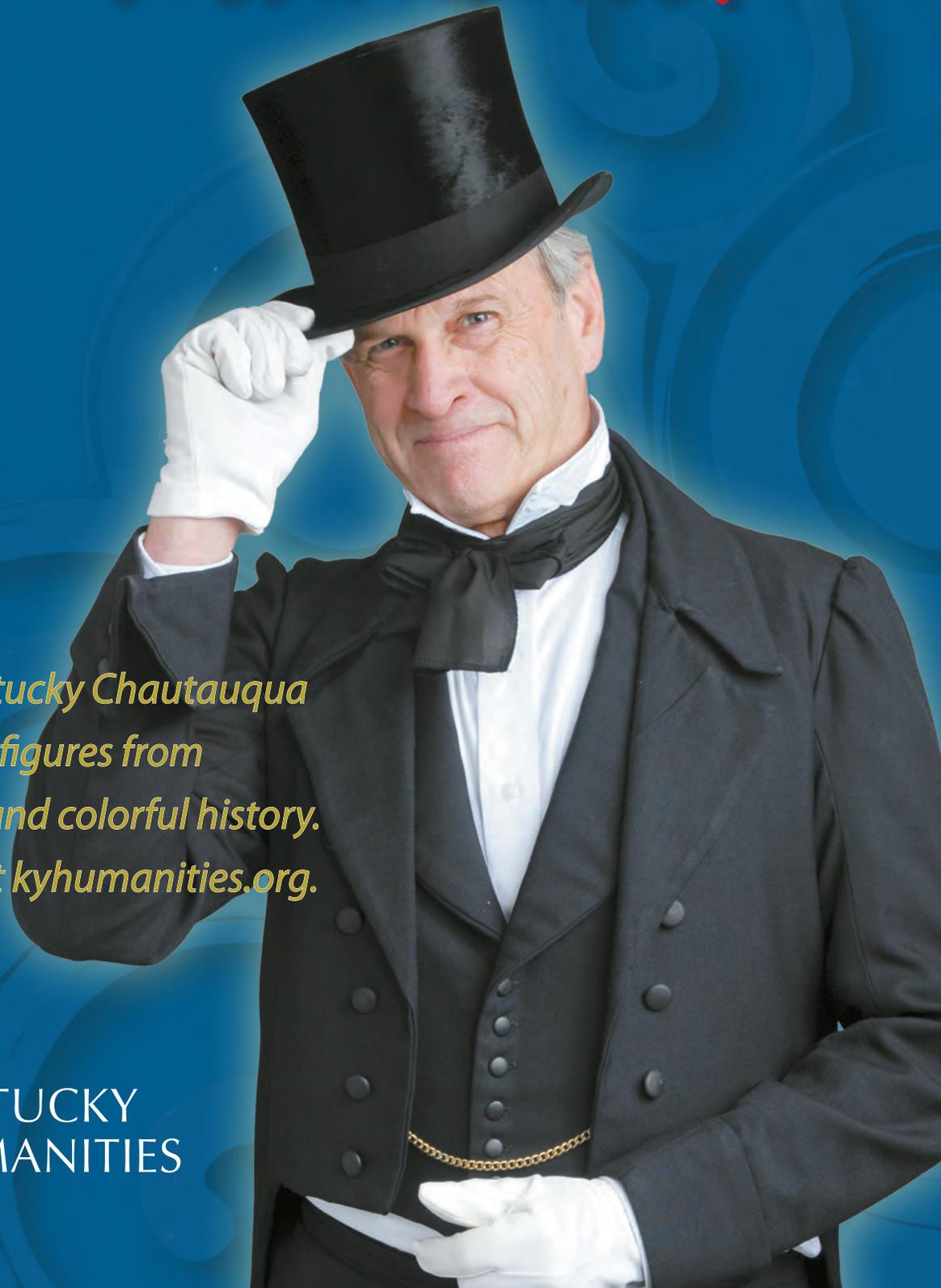
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KENTUCKY
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Cousin Emmy

Playing in a Man's World



Photo courtesy of Library Special Collections, WKU

By Nancy Richey

“Cousin Emmy” was the stage name for Cynthia Mae Carver. The second daughter and fourth child of William Henry Carver and Mary “Mollie” Bewley Carver, she was born on March 14, 1903, near Lamb, in the Barren or Monroe County areas of south central Kentucky. Her father, Henry, was on the run from a manslaughter charge, and so it depends on which side of the law he was on at the time as to what county Cousin Emmy might have first seen the light of day. The tales of her father are many, none very good except those that extol his musical abilities.

One example of his jealous and vindictive temperament was written about in an 1889 copy of the *Glasgow Weekly Times*.

