In which we left Oxford and traveled due south to Jackson, Mississippi, where we made a quick photo stop at Eudora Welty’s home and garden. From there we swung by the world famous Lemuria bookstore. We browsed the bustling complex of stores, restaurants, and the bookstore itself, spending more on books from its extensive collection than we could probably afford. From there we continued on to the Gulf Coast, arriving in Pascagoula, Mississippi late that afternoon, meeting up with another group from Wofford who were doing relief work for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. We met them at a Methodist church which was housing about 100 relief workers, 20 of whom were Wofford students. We ate a buffet-style dinner of fried fish, mashed potatoes, and green peas, and listened to a minister give a motivational speech about the work they were doing there.

After that, we piled into three vans, along with several of the other Wofford students, and drove around the neighborhoods in which they were working, surveying the damage by means of large Mag-Lites.

The group decided to go in search of a hotel to spend the night, but Mark, Jason, and Austin stayed behind with the Durango at the church to walk around the neighborhoods the next day.

After spending the morning in Pascagoula, the small group traveled to Mobile, Alabama, to meet the others at the Pelican Reef Restaurant with Prye Gaillard. Over a buffet-style lunch of fried catfish, fried okra, and macaroni and cheese—just to name a few of the delicacies—the group talked with Mr. Gaillard about his book, his experiences growing up during the Civil Rights Movement, and also the current race issues in the area.
After the Deluge
by John Lane

It’s been almost five months since Hurricane Katrina crawled slowly ashore and devastated the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Mobile. Katrina was one of the greatest natural disasters in the South’s long history. Over 1,000 people lost their lives and thousands are still missing. Tens of thousands of homes were destroyed. The storm scrawled a Gothic narrative of destruction on every acre of the Deep South’s coastline it crossed.

Last week my Cornbread and Sushi group met up with another Wofford interim camped out doing relief work for a Methodist church in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The other group had been working 8 hours a day hammering up sheetrock in houses damaged by the storm. We figured that the first law of creative writing is “Write what you know,” so we stopped by for a brief glimpse into this historic storm zone the other students were now intimate with.

Headed south from Jackson, we hit I-10 outside of Gulfport (we were still ten miles from the Gulf) and drove east to Pascagoula. It was already dark by then, so it was hard to see the damage. Almost all the road signs had been bent, and there were some down trees, lots of trash, big piles. The biggest sign of the storm was that every billboard along I-10 has been replaced with one hawking roofing repair companies.

In Pascagoula we made our way to the Methodist church where Wofford professors Ron Robinson and Ab Abercrombie were housing their 26 students—all in two Sunday school rooms, one for the guys and one for the girls. There were 175 relief workers at the church, including a tribe of retired people living outside in Winnebago. There were only two showers for everyone.

The other Wofford crew was overjoyed to see the Sushi crowd roll in and we joined them for a supper of fish sticks, boiled potatoes, green peas, and slaw. The church was six blocks from the Gulf in a densely settled neighborhood, strangely quiet and deserted, and the gravity of the situation only began to dawn on me when I noticed that the sheetrock in the church gym up six feet was fresh and unpainted.

"Is that where people were practicing their sheetrock installation?" I asked. "No," Ron said, "there was water in here 40 inches deep in here and all that had to be replaced."

After supper we all piled in four vans and drove toward the Gulf through Pascagoula neighborhoods where all the houses were abandoned. There were small travel trailers in many of the front yards—"FEMA trailers"—with little lights in them, but the houses behind them were dark. Inside of many you could shine the flashlight from the van and see there was nothing but studs for walls. All the sheetrock had been removed and piled in the street, ruined by the rising water. Ron explained how the town of Pascagoula alone had 1,000 houses destroyed and 12,000 damaged by flooding.

Strangely enough, there was little sign of wind damage. Here the hurricane was mostly what Ab called "a big water event." Pascagoula had flooding two miles inland. That was bad because no one outside the narrow coastal flood zone had flood insurance. Everyone would need sheetrock, which is now running at $18 a sheet up from $6 before the storm. Ron and Ab said that it’s real easy to empty your bank accounts to help out, and the need is still so great.
It was cold that night in Pascagoula, and the Gulf looked so calm with moonlight on it. I'll never forget the devastation highlighted in the beam of Ron's flashlight. On the first row of houses off the water the destruction had been almost total. Half a million dollar "Gulf view" houses were now either flat gone (about half of them) or the whole bottom floor was washed through, as if they had been built on 2X4 stilts. Ron moved the flashlight beam around to show us the devastation.

