In which we continued our stay in the upscale urban center of Oxford. In this town some of us witnessed the power of the pulpit as a congregation tossed out Satan, cell phones and Miss Cleo. Among the yelling and the prayer many of us were reminded of earlier experiences with religion, including family funerals. We have tried to recount the deep connection and sense of community that is nearly exclusive to theatrical and inspiring Southern funeral customs. Looking into many facets of Southern religion, we have realized that it goes much deeper than a church or a corner evangelist and is far more powerful and varied than we gave it credit for. In an area of the country where advice comes from the Good Book and God pops up at a flea market, it can easily be seen that the South hosts a unique idea of what is and isn't spiritual. Looking back over the days of our sojourn, we discovered a dizzying number of ways in which religion has become manifest in Southern institutions, places and people. Southern novelist and poet Ron Rash, one of our hosts in Clemson, recounts in one poem the experience of watching a snake-handler at a church service and the almost palpable sense of religious ecstasy. Even at dusty flea markets among old medals and used records we have Proverbs next to glitter puppets. Ultimately, through the days of our trip our group realized that religion can be found on billboards, front yards and even yard sales...right next to the Jesus bumper stickers.
Just Another Sunday in Oxford
by Ivy Farr

After a croissant and a flavored mocha for breakfast, Laura Vaughn and I began our trek to Second Missionary Baptist Church in Oxford, Mississippi. I'm not sure if it was the caffeine rush or just the anxiety I felt upon approaching the first all-African-American church I had ever been to that gave me the apprehensive feeling, but I am pretty sure that it was the latter. Either way, I had kamikaze butterflies in my stomach as we approached the front door.

In the parking lot was a father, dressed in a dark suit, walking with his four- or five-year-old, a scene that eased my mind somewhat. I was anxious about how two white girls from South Carolina would be received by an all-black congregation, for even the tan that I had worked on so diligently at the beach could not help me blend in with this congregation. Would we be welcomed? Would we be stared at? Would people think that we were there to analyze their culture?

My uneasiness increased as we walked into the sanctuary. Aside from one white couple sitting near the windows and a photographer documenting the pastor's final sermon, we were the only pale-skinned people there. Shortly after we sat down, though, we were approached by a very friendly lady dressed in a white suit from head to foot that made her resemble a nurse. She handed each of us a visitors card to provide personal information.

I've always been wary of those little cards before, since at my grandparents' church they read out your name during a special visitors' moment. All the visitors have to stand up when their names are called, and everyone stares at them until everyone's name has been called. "Great," I thought. "As if we needed to draw any more attention to ourselves."

As the members of the church listened to the announcements, I settled into my seat and started to feel more relaxed. "This is a lot like our church," I thought, "except I don't think that our church would ever host a 'Ballers for Christ' Basketball Tournament." My uneasiness began to slip away little by little and, by the time the youth choir had completed their enthusiastic praise hymn, I honestly felt right at home. My only apprehension at that point concerned what was going to happen next because in this church I had no idea what to expect.

The religious experience was so wholly different, so infused with religious fervor, that I hardly knew what to do. My thoughts continued to drift back to my reserved, traditional, unadventurous small-town church at home. Maybe I should arrange a field trip to Oxford for my own congregation; it wouldn't hurt to ignite a flame in our sanctuary every now and then.

Brother Leroy Wadlington began his sermon by checking his watch, which must have already read 12 noon (the service had begun at 11) and by assuring us that he would keep his message short. He read from 1 Peter 5:7—"Cast all of your cares upon him"—several different versions of the scripture, with emphasis placed on key words to make sure that everyone understood what would be the subject of his talk. What follows is a summary of his message.

"As long as you're on this side of the river, you're gonna' have cares. "When we have so many cares, we can slip into the temptation of worry. But worry is a useless exercise." The sermon had been punctuated all along with "Amen, brothers" and "Yessir, yessir's," and these comments only increased as Pastor Wadlington went on. "Worry does nothing positive. Tell me one sickness that worrying has cured? Tell me one problem that worry has solved? We all have cares; it's just a matter of how we deal with them.

