

2ND & CHURCH

Where Tennessee's Writers Read

Issue 1: Q1 2012

J.T. Ellison

A CONVERSATION WITH J.T.
BY PAIGE CRUTCHER

Nashville writers

SHARE POETRY, FLASH FICTION, BOOK
EXCERPTS, CREATIVE NON-FICTION,
AND MORE

River Jordan

IN DEPTH

IN THIS ISSUE

Literary libations: Nashville writers mix it up

Events: Clarksville Writers' Conference

Under the stars: Shakespeare in the Park

Across the sea: From Orléans to Clarksville



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Nashville Convention &
Visitors Bureau

2ND & CHURCH

Issue 1: Q1 2012

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A special thanks to River Jordan and J.T. Ellison for their help and guidance with the launching of both 2nd & Church and the first issue of 2012.

Web banner photo

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A word from the editor

Hello and welcome to the first issue of *2nd & Church*, a quarterly journal by, for, and about writers and readers throughout Tennessee.

Have you ever been in downtown Nashville, at the intersection of Second Avenue and Church Street? If so, perhaps you have noticed that it contains many different aspects of our city: honkey-tonks, small businesses, tourist spots, office buildings. And—of course—it's in the heart of the city, in the center of the state. It seemed to us to be a perfect spot for *2nd & Church*.

While preparing a special preview issue for the 2011's Southern Festival of Books, we didn't know what sort of reception to expect. To our delight, it was overwhelming and positive. Thank you to everyone we met there and for all of the kind words. Also, thank you to the book-

We hope you will enjoy reading our words and phrases, no matter where your *2nd & Church* happens to be.

shops and libraries throughout Tennessee that have graciously agreed to make copies of *2nd & Church* available to their customers. Thank you to the wonderful writers who are sharing their words and stories with us all in this issue, and thank you to our (underpaid) InDesigner for her tireless efforts in transforming our nouns and verbs into the four-color, glossy world of journals and magazines.

Most importantly, though, thank you—dear reader—for your support, for making this possible!

What can you expect to find at *2nd & Church*? When creating this journal, we asked ourselves the following: What does it mean for writers or readers to attempt to live lives of fine arts in Tennessee? Where can writers and readers go, either alone or in groups? What do they choose to write and read about? Which experiences make it from their lives to the pages? How are writers engaged, entertained, and provoked? And in turn, how do those writers engage, entertain, and provoke via their words and phrases?

The answers to these questions will be different for each issue, but for our inaugural issue,



LEFT Photo by Gayle Edlin

BOTTOM Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau

they have resulted in many different types of writers and writing: creative nonfiction, technical writers, literary fiction, poetry, a translator, and commercial fiction. In addition, there are feature stories that reveal the creative writing life of Nashville and Middle Tennessee. Future issues will include literary happenings from the eastern and western portions of the state, as well.

What can you expect online? *2nd & Church* is an ink and paper experience; therefore, you will never be able to read a copy of it in digital form. So, what's online? Our Web site is a showcase for our contributors and a way to preview what's coming in the next issue. That being said, there is Web-exclusive content. We have a bulletin board to promote writers and writing organizations, a blog, and an area known as "Between the Issues." Use this link to discover press releases, short Q&A sessions, and feature

story-style pieces not found in our physical journal.

Where can you expect to find a copy of *2nd & Church*? HP MagCloud is our publisher, and our Web site provides a link to where you can purchase and order a copy. In addition, we have a public service mission. As such, we will make a certain amount of copies of each issue available to the public at no charge. Look to our site for a list of venues across Tennessee that make *2nd & Church* available to its customers at no charge.

Back at that intersection of Second Avenue and Church Street: of course, you won't find us in any of the buildings there, but that's where our heart will be as we are discovering writers and their writings from across Tennessee. We hope you will enjoy reading our words and phrases, no matter where your *2nd & Church* happens to be. Happy reading!

Roy Burkhead

2nd & Church

Q1, January–March 2012 issue

About us

Welcome to *2nd & Church*, a literary journal by, for, and about writers and readers throughout Tennessee. Our primary audience is Nashville and Middle Tennessee, and our secondary audiences stretch as far west as Memphis and as far east as Knoxville and Chattanooga.

2nd & Church publishes four volumes each year, once each quarter, and it is for sale via HP MagCloud. To purchase a single issue, please visit us online at <http://www.2ndandchurch.com> Subscription Inquiries: Email 2ndandchurch@gmail.com Please give a notice of six weeks for change of address.

Our mission

Our goal is to be inclusive of many different types of writers and writing: creative nonfiction, technical writing, literary fiction, poetry, translation, and commercial fiction. In addition, *2nd & Church* includes brief news and feature stories that reveal the creative writing life of Nashville and Middle Tennessee.

What does it mean for a writer or reader to live a life of fine arts in Tennessee, especially in the 21st century? Where can writers and readers go, either alone or in groups? What do they choose to write and read about?

Which experiences make it from their lives to the pages? How are writers engaged, entertained, and provoked? And in turn, how do those writers engage, entertain, and provoke via their words and phrases? These are some of the questions our editors seek to answer when selecting work for publication in *2nd & Church*.

Submission guidelines

We welcome unsolicited manuscripts, but the expectation is that the work is in line with our mission. Send up to six poems and/or about 6,000 words of prose. For work over 6,000 words, query first with the work's first five pages. We will consider novel excerpts, but the selection of material must be able to stand alone and be self-contained. We prefer to assign book reviews and criticism; please don't submit those ideas to us. And in general, we don't publish essays on craft.

We like interviews, particularly those between 4,000 and 7,000 words. Query before submitting an interview. Please include an introduction to the author (a paragraph or two), including the usual biographical information. *2nd & Church* features interviews with anyone who has a significant connection with our mission. (Please visit us online for complete writing and submission guidelines.)



TOP Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau



An out-of-towner's taste of Nashville's literary life

A fresh look at what Nashville offers its literary lovers by Charlotte Rains Dixon

I love Nashville.

I love it in the way that only a non-resident who visits regularly can. As an outsider, I manage to miss the bad things about it (hot, humid summers and tornadoes) and enjoy the good, like the music scene and the friendly people. My hometown is Portland, Oregon, which I love, too.

And when you compare the two places, it's easy to see why I've fallen in love with each of them, given their similarities in size, friendliness, and temperament. And, perhaps most importantly, both are great literary towns. I get to experience Portland's literary life on a day-to-day basis. But I miss the day-to-day events, for the most part, that make up a life lived in Nashville. And that means I miss much of the fabulous literary life that goes on here, in my adopted hometown.

I do know a little about literary life in town because that's why I come here. As director emeritus of The Writer's Loft at Middle Tennessee State University and a current mentor in the program, I've been arriving in town on a regular basis since 2003, long enough to get hooked up with another local writing event—*Room to Write* at Scarritt Bennett, which means I'm in town four times a year, maybe more. It's enough to give me a flavor of the literary scene, though not enough to experience the dailyness of it: the trips to bookstores, the meet-ups in bars, the attendance at readings and signings.

Which is why I got assigned this piece: the idea being that I, as an outsider, could cast a

fresh eye on literary doings in Nashville, based on a specific snapshot in time, namely one week in June. The precise week in June when the *Nashville Scene* and *The City Paper* published their annual summer reading issues. Well, okay, the *Scene* published a summer reading issue. *The City Paper* published one article. But it was a good article! (For the record, *The City Paper* pub

business partner Karen Hayes, a former Random House rep, will be opening Parnassus Books.

There's at least a small case to be made that authors tending bookstores is a tradition. Consider novelist and screenwriter Larry McMurtry, who operates multiple bookstores in dusty Archer City, Texas, his hometown and the location of one of his most famous novels,

There's at least a small case to be made that authors tending bookstores is a tradition.

date was June 27, 2011, the *Nashville Scene's* June 23-29th, 2011.) So let's take a look.

First, bookstores. Is the health of a city's literary life intimately linked to the condition of its bookstores? Some would say a resounding yes, particularly in a city that is sometimes known as the Athens of the South, which is why it was such a shock for Nashvillians when the venerable and beloved bookseller (or more to the point, its out-of-state corporate owners) Davis-Kidd announced it would be closing in 2011. Shortly thereafter, the former giant Borders floundered, with the announcement of the closure of its West End store not far behind. This resulted in the lamentable situation of no bookstores selling new books existing in the city proper. And then, voila! A rescuer rode in on a white horse, in the form of a literary goddess. Novelist Ann Patchett announced that she and

The Last Picture Show. Nobody works at the bookstores, save for one, the mothership, but busloads of tourists from all over the world visit. If they want to buy a book from a satellite shop, they carry their purchases up the street. It's not far. Trust me, I've been there. The entire town would probably fit into the Vanderbilt Campus with room to spare. And novelist Crystal Wilkerson recently announced that she'd bought Morgan Adams bookstore in Lexington, Kentucky and renamed it The Wild Fig Books. So Ann Patchett, eat your heart out. And please be successful in your new endeavor.