There were clothes in the trees and mounds and mounds of belongings everywhere. Occasionally there would be someone living in a little FEMA trailer on the foundation of a once palatial mansion. Once, Ron shined the light at a huge roof sitting flat on its foundation. The water had swept in, took the house, and sat the whole roof back down perfectly on the slab, and swept out again. "We call this the 'good news/bad news' house," Ron said. 'The good news is that their roof is not damaged. The bad news is that their house has gone missing.'

After our tour we took four vans and found an open Wendy's (everything closes at 6pm because there's no help to hire), and the Wofford kids ate cheeseburgers, and they laughed and talked like the college students they are.

Will stories, poems, and essays come out of this brief brush with history? There's no way to know, but we're sure now that at least some Wofford students who consider themselves writers have seen it. They now know something about the Great Hurricane of 2005, even if it's only what they could see in the beam of a flashlight as a van drove through Pascagoula.

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It was my first encounter with the great Southern sin. I remember it now as a warm, sunny day, though it must have been fall, for leaf piles were burning, and the sweet scent drifted through the neighborhood. Robert Croshon was there with his wheelbarrow, and I was five years old and ready for a ride. It was something of a ritual for us by now. Every Saturday on his way to work, Robert would stop to pick up his "helper." That was me—the youngest grandchild in a family for whom Robert had worked for thirty years.

Robert was a black man, a person of indestructible good humor, and then as now, the gentlest soul that I ever met. He was a gardener by trade, scratching out a living for himself and his family, and on the day I'm remembering he was working in my grandfather's vegetable patch, chopping at the weeds and tugging at the meanest clumps of wild onions. My own contributions were a little more random; I chased away the Indians in the bamboo hedges and practiced high-jumping across the collard greens.

It was, however, an exuberant partnership that we had forged, and when it was time for lunch, we headed for the Big House, as my grandfather's dwelling was known in those days. The extended family was beginning to gather, and it was an impressive spread on the dining room table—fried chicken, turnip greens, a platter of biscuits. But as we took our places around the great cluttered feast, Robert found a chair by himself in the kitchen.

To a five-year-old it made no sense. "Robert!" I called. "Come on in here." I knew immediately that I had made a mistake, for my aunt quickly shot me a look that could kill. "Shame on you!" she said with a hiss. "Shame on you for hurting Robert's feelings."

I remembered that moment as the years went by and the civil rights movement descended on the South, raising the most fundamental of questions. I was a teenager when the movement hit its stride, and for me at least, those festering doubts that began when I was five—the secret suspicions that the world around me didn't make a lot of
As the community struggled with what it wanted to be, it was, for me, a lesson in the literature of the craft, in the notion that journalists, like their upscale cousins in the its legacy of segregation. For a while, the city was thrown into turmoil, with racial fighting schools and the idea of integration, appealing to the better instincts of their neighbors.

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closing down the schools, adults throwing rocks at children on the buses, a black lawyer's one of the South's most distinguished newspapers, where my first assignment was the Militant demands—not only for the laws that would end segregation, but for a change ciliation, holding out the olive branch to white Americans. But he was also making his movement.

If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, justice is a lie."

Even down in Mobile, my family and friends were incensed at the impudence of this middle class Negro and his intimations of far-reaching change. They thought he was the most dangerous man in America. At Vanderbilt, however, where I was a student in the 1960s and first heard him speak, he seemed to be far less frightening than that. He was a smallish man with large, dark eyes that were shaded with sadness, and his manner in conversation was casual and relaxed—none of the pomp that we might have expected from a man who had recently won a Nobel Prize.

Only when King began to speak to the whole student body did the full implications of his presence become clear. It was true enough that he stood as an apostle of reconciliation, holding out the olive branch to white Americans. But he was also making his militant demands—not only for the laws that would end segregation, but for a change of heart and mind in the country that would enable us all to live up to our values.

As an aspiring journalist, working in the summers for my hometown paper, I knew immediately that this was a struggle I would have to write about. But I knew also that I could not do it from the state of Alabama. I tried it for a while. I returned to Mobile and took a job with the morning newspaper. The paper, however, was not especially interested in the civil rights story, and family tensions were still on the rise—too many uncles and cousins and friends who were astonished and angry at the things I was writing.

Searching for a more hospitable climate, I soon moved on to the Charlotte Observer, one of the South's most distinguished newspapers, where my first assignment was the busing controversy. It was a landmark case that compelled the community to confront its legacy of segregation. For a while, the city was thrown into turmoil, with racial fighting closing down the schools, adults throwing rocks at children on the buses, a black lawyer's offices burned to the ground.

It was a spectacle you might have seen in Alabama.

But there were other people who stepped forward also, black and white, defending the schools and the idea of integration, appealing to the better instincts of their neighbors. As the community struggled with what it wanted to be, it was, for me, a lesson in the literature of the craft, in the notion that journalists, like their upscale cousins in the world of fiction, could wrestle with the great Faulknerian themes: the human heart in conflict with itself.