"Your cares may be a disobedient child or a marriage gone sour. Your cares may be conniving, back-biting coworkers. They may be about a member of your family who has taken all kinds of your possessions and pawned them off to support a nasty drug habit. But whatever your cares are, place all of them on Him." I was amazed at the frankness of his message. My church would have never addressed our community's issues as directly as Brother Wadlington addressed the issues in his.

"God knows us better than we know ourselves. A man one time asked me if I could prove that. And since I've studied the Bible, I quoted Matthew 10 to him: 'But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.' "Do you know how many hairs are on your head?" I asked him.

"No sir," he said.

"You see? God knows you better than you know yourself!" The balding preacher continued.
“Now, for some of us, He don’t have to count very much. For some of us, he don’t have
to count at all. But God knows us better than we know ourselves...

“We have trouble turning over our cares to God. You wanna’ go to Louisiana, get
yourself a mojo because your husband is runnin’ around. You wanna’ call up the psychic
bovine. But what you need to do is cast all your cares on Him.”

Brother Leroy’s voice had been wavering up and down throughout, but as he
approached this, the climax of his message, his voice became even more raspy. His
speech was marked with shouts, deep breaths, and sing-song blues notes. The organist,
a young, slender woman clad in winter white—the only woman there, besides myself,
who was clothed in a color lighter than charcoal—joined in, mimicking his glissandos
and slides. The saxophonist and drummer struck up, too, as Brother Leroy ducked under
the lectern. A few seconds later, he emerged, standing at his full height of perhaps five­
feet six, bursting into full song. With a pained, scratchy voice, amplified three times over
by the microphone he held in his hand, he screamed, “I knooow He cares!” and “I got
religion!” over and over while mopping his dark brow with a white cloth.

For the next seven or eight minutes, Brother Leroy attempted to cut off the music
with a quick wave of his hand, but each time the band continued.

So Leroy returned over and over, repeating, “I know He cares!” just in case someone had missed his
previous homily.

The minister of music, who had led the congregation in a sonorous version of t
he traditional hymn, “Lead Me, Guide Me” an hour before—truly the most moving
expression of the hymn I have heard thus far in my short life—finally stepped in, seeing
that it was five minutes till one. He managed to calm the service down, though I cannot
remember exactly how he accomplished such a feat.

The service let out after an invitation to the altar, and I left the church, head spinning
in disbelief and wonder. The sanctuary and foyer of the church were as hot as a furnace,
heated by souls aflame with the spirit of God, a sharp contrast to the cold and windy
streets of Oxford in winter, but I carried that warmth within me for the rest of the day.
SATAN
by Larry McGehee

When I was fresh out of college, "Brother" Irion (we called all ministers "Brother" in those days), minister of First Methodist Church in my hometown, invited me to substitute for him at Sunday evening service.

I had studied a bit of history in college and had been struck by how many awful things had been done over the centuries by Christians claiming to be "fighting Satan." Slaughters of countrysides of people in eastern Europe, the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, and episodes of the Crusades were all part of a long history of "defeating the Devil" that gave Christianity a bad name. Showing so much attention to Satan, it seemed to me had detracted from the central figure of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, and had elevated the Evil One to too exalted a status in the Church.

Satan is not mentioned often in the Bible at all: outside of the snake in the Garden, the tempters appearing to Job, and the temptations of Jesus, Satan is a minor biblical character. But Christians later inflated Satan to a standing almost equal to God and saw history as a perpetual war between Good and Evil, God and the Devil. I wanted to show in this modern age of science and facts that Satan is just a figment of the imagination and, at most, a literary symbol used to explain the presence of evil in the world.

Looking back later, I realized what I was really trying to do with a lot of references to books and quotes and scholars, was to show off my recent college education to hometown folks.

A sermon conceived in pride and youthful zeal isn't likely to get very far, and that one certainly didn't. About five minutes into this sermon demythologizing Satan, the sky outside grew enormously dark. The wind could be heard rising, and then hard rain pelted the stained-glass windows of the church. But I preached on.