“W. H. Carver of Barren County passed through here Tuesday en route to Texas. Mr. Carver was, as he states, engaged to marry last Sunday, Miss Mollie Bewley, a beautiful young lady of Tracy and went to

town Saturday and got the license. He went to the residence of his intended bride to stay until the ceremony. On Saturday night, he concluded that his jealousy would prevent his living happily with his intended and he decamped without letting anyone know of his intention. Carver is the man who killed one [Charles] Greever, in Barren County about four years ago and his intended wife is to be congratulated on his flight.”¹

But Henry came back the next year and married Molly. Henry had been married previously and had other children. His first wife divorced him for desertion and cruelty. The father’s legacy of law-breaking and violence carried on to Emmy’s older brother, Hazie Carver. He was killed in Iowa in 1931 because he slapped a woman.²

Cousin Emmy grew up on rented farmland as a tobacco sharecropper’s daughter. She would say that she was born 18 miles from a railroad and lived in cabins that “had cracks between the walls so big that you could a-throwed a cat betwix them without tetching a hair.”³ Sharecropping in south central Kentucky was not an easy

¹ *Glasgow Weekly Times*, January 23, 1889, 1.

² *Iowa City Press*, February 19, 1931, “Carver Dies, Assailant Will Face Murder Charge,” 2.

³ “Cousin Emmy,” *Time*, December 6, 1943, 47.

life for anyone. Some historians have characterized sharecropping as slavery with another name for African American families and for poor whites. In the Carver family's case, this was true. There seemed to be no escape from the never-ending cycle of debt and landlessness. Cousin Emmy noted in a 1943 *Time* magazine article that she "... started strippin' tobakker when I was eight, I reckon. Summers I chopped out corn and wormed and suckered tobakker."⁴ She also revealed that her formal education lasted two weeks and she learned to read by looking through Sears & Roebuck mail order catalogues.

Cousin Emmy wanted out of the sharecropping life and since she loved "showin off," she soon realized that she could, "Tom Sawyer-like" get out of work by performing for others. This, some interviews suggest, came as early as the age of seven. Although Cousin Emmy liked to say that she was a mountain gal, this simply was not true. South central Kentucky is not like the more isolated, mountainous regions of eastern Kentucky. This is part of the dual persona of Cousin Emmy. What she portrayed in public may not have been true in actuality.

South central Kentucky was and still is an area known for its rich musical traditions so Cousin Emmy was steeped in these distinctive conventions of performing, singing, and producing vocal and instrumental music. Musical talent was fostered in many families and passed along generational lines. The fiddle and banjo had a particular hold in this area, whereas western Kentucky developed distinct guitar styles such as those promulgated by Mose Rager, Merle Travis, and Chet Atkins.

The southern Kentucky area did, however, have much in common with the playing styles of eastern Kentucky's mountainous areas. But because travel was limited, song sharing and stylistic innovations were limited. In Barren and Monroe counties, local musicians would travel in tri-county areas, sometimes dipping down in northern Tennessee, and neighbors would get together regularly at someone's home and have a dance or music party. But mainly they would have listened to and performed in a limited social sphere, in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Traditional ballads and hymns would have been commonplace but with the advent of radio, popular songs of the times were copied and performed as well.

Henry Carver was a well-known fiddler but the whole family was musically talented. Her first cousins, Noble, (whose stage name was "Uncle Bozo"), Warner Carver, and Robert, recorded as the "Carver Boys" for Paramount Records in 1929, the first out of the area to do so. Their influence, as well as the influence of her grandmother and mother, grounded Cousin Emmy in ballad and old-time song traditions. Women had long been the "guardians of the ballad traditions."⁵

Cousin Emmy hated the backbreaking work of farming and was determined to find a way out of that life. She began to formulate her plan of escape through music since the day she first heard a radio in the general store at Lamb. "I set right down there in the store and I cried," she recalled, "and I told the folks that I was a-goin' to git on the radio. My mother she upped and whopped me."⁶

But she did perform, and her talent was showcased locally at bean hullings, quilting parties, pie suppers and dances, and at County Court Days. She also began to play, as she loved to boast, some 13 or more musical instruments: banjo, fiddle, guitar, French harp, tenor guitar, ukulele, trumpet, accordion, piano, twelve-string guitars, Jew's-harp, dulcimer, and five-string banjo. With very little urging, she would also happily play a tune on an old hand saw or a rubber glove. And to further showcase that she was just full of talent, as paraded in a performance on Pete Seeger's "Rainbow Quest" television program, she could make music by slapping her cheeks.⁷

County Court Days were one of the few times almost everyone went to town, including the Carvers. Court Days, originally set aside for legal affairs, became a mad melee of people and livestock, gathered together for the purpose of doing business and having social reunions, visiting with friends they had not seen since the last Court Day. Imagine patent medicine men, fortunetellers, and itinerant peddlers thrown into the mix and one gets an idea of the atmosphere. Everyone looked forward to this time of year and as Court Day approached, a storm of dust could be seen for miles as the people, wagons, stock, and horses churned up the country roads.