All in all, for a writer in search of a place to ply his trade, it was as fine an opportunity as I could imagine. I stayed in Carolina for the next thirty years, never expecting to go home again. But then sometime in the year 2000, I was asked to do a book on the civil rights movement in Alabama, a state that had been at the heart of the struggle. Supported by Auburn University and the University of Alabama, I spent the first three years of the new millennium interviewing the veterans of that history—foot soldiers, mostly, those ordinary men and women who managed for a time to do extraordinary things.

There was Annie Cooper, an old woman now, who was beaten bloody during the Selma protests, but remembered the speech of Martin Luther King when the marchers finally made it to Montgomery. "His eyes were just a twinklin'," she said. And there was Barbara Cross, who, as a Birmingham teenager, had survived the infamous bombing of her church, but lost four of her closest friends in the blast. J.D. Cameron faced the cattle prods during a march in Gadsden, and Vivian Malone took her stand for dignity as the first black student at the University of Alabama.

When the book came out, telling these stories, people all across Alabama, white and black, seemed to be fascinated by the history, and the University of South Alabama asked me to teach a course on what I had learned. I was suddenly face to face with an unexpected irony: that the issue that had driven me out of the state was now on the verge of bringing me back.

I talked to my old friend Robert about it—Robert Croshon, my grandfather's gardener, with whom I had managed to keep in touch through the years. I would drop by to see him on visits to Mobile, talking about old times, and listening also to stories of his family. He was the proud descendant of runaway slaves, people who had fled from a Georgia plantation, but found themselves headed south instead of north when a thunderstorm blotted out the stars.

They decided to make their way to Mobile, where there was a small, but determined community of free Negroes, and I always knew that the great and unruffled dignity of Robert—his equanimity in the face of segregation—was rooted in part in the courage of his forebears.

"It's different today," he said near the end. He was lying at the time in his hospital bed, a wispy, gray-haired man in his nineties, recently retired from his physical labors, as his heart was slowly giving up the ghost.

"It's better for all of us," I told him, handing him a copy of the book I had written. Robert took the book and thumbed through the pages. I knew he was probably too sick to read it, but as his mind drifted back to the way it used to be, through the arc of history that all of us had lived through, he seemed to be pleased.

My own feeling, as the old man nodded and laid the book at his side, was that in a way I had never expected to know it, it was good to be home.
An Interview with Frye Gaillard

On a crisp January Sunday afternoon in Mobile, Alabama, Frye Gaillard sat down to lunch with us to discuss both himself and his work at one of his favorite seafood restaurants. The Pelican Reef, which sits on the shore of Mobile Bay, seemed to be a rather fitting place to meet with the author, because, just like the subjects the author wrote about, it too had overcome adversity. When hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast regions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, the ensuing flooding completely submerged the Pelican Reef. But amazingly the restaurant reopened after only four days of repairs. With that in mind, the author discussed topics ranging from himself to his works to the current situation in the Gulf Coast region.

What influenced you to pursue the career you have today?
FG: At age sixteen, I witnessed Martin Luther King being arrested. Even though the people I grew up around were good people, we still supported segregation. But seeing the look in the man’s eyes, what I would later realize was hope, intrigued me. The turmoil of the times and of the region would influence me into journalism and to leave the state.

A phrase that often comes up in discussions about this topic is “being on the wrong side of history.” Can you talk about how you and your family fit into this, especially in light of your encounter with Martin Luther King?
FG: Growing up seven miles from Mobile, close to the center of the movement, in an area still feeling the ravages of yellow fever, my family had lived there for a hundred years. Part of the status quo, we were prominent in the community because my father was a circuit court judge. We could sympathize with people like Governor John Patterson, who was a segregationist out of the necessity of the political climate. Although moderately progressive, to win in the environment he was in, he had to side with segregation, which he did. During my interviews with him in later years, he would admit this fact remorsefully, admit the fact that he, and we for that matter, were at least for a time, on the wrong side of history.

Why did you leave Alabama?
FG: In the late sixties, several years after I had come to embrace the civil rights movement, I couldn’t stand the incredibly close-minded society and the residual bigotry that was still all around us; it was difficult to live in, even hard to breathe in if you didn’t agree with the close-minded majority.

How do you define a close-minded society, such as the society of Alabama in the sixties in which you lived?
FG: A society in which antipathy is shown towards anyone who “rocks the boat.” Either that or belligerent resistance.