Then suddenly a bolt of lightning turned the world outside light blue for a second, followed by an indescribably loud clap of thunder. The lights in the sanctuary went out. But I preached on.

My good friend, Mac Luckey, was presiding at the service, and he was resourceful enough to light the candles of a candelabrum on the altar and to hold it beside me so that I could see my notes. I preached on.

All had grown calm and silent and dark outside. Then, abruptly, a mighty roar of wind could be heard. The wind pushed open the heavy front doors of the church, filled the vestibule, threw open the swinging doors into the darkened sanctuary, rushed down the center aisle...

And blew out the candles.

At this point, the weather finally had gotten my attention. I quickly announced that it was obvious that I needed to reconsider my views on the nonexistence of Satan and that perhaps we should all rapidly sing one verse of "Shall We Gather at the River" and get on home.

That autobiographical footnote has come to mind several times in recent months. During the rejoicing over the death of totalitarianism in the USSR, I have hesitated to celebrate either loudly or dogmatically because I know that strong winds can rise suddenly on calm nights. Strong-man rule can seem the answer to disoriented people unaccustomed to new abundances of personal liberty amid shortages of food and work.

The same restraint nagged me during the national euphoria over the success of allied troops and American weaponry in Iraq. History shows the frequent and sudden sandstorms are natural to that region, and that Operation Desert Storm may not be the last word in Iraq.

And here on the home front, this story reminds me that all of the separated thousand Points of Light, each bright and wonderful in its own way, held up for public praise recently, really show us that we are in a darkness and wind of economic hard times and governmental deficits, suffering people and blighted hopes. The Points of Light help us keep on preaching, but sooner or later we are going to have to adjourn to reconsider our views on the black hole in which they flicker.
Snake Handling
by Larry McGehee

Before I got a car in my senior year of college, I rode the L&N trains and Greyhound buses a lot. Once, in the late 1950s, I was seated by a fellow from the mountains of Kentucky, homeward bound from working somewhere in Ohio or Louisville. Unlike most mountain folk, this man was talkative. I learned a great deal about mountain culture from him. Most of what he taught me has been confirmed since then by books and visits to the mountains. However, one thing made my fellow sojourner especially memorable.

He was a snake handler on his way to mountain services.

Once over the shock of him telling me that, I begin peeking around to see what baggage he had stowed under our seat or in the overhead rack. As it turned out, chatting with him was one of the most educational experiences I ever had. The man was civil, patient, rational, talkative, and—as near as I could tell—unaccompanied by any snakes. And although I didn’t rush out to my hometown snake farm to start my own congregation, I did come away with far more understanding and appreciation for snake-handling religion than I ever would have had otherwise.

That memory has come back as I have read a couple of new books. One from Alabama, at the lower tip of Appalachia, is Dennis Covington’s Salvation on Sand Mountain (Addison-Wesley). The other is David L. Kimbrough’s Taking Up Serpents: Snake Handlers of Eastern Kentucky (University of North Carolina Press).

Kimbrough investigated snake-handling religion as an academic exercise working on his graduate history degree at Indiana University. He followed the Saylor family and George Hensley, famous around Harlan, Kentucky. Covington was a Birmingham-based stringer for the New York Times, drawn to exploring the religion after covering a trial in which a minister got ninety-nine years for trying to kill his wife with church snakes.

Both men became personally involved in the religion they were studying. Covington actually handled snakes and even took up preaching until he had second thoughts about the risks he ran and about the church’s stand on women in the pulpit. Kimbrough was better able to maintain his objectivity, although he had an obvious fascination with the practitioners and a high degree of tolerance for what, to mainstream Protestantism, has to appear as Orthodox religion.

Although not mountain holiness folk, both Covington and Kimbrough had grandparents who were, thus easing their acceptance as reporters by the congregations.

Both point out that snake handling (and strychnine swallowing and fire handling) are religious phenomena of this century, started when mountain people were forced down off the mountains for economic reasons to work in the valleys and towns. Faced with the tempestuous temptations of urban and industrial life, they resorted to extremes of faith to protect them from the evil spirits roaming around them.