The escape route from this farming lifestyle came, in part, through the divorce of her parents. By 1920, Molly had divorced Henry and moved to Bloomington, Illinois. In Illinois, Cousin Emmy began performing, first with her brothers and then joined her first cousins, the Carver Boys in Kansas City, Kansas. They did well with live performances and had a radio program with Cousin Emmy playing banjo in their string band. But Cousin Emmy knew she could do well on her own, so in 1936 she returned to Kentucky. A story that Cousin Emmy liked to tell of her return to Kentucky and obtaining her first job at WHAS in Louisville is illustrative of her spunk. Although the station manager had promised to see and listen to her, he was always busy and could not be bothered to grant her an interview. So she convinced the custodian to let her not only in the building, but in the manager's office before it opened. She then hid in a closet in his office and somehow, after his fright wore off, convinced him to listen to her play. She did get her own show and that same year became the first female to win the National Old Time Fiddlers contest, beating 13-year-champion, Clayton McMichen.⁸

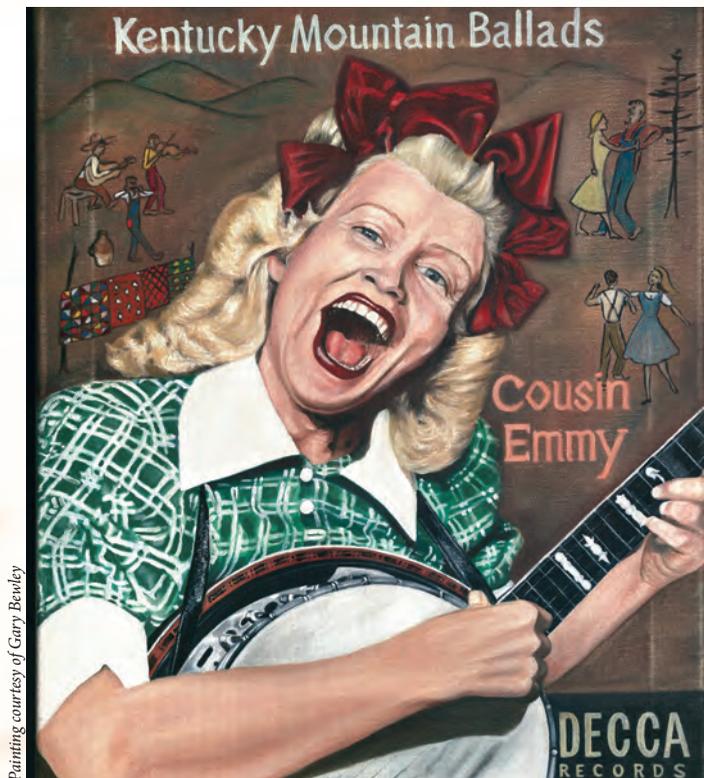
⁴ "Radio: Cousin Emmy," *Time*.

⁵ Christine Cooper, *Oldtime News*, Autumn 2008, no. 55, page 6.

⁶ "Cousin Emmy," *Time*.

⁷ *Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest* directed by Sholom Rubinstein (2005; [Newton, N.J.]: Shanachie, DVD).

⁸ Mike Seeger Collection interview FT-20029/8815_1.



Painting courtesy of Gary Bewley

Her talent brought her to the attention of stars such as Clayton McMichen and Frankie Moore. McMichen, she said, was jealous and fired her the first day after her performance.⁹ But Moore knew she was an excellent performer, and she became a banjoist with Frankie Moore's Log Cabin Boys and "the belle of the Louisville barn dances."¹⁰ It was with Moore that Cousin Emmy popped and began to gain national prominence. Soon, as she predicted and fought for, she was given her own show on WHAS, which enabled her to ask for and receive more money. Rapidly she achieved national acclaim as a "banjo pickin' girl" from Kentucky, known for her wild frailing-style banjo playing. She taught this style to Grandpa Jones, whom she met while she was in Wheeling, West Virginia. He adopted the style as his own and was always quick to credit Cousin Emmy. Grandpa Jones said of her: "She was pretty wild I guess ... she had them big, wide teeth, and you know, she'd grin and they'd just shine. And, oh me, she was mighty good on the old five-string banjo. She played a little fiddle and everything else on her show. She was a good showman, I'll tell you that."¹¹

Within 10 years, Cousin Emmy became one of the most popular radio stars of the era, blanketing the south with the old standards. She regularly hired talented male and female performers to be a part of her "Kinfolks." One of the performers was "Little