Both the *Scene* and *The City Paper* briefly discuss her plans, mainly as a worthy excuse to revisit some of Nashville's smaller, used bookstores, which (let us not forget) have been selling books around the city for years. The *Scene* visits Bookman/Bookwoman in Hillsboro

BOTTOM Photo by Kristy Galbraith Dye



Village, noting that the store was recently mentioned in the industry bible, *Publishers Weekly*. Not only is Bookman/Bookwoman adding new titles to its winning used format, it also became a store that reports its sales to *The New York Times* bestseller list. In the wake of the closing of Davis-Kidd, owners Saralee and Larry D. Woods are also ramping up the number of events at their stores, according to the article, penned by Steven Hale.

I've always loved Bookman/Bookwoman, whose groaning shelves and labyrinth-ish interior reminds me of the bookstores of my youth, the kinds of places where you're never quite sure who or what you might run into. And indeed, once when I perused books there, my friend Karen followed the sound of my voice to find me, which she recognized from several aisles over.

In the same article, the *Scene* also profiles Rhino Books, with two locations on Charlotte Avenue and Granny Pike. I have fond memories of wandering the Granny White Pike store after eating brunch at the Copper Kettle Cafe next door, stomach full and a light snow falling. I bought a book called *The Autobiography of Santa Claus*, seeing as how it was December. The *Scene* notes that Rhino is owned by Fred Koller,

who is also a prolific songwriter. Finally, the article analyzes the success of Fairytales Bookstore & More, in East Nashville. Interestingly, *The City Paper* article, written by Philip Nannie, profiles some of the same stores, adding Landmark Booksellers in Franklin, and concludes, much the same as the other article, "The message is, if you want to be in the business of selling books on a small scale, you'd better love books with a passion that can carry you through the tough times when the money is scarce."

Moving from bookstores to books themselves, the *Scene* reviews several that deserve your attention. Since they were new in hardback in June, they'll soon be released in paper, so snap them up. Ann Patchett's latest book (her eighth), *State of Wonder* is reviewed, with writer Margaret Renkl stating that "Patchett reinvents literary fiction—again." An interview with Adam Ross intrigues me—this guy toiled away in obscurity for 15 years, writing his first novel, *Mr. Peanut*, which was published to great acclaim—and an initial print run of 60,000 copies in June 2010. And less than a year later, his second book was released. What's not to love about a success story like that? While the *Scene* also devotes space to reviews of books by Roy Blount Jr., Victoria Schwab (a YA novelist who is

just 23!), and Lorraine Lopez, the other review that caught my eye as quintessentially Nashville is the one about the memoir written by songwriter Rodney Crowell, *Chinaberry Sidewalks*. The fact that he was once married to the spectacular Roseanne Cash is enough to make me want to read his book.

Honestly? The book that intrigued me the most was one that wasn't reviewed, but rather featured in a full-page advertisement. Lyricist Joe Henry has released a novel, *Lime Creek*, to rapturous reviews. He seems like the type who would live in Nashville, seeing as how he's written songs for numerous country stars, including Garth Brooks, Vince Gill, and Rascal Flatts, thus justifying my mention of him here, but alas, such is not the case. The man lives (apparently as a recluse) in Aspen, Colorado. But I'm going for the songwriting link as reason for the mention, and if his lyrics are any indication of how great his writing is, it'll be a great read.

Which is exactly what the literary scene in Nashville, judged not only by one snapshot in time, but by overall impressions, is also: pretty damn great. So, Nashvillians, be proud. Be grateful. And if you ever make it to Portland, look me up. I'll share a slice of our literary life with you as well!

RIGHT Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau

BOTTOM Photo by Gayle Edlin

Creative technicalities

Warning: Do not eat batteries by Gayle Edlin

After I began writing for a living, the thrill I had in being able to call myself a writer was tempered by the necessity in prefacing the powerful noun “writer” with the ambiguous modifier “technical.” Looking back, I’m certain that my apologetic demeanor had less to do with the reactions I received than my statement of my occupation itself. I presented technical writing as a dull job, one which I was rather

The problem wasn’t the lack of on-the-job imaginative requirements, per se. It was more that I felt like technical writing was throwing a stone across the surface of REAL writing. The act of stringing sentences together in a cogent order was skimming the surface: there isn’t a plot to a technical manual, you see. There isn’t a whole lot of anything beyond procedures and explanations, processes and formalities.

Immersion in this kind of writing, while vital to keeping a roof over my head, gave me a sense of drowning instead of inspiring me to swim.

embarrassed to admit to performing, and by virtue of my saying it, so it was.

In the not-unusual event that the person to whom I was speaking seemed flummoxed by the term, “technical writer,” the witty response I never failed to deliver was also steeped in vocation-deprecating humor: “You know those boring manuals that come with everything from curling irons to industrial air conditioning equipment? The manuals nobody reads? Yeah, I write stuff like that.”

My problem with technical writing has never been the writing part. I’m a damn good writer and I enjoy it, even when part of what I write includes abominably mundane phrases such as: “From the ‘File’ menu, select ‘Print’” and “Warning: Do not eat batteries.” But as a person who prefers to spend her time composing stories, novels, blogs, and yes, even Facebook status messages, my ability to write creative things became hobbled by my dedication of 40+ hours a week to one technicality after another.

Immersion in this kind of writing, while vital to keeping a roof over my head, gave me a sense of drowning instead of inspiring me to swim.

On the other hand, my inability to recite my job title with joy and vigor wasn’t entirely due to my own hang-ups. Who among us reads technical literature unless we have to figure out something technical? You don’t pick up something with a title like, “Rebuilding the Multi-Motor Twin Cylinder Engine” unless you have to. Even in a requisite case, rarely is a technical manual read from cover to cover, and it may never be devoured with unbridled enthusiasm.

The need that technical writing fulfills is not about creativity. Technical writing, as a genre, exists to fill a knowledge gap and to do so in succinct and clear style. But while clarity and brevity are worthy goals, they do tend to strip whole paragraphs of all but the most basic of descriptors. And if the technical writing is good technical writing, each and every chapter will