The clash of two cultures within the personal lives of mobile people is a theme all of us can appreciate. The contrasts between isolated and protected rural or mountain lifestyles and the hustle and complexity of the story and city life are widespread and obvious. Change has been an epidemic in this century now ending, and it brings with it mixed blessings: improved living conditions sometimes, but stresses on values and families as well. A society on the move, as America has been, comes to more crossroads than a fixed society where change is measured in centuries rather than seconds.

We resort to all sorts of ways for living precariously at the crossroads. Sometimes we adapt rapidly. Other times, we build fences around sacred certainties. The raging battles we have had over flying some flags and burning others is but one example of how we get caught at the crossroads and sometimes take up metaphorical serpents to hold on to something we fear we will lose. The list of other examples can be as long and big as a boa: medical care, abortion, school prayer, single-sex education, political correctness, and deficit spending are just the first page in a catalog of changes so thick it makes the Sears catalog look thin.

Changes abound in our times, and we are trying hard to find some grace abounding in them. Televised congressional hearings and afternoon and late-night talk shows bear remarkable similarities to snake-handling services to which our mountain kinfolk retreated in trying to come to grips with change and evil in the world.

All of us engage in some form or another of taking up serpents; highly emotional wrestling with faith and change is a sign of our times. We differ from each other mostly over choices of what changes most threaten us and over what methods are most appropriate for handling them.
Will the Real Southern Religion Please Stand Up? 
A Cultural Comparison of the Pentecostal and Southern Baptist Faiths  
by Jason Rains

It is impossible to discuss southern culture without discussing the South. Southern literature is rife with religious characters and themes; appeals to the conservative religious population are the hallmarks of politics in the South; and many towns to us seem to have more churches than they do citizens. Even non-Christians in the South are guaranteed to live surrounded by Christian images and exposure to Christian ideas and messages. Without a doubt, Southern culture is inextricably tied to Southern religion.

What is Southern religion, though? While religion in the South may not seem as diverse as in other regions of the country (and there is certainly a great deal of truth to this observation), there is not, as many seem to believe, a single overriding mode of religious thought common to all Southerners. In fact, the two Protestant denominations that one could easily most characterize as being the “most Southern” are so different from one another that, if one were ignorant of the theological precepts that they have in common, one could easily mistake them for being two entirely different religions.

I am referring to the Pentecostal and Southern Baptist denominations, which I will be discussing in this paper. My goal here is not to evaluate the validity of either sect, or assert that one is somehow “better” than the other. Nor is it within the scope of this essay to discuss the theological similarities and differences between the two. My aim instead is to examine the relationship between these denominations and the culture of the American South. Each point and observation I will make will be intended towards the answering of a simple question: which of these two denominations is truly the “most Southern”?

Clearly a question that arises is: what qualifies something as being more Southern than something else?

Formed in Augusta, Georgia in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention (a term which refers to both the denomination and the actual convention at which Southern churches meet annually) has since become the largest Protestant denomination in America. According to the SBC website (www.sbc.net), the denomination currently has over 16 million members worshiping in over 42,000 churches, as well as roughly 10,000 missionaries in 153 countries.

The Pentecostal movement is not actually a single denomination but a group of churches in a certain tradition. The range of smaller sects within it makes it very difficult to determine the number of its followers. The movement began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 with a small handful of students at a Bible school, but has since grown steadily. As of 1993, there were roughly 200,000,000 Pentecostals in the world. That means that if it were to be considered a single denomination, it would be second in size only to the Roman Catholic Church.

Simple observation shows that the beginnings of each group are reflected today in the types of places where each denomination can be found: Pentecostal churches are much more common in rural and wilderness areas, while Southern Baptist churches are more likely to appear in areas with more concentrated populations. In my hometown of Lagrange, Georgia, if someone goes to church in the city, odds are they attend one of two massive Baptist churches. If someone attends church outside the city, it is more than likely one of many small Pentecostal churches. The poetry of Ron Rash characterizes Pentecostalism as a distinctly Appalachian sect. While the verdict may still be out on which group is more Southern, Pentecostalism is without a doubt more rural.