Shoe," Alma Crosby, who was a niece of Cousin Emmy, and enjoyed a short career of her own. A motley crew, brothers-in-law, cousins, nieces, nephews, and so-called adopted or foster children would form Cousin Emmy's traveling entourage. There was never any doubt who was in charge of the troupe as they traveled around the country in her Cadillac. Even though she never learned to drive this Cadillac, for Cousin Emmy it showcased success, and she loudly proclaimed that she was "the first hillbilly to own a Cadillac."¹²

Her voice has been described as Ethel Merman-like or a locomotive, and her personality a cyclone or hurricane. Well portrayed, as she made herself the center of attention on any stage, strutting, dancing, and shouting her way into her audience's hearts. The *Time* magazine article of 1942 also described her as having a broad bony face, a wide mouth, lots of platinum-colored hair, immense enthusiasm, and a masterly capacity for mugging.

Success to Cousin Emmy was the radio shows. She appeared on Atlanta's WSB and WAGA; Kansas City's WHB; Knoxville's WNOX; Wheeling West Virginia's WWVA; St. Louis' KMOX; even briefly as far south as Mexico. Many will note that WSM in Nashville is not listed nor the Opry. But Charles Wolfe notes that other areas of the country were "more receptive to bluegrass and more traditional and pure forms of country music than Nashville's WSM," preferring acts that shown with professional polish.¹³ This in part, explains her absence from this station.

It was at St. Louis' KMOX, in 1941, that her popularity soared. This 50,000-watt CBS station claimed more than 2 million in its listening audience, and it was here that America came to know Cousin Emmy. She was making excellent money, \$850 from the radio show alone, (almost \$14,000/week in today's dollars), and she supplemented the income from the radio program with live shows and festivals. She would sometimes be driven on 500 mile round-trip within a single day to honor her venue and radio commitments. During this time, she was also chosen by the City Art Museum of St. Louis as the "most-perfect singer of mountain ballads."¹⁴ Her popularity shown in the 36,888 pieces of mail (of which 28,365 were direct product inquiries and 8,523 personal fan letters) she received while at the station.¹⁵

Historians have inquired about her lack of time at WSM or on the Opry.¹⁶ Interviews with family members have provided information that she was asked by certain managers to perform "privately" backstage or she would not be able to "perform publicly"

⁹ Ibid. of footnote 8.

¹⁰ *Standby*, July 18, 1936 "Versatile Emmy," 12.

¹¹ Grandpa Jones quoted in "Marion Sumner, Fiddle King of the South," <http://www.plankroad.org/Articles/FiddleKingOfTheSouth.pdf>, 12.

¹² NLCR, *The New Lost City Ramblers with Cousin Emmy*, Folkways, album, 1968.

¹³ Charles Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings: The Story of County Music in Tennessee*, (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1977).

¹⁴ "Cousin Emmy," *Time*.

¹⁵ "Merchandising & Promotion," *Broadcasting*, August 14, 1944, 54.

¹⁶ Barbara Carver Forkin, Interview, Springfield, IL, 2012.

on stage at the Opry. She refused this arrangement. She also felt that the Opry management thought more of their bottom line and reputation than they did of the performer's career.¹⁷

Though her formal education was weak, she was an astute business woman, always keeping a close eye on her earnings. She made sure she was paid in cash and hawked her songbooks with the zeal of a car salesperson. She controlled her image as well. When a reader asked about Cousin Emmy in a 1938 issue of *Rural Radio*, it was all right to say that she was blue-eyed and had blonde hair, was 5' 5" inches tall and weighed 126 pounds but it was not all right to give her true birth date. It was listed as 1911 not 1903.¹⁸

As it was for many artists during this time, success was not measured by recordings or record sales but by the exposure of radio and live venues. But in 1947-48, Carver was asked to record for Decca by folklorist Alan Lomax. Lomax titled her album, "Kentucky Mountain Ballads."

Her overwhelming personality could hardly be captured in recordings, yet one gets a sense of her stage presence in the two movies that she was featured in, "Swing in the Saddle" or its working title, "Under Western Skies" (1944) and "The Second Greatest Sex" (1955). She also appeared on the Jack Benny program, "Jack Takes in a Boarder," in 1962. She was asked at this time to read for the part of Granny on the "Beverly Hillbillies," but decided against it, as she could not read well enough to learn the scripts.

She liked the warm climate of California and as she got older and could no longer tolerate the cold winters of Illinois, she moved permanently to California. Her live radio performances had been replaced with the more popular recordings, so that part of her career ended also.