How did the civil rights movement occur so quickly in an area like Alabama, which was notorious for racism, especially when people thought it just couldn’t be done?
FG: People with an eloquent ability to hope stepped forward; they gave those who needed it the possibility to imagine a different world, a different way of life, to draw a different picture of how it could be, people like Martin Luther King.
Now that you're back in Alabama, what are some of the challenges you see facing the society today?

FG: First and foremost, the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina. The areas were already some of the poorest in the nation, so when the area was hit hard by the storm, the people who were already hurting were hurt worse. The area already had a high percentage of people living below the poverty line; after the storm, even more joined their ranks. After the storm surge pushed fishing boats into swamps, FEMA drained them of gas in an effort to protect the environment. These boats are in an extremely difficult position to move, and the costs of refueling them and retrieving them from the swamps can be in the thousands of dollars. Instead of helping these folks resume their livelihoods, FEMA has wanted to pass the cost on to them. For the owners of the boats, the people who depend on the income they earn from fishing, FEMA doesn’t seem to have helped very much. Creoles, Blacks, Indians, and Vietnamese are some of the minority groups who are being hit hardest by these actions. [A couple of months later, Frye wrote to us to report that money raised by former Presidents Clinton and Bush would be used to retrieve the shrimp boats from the swamps.]

Aside from the natural disaster, have issues changed in the area?

FG: People who say no real progress has been made are wrong. The laws have changed, and, to a very great extent, they are being enforced. This is especially apparent in the interactions between the races; what goes on today would have never happened forty years ago. But, there are still lingering bigotries towards blacks, and more recently, homosexuals. Once again, being on the wrong side of history will play a factor, in that the churches that make this issue the litmus test of Christianity will one day look like the churches that advocated slavery. Segregation has taken a new form, in that the rich and poor becoming increasingly segregated. With more and more people being pushed below the poverty line as a result of Katrina, segregation between classes seems likely to increase.

Race is like a big crazy cousin locked in the basement, a red-eyed giant who strangled a dog and crippled a policeman the last time he got loose. We never forget that he's down there. But it's amazing how long we can ignore him, no matter how much noise he makes moaning and banging on the pipes. Our denial's almost airtight, until one day he's out in the yard again swinging a pickax, and all we can do is blame each other and dial 911.

He's out. The Million Man March of Minister Farrakhan, the Simpson verdict, the ambitious black general who paralyzed both political parties with his popularity—where can you hide from race anymore? There's no safe place to position yourself, either. Sympathize with the Simpson jury and you're a misogynist; ridicule them and you're a racist. Criticize Farrakhan and you're a closet Klansman; praise him and you're an anti-Semite.

It's real hard to duck that last one, the anti-Semitism. On the day of the Million Man March, the Chicago Tribune quoted Quanell X, national youth minister for Farrakhan's Nation of Islam: "I say to Jewish America: Get ready...knuckle up, put your boots on, because we're ready and the war is going down."

"All you Jews can go straight to hell," suggested another Farrakhan aide, the virulent Khalid Muhammad.
Yet black columnists I respect compared the March to Woodstock and “the embrace of home.”

“American-African men who missed it missed more than they will ever know,” wrote Leonard Pitts, Jr., of the *Miami Herald*.

Where’s the middle ground for the moderate and well-meaning? Race is intellectual quicksand. All the wisdom I’ve ever heard on the subject was personal, provisional, subject to revision. And that ambiguity runs a little thicker here in the South.

While 400,000 black men converged on Washington, several thousand of the South’s best readers converged on Nashville for the Southern Festival of Books. Black readers were much in evidence. But so was the fact that even literature is segregated, unintentionally. I’m afraid I never saw a black person in line to get a book signed by a white author, or a white person in line to meet a black author. The only writer who seemed to straddle the color barrier comfortably was the inimitable Reverend Will Campbell, the last of a breed of unsentimental liberals the South will sorely miss when they’re gone.

Few white writers consciously target white readers. But a white novelist from Virginia, addressing a panel on Southern literature, exposed one good reason why whites are the only readers most of them find.

She confessed her lifelong indifference to the Civil War, and her wish that we might finally bury the Confederate dead. A large all-white audience was divided between applause and horror at this revelation. But among the mildly horrified was another novelist on the panel, one of her close personal friends.

It turned out that several of the poets and novelists at the Nashville gathering can discuss Shiloh or Chickamauga regiment by regiment, hour by hour, the way my friends and I discuss a classic World Series. Some readers are afflicted even more severely. An old man came up to the writer who was tired of The War and reproached her sorrowfully, with tears in his eyes: “My family lived on rats during the siege of Vicksburg,” he said, “and we’ve never gotten over it.”