Of course it is hard to discuss the SBC without discussing American politics. The SBC may be one of the most politically vocal (and powerful) Christian denominations in America. Both praised and derided for its highly conservative beliefs, the SBC is inextricably intertwined with red-state politics. My purpose in mentioning this is not to evaluate these political views, but to address an observation of my own.

In preparing for this paper, I browsed a handful of Christian message boards to see how well each denomination was represented in online communities. Not surprisingly, I did not come across a single user claiming to be a Pentecostal, while the vast majority of users seemed to be Baptists from the South. What was most interesting, though, was that in reading posts about politics and current events, I observed two things from these same users: one, a prevailing belief that Christianity in America is under attack by an obsessively-PC bureaucracy; and, two, an intense opposition to any perceived anti-American sentiment.
Perhaps this isn’t as paradoxical as it may appear, especially considering that many Southern Baptists (and other religious conservatives, to be fair) seem to have assigned strict good/evil values to conservatism and liberalism, and characterize American politics as a battle between the two. In this light, such attitudes are completely understandable. The SBC’s website also reflects these attitudes, although typically in far less abrasive terms.

Southern Baptists are deeply engaged in American politics and patriotism. Pull into the parking lot of a Southern Baptist church and you are likely to see a multitude of cars adorned with “God Bless America” and “Support Our Troops” stickers; venture inside, and you are likely to hear a sermon about the dissolution of traditional American family values (this is based chiefly on my own anecdotal experiences).

Conversely, nowhere in my research did I find a Pentecostal website proclaiming a stance on a political issue. This is not to say that Pentecostals are entirely apolitical, or unpatriotic, as Southernness and patriotism are, for whatever reasons, virtually inseparable these days. In fact the number of vehicles in the rural areas of my hometown that are decorated with both American and Confederate flags is astonishing. However, thinking about this fact led me to ask: which sect is more typified of Southern independence and separatism: the aggressively political SBC that pushes for a more conservative sort of reform, or the Pentecostal churches that, as organizations, seem to typically choose to simply stay out of it? The SBC is not above secession: in 2003, it withdrew from the Baptist World Association in response to a perceived increase in liberalism and anti-American sentiment within that body. I would argue that the Pentecostal church is a better example of the Southern independent spirit, while the SBC is a prime example of Southern conservatism and nostalgia.

Another issue worth addressing is food. I have had experience attending both Southern Baptist and Pentecostal churches. I do not recall food being a major focus of any Pentecostal function. Conversely, the food is what I remember most about my Baptist experiences, and I do not recall a single Baptist function in which fried chicken, deviled eggs, green beans, and assorted casseroles were not available in abundance. While I have found no official statement from the SBC and no scholarly papers documenting this, I feel confident in saying that the Southern Baptist obsession with covered-dish meals is virtually unparalleled. I am not sure of the origins of this unbreakable bond between the SBC and traditional Southern foods, but this is one area in which the SBC exceeds the Pentecostal church in Southern-ness.

The nature of church services is another area where the two differ. Baptist sermons may be rigid or fairly lively, but I would wager that the most raucous Baptist service is about as intense as the most unenthusiastic Pentecostal service. The Pentecostal movement is distinctly charismatic and is legendary for its energetic sermons, which are very often open-ended and occasionally downright chaotic. Vocal participation of the congregants is the norm. Perhaps most famous (though not as common as many would believe) is the practice of handling live snakes as a demonstration of faith.

There is nothing about this form of worship that makes it inherently Southern.

What is unique about it is simply the fact that, for the most part, it does not happen elsewhere in the country. This is a mode of worship that is more prevalent in the South than in any part of the country, and I believe there are two reasons why it has not become more widespread. First of all, as addressed above, Pentecostal churches tend to be fairly isolated and not especially vocal on the national level, so their practices don’t have much chance to be spread. Secondly, and probably more importantly, these practices are viewed nationally as distinctly Southern practices. A Northerner may not believe that this is how all Southerners worship, but he is quite likely to believe (and for the most part, rightly) that only Southerners worship like this.