In the '60s, Cousin Emmy continued to perform in live venues such as the "Country & Western Night" show at Disneyland and at many clubs. In 1961, members of the "New Lost City Ramblers," led by Mike Seeger, brought her to the attention of devotees of the urban folk revival. With them, in 1968 she recorded, "The New Lost City Ramblers with Cousin Emmy." These appearances and recordings revived her career and led to many nationwide appearances during the '60s and '70s. She also performed collaboratively with this band at venues includ-

ing the famous Ash Grove in Los Angeles and the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island. Here, as Dylan went electric, shocking the crowd who had just enjoyed her traditional music, concert goers could be heard shouting their displeasure by saying "Bring back Cousin Emmy."¹⁹ She also appeared on "Rainbow Quest," Pete Seeger's televised program dedicated to folk music. Cousin Emmy capped off the '60s touring Europe with the NLCR and other musicians. She continued performing but as age progressed and dementia took over, all of it came to an end.

¹⁷ Mike Seeger Collection interview FT-20029/8815_1.

¹⁸ Peggy Stewart, "Family Gossip," *Rural Radio*, June 1938, 18.

¹⁹ Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (Montclair, NJ: Backbeat Books, 2011) 210.

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Cousin Emmy died in Pacoima, California, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the northern San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles on April 11, 1980, and is buried in Eternal Valley Memorial Park in Newhall, California.

Cousin Emmy was a self-taught accomplished musician but she was also a pioneering woman entrepreneur and a fiercely independent business woman. She did not see the value in recording and thus spent most of her career on the road in personal appearances to support her radio work. She toured as a lone female primary solo act at a time when this was not done thus paving the way for other women performers to create solo careers. She bristled at the notion that she was not able to bring in the audiences, and ticket sales of male performers. “I know and can prove that I outdraw Pappy [Cheshire] or anybody else. So you just go ahead and put me on top of that there pile, where I belong.”²⁰ She also held the copyright to her recordings that are still producing royalties today. Her classic, copyrighted version of “Ruby, Are You Mad At Your Man” is one example of her control of her art.

Cousin Emmy’s public persona created a few myths. In the *Time* magazine article, the reporter says that Emmy was a “teetotaling, nonsmoking, unprofane Baptist, who forsakes parties and has remained unmarried because “I ain’t got time to do no courtin’,” and that Emmy gives the church 10% of her income and attends services regularly.”²¹

However, she did find time to “court” and married at least six

times and went through several messy divorces. Some sources say she married before she left Kentucky and married again in Illinois to Dr. Joseph White. Her next marriage was to John Alfred Creasy, her announcer and co-performer. He divorced Cousin Emmy to marry her niece, Joy. Next, she married Elmer Schaller of St. Louis who said she “slapped, scratched, clawed and swore” at him and gave him a black eye with a frying pan!²² Her fourth husband, James “Jimmy” Powers did not fare any better. Cousin Emmy said he had pawned her guitar and so in the end “she exchanged a pawn ticket for a divorce decree.”²³

She did smoke and drink according to some sources, and there are photographs of her with cigarettes. She said she learned some of her ballads and songs from her Jewish grandmother but there is no evidence that she had any Jewish heritage — south central Kentucky was not exactly a hotbed of Jewish settlement.

She did not spend time in a penitentiary. Many still today believe that she was jailed for assisting the Nazis in World War II by singing “Smoke on the Water.” This was supposed to be a signal that the Allies were sending out a fleet of ships.

She is listed by many names: Joy White, Joy May Schaller, Joy May Creasy, May White, Emmy Carver, and Joy Carver but she was born Cynthia Mae Carver, named after an aunt.

Cousin Emmy developed a fiery reputation, closely watched her well-crafted persona, and was known as someone who watched the financial bottom line constantly. She could be a difficult person to deal with. There are stories of tensions between her and co-workers, as well as the men who tried to serve as her manager or announcer/producer. She felt she was “the biggest thing to hit any man’s radio station” and was as good as or better than any male performer.²⁴ She was not an easy person to manage, preferring her own way, bristling at any perceived slight or someone trying to take advantage of her because she was a woman.

Managers such as John Lair “groomed” all their female performers and maintained very strict gender roles, dictating the types of instruments to play, the songs to sing, and choosing the costumes they wore. Lair of “Renfro Valley Barn Dance” fame did not like that Cousin Emmy wore “diamond rings big as hickory nuts” and had a pair of Cadillacs.²⁵ Lair wanted pretty female singers who wore calico dresses and hair bows who sang decent “home and hearth” songs, both onstage and off. This was what the audience wanted also, he surmised. Off stage, much to Lair’s trepidation, Cousin Emmy loved the latest flashy, fashionable clothes, high black heels, and high priced jewelry of all kinds. Cousin Emmy wanted none of this type of outside control. She wanted the work, and to work for Lair, but it

²⁰ “Cousin Emmy,” *Time*.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² “Cousin Emmy Gets Rough,” *Reading Eagle*, Berks County, PA, July 3, 1949, 13.

²³ St. Petersburg Times, “Wife Exchanges Pawn Ticket for Divorce,” April 3, 1950, 25.