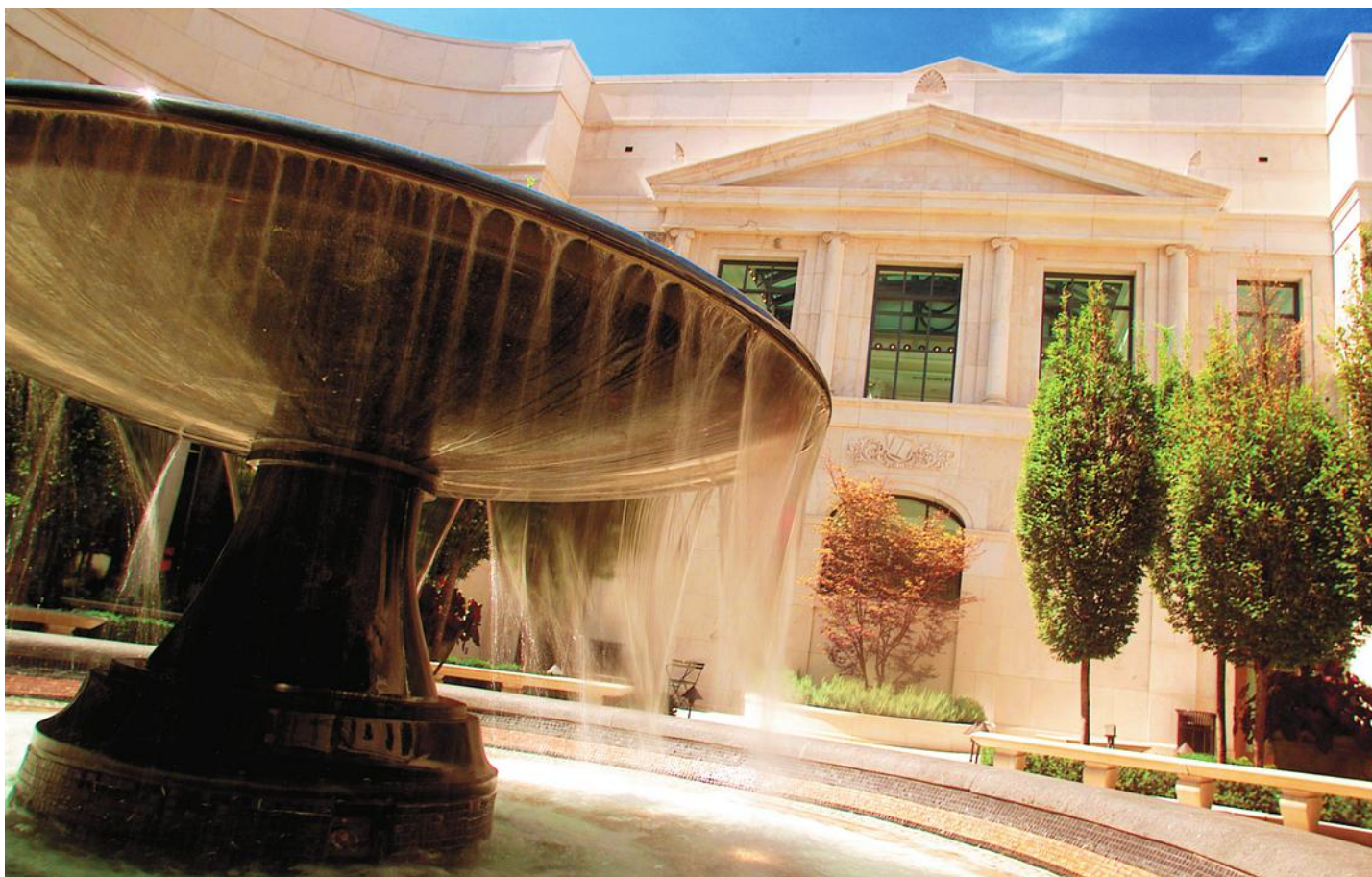


pass without a single allusion or the slightest hint of mystery.

You will not find a metaphorical anything in a good piece of technical writing, nor will you find a setting that involves more than one or two senses at the most. There’s precious little dialog, too, unless it’s something you will find a computer “saying” to you on a certain screen.

So I should be forgiven for having and giving the impression that I found my job as a technical writer to be the next best thing to an actual cure for insomnia. But what is inexcusable—in exquisite hindsight, at least—is how having a work-trained eye for technical detail has also

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Write around Nashville

Take your notepad, sweet tea, and curiosity by Suzanne Craig Robertson

Places to read, work out plot lines and resolutions, or imagine new stories crowd the Nashville area. If you are in the right frame of mind and have a laptop, book, notepad, or unused napkin with you, *any* place can work of course. Here are some well-researched and often-loved spots to try. (This list is not comprehensive; so, please don't write a letter to the editor about its geographic lopsidedness.)

Places to Think

If your style for plot-building is helped by moving your feet, get on one of the many walking trails in the Warner Parks. Start at the Warner Park Nature Center on Highway 100 for a map (as well as bathrooms and a long porch with rockers, which is also a perfect reading/writing

spot). There are enormous log benches dotting the walking trails, so you can stop and jot a few notes -- or bring an inspiring book and just relax. Some of the paths are remote, though, so I like to take my German Shepherd: a good listener but not a good editor. Like my mother, he likes everything I write.

Next, go to the Steeplechase grounds, a sweeping grassy racetrack running next to Old Hickory Boulevard. I'm not talking about on Iroquois Race Day, when 20,000 or more people stream in (heavens, no), unless you are developing a character for a moneyed Southern Lady in a time-warp couture hat. Go when it's quiet, and the breeze skims up from the track, ruffling the leaves on the hedge jumps where you can feel it. From the traffic light at Old Hickory

and Vaughn Road, take the park road that goes straight across from Vaughn, drive a ways, and take the extreme hairpin curve to the right. The wide-open top is just ahead and perfect for considering vast ideas. Park, get out of your car, and breathe. Like low-hanging fruit, the good ideas up there cling to the trees so thick that they are almost visible and may drop in your lap.

While you're in the Warner Parks, drive around to the end of Belle Meade Boulevard and past the eagle-topped stone columns at Percy Warner's main entrance. There's a parking area a short ways up, so park and walk to the top of the stacked-stone stairs. Sit. Listen. Your characters will be popping up all around you.

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From Orléans to Clarksville

How a Frenchman became a Tennessean via a little bit of luck and a whole lot of love by Renaud Rousselot de Saint Céran

“Allons enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé”. This first verse of the French National Anthem (“Arise, children of the Fatherland”) is what *should* go through my mind every July 14th; yet, the French National Anthem is more of an afterthought than anything for me.

What does go through my mind; however, is how this cheese-eating country gets the day off, while I’m sitting in my corporate America cubicle “sweating” over a service manual for an HVAC unit. No more military parades on television; now I watch fireworks in celebration of the Declaration of Independence. July 4th has become my July 14th, the same way pork barbecue and sweet tea have replaced *pot-au-feu* (French pot roast) and wine in my diet. Sting’s lyrics come to mind, “I’m an alien, I’m a legal alien,” with one difference: I’m a Frenchman in Clarksville, Tennessee.

Seven years ago, I boarded a plane in Paris. Destination: USA. Little did I know I had punched what would become a one-way ticket.

At the time, I was a student at the University of Orléans, France, participating in an exchange program with Austin Peay State University. The goal was to study there for one year, improve my English, and then return to France to start a master’s degree.

That first year flew by, and I felt cheated returning to Orléans so quickly. It wasn’t enough time to perfect my southern draw, and my twang was still a work in progress (still is). If improving my language skills wasn’t enough of

Seven years ago, I boarded a plane in Paris. Destination: USA. Little did I know I had punched what would become a one-way ticket.

a reason to come back, the prospect of leaving behind the very nice Dixie gal I had become well-acquainted with was too much to bear for this enamored Frenchy.

I returned to Middle Tennessee as quickly as it took me to obtain a new visa and another student loan.

A year and a half later, I stood by the American flag while proudly holding my diploma in front of the university’s official photograph.

Study in the U.S: Check!

Graduate from an American university: Check!

Work in Clarksville as a technical writer with a B.A. in Foreign Languages and Business: Well, as unlikely as it sounds, check that one, too!

One semester before I graduated, a French professor at Austin Peay told me that a local HVAC company was looking for a French translator. She encouraged me to apply. My hopes

BOTTOM Photo by Wendy Welch



were low since my student visa didn’t allow me to work off campus, and all I had going for me was my nationality.

I still don’t know today whether I did well during my interview, or if it was the fact that I was the only native French speaker to apply for this job, but—to my surprise—I was hired. After a few weeks, the company realized it would take me too long to translate all of its literature.

A vendor was brought in to finish the job, and my position was changed to technical writer.

When I started as a translator, the learning curve was somewhat steep because I had to familiarize myself with a lot of technical terminology specific to the HVAC industry, in both English and French. On top of that, we were targeting the Canadian market, which meant I had to translate into French-Canadian, a challenge in and of itself for a guy from the old continent.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

... Write around Nashville continued from page 11

If your story line is urban and needs a majestic city scene, you must head to downtown and walk out on the Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge. Park on the west side and don't turn around until you get to the middle so it will be a surprise.

The intricate cityscape of blinking lights in jagged buildings may show you a new way to get your main character out of a pickle. If not, at least you now know where to take your next out-of-town guests.

The downtown and Green Hills locations of the Nashville Public Library, as well as the Walker Library at MTSU in Murfreesboro, are almost too obvious to mention, but their large tables are perfect to spread out index cards so you can shuffle scenes around; there is wireless for research, their architecture is inspiring each in its own way – oh and they have *books*. Under no circumstances, however, are you to go to the Bellevue Branch and expect inspiration, bless its heart.

You may go there to pick up books you have requested online, or you may go to the bathroom on the way to the park, but that's about it.

Idea Generation/People Watching

If you are writing a novel with Southern roots, you should be slapped if you can't create your memorable characters from the prototype pickins' around here. Eat breakfast at Dotson's in Franklin or The Country Boy in Leiper's Fork to get that delicious greasy gravy perspective. Don't hog a table to do your writing though – *people will stare, hon, it's not Starbucks!*

Get your ideas and details with your biscuits and sweet tea and then go write it all down somewhere else.

The Nashville International Airport is obvious for people-watching and character development, with its innate heart-rending goodbyes and tearful hellos.

Count the number of guitars arriving. More guitars depart via bus, you can bet, so swing by the Greyhound station on Charlotte Avenue if you must have faces of broken dreams. With the intimate waiting area, though, you'll be eyed suspiciously if you are too obvious about taking notes.