What can you say to that? I’ve lived in the South half my life. In none of the places where I lived the other half—not even in England, land of defiant anachronism—did I encounter anything approaching this old man’s retro-fixation. Every year at the Festival of Books, historians and intellectuals gather to flog the official cult of the Civil War, as articulated by the much-deconstructed Fugitives in *I’ll Take My Stand.*

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You don’t have to go back 130 years, to the war and the great-grandfathers, to find the raw places. It wasn’t much more than thirty years ago that my liberal hometown of Eden, before the war, as a kind of Eden.”

Why Dixie? Nostalgia is a function not only of culture, but of aging. It’s a softening of perception few adults avoid. Just at the age when your hopes begin to lose variety and velocity, nostalgia comes to you as a friend, retouching your memories in brighter colors and airbrushing out most of the grief and humiliation.

Nostalgia is a mercy much like whiskey; it becomes a handicap when it intoxicates you and a curse when you can’t sober up. You’ve uncorked the bottle too many times when you begin to pine for some imaginary Eden. A perfect un-Southern illustration was the political development of Irving Kristol, one of the godfathers of the “neo-conservative” movement. In a devastating review of Kristol’s book, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea,* Theodore Draper demonstrates that Kristol’s philosophy hangs entirely upon his belief in a retro-never-never land—a utopia where capitalism is the genial guarantor of a humane bourgeois patriarchy, one that values and protects Jews and other industrious, orderly minorities.

In your dreams, Irving—the only place a Jew can court right-wing Christians without surrendering the last tatters of his self-respect. But Kristol’s high-wire act—a blend of elaborate rationalization, selective perception, and daredevil denial—resembles tricks that intelligent Southerners have been performing all their lives.

Everyone’s entitled to the symbols of his history. I have no problem with the Confederate battle flag, if you convince me that it’s displayed in a nonconfrontational context. I have no personal stake in The War; of my eight great-grandparents, only one, a woman, was living in the United States before 1870.)

But it would be a different matter, a different flag, if I were black. Novelist Jill McCorkle, a white North Carolinian, tells a story about a woman who was fawning over the Civil War historian Shelby Foote at a writer’s conference.

“Oh, don’t you just wish you’d been alive back in those days?” she gushed directly at a black writer, Tina McElroy Ansa, who answered simply, “No.”

Literary Southerners are entitled to Stonewall Jackson and the Lost Cause. Blacks are equally entitled to view the Civil War as blessed deliverance from a society where they were bought, sold, and bred like hunting dogs, and usually treated with less affection. Most black readers don’t care if Huckleberry Finn is great or even great-spirited literature. It embarrasses them. They don’t want to “valorize” Nigger Jim. They want to forget him.

Most Southern writers I know regard themselves as racial liberals. But memory is the primary raw material of their trade. It’s hard for them to see that the least blush of nostalgic longing, in a white Southerner’s story, will strike many black Americans as an outright insult.

You don’t have to go back 130 years, to the war and the great-grandfathers, to find the raw places. It wasn’t much more than thirty years ago that my liberal hometown of Chapel Hill, so despoiled by Jesse Helms, was still making its bows to Jim Crow. A black man couldn’t get a degree there, or a sandwich.

When Hodding Carter, Jr., entered Bowdoin College in Maine in 1923, he was such a racist that he’d get up and leave the room when the school’s lone black undergraduate entered, and he avoided the toilet he thought the man was using. Carter, who became an editorial crusader for racial justice, was nine years old when he saw his first lynching victim, a black woman, hanging from a bridge near his home in Hammond, Louisiana.

Hodding Carter is not ancient history; I ate supper with his widow in New Orleans.
just last month. W. J. Cash, in The Mind of the South (1941), recalls a conversation with a night rider who had fond memories of burning a black man alive. John Egerton, in Speak Now Against the Day (1994), reports that it was such a public burning in Tennessee that forged the radical conscience of H. L. Mitchell, who organized the first biracial union of Southern sharecroppers.

The last racial murder officially recorded as a lynching occurred in 1951. In nursing homes somewhere in the South, a few of the dreadful old crocodiles who carried the nooses or lit the torches must still be breathing. It's no wonder that African Americans aren't a nostalgic people. Black writers like Toni Morrison and Randall Kenan may work wonders with memory, but never accuse them of nostalgia.

Current reality isn't especially pretty, for most black Americans. One black male in three will be incarcerated at some point in his life. But Colin Powell led the presidential preference polls for six months, and only seventeen bewildered Klansmen showed up for "a mass rally" in Raleigh. Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey control financial empires. Clarence Thomas sits on the Supreme Court, even if he had to submit to a surgical procedure to get the nomination. O. J. Simpson can not only sleep with a white woman, but beat her up and probably even murder her without fear of being hanged from a bridge.