Ultimately, it is exceedingly difficult to determine which tradition is more Southern than the other. Given the number of paradoxes and contradictions in modern Southern culture, it may well be impossible. I would submit, however, that these two religious traditions exemplify the division between Old and New South that exists today. The Pentecostal Church is distinctly Old South: an independent rural and regional tradition that makes no effort to extend its domain into other locales. The SBC is clearly New South: centered in developed areas and active on the national political scene, yet maintaining ties to traditional Southern-ness through conservative policies and Southern culture such as traditional foods. As the paradox of Old and New South continues to grow, it is certain that these two religious traditions will only grow further apart, while both remaining equally and distinctly Southern.
A Personal Perspective on Southern Funerals
by Leland Wood

I have only experienced two funeral services in my life, one eight months ago and one eight years ago, and the services were markedly different. One was more religious and elaborate, the other militaristic and austere. There is nothing remarkable about these experiences except the fact they were mine.

It is harder from a chronological standpoint to recall my grandmother’s funeral service. Jeanne Wood passed away when I was in the middle of fifth grade, and I don’t believe that a child’s untrained mind can grasp the importance of the work required of a funeral at such a tender age. The responsibilities and finicky details were left to the capable hands of the adults to prepare a fitting memorial to the paragon of virtue and domesticity that my grandmother had been, and my grandfather and his children performed the task capably. Every detail was executed to the letter, and my grandmother’s funeral reflected the Baptist church customs typical of my paternal family history.

In my grandmother’s tiny backwoods hamlet of Raeford, North Carolina, her passing was a sad but publicized event. Grandmother was an active member of many local church organizations, charities and committees and in my child’s mind one of the most enduring memories that attests to her importance in the community was the sheer number of people at her funeral. Every pew was filled and many more lined the walls at the chapel of Raeford First Baptist Church. The service itself was properly religious in content, with a moving sermon by the reverend meant to emphasize that life itself is unending and death serves only to take us to a new spiritual plane.

At Granddad’s house there was a steady flow of well-wishers and friends that brought food, ferns and condolences, and a better display of Southern hospitality and generosity than this I cannot recall. The open-casket, public visitation at the Crumpler Funeral Home (a custom which itself is dying out but is a staple for my father’s Baptist extended family) also brought a constant flow of family friends and acquaintances who came to pay their respects.

I remember at the visitation, as I touched Grandmother’s cold hands I noticed how appropriate and tasteful the accoutrements of her casket and wardrobe were. The casket was painted pure white, made of a steel alloy that Granddad and Dad assured would last forever, and it was detailed with gold trimmings and borders of pink roses. Grandmother wore a pale lavender dress and jacket (her favorite color) that complemented the pinks and dusky rose of her makeup, and were it not for the stillness of her body, I could easily have been persuaded that she was sleeping. Perhaps seeing a still and silent body would be unnerving to those that don’t have open-casket ceremonies, but like most Southerners I found the experience to be an emotional event that drew our family together.

The aptly named Raeford Cemetery was the sight of Grandmother’s interment. The funeral service itself had a very large turnout. I cannot give an exact number but there had to have been about two hundred people there. There were ten flower wreaths that flanked her casket, and the casket itself was covered in flowers of every kind. At my parents’ house I still keep upon my dresser a dried rose from one of the floral arrangements, and all it takes is a small bit of that musky sweet scent to send me back eight years. Our family does not maintain a strict schedule when it comes to visiting Grandmother’s grave at the family plot, but about once a year during Christmas or summer we will come to visit. Sometimes we pick away at errant weeds, uncover dirt-encrusted plot markers and perhaps replace the flower arrangements with a fresh offering. There is never much to say at occasions like this; instead I myself am simply content just to let a kiss pass from my lips to my hand as I touch that gray polished marker and let Grandmother know that I wait anxiously for the day when I’ll see her again.