²⁴ Charles Wolfe, *Classic Country: Legends of Country Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 107.

²⁵ Lily May Ledford Collection, 1936-1985, Series II, Berea College.

was to be on her terms. She also watched her profits noting that one producer “wanted too much of a cut.”²⁶

This fiery reputation hurt Cousin Emmy many times and she lost out on numerous opportunities because of it. But she was playing in a “man’s world” and not only learned how to play in it, but how to succeed in it. She felt no one could represent her and her interests better than herself.

What is true is that Cousin Emmy maintained a fidelity to the traditional sounds and songs of her rural background, creating and performing music that conveyed a depth of feeling, artistic expression, absolute energy, and an interweaving of the varieties and textures of true rural music. This music still appeals to many cultures and audiences because it portrays the never-changing human condition.

Jim Wayne Miller, Kentucky Poet Laureate, in his poem, “Harvest,” captured a bit of the appeal of Cousin Emmy and others who sing the old songs and why they continue to touch us.

Still, he thought of songs landlocked two hundred years, living in coves and hollers, far from home, by creeks and waterfalls, and springdrain trickles, — songs that still remembered the salt salt sea and held all past time green in the month of May

and made all love and death and sorrow sweet ...
But what was lightest lasted, lived in song.²⁷

Cousin Emmy’s life, her interpretation, presentation, and arrangement of a special part of our nation’s music endures because many of her songs continue to illuminate the heart’s hollow ache and call. Though C. S. Lewis was speaking of an internal longing for a far-off country (Heaven), his words are well suited to music. Songs “are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”²⁸ But, somehow we know what the music means, and means to us, because of artists like Cousin Emmy.