Don't wax too nostalgic in front of black people. They'll take the present, any day, over their American past. They don't read Gone With the Wind or Walker Percy, and I've got my doubts about Faulkner. I'll bet they didn't watch The Civil War on PBS. Don't lecture them about the Siege of Vicksburg. They think those starving Confederates deserved to eat a few rats, or worse.

An Excerpt from Clover
by Dori Sanders

They dressed me in white for my daddy's funeral. White from my head to my toes. I had the black skirt I bought at the six-dollar store all laid out to wear. I'd even pulled the black grosgrain bows off my black patent leather shoes to wear in my hair. But they won't let me wear black.

I know deep down in my heart you're supposed to wear black to a funeral. I guess the reason my stepmother is not totally dressed in black is because she just plain doesn't know any better.

The sounds inside our house are hushed. A baby lets out a sharp birdlike cry. "Hush, hush, little baby," someone whispers, "don't you cry." There is the faint breathless purr of an electric fan plugged in to help out the air-conditioning, the hum of the refrigerator going on in the kitchen, a house filled with mourners giving up happy talk for the quiet noise of sorrow.

We take the silence outside to waiting shiny black cars, quietly lined behind a shiny black hearse. Drivers in worn black suits, shiny from wear, move and speak quietly, their voices barely above a whisper. It seems they are afraid they might wake the sleeping dead. It's like the winds have even been invited. The winds are still.

One of the neighbors, Miss Katie, is standing in the front yard, watching the blue light on top of a county police car flash round and round. She is shaking her head and fanning the hot air with her hand. Biting, chewing, and swallowing dry, empty air. Her lips folding close like sunflowers at sundown—opening, like morning glories at dawn.

They asked Miss Katie to stay at the house. Folks in Round Hill, South Carolina, never go to someone's funeral and not leave somebody in their home. They say the poor departed soul just might have to come back for something or another, and you wouldn't want to lock them out.

My breath is steaming up the window of the family car. It's really cold inside. Someone walks to our driver and whispers something. I see a cousin rush from a car with what Grandpa would have called a passel of chaps. They leave our front door wide open. A hummingbird flies to the open door and stands still in midair, trying to decide about entering, but quickly darts backward and away.

I press my face against the cold window. Only a few days back, my daddy, Gaten, walked out that very door, carrying a book. He headed toward the two big oak trees in the front yard and settled himself into the hammock that was stretched between them.
And after awhile, like always, he was sound asleep, with the open book face down across his chest.

My daddy looked small between those big trees. But then, he was small. Everybody says I’m small for a ten-year-old. I guess I’m going to be like my daddy. Funny, it’s only the middle of the week, but it seems like it’s Sunday.

They say I haven’t shed a single tear since my daddy died. Not even when the doctor told me he was dead. I was just a scared, dry-eyed little girl gazing into the eyes of a doctor unable to hold back his own tears. I stood there, they said, humming some sad little tune. I don’t remember all of that, but I sure do remember why I was down at the county hospital.

Things sure can happen fast. Just two days before yesterday, my aunt Everleen and I walked in and out of that door, too. Hurrying and trying to get everything in tip-top shape for Gatén’s wedding supper.

Gatén didn’t give Everleen much time. He just drove up with this woman, Sara Kate, just like he did the first time I met her. Then up and said flat-out, “Sara Kate and I are going to get married. She is going to be your new step-mother, Clover.”

I almost burst out crying. I held it in, though. Gatén couldn’t stand a crybaby. “A new stepmother,” I thought, “like I had an old one.” I guess Gatén had rubbed out his memory of my real mother like he would a wrong answer with a pencil eraser.

Everleen had been cooking at her house and our house all day long. My cousin Daniel and I have been running back and forth carrying stuff. I should have known something was up on account of all the new stuff we’d gotten. New curtains and dinette set for the kitchen. Everleen said, “The chair seats are covered in real patent-leather.” Gatén’s room was really pretty. New rug and bedspread with matching drapes.

In spite of all the hard work Everleen was doing, she had so much anger all tied up inside her it was pitiful. She was slinging pots and pans all over the place. I didn’t know why she thought the newlyweds would want to eat all that stuff she was cooking in the first place. Everybody knows that people in love can’t eat nothing.

Even Jim Ed tried to tell her she was overdoing it. “It didn’t make any sense; her husband said, “to cook so much you had to use two kitchens.”

“I don’t want the woman to say I wouldn’t feed her,” Everleen pouted. “I think Sara Kate is the woman’s name, Everleen,” Jim Ed snapped.

Well, that set Everleen off like a lit firecracker. She planted her feet wide apart, like she was getting ready to fight. Beads of sweat poured down her back. The kitchen was so hot, it was hard to breathe.