Don't miss the Arcade downtown, a glass-covered collection of restaurants, salons, and art galleries, built in 1902 that runs between 4th and 5th avenues. In the summer, huge rusty fans blow tepid air onto government workers, moms pushing strollers, artists, people down on their luck, rushing people, people languishing.

Fewer interact there in freezing temps, but no matter the season, before you settle in at one of the old metal tables lining the corridor, stop by the Peanut Shoppe for a treat. You need to keep your strength up.

Sit on the steps of the War Memorial Auditorium, overlooking Legislative Plaza down Deaderick Street toward the Metro Public Square.

The stone, backless perch is not too comfortable, and you may not last long, but with the Capitol to your left and the imposing public library to your right, you are in the cross hairs of an electric current of ideas. Grab one.

Right behind you, on the first floor of the William R. Snodgrass Tennessee Tower, you can gather ideas from the steady stream of story-encrusted humanity as it interacts with the government. You can also renew your driver's license while you're there. Any driver's license office would do for studying character, but the downtown office is especially cramped and stifling, and on a recent day the computers were down for an hour, which heightens the tension. The seat rows are so squished together that human interaction is uncomfortably necessary. I wouldn't recommend trying to work out a plot line in this setting, but you can jot a few notes about the excitement level of the employees or the confusion surrounding the convoluted process. Pretend you are ciphering in your checkbook, though, or you will arouse suspicion.

While you're in the downtown area, stop at Farmers Market and the Bicentennial Mall's amphitheater or head west to Centennial Park. Hop onto one of the bench-style swings near the sunken garden, especially if a wedding is in progress.

My other favorite word places, inaccessible to you, are the swing in front of my old log house, my porch in the rain, and my overstuffed chair looking out the window at the yard art that doubles as a hippo-sized propane gas tank. (It adds a dose of Southern Charm and reality to the setting, in addition to heat.)

You may have similar personal places, but sometimes you and I must get out and smell the characters.

Pour yourself a sweet tea and go on now.

... From Orleans to Clarksville continued from page 12

The transition to technical writer brought its own language barrier issues, and that learning curve proved to be even steeper. Not only did I have to learn how to use different software applications to do my job, but I also had to update manuals in English for an English speaking audience. Pepé le Pew was in Yosemite Sam's territory.

I was out of my comfort zone.

Learning to use high-end desktop publishing programs like Framemaker and Illustrator turned out to be pain-free, relatively speaking. Sure I had my moments of frustration, but I was able to pick up enough to get the job done without asking for too much help. The real

challenge came from convincing myself that my English level was adequate enough to do the job. After all, how could I tweak a manual, or reword a service bulletin created by a native speaker, when 'la langue de Molière' was my native language?

Today, my concerns are gone.

I'm still green behind the ears, but I don't feel like I am out of my element anymore. I have acquired new skills, along with new responsibilities, and the steep learning curve has turned into a gentle slope. I edit and publish HVAC manuals, update web sites, validate our literature translated into French, and review safety messages in documents to ensure compliance

with national product standards. Writing for an American audience doesn't scare me anymore. If I make mistakes, so be it; everybody does, and I'm no exception.

I've been in Tennessee for seven years now, five on the job. I suppose I have become just like any other technical writer around these parts. My improved twang has even earned me the title of French Redneck among my co-workers. I'm a froggy living the American life, a French "coon in the Middle Tennessee woods."

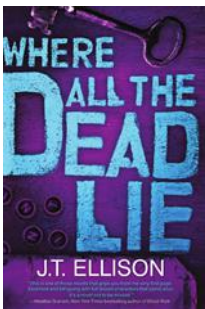
Yet as hard as I try to blend in, I don't forget where I come from: I may like my catfish deep fried, but nothing beats a fresh, out-of-the-oven baguette, with a smelly camembert!



LEFT Photo by Terry Price

Her seventh heaven

A conversation with best-selling, award-winning author, J.T. Ellison by Paige Crutcher



TOP J.T. Ellison's gripping new release is available at your local bookstore.

Seven books into her Taylor Jackson series, internationally best-selling author J.T. Ellison continues to wow readers. More than haunting us with her authentic plot-lines, mind-bending suspense, and raw characters, Ellison takes us away, providing a gritty and captivating escape: she won the prestigious Thriller award for Best Book of 2010 (for *The Cold Room*).

As her star climbs, Ellison's feet are planted firmly on the ground while her hand reaches out, offering support to others. Diligently she perfects her craft and broadens her web of story from the world of Nashville's Taylor Jackson into the streets of D.C. and Samantha Owens.

Recently we met at The Good Cup in Franklin, Tennessee to talk publishing, her award, and what the journey of a writer has been like for her.

Taylor came to Ellison, "On Interstate 40, as I was going to therapy for my back after surgery. I had just read John Sandford's Prey Series, and I was positive I wanted to have a female character in Nashville. She's not me, people ask me that all the time, though we share biographical details. Half cop, half rockstar, this chick popped into my mind. I could see her - this tall, thin, beautiful woman who eschews her parent's lifestyle to give back [by being a cop]. She was my Athena. Oddly enough, I hadn't known we had an Athena in the Parthenon in Nashville. I found that out when I placed a murder on the steps there."

Taking us back, before the publishing world flipped on its side, what was the moment that catapulted her career?

"My first pivotal moment in writing was in 2003. I started to write a book and realized I knew nothing about cops. I wasn't going to join the police force, although that was something I had thought about doing when we were in Columbia, Maryland. They were looking for new recruits, and I was bored out of my mind. Instead, I did the next best thing and wrote about them."

For many writers, it would seem overwhelming, taking on the mind of a serial killer. How would you even begin to research such a thing?

Ellison quickly went to the heart of the hunt. "[In Nashville] I called down to Metro and asked if Nashville had had any serial killers." As for it crossing her mind that this might be an unusual question to phone in, "I didn't know any better, and what was I going to do? They said they hadn't, but they did have a serial rapist, and that got into my head, and, of course, he became a character in the book."

Ellison isn't uncomfortable going the distance for her craft, and this wouldn't be the only time she pursued a line of unusual questioning. While writing *The Cold Room* she called the ranger at Radnor Lake. "[I said] I'm going to drop a body in your lake, and I need to know about your security. She thought I was serious."

Ellison writes authentic criminals who are uncomfortably brilliant. "When I wrote the draft of *All the Pretty Girls*, I made [the serial rapist] a home security guard, and I got scared for a minute that it might be too real for people. How could they trust their home security? But of course that was what he was. He had to know how to go into people's homes."

And if you call her on writing these skin-crawlingly creepy, leap-off-the-page antagonists as intelligent men?

"Well, yeah [they're smart], because the dumb ones get caught! You can't have a book where the criminal gets caught right away. Yes, the criminal mastermind is overdone, but I'm not writing Moriarty. I'm writing people who decompensate. You get them at the peak of their story, and they start decompensating because either they want to get caught or they have made a mistake. When you go into the book they are at the top of their game, then they get cocky, and the cops catch up."

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... Her seventh heaven continued from page 15

What drives Ellison to look inside the mind of the killer?

"[For] *So Close the Hand of Death*, it was to find out who [The Pretender] was, and why was he doing this. It had to be more than he had a bad childhood. Serial killers are made. They have a choice, and they can choose. People have horrible backgrounds, and they rise above it. They become good people and volunteer, they try and help other people. People can go to a doctor, seek help, but the killer will choose, and then they kill."

To obtain such in-depth knowledge, how many books has Ellison read on the mind of a serial killer? "Tons of books, it used to be the Encyclopedia of Serial Killers never left my side. But I don't want to write about them anymore. I've learned what I wanted to learn about it, and now I'm done. I want to write about other things."

What is it like spending seven books inside the head of Taylor, inside the minds of a variety of psychopaths?

"You're living it, inside and out, day after day, and it starts praying on your sanity. I started having horrible nightmares. The only thing you can do is find another path, and I've done what I wanted to do with the serial killers. I'm not saying I won't go back to it, but I have been called to something else. Like Anne Rice and her vampires, once you've reached as far as you can into that world, there's nothing but to move on and find the next." Ellison has mastered the genre, it's easy to slip inside the pages of her stories and forget where you are, what time of day it is, and what you're supposed to do next.

How did she hone her craft to excel as it does today?

"When I first started I was sort of imitating John Connolly -- I didn't know how to write, so I had to look to other authors, but now I've found my voice."

What of the "gimmicks" that authors invoke in building a mystery?