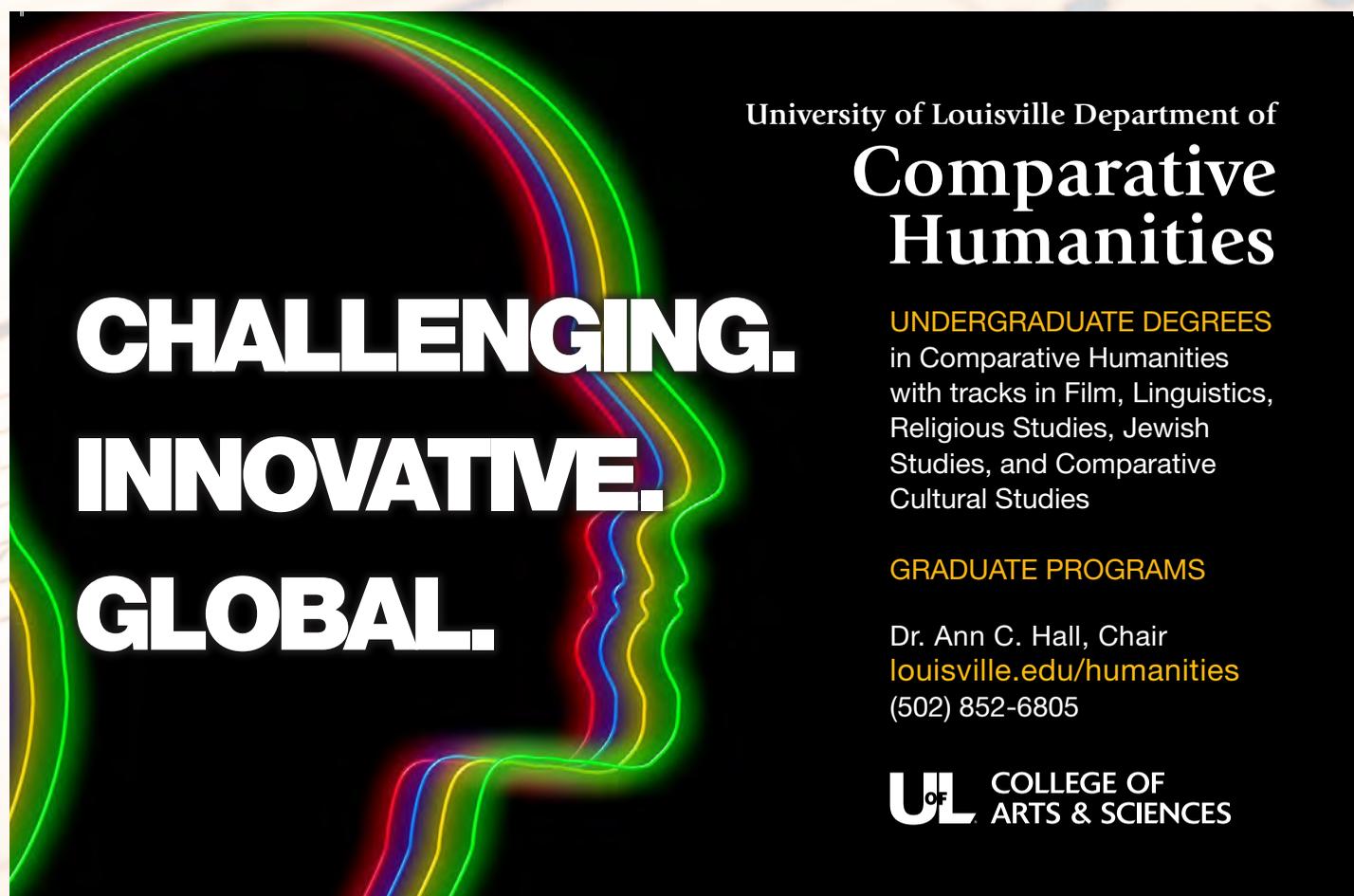
About the Author

Nancy Richey is an associate professor and visual resources librarian for the Department of Library Special Collections at WKU. A native of Mt. Hermon, Richey grew up near the area of Carver’s birth and has been happily chasing the mysterious “Cousin Emmy” for many years. She also serves on the Barren County Historical Society and Morrison Camp meeting site boards and is the co-author of *Mose Rager: Kentucky Incomparable Guitar Master*.

²⁶ Mike Seeger Collection interview FT-20029/8815_1.

²⁷ Morris Allen Grubbs, *Every Leaf a Mirror: A Jim Wayne Miller Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014) 65.

²⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, (1941), <http://www.ucla.edu/~ras2777/spirituality/lewis.htm>.



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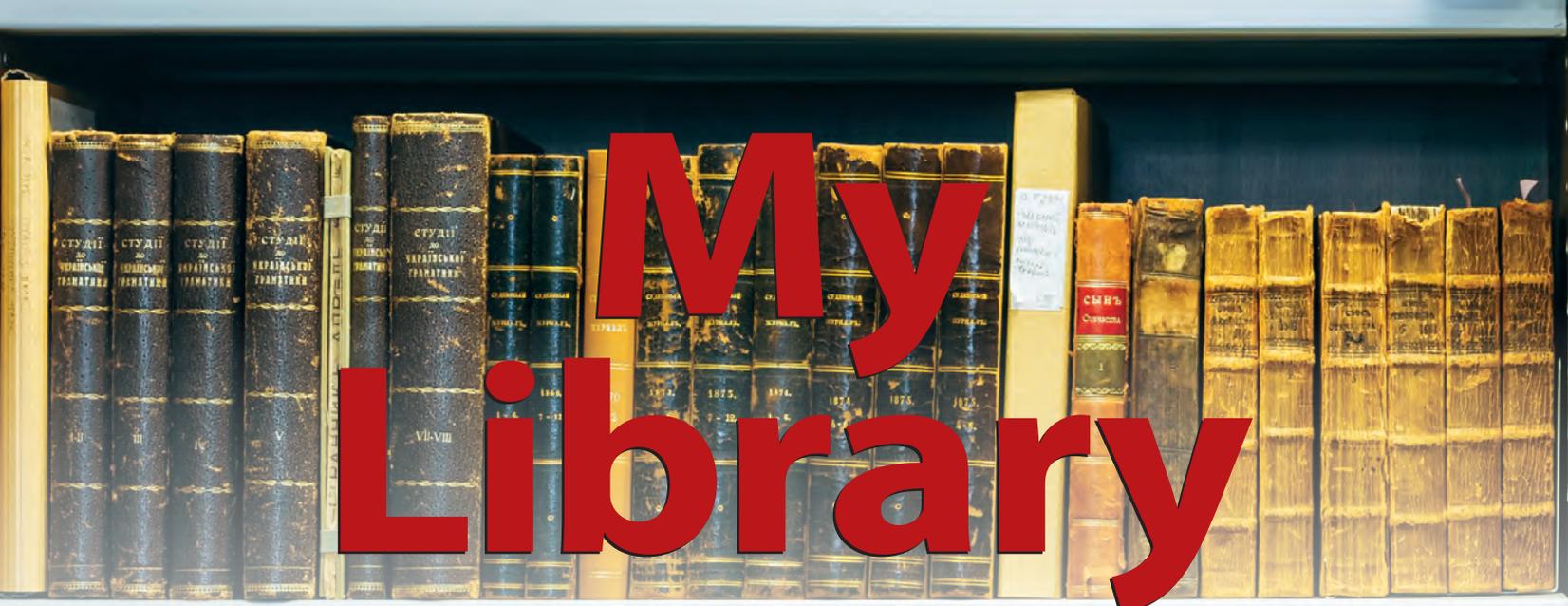
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My Library

By Georgia Green Stamper

My husband would say that we bought our nothing-out-of-the-ordinary suburban home because it had a walk-out basement. That's an uncommon feature, we were surprised to learn, in our more flat than not subdivision. The real reason, however, was its tiny front room.