Jim Ed gave his wife a hard look. “I hope you heard what I said.”

Everleen put her hands on her hips and started shaking them from side to side so fast, she looked like she was cranking up to takeoff. “I heard what you said, Jim Ed. Heard you loud and clear. What I want to know is, what you signifying?”

Everleen was so mad, she looked like she was going to have a stroke. “Let me tell you one thing. Get this through your thick skull and get it straight. You are not going to get in your head that just because some fancy woman is marrying into this family you can start...
talking down to me. You better pray to the Lord that you never, and I mean never, embarrass me in front of that woman. Because if you do, only the Lord will be able to help you." She waved a heavy soup spoon in his face. "Another thing, Jim Ed Hill, I am not going to burn myself to a crisp in that hot peach orchard getting my skin all rough and tore up. I'm sure all Miss Uppity-class will do is sit around, and play tennis or golf. One thing is the Lord’s truth, she is not going to live off what our. . ." She stopped short. "I mean what your folks worked so hard to get. Everleen Boyd will not take anything off anybody no matter what color they may be. I've been in this family for a good many years, but I sure don’t have to stay."

My uncle looked at me. I guess he could see I was hurting. He put his arm around me. "Oh, baby, we ought to be ashamed, carrying on like this. We can’t run Gaten's life for him. And we sure don’t need to go out of our way to hurt him. Gaten told me out of his own mouth, he truly loves the woman he’s going to marry. My brother deserves some happiness. You are going to have to help him, also, Clover. Getting a stepmother will be something new for you to get used to."

Jim Ed turned to his wife. "You always say you put everything in the Lord’s hands. I think you better put this there, too, and leave it there, Everleen." Well, that quieted Everleen down. She never bucks too much on advice about the Lord.

Right then I couldn’t even think about the stepmother bit. All I could think about was what Everleen said. Maybe she was thinking of leaving Jim Ed and getting a divorce. She called herself Boyd. I didn’t think she wanted to be a Hill anymore. If she took her son Daniel and left me all alone with that strange woman, I would die. I knew in my heart, I would surely die.

I was starting to not like my daddy very much. Not very much at all. Miss Katie says, "Women around Round Hill leave their husbands at the drop of a hat these days." If Everleen leaves it will all be Gaten’s fault, I thought. All because of his marriage plans.

Everleen pulled me from Jim Ed to her side. I buried my face against her sweaty arm, glad there was the sweat so she couldn’t feel the tears streaming down my face. Her hot, sweaty smell, coated with Avon talcum powder, filled my nose. It was her own special smell. I felt safe.

Finally she pushed me away. "Let me dry them tears," she said, dabbing at my eyes with the corner of her apron. I should have known, I couldn’t fool her. I don’t know if it was what Jim Ed said about Gaten or the Lord that turned Everleen around. Probably what he said about the Lord, but it sure turned her around. After a few minutes she was her old self again.

"Alright, little honey," she said, "we better get a move on. We got us a marriage feast to cook. Now I’m going to put together the best wedding supper that’s ever been cooked. Then I’m going to dress you up in the prettiest dress your daddy has ever laid eyes on." She glanced at my hair. "Lord have mercy, Allie Nell’s still got your hair to fix!"

Anyway, Everleen was still cooking and cleaning at the same time when the telephone rang. My daddy had been in a bad accident. Everleen snatched lemon meringue pies out of the oven and drove her pickup like crazy down to the hospital.

Preserving Culture through Art
by Elizabeth Bethea

Throughout this course, literature has provided a window to view the landscape of our Southern past. We have studied the cultural shift in the South from rural to urban by looking at the Southern perspective on the landscape, religion, politics, family, language, and death. The fine arts can also act as a device to understand the vibrant culture of the South. More specifically, the paintings of Jonathan Green reflect the unique heritage of the Gullah people, who reside on the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia. He paints bold scenes depicting the everyday life of the Gullah people, such as going to the beach, fishing, and even a funeral. Recently, a dance production by the Columbia City Ballet, titled "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage: The Art of Jonathan Green," has enabled his art to provide awareness to more people about Gullah culture.
The Gullah people came to the islands of South Carolina and Georgia as a workforce of African slaves to tend the flourishing rice, indigo, and cotton fields. In Bettye J. Parker Smith’s “Jonathan Green in Motion,” she states:

"The geographical isolation which characterized the newly transplanted Africans, the state of South Carolina’s insistence on importing Africans directly from the Gold Coast of West Africa, and the small number of whites able to survive the climate and conditions of the Sea Islands created a sort of Petri dish for preserving African cultural tenets and for the development of a unique African American culture."