The passing of my Pawpaw was especially hard on me, since I was named for him and shared a connection with him greater than with my other grandparents. Pawpaw and Granny had lived with us for nearly a year before he succumbed to congestive heart failure. My Pawpaw had always had great foresight in matters of finance and personal affairs and had left us explicit instructions on how to handle his funeral arrangements. Having served with great valor as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force for many years, my Pawpaw wished for a simple dignified service that would focus on God, country and service. As arguably the most artistic of his grandchildren, I was charged along with my mother the task of selecting an appropriate vessel to hold his ashes, for Pawpaw wanted
to be cremated. We selected a simple gold cube with Pawpaw's name, Leland T. Williams, and the Air Force crest engraved on the front.

Hours later my family and I found ourselves at a private visitation at the Floyd Mortuary. There, in a small dim room, we said goodbye to Pawpaw, who lay on a gurney with a simple white sheet and serene expression on his face. There were no gentle notes from pipe organs and subtle hints of perfumed flowers to soften the severity of that experience as there had been at Grandmother's visitation. Many of us broke down in tears, gave Pawpaw a kiss and said one last prayer for his soul. That would be the last time we saw his body.

Pawpaw's funeral was a markedly different occasion from that of my grandmother's. My Pawpaw himself was not a Southerner and had been born and raised in New York and perhaps his origins played a part in the more austere ceremony at his burial at Salisbury National Historic Cemetery. Before Pawpaw's passing I had never attended a military funeral and I found his to be especially hard-hitting. In contrast to Grandmother's more traditional church service, Pawpaw's service drew only family members and about thirty close friends. There were few or no flowers but in their place there was a twenty-one gun salute by military officers. It was a noted departure from details and ritual, and perhaps this was what made the occasion all the more intense and somber. That atmosphere, combined with the lone trumpet playing 'Taps,' created such a serious, bittersweet flavor on that evening that for those few minutes I think it was impossible for my family and friends not to realize what it was that service would've meant to Pawpaw. As the music and the solemnity of the occasion washed over us, we understood the message about love, devotion and serving a purpose greater than one's self. The entire service was so poignantly patriotic that I do believe that it made everyone there reflect on what it meant to be not only a complete person but also an American. The burial may not have been characteristic of the Deep South but I myself certainly felt that the service spoke of duty to God, country and personal responsibility.

That burial was less than a year ago, and to date the family has not visited the cemetery yet. I suppose that it is a bit too soon to, with the memories still so fresh in our mind, although we have considered visiting the grave next time we pass by the area. The simple granite marker set in the ground is unremarkable and looks no different than its thousand brothers that comprise the rows and columns of stone that fill the graveyard.

This is meant to be a testament to the emotions we all go through—fear, sadness, guilt, acceptance—no matter how simple or elaborate the ceremony because funerals remind us that death awaits us all.

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**Life, Death and Deviled Eggs**

by Jim Morgan

My grandfather, whose stories I enjoy telling very much, died just this past year during my first semester as a sophomore at Wofford College. Prior to his funeral we held a viewing with an open casket at Sheppard's Funeral home. I remember sitting on the porch in rocking chairs with my brother and sister watching all the people wearing dark suits and dresses file into the funeral home to pay their respects and being amazed at how many visitors there were and how few of them we recognized. None of us particularly felt like spending a great deal of time inside. The funeral service itself was held at Middle Ground Southern Baptist Church, where my grandfather was a pastor for so many years. It took three ministers to perform the service, each delivering his own eulogy and sharing his own stories and memories about my grandfather and his life.

Unlike most Southern religious gatherings, this service concluded relatively quickly, leaving all of the family and friends who were in attendance no choice but to walk to the social hall for what was for all intents and purposes a covered-dish supper, complete with casserole dishes and Cool-Whip covered desserts. This certainly didn't seem like such a strange occurrence at the time, and I think that most Southerners would agree
that my grandfather's funeral would fit the description of an average funeral in the American South. Southern funerals are their own particular breed anyway that cannot quite be matched anywhere else. They are a strange combination, part religious memorial service, part social gathering, and part expression of grief.