"There's the "when in doubt bring in a gun," but I found "when in doubt bring in a serial killer," because it ratchets up the excitement." But Ellison does more than bring in a serial killer. When she created Taylor Jackson, the tough as nails, biting (yet charming) heroine who kicks ass and crosses off names, she brought out the bazooka. In her latest, out September 20, 2011,

Ellison peels back the layers of our feisty protagonist, altering the landscape of Taylor and taking the reader into a journey across the pond. "Taylor is a hero, and heroes always have to get knocked off their pedestals. It's part of the hero journey - they have to hit a road block that makes them examine themselves.

"It was fun to write her off balance, off kilter. She has PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder), she's been shot, she has gone through the worst you can possibly go through, and she has to rebuild herself. But she has the presence of mind to know she can't do it in Nashville under the watchful eye of Baldwin.

She has to go somewhere else to heal herself." And that somewhere else involves the sexy swagger of Memphis and his castle in Scotland.

Is Ellison concerned that readers might balk at Taylor stepping back from Baldwin and, possibly, into the arms of Memphis?

"People are so invested with the stories and feel like they have spent years with Taylor. But the books only span 16 months, which isn't a long time for our heroine to be in a relationship." And just as real life throws romance curves, fiction pitches its own cannons of chaos. It's the anticipation that sweetens the suspense.

What dreams realized along the written path stand out for Ellison?

"Getting my agent. That was big because he's Harvard. Scott Miller is Harvard. This was the agent I wanted. He's just brilliant." And the story of Miller and Ellison coming together offers its own kind of brilliance. "I was writing him an email when I got an email from him. He had seen my work on Publishers Marketplace and wanted to see more.

"Publishers Marketplace is our bible. It has all the deals posted, and you can actually build a web site in it, where you can post a synopsis and the current work you're offering.

I had posted a synopsis of the book -- called *The Spirits Within* -- a blurb, its title, and that I was looking for an agent. The minute I had it up, I got two or three emails right away.

Scott's assistant, Holly Root, who is an agent in her own right today -- she's phenomenal, and from Nashville - she read it and showed it to him. They asked for it, I sent it out, and the next day they came back and asked for an exclusive on it.

"Scott called me two weeks later. He said that he didn't want to beat around the bush,

that he liked my book, wanted to represent me, and wanted to change the title. He wanted to change the name to *Crossed*, which was perfect. [The name change] showed that he really got it, he got my book.

"The agent author relationship is like a marriage. You have to be compatible, you have to trust each other and it really, really helps to like each other. A few weeks later he decided we should change my name. Although J.T. is my name, it's my nickname, something I've been called my whole life.

"The next big moment was when we sold not one, but three books. I cried I was so happy. Then, when I got the cover for *All the Pretty Girls*, and saw that hand. I was blown away. Every time I get a box of books, it's real. The first time I got a fan letter, the first review, I mean I have just been so blessed, just so blessed. Every step along the way -- I am so shocked by it. I have never had expectations, and so everything that happens is a big surprise. If there is a setback -- that's just what happens. This is a really hard industry, and I'm grateful that I have a thick skin. This is a subjective industry.

"As writers, we're not out there talking about the bad stuff. You paint your own reality, you have to. I mean, a writer isn't going to say, 'Hi, I'm tanking -- my sales suck, please buy my book!' Readers aren't going to want to hear that. We don't need to over share."

This year brought the biggest high of her career, winning the Thriller. "Yeah, that wasn't on the five year plan. Awards weren't something I ever, ever, ever thought about. I am a paperback writer; never in a million years did I think I would get nominated. And the honor, seriously, is in the nomination. In Killer Year we had people nominated all year long, and as long as one of us was nominated for something, that was what was important. But as for me being nominated -- never in a million years."

(Now known as the International Thriller Writers Debut Author group, Killer Year started as a group of 13 debut crime/mystery/suspense authors whose debut novels were published in 2007. Today, the group is where all debut authors in the genre get a chance to showcase their work.)

To pack irony onto a great moment, Ellison also battles an extreme case of stage fright. Public speaking is not one of the tricks in her bag. She even joked that if she won, which she didn't think would happen, she would fake losing her voice.

So what happened when the weekend of the awards rolled around?

"I got sick, violently ill with laryngitis which I haven't had since I was 18. I was really sick, had to cancel a class, had to get someone else to moderate a panel. Then, me and Ativan went to the awards on my husbands arm. I was so nervous.

"But it wasn't about me anymore. My editor was there, my publisher was there, and it was about making them proud. Then they said my name, and I was like, *you've got to be kidding me*. I was in complete shock. There was a dull roar, and Allison Brennan is sitting at the table next to me - she turns around and mouths *get up, get up*, and I see Doug Lyle smiling for me, he was lit up like a light bulb because he believed in me, and that was when I started to cry.

"I stood up, speechless, and fell apart. Jeffrey Deaver said to me afterwards, 'we all knew you really appreciated this honor.' And I did. This was affirmation from my peers, this was, 'you wrote the best book this year,' from my peers, and you can't top it. It is a moment that will forever be seared into my imagination. This was not on the five year plan. I don't know how that high point will ever be topped."

J.T. cares about story, about the community, and about being a part of it beyond herself. She is available to readers via email, her blog, Facebook, and Twitter. She never shies from connecting with writers or storytellers looking for guidance.

"When I was coming up, Lee Child reached out to me and gave me some of the best advice. He told me to focus on my work and the rest would fall into place. John Connolly, who is my hero, one of the true geniuses of crime fiction, told me that all good books find a home. That kept me sane, when I started to really doubt in the beginning. The most freeing advice I ever received was from Stuart Woods - that you, the writer, create the rules, page by page.

Do what you want to do, it's *your* story."

What about the people who say that to be an author you need to have your MFA?

"MFA programs are like the marines; they break you down and build you back up in their own image. But all you have to do is to bleed on the page. If you can do this, your passion will translate, and the reader will follow it anywhere - follow you anywhere. It is an amazing thing we do. That is our job. That is the idea behind the story. To be taken away.

"I spent my first year writing educating myself on the publishing industry. When I got in, it was 2005 - the year I got my agent. The first book didn't sell, but the second sold. Back then, paperbacks didn't get any respect. Self-publishing was just starting out, and people would go into bookstores trying to sell their self-pubs, and bookstores didn't really care. I had bookstores that wouldn't let me come and sign—don't worry, I remember who you are—and conferences who wouldn't let me speak on panels— yes, I remember who you are, too— because I was a paperback writer.

"I was a second class citizen, and that pissed me off. I didn't believe that was acceptable. A good book is a good book, and it doesn't matter how it's formatted. So a few of us were coming out in paperback, and we were afraid we wouldn't get press, so we banded together and Killer Year was formed.

We got press right, left, and center, and all of the paperbacks got reviewed. We weren't going to sit back and let our careers be tainted. That raised all of our profiles, and everyone in that group today is a successful author.

"Today eBooks are where it's at. My house just changed the royalty rates, and has gone to the agency model for eBooks. I self published a collection of my short stories in an anthology. We're in control, and the consumers are driving the market instead of the buyers.

"As authors, our promotion budgets are being cut, print runs are dropping, and it's falling on us to write brilliant books and have a brilliant marketing strategy. That's a dangerous thing because at what point do publishers become irrelevant? It takes years to get everything slowed down before the ship can turn, and while publishing houses are turning, they're not defining the game right now, the authors are.

"People keep asking me, do I need an agent and a big New York deal? In five years, that may not exist. The major chains are going out, but the Indies are there - they are the survivors.

Go to Indiebound.org to find your local bookstores. Barnes & Noble will survive. They have the Nook, which I bought because Barnes is a bookstore. Amazon is not. It's consumer driven and the Kindle doesn't support a bookstore, but the Nook does. So buy a Nook! I love my e-reader.

Ellison supports bookstores as much as she champions writers. How does she know which

aspiring-to-be-published writers aren't just looking for a get rich quick dream?

"You can tell who is really serious. Everybody thinks they can write a book because they can physically take a pen, put it on the page, and make words come out. But writing a book is a very different thing. Everybody doesn't get a blue ribbon in the real world. You have to excel to be acknowledged. Nothing will be handed to you.

You can tell pretty quickly if someone will be who you want to invest your time in. I try and pick a few people a year and mentor them. So many people helped me, and it's important for me to help others. But you can tell who is serious and who isn't. There is a mythical quality to storytellers, and you can immediately recognize that in others.

"I think we make our own journeys. Every time I start a book, I can't remember how I did it, I can't remember how it came together, how it's going to work, and what am I doing, I don't know how to do this, and then it does." Much like the book unfolds, so will the path of the writer, if s/he is committed, has faith, and refuses to give up.