Due to the South Carolina slave owners’ desire to create a pure slave race, they imposed high duties on slave imports from anywhere other than the west coast of Africa. This caused the slave population on the Sea Islands to have similar cultural backgrounds. After the Civil War, the slave owners abandoned the Sea Islands and left the Gullah people to flourish. The Gullah people remained isolated until after World War II because no roads were built to connect them to the mainland of South Carolina. The people developed a unique culture combining traditions from their African heritage and European influences from their white owners. Jonathan Green’s artwork provides insight to the Gullah world that he grew up in because his canvases act as a tribute to the rich culture of Gullah society.

Jonathan Green is known as the first formally trained artist of the Gullah community. He uses bold colors to illustrate the Gullah life that he remembers from his childhood. He has created over 1,700 images that are displayed in galleries not only across the Southeast, but nationally and internationally as well. Green’s paintings inspired William Starrett, the artistic director of the Columbia City Ballet, to create his eleventh full length production. Starrett has traveled the world working with the American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet before becoming artistic director at Columbia City Ballet and he also has spearheaded an outreach program to educate elementary children about classical dance. In order to transform Green’s paintings into a production, Starrett enlisted the talents of musical consultant, Marlena Smalls. She founded a musical group called the Hallelujah Singers in order to preserve the musical traditions of the Gullah people. She composed original songs and reworked old ones to create the soundtrack for the production.

"Off the Wall and Onto the Stage: the Art of Jonathan Green" transforms the works of Jonathan Green into a contemporary ballet, which recalls classical ballet’s blending of dance, music, and fine art. It consists of a series of scenes drawn directly from eleven of Green’s energetic paintings, which reflect the culture he was raised in. The landscapes and figures in Green’s art come to life in dance set to music rooted in the history of the region. "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage" is an ode to vibrant culture of the Gullah people and reflects the importance of the visual, oral, and spiritual traditions of the South, such as community, religion, and connection to the land. The commingling of the arts is an enlightening testament to the lively, multi-cultural reality of the South, and one with real significance for America and the world.

Jonathan Green’s art truly imitates the life of the Gullah people. This concept carries over to "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage" through the scenery, which plays a central role in creating the tone and atmosphere for the production. In order for the dancers to appear as if they have stepped out of Green’s work a scrim with an original painting and a muslin drop with the figures removed are used for each scene. The scrim hangs in front of the muslin drop and the dancers that resemble the figures in the painting stand in between the two drops. Depending on the lighting technique, the scrim can be translucent or opaque, therefore hiding or revealing the dancers. This causes the audience to be spectators as well because throughout the production there is a shift from painting to canvas. There is a sharp attention to detail throughout the production as the costumes, including hairstyles and shoes, reflect Green’s work as if he painted the dancers himself.

In the painting entitled "Daughters of the South," Green depicts two women standing in a rural landscape, one with light skin and one with dark skin. Both women are dressed in boldly colored dress and they have their arms around one another. In "Off the Wall and Onto the Stage," Starrett uses his artistic license to transform the painting into a dance exploring the themes of racism, interracial love, and colorblind friendship. These themes are important to Southern culture due to the struggles that the South has had concerning racial equality. Green’s painting and Starrett’s interpretive dance show hope for the colorblind future of the south. Another scene that has strong connections to Southern culture is the scene in which Green’s painting "Sand Dance" is depicted. The dance brings the sea to life by using billowing silk to represent the waves. The
dancer is dressed in a white bikini as she fluidly moves across the stage controlling the motion of the large silk waves. This scene is a representation of Southern culture’s tie to the land, as the dancer and the silk connect to create one series of movement throughout the scene.

“Off the Wall and Onto the Stage” has toured throughout South Carolina and the United States in order to raise awareness about the Gullah people. This year they are embarking on an international tour across Europe and then on to Japan. To further their influence, South Carolina has created an educational outreach program for South Carolina public schools. In classrooms and after-school programs, schools will use interpretive exercises to explore William Starrett’s interpretation of Jonathan Green’s work. There is an educational guide and CD that put the performance and paintings into historical context in order to create awareness for the Gullah way of life as a unique aspect of Southern culture with strong ties to African heritage. The program will also allow students to explore the process of creating interpretive images through dance and music.

Jonathan Green and William Starrett’s work has real significance as fine art rooted in Southern culture. There have been writers, filmmakers, and artists who have created a false “national image” of the South, but the truth lies with those who interact in the South everyday and continue to have ties to its past. Art from the past allows us to grasp an image of past that we can learn from and art in the present allows us to tell a story about the realities of Southern culture. The unique southern traditions will not be lost as long as artists continue to create works that capture the essence of Southern culture, as Jonathan Green said, “I know I can’t save a whole culture, but I can help create greater awareness.”