"A library!" I said. I'd wanted a house with a library since I first read about them in English novels when I was a girl, since I'd first glimpsed them on TV in old black and white movies of the 1930s and '40s. In my imagination, people who had achieved the good life were always retiring to their "library" to talk or read or to ponder big decisions.

"Where?" my husband asked.

"Where?" the real estate agent asked.

"Why here," I said, pointing to a little bitty room squished behind French doors that opened off the entry hall.

"Oh," my husband said.

"Oh," the real estate agent said.

I could tell that they were having trouble looking past the dark Hunter green walls and the huge floral design on the draperies that did indeed shrink this little room to cell-like proportions.

"Are you sure this isn't the closet for the master bedroom?" my husband asked.

Seizing the moment, the agent jumped in. "It wouldn't be hard at all to knock out that wall next to the master, and turn this space into a closet to die for."

Why were they not impressed with the two walls lined with

white enameled bookshelves that stretched from floor to ceiling? Didn't they see the deep, pretty crown molding that held the shelves in place? Why hadn't they noticed that the room had a large bay window that faced east toward the morning sun? And what about the hardwood floor and the fireplace with a mantel? "Look here, and here, and here, and here," I said.

Why couldn't they imagine how this room would grow with the walls painted in a calm, space-expanding ivory? Couldn't they see the light flooding in the bay window once it was freed from the drapery jungle? And don't forget mirrors — we could add mirrors to reflect that light.

Couldn't they feel the warmth of the fireplace on a January day, themselves sinking deep into an easy chair beside the fire, their feet resting on an ottoman? And my boxes and boxes of books — my lifelong friends that would replace the doo-dads that now filled the shelves — surely, they could appreciate the joy the books would bring into the room.

"Well, the house does have a big, walk-out basement," my husband said.

"Yes, it does," the agent said. "A great re-sell feature."

And so, it was decided.

In the 16 years that we have lived here, my husband has come to love our little library as much as I do. He might say it's the morning light that lures us there for breakfast coffee and the newspaper most every day. It's where we spot the first glimpse of spring in the trees along the street, where we luxuriate in summer's indolent display of flowers just beyond the window.



And in winter, when all the world is pale and dim, the sun still rises in the east, lighting our mornings with promise.

Some — the grandchildren for example — would say they like the room because it has those glass French doors that can be closed, shutting the grown-ups out. They like to sprawl across the wood floor to play board games or for long make-believe sessions with tiny figures and little cars. There's a small TV tucked into the shelves, too, and no one tells them to turn the volume down when they're in there with the doors closed.

Others, who come with problems to discuss, would say they like the privacy the doors afford when secrets must be whispered, answers sought. But it's also a good place for laughing conversation, a cozy retreat that pushes back at HGTV's "open concept" and soaring ceilings.

In the end, though, I think we all like the little library because it's filled with books from floor to ceiling. Even those who don't much read books seem to understand that these spines contain everything we'll ever experience, from joy to despair, from the ignorance of people to their greatest insights. And from time to time, I pull a book off the shelves and hand it to one or another, to help them learn something they're seeking, or to amuse them, or to inspire them when I have no words to do so.

On the north side of the room, I tell them, they'll find the Kentucky voices, some of the best, if not most famous, writers who've ever lived. There's Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, Jesse Stuart, and James Still. Wendell Berry and youngsters like Silas House. Oh, and here's one by that nice woman I met at the Kentucky Book Fair last year.

To the west, are the masters, Shakespeare, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Hemingway, and the Harvard Classics. Eudora Welty, Katherine Ann Porter. Up high are the anthologies, some I taught from, others I studied from. Down there are comfortable favorites, *Run With the Horsemen*, *Cold Sassy Tree*, *Watership Down*, all the Michener books. And over here, well, these are the ones I haven't gotten around to reading yet, and I make the joke that I can't die until all of them are read.

The books, like the old friends they are, remain constant in all seasons. Their presence and influence ground me, make me seem wiser than I am. Today, though, when the world's news bounces ever shriller off the landscape, I am more interested in comfort than in wisdom.

"Come sit with me in the library and let's read awhile," I say to my husband. "And close the French doors — let's shut the grown-ups out."

About the Author

Georgia Green Stamper is a seventh generation Kentuckian. A graduate of Transylvania University, Stamper is a former high school English and theater teacher and speech team coach. Her published works include *Butter in the Morning* and *You Can Go Anywhere*. She also writes a bi-weekly column, "Georgia: On My Mind," for *The Owenton News-Herald*. She has been a regular commentator for NPR member station WUKY affiliated with the University of Kentucky and a popular member of the Kentucky Humanities' Speakers Bureau.



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