So what's next for J.T. Ellison?

"I'm making a lot of changes that you will see in *Where All the Dead Lie*. It is the last Taylor book for a bit, not forever, but for a little while.

"I'm putting everything on pause and starting a series with Samantha Owens, she's the medical examiner in the Taylor series, and it's a spin off. *A Deeper Darkness* is set in D.C. which is where I'm originally from, and it's a very different book for me. Sam is a damaged character; she's much more human, much more relatable than Taylor. There's a lot of suspense to it, but it is not a serial killer book by any means. It was the quickest, fastest and cleanest book I've ever written. Sam is probably more me than Taylor. We'll see what happens."

J.T. Ellison is many things, an author, mentor, storyteller, and reader. But most of all, she is a champion for the souls of great books. Committed to bewitching readers by offering a great escape, she continues to push herself to be the best she can be, provide a helping hand to those who seek it, and change her written landscape one story at a time. Award winner, best-seller, Ellison blushes at the title and brushes it off. Because it's not about her, it's about the story, and at the end of the day that is where her truth resides.

The Tree Has Just Begun to Wilt

by Alvin Knox

Three days now since the wreck down the road,
three days since the ambulance, the aid car,
the police and helicopter, three days since the skid
marks were lain down, since the shattered pine
was pulled to the back of the grassy verge, and today
a different set of cars plays out along the roadside.
Two men, middle-aged, stand beside an Oldsmobile as if
in conversation, but they do not talk. Neither smokes,
but one glances nervously back along the blacktop.
By a Jeep, a young woman talks on a cell phone, her
arms waving an explanation. A bearded man leans
against a Mustang, tired, a cigarette dangling limply
in his hand. He is far away and doesn't seem to notice
my car passing. None do. And at the edge of the road
at the end of the skid marks, two women, a mother
and her sister, I'd guess, sift through the gravel
with their fingers, inspecting each piece, searching
for that lost thing that won't be found.



Photos by Gayle Edlin

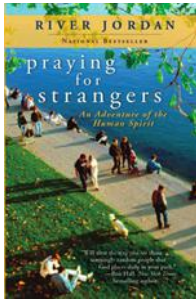
Going Home

by Alvin Knox

It was the kind of drive my dad once dreamt of, 78 miles per hour, 900 miles per day, 2608 miles in 57 hours and 6 minutes, empty miles of nearly empty divided 4-lane in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of everywhere, in the middle of America, from the Puget Sound to Central Tennessee, and it's just me, the car, a pack of smokes, a cup of coffee, the suck and flap of rubber on blacktop that disappears and disappears and disappears under the car, a great mobius strip of 0-grit abrasive passing inches under my ass, and I'm blowing through places like Wolfledge and Arrowrock, Booneville and Butte, and, Baby, it's all Big Sky Country, big mountain country, big dream country, the myths of our daily existence lying broken along the roadside with skunks and dogs, rabbit, deer, indistinguishable piles of fur and bloodstains and daydreams and other pedestrian fantasies, and I'm on the downhill slide past Big Timber, Yankton, Cummings and Loveland, all places in the rearview mirror before you even knew you were there; no sightseeing on this trip, just the place you're leaving and the place you're going and gas station restrooms and fastfood meals, and my wallet's on the console and my foot's on the gas, and the ghosts on the windshield melt into the sunrise, and I'm going home, Baby, I'm going home.

Book Review

How *Praying for Strangers* will captivate, challenge, and amuse your mind by David Pierce



Praying for Strangers is River Jordan's latest work that all began with a New Year's resolution that she dreaded, dreaded, dreaded: Pray for one stranger every day.

So for one year she was intentional—she chose a complete stranger to utter a prayer for,

at least that's how the story starts. At first she picks a stranger from the crowd and asks God to bless him or her. Then (maybe the prompt comes from heaven) she feels compelled to approach this specific stranger, ask for a name, explain her resolution of praying for one stranger a day, and then ask if there is anything "specific" she can pray for—and there always seems to be. And she seems to dread the process every time—like I think most of us would when we step out of our comfort zone.

Sometimes her approach is subtle as she asks a stranger with a soft (and always Southern) voice, "You are my stranger for today." Sometimes she places a hand on a shoulder and says, "Look here, here's the thing..." And after her explanation, more than once someone will answer, "I sure do need that." And she rejoins with, "We all do, honey." Still so Southern!

In *Praying for Strangers* Jordan takes a year to explore this power of prayer, albeit she comes kicking and screaming into the process. She begins with the question of "Exactly where are my prayers going anyway?" and discovers there is a "satisfaction when someone receives the promise of a prayer." The satisfaction will

manifest itself in words ("Thank you") or in actions (a smile or a hug).

During the course of this year she prays for a welder, a landscaper, a convenience market cashier, a woman in a hotel lobby, a waitress from a diner, a man in a garage, someone in an elevator, and Daryl—who opts to have his prayer fall onto his mom and dad (one of the most powerful chapters of the book).

In the greatest understatement of the book, Jordan says that she has learned that this resolution to pray for a stranger is "no ordinary thing." She comes to the realization that "the act of praying is huge, the act of consideration of another human being and their life—a moment to wonder what they are going through and to care—is paramount."

One of the most poignant moments is when she realizes the effect this power of prayer has on her: "We are souls on this planet full of dreams and heartaches and big love."

As I read this book I am reminded of what C.S. Lewis said about prayer: "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time—waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God—it changes me." For Jordan, that earlier dread (12 months earlier) disappears and is replaced by a challenge: What if we all prayed for another? What would that kind of world look like?

This is not a how-to book, but rather a how-I-did-it book. And rather than explanation, we are offered an opportunity to experience one encounter after another. As always, we can all learn from one another. And what this book shows is that we can pray for one another—and should.

Literary libations: Where Nashville's introverts extrovert by Roy Burkhead

There is no structure, no agenda, no program. No glossy, tri-fold brochure. Not even a bookmark. And no fees, other than a bar tab. But what there is, there's a lot of it.

"The monthly gatherings are the perfect venue for writers to share fellowship, ideas, support, and some darn good company," said Jaden Terrell, a local author whose latest novel, *Racing the Devil*, came out at the start of 2012. "And, of course, it's always good to share a drink or two with River and J.T.; it would be hard to find a pair of sharper, savvier women."

This successful novelist is referring to Nashville literary institutions J.T. Ellison and River Jordan. River is an author of five books, speaker, and local radio personality with 107.1 FM, Radio Free Nashville. J.T. is the international author of seven novels and published in nearly two dozen countries.

According to River, the event stems from a literary lunch outing that she once arranged with like-minded creatives.

"We always had different writers, literary agents, librarians, and so on at these dutch lunches," River said. "We made sure that an unpublished writer was always at the table: Literary Libations was a spinoff of that."

"It was always in downtown Nashville because it's a great place, and Union Station is so beautiful; May (2011) was the first time, and somehow we've done it ever since."

In this age of the Internet, J.T. said that it's important to "re-establish the face-to-face, to get out of the house to physically meet your friends. Relationships wither and die if they're only conducted through Facebook and Twitter."

"Early on, River and I spent a year trying to match up for a drink," J.T. said. "We wanted to see each other, but with schedules and city differences, we never

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Talking with River Jordan

How this author's greatest passions became her Clearstory by J.T. Ellison

How did you get into radio?

I was involved in radio broadcasting in high school where I had the most wonderful teacher, Anna Kelly. I took it seriously. Worked on programs that I felt were significant. Apparently, someone noticed as I received a small college scholarship for radio and TV broadcasting. Later, I started writing plays and took a different journey into theatre, but my love for radio has been an old one. When I moved to Nashville I saw a notice that WRFN (107.1 WRFN-LP) was looking for programmers to create and host original programs. I didn't hesitate to pitch my idea to them. The result has been years of having fun on the radio interviewing authors and celebrating story in all its glory.

You were a playwright for many years – what did that teach you about how to do radio?

Maybe to relax and enjoy the moment. Every rehearsal for a play was different than the show and every show different from night to night. It helps to realize this moment isn't frozen in ice and to go with the flow. The goal in the theatre is never perfection but truth. I like that element and try to keep that as an essential part of *Clearstory Radio*.

Who is your all time favorite guest?

Okay. That has to mean J.T. Ellison excluded, right? I've had some great interviews including the creator of Art-O-Mat®, where they take these old cigarette machines and turn them into original Art dispensers. Also, loved the Christmas show that featured so many different authors sharing stories from Christmas Past, but the one that had me in stitches and giggles was Mr. Clyde Edgerton. I don't think it was much of a show on my part, but the consummate storyteller Clyde shared stories of everything from crashing his airplane to southern funeral stories—as only he can tell.