I remember one time attending a funeral service that my mother, a newly ordained Methodist minister at the time, performed for one of the members of our church. Rather than being held in the sanctuary, the funeral service took place in the living room of the deceased's home, with friends and family in attendance on fold-out metal chairs. The casket was not your usual oak or walnut box, but rather was made of thick gauge sheet metal. Apparently the son of the recently departed woman was a welder and so, rather than spending a great deal of money on a new store-bought casket, he decided to make his own. After the service, which in my opinion was very nicely done, he pulled out a Black and Decker electric drill, and, as the guests were filing out, proceeded to attach the metal lid of the coffin by screwing it on. Then, in order to make sure no moisture would get into it, he produced a caulking gun and began to spread caulk around the edges. Needless to say this funeral ended too with a meal in our church social hall.

My grandfather on my mother's side, Lawson Styles, told me that when he was young, around the age of 15 or so, his great uncle Earl died. My grandfather, of course, attended his funeral. This particular funeral was typical in that it included a time for which mourners could walk by and view Earl's body. I'm not sure what kind of a person Earl was in life, but one thing that is clear from the story is that he was not the most loving or accommodating husband in the world, to the point that his wife Margaret refused to say anything at his funeral, claiming that she had nothing nice to say about him and so would remain silent. When most people walked by the casket they said some kind words concerning the deceased, straightened his tie or maybe placed a flower in the coffin with him, but when Margaret walked past his casket, she didn't say a word. She simply reached into her pocket and took out a bag of grass seed, which she poured over the body of her dead husband, evidently in an effort to encourage the earth to take him as fast as possible. Ashes to ashes and dust to dust ... and dirt into grass.

Something for Everyone: Finding Religion at the Pickens County Flea Market
by Ivy Farr

The best deals will be to the left," author George Singleton told us. "Those are where the most desperate people set up. They don't pay to rent those tables; they just get here real early in the morning and start putting their stuff out."

I had been very excited about this trip. What could be better than a half-day tour/shopping extravaganza at Pickens County Flea Market, led by good ole George, who had become one of my favorite authors after his visit to Wofford last fall. He had agreed to meet with our class once again and insisted that we visit his former stomping ground.

Enormous signs announced the entrance to a vast field of wooden tables and covered sheds that would make Spartanburg's tiny market look like a single-family garage sale. The squatters who had been able to claim booths filled the tabletops with every kind of junk imaginable.

As usual, the shopping experience was slow to start. My mood has a tendency to wallow at rock bottom as a shopping trip begins; it is not until I find that perfect purchase that I really get excited about my role as consumer. But reaching the first covered building, I found what was meant for me: sequined purses. I approached the table in awe.

As I was deep in thought, trying to decide between silver, red, or multi-, I spoke with a man who was contemplating purchasing the same for his sister.

"Do you think she'd like something like that?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know anything about your sister, but I would think so," I replied excitedly, thinking that he was going to refer me to some far-removed civilization. They would be settled deep in the furthest heights of the Appalachian Mountains, desperately in need of an ethno-biological field study. I had visions of books in print.

"Proverbs."
“Oh,” I said, unable to disguise my surprise and disappointment. Fumbling for words, I added, “Yeah. I guess there is a good bit of psychology in Proverbs.” I racked my brain to recall even one verse that would apply.

“Have you read it?” he asked.

“As a matter of fact, I have.” But it wasn’t for any of my psych classes. Proverbs had definitely been left off all of our syllabi.

“Oh. Well, you ought to read it again. And then, when I see you here some other time, you can tell me what all you learned.”

“Okay,” I said, feeling simultaneous disappointment, confusion, and anger. I turned back to the bags, which had lost much of their allure after such a sermon. How in the world did we get from flashy accessories to the Word of God? I thought. Either shopping is an activity specifically blessed by God, or I just experienced something really bizarre.

Who would have thought to look for religion at the Pickens County Flea Market? Certainly not I. Then again, as the good book of Proverbs says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” And I guess that includes a booth of sparkly handbags, too.