Who is your white whale?

I don't have the Moby Dick of all time that got away. I do have a huge number of guests



TOP River Jordan with "Big Dog". Also known as Titan, her Great White Pyrenees. Photos by Chris Blanz.

I do feel that Clearstory is all about story: its myth and meaning, its power and purpose. So whether I'm featuring a guest, promoting a new book or a forgotten author, or playing a song, they are all connecting by that same thread. It's also why I chose the name.

who I haven't been able to schedule yet. That's a little frustrating because there are so many wonderful authors of all genres and other interesting, creative people I'd love to have on the show.

What's your favorite tune?

I'm a moody listener, so all the songs I play are crazy, wild, different. (For instance, I just confused Pandora radio with my desired combination of choices. It's struggling to figure out exactly what I want.) Frank Sinatra one minute and Dire Straights the next. But one of my favorite songs of all time is "Movin'", by Little Feat. Maybe, "King of the Road," by Roger Miller.

And "The Best is Yet To Come," by Frank Sinatra. I also like a lot of new alternative music and a voice like Cat Power's. I also love to play music that is the author's favorite artist or to play something that is related to the theme of the guest work.

Do you ever have radio moments that you immediately want to fictionalize in your novels?

No. But I have a few I want to immediately forget. Those are all related to what we call a 'train wreck' of a show where anything that can go wrong – goes wrong. Usually, those are

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LEFT Photo by Gayle Edlin

Emerging playwrights

The web we weave: Midstate hotbed of collaboration thanks to playhouses, art centers, festivals, outreach, residencies, and more by Peggy Smith Duke

Playwright Valerie S. Hart sat near the back in Nashville's Darkhorse Theater, a spread of note pages balanced on her lap. This is the first full production of any of her plays. *Rising & Falling*... , timely in its 9/11 subject matter, was sparsely attended but exuberantly performed by the cast of the Rhubarb Theater Company on a Wednesday night performance of a nine-day run.

"It is very beneficial for a playwright with a new work to collaborate with a theater company," Hart said. As the director and actors mine material through repetition it "pushes the piece to its limits" and can be painful, she confessed. "(The play) invariably changes from what you first envisioned."

Her assessment touched the heart of the conundrum: creation versus the consumption of art. At one end of the spectrum, playwriting is a difficult field to break in to. At the other end, how much "help" is too much for an artist in the development of a script?

Commercial viability and artistic freedom are not always mutually beneficial.

"We are always looking for new work that fits the cultural context of our community, which makes it more challenging," said Donald Fann, who has guided the Arts Center of Cannon County in Woodbury, Tennessee, for almost 17 years.

Fann has partnered with the storied Barter Theater in Abingdon, Virginia near Bristol, Tennessee, and with the Cumberland County Playhouse in Crossville, Tennessee to champion new work but clearly these self-sustaining non-profits' productions must be commercially

viable. Each may assist another's production through set rentals, word-of-mouth promotion, and they may enjoy the residual effects of successful regional marketing.

"We are non-profits, but we are all producing on 80 to 90 percent earned income," Fann said.

His concern regarding cultural context and his audience preferences may be unique to rural community theater, but it is a real one. Hart's experience as a playwright, whose work evolves by virtue of the involvement of actors and directors, presents challenges for commercial theater.

"We did *Don't Cry for Me Margaret Mitchell* and the name was changed to *Frankly My Dear*, then changed back at the Barter, and Chaffin's Barn picked it up as *Frankly My Dear*," Fann said. The same work was done under two different

is to be an entry point. "We want to be the first theater they come to and be a slightly challenging experience," hoping their appreciation of live theater will grow from there.

Where, then, are playwrights born and raised?

Neither Lauren Shouse, artistic associate with the Tennessee Repertory Theater (Tennessee Rep), nor Claudia Barnett, professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University are aware of any program in this part of the state that encourages or introduces playwriting to high school students.

Even with a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree, it is a hard slog to enter the field as a neophyte. Hart found skill development and a mentor through the MFA in Creative Writing program

The playwright doesn't write out of 'motivations' but rather out of truth and reality, out of people and story and worlds he or she wishes or needs to create for us

names in three theaters.

When contemplating a new work Fann asks, "is it finished?" The answer affects the choice of director and the marketing to audiences who may depend on familiarity with the title before they consider buying a ticket.

"There is no subset of our audience that gets excited because (a play) is new," Fann said. "Our audiences are not early adopters." Part of the mission of the Arts Center of Cannon County

at San Francisco State. Barnett, who has a Ph.D. from Ohio State University, also encouraged pursuit of an MFA for new playwrights.

Ron Osborne came to playwriting by a different route. With a University of Missouri journalism degree and following a career in promotion and advertising, he discovered his love for playwriting. He won the 2002 Barter Theater

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... Creative technicalities continued from page 10

been a tremendous boon to my creativity when I do have the opportunity to use it.

In technical writing, the smallest omission can still have tremendous repercussions. You cannot run a viable piece of equipment—not for long, anyway—if you are missing a certain valve or bolt. Necessary detail is not only important, it is essential. And when I stopped to think about it, detail can carry that same worldly weight in creative writing: what a character sees or chooses to see in a scene can be telling, as can that which the character misses.

I don't get to develop my writing voice at my day job. If there's a "voice" in technical writing, it's impersonal and tends toward the omniscient, lacking any distracting individuality

whatsoever. But what technical writing lacks in the vitality of voice, it balances with critical aim. As a technical writer, I have learned to hone my focus in just the right direction and to practice this skill repeatedly. What used to appear to me to be wildly divergent types of writing do, in fact, share the same basic toolkit and require similar talents: examination, intent, and detail.

While my work-day writing does have an emotionless tenor that I would never wish to cultivate in my creative writing endeavors, the on-the-job training I received as a technical writer has given me a great deal. In addition to teaching me to attend to detail and determine which details warrant special notice, I am practicing a certain subtle creativity that I may never

have otherwise understood. I've graduated from proclaiming myself a writer ... I have, in fact, become one.

In the end, what it takes to get to the final chapter has no dependence on whether you are explaining how to use a camera or weaving a transcendent love story, whether you are writing about how to install an evaporative cooler or crafting a thrilling whodunnit. To finish a guide, essay, manual, novel, or poem, the one and only way to get to the final line is to sit down and WRITE.

But when do you find the time to write what you want when you spend your days writing what you must? Tune in next time, and I'll discuss how creativity comes into play there, too.

... Emerging playwrights continued from page 23

Appalachian Festival of Plays (AFPP) with his comedy-drama *First Baptist of Ivy Gap*.

"The best opportunities for emerging playwrights is through entry in various playwriting competitions and contests," said Osborne. Five of Osborne's plays, including *First Baptist of Ivy Gap*, have been produced as a result of the festival. All are now widely produced and most have been published by Samuel French Inc., a play publishing house. The Barter finds and promotes new plays through the AFPP. In addition, the Barter holds an annual Young Playwrights Festival which cultivates the talent of high school students.

Nashville's Tennessee Rep is in its third cycle sponsoring the three-pronged Ingram New Works Residency, Lab, and Festival for playwrights. Artistic Associate Lauren Shouse directs and coordinates the nine-month-long program that she refers to as a gestation period for new plays. In 2007 then-Artistic Director David Alford and current Artistic Director René Copeland solicited support from co-founder Martha Ingram and the Ingram Foundation to develop the program.

A fellowship was established to bring in a well-known playwright as an artist in residence to develop a new work of their own and to do outreach in Nashville in the form of talks, forums, and seminars. A mini-lab and six-week education workshop grew into the second element of the New Works effort in the form of a nine-month program of feedback, readings,

and dramaturgical assistance to hone scripts of seven selected playwrights who applied through the Rep.

Both Hart and Barnett have been among the seven lab playwrights in its first two years.

The culmination, the third element, is the New Works Festival of readings at Vanderbilt University's Neely Auditorium. The incubated plays of the lab participants and the artists in residence are directed and read aloud by professional actors.

Plays are produced with minimal lighting, costuming, and sets so the playwright can focus on the script. The readings occur in front of an audience, often members and frequent patrons of the Tennessee Rep.

Cognizant of another lingering issue for playwrights, Shouse intends to ensure the New Works model does not impose its will on playwrights. She invoked the term "development hell" from Richard Nelson, Tony-winning playwright and former chair of the Department of Playwriting at the Yale School of Drama.

Nelson pointed out that a culture of "help" breeds a culture of dependence and argues that plays should not be addressed as works to be fixed, but rather to be solved.

"The playwright doesn't write out of 'motivations' but rather out of truth and reality, out of people and story and worlds he or she wishes or needs to create for us," Nelson said in a speech to A.R.T./New York transcribed on the Philadelphia Dramatists Center Web site.

Alex Kilgore, in "The Shame of Theater" (*Brooklyn Rail*, April 2011) cited an article appearing in *American Theater* titled "Not There Yet," by Marsha Norman. Norman likened the process to handing a paintbrush to an art gallery patron and asking them to walk around "fixing" the paintings that don't look right to them.

She called script development an "endless process by which those plays are worn down until they are no longer produceable (sic)."

Instead of protecting and championing bold new work, (we) are encouraged to tame it, Norman wrote.

Hart feels the pinch, though still a champion of the collaborative efforts of mentors, colleagues, teachers, directors, dramaturges, and actors.

She recalls a thrilling moment in rehearsal of *Rising & Falling...* with Chaz Howard who plays Chuck the Ironworker. Director Trish Crist asked him what he meant by a particular line and he said, "What I mean is that I didn't really help anyone at the disaster and this grieving mother may be the only person I can help."

"All that was in the subtext... which wasn't even clear to me until he articulated it," Hart said.

In the end, the playwright's ultimate thrill comes from the production of his or her work. Barnett, whose play became a part of the Kennedy Center Page to Stage Festival, advised, "The tried and true way to get your play done is to get your play done."



BOTTOM Photo by Jeff Frazier

RIGHT Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau

Under the stars

Nashville's 24th Annual Shakespeare in the Park sparks Centennial Park bandshell by Roy Burkhead

Friday: 5:30 p.m.

After a humid, sticky summer, a cool September breeze iambic pentametered generously across an empty stage, as if it knew what was to come with sunset.

The Nashville Shakespeare Festival's web site foreboded big crowds and urged early attendance for prime parking and good seating. It was early still, and the bandshell's stage boasted a single plastic bin, a microphone, and wires.

A lone patron with a program for *Romeo and Juliet* walked on the grass, paused, sat, looked at the stage, stood, and moved to a new spot. She opened the bulletin and read the words of Denice Hicks, the artistic director for the Nashville Shakespeare Festival:

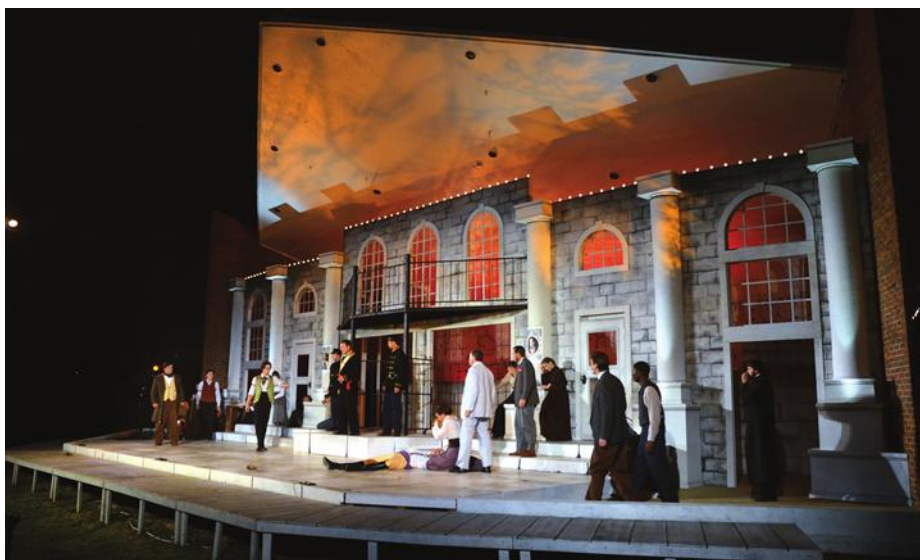
"We are Nashvillians, we do Shakespeare, and we approach each offering with a Festive spirit; Nashville Shakes is known for interpreting Shakespeare in creative ways while honoring the original poetry, and for having people from the region comprise the acting company and production teams."

The Festival's 24th show would remain true to this mission. The evening's performance of *Romeo & Juliet* was set in 1894 Chicago with the Montagues and Capulets staged as political rivals.

There will be more in summer 2012.

"We have auditions coming up for Shakespeare in the Park 2012: *Much Ado About Nothing*," said Hicks. "I'm setting this *Much Ado* at the end of World War II and at the beginning of the Baby Boom Generation, dedicating this production to American veterans and service-men and women.

"Unabashedly patriotic and boisterously romantic, we will be setting soliloquies and some scenes to music creating a musical comedy that will warm hearts and lift spirits in a challenging election year."



Rewind back to the summer of 2011.

Fifteen minutes later on that Friday, the first blankets started to unfurl on the grass in front of the stage, forming a semicircle of seating. Behind the Linus blues and Easter pastels, there was a second layer: quilts bookended by folding chairs. The fabric nestled against signs stating, "Blankets Only Beyond This Point."

Next, well-worn wooden park benches: three rows.

And the last layer: aluminum bleachers, junior high style. All of this was reinforced by a makeshift wall of banners that boasted the supporters: www.nashvilleshakes.org, Metro Parks, the *Nashville Scene*, the *Nashville Arts Magazine*, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, and more.

Another 15 minutes, the infield swelled with moms and strollers, with the pretty people being pretty. Stagehands talked shop and shared stories. Dogs tugged at leashes. People chilled and sipped what appeared to

be Champagne: maybe; maybe not. And music vibrated through large speakers. Volunteers traded programs and stickers of the Bard for ten-dollar bills, and an elderly man read from the program:

"Each summer, 10,000 to 15,000 people attend the annual Shakespeare in the Centennial Park production which is designed to be accessible to people from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Since 1988, over 230,000 Middle Tennesseans have attended.

"Over 175,000 students—many of whom had never experienced live theatre before—have been introduced to Shakespeare through the Festival's interactive workshops and energetic performances."

6:30 p.m.: the crowd thickened.

Children in sci-fi shirts pulled chips out of bags and ate sandwiches while college-aged students gulped who knows what out of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37



... Talking with River Jordan continued from page 21

technical difficulties. Often caused by human error. Mine.

Do you ever have those moments when your brain goes – uh-oh, dead air?

Ha ha! See the above answer. Everyone knows DEAD AIR is BAD AIR! Bad, Bad, Bad. But usually that's if I'm running live and switching from one mic to another.

You make it seem so effortless, but there's a huge amount of work that goes into your show. How do you balance the show with your daily writing and all the other amazing outreach you do on behalf of Nashville and the South's literati?

My husband, Owen Hicks, listened to my first show live and called in to tell me I was doing great, but I needed to stop playing music behind one of the mics because no one could hear me. That's when I used to do the show live, and while I occasionally still do, my travel schedule and that of guests I wanted to interview didn't always make that feasible. I produce most shows now the day before they air. It is a lot. I can't lie about that.

Balance? Oh, honey – I greatly desire balance, but I wouldn't know what it felt like. I guess like the world suddenly stopped spinning, and then I would just fall down.

I don't know how I accomplish anything except for the grace of God, good friends, and a great family. (And a very special shout out to the WRFN engineer and super-producer extraordinaire, Matt Lane, who comes to my aid and even in the midnight hour dares to ghost my machine when I'm freaking out over a production issue.)

There's a certain spirit to working the radio genre. It's an art. Not everyone can do it, and do it well. What's your secret?

Well, first thank you for the compliment. It may be a part of doing what you love. I love

radio. I have a true romance with the art form of radio. I listened to a lot of other radio shows and was amazed at the hosts who interviewed me for the *Praying for Strangers* tour. A few of those shows are featured on my web site, like the one on the NPR show out of Memphis, *Book Talk*.

I think it strips a lot of the superficial that can be (but isn't always) television. The power is in the voice and in the story. There's no distraction—if you will—of the visual elements. And it feels so intimate to me. Very honest, very natural.

You speak so eloquently about the power of story. And anyone who's been around you for more than five minutes has heard you telling tales – your entrance us all. Since so much of our history is oral, does that play into your radio mandate?

Ahhh, a radio mandate. That sounds like something I need. And hush now, you are making me blush with all that flattery.

Seriously, oral history is a huge factor in another novel I have waiting in the wings, and the power of story moves and entrances me.

I suppose you might say it is a passion. Even the new 'memoir of moments' if you will, *Praying for Strangers* seemed such a bizarre departure for me from writing fiction and my show focusing on literary people, events, and art – then I realized recently it was really a collection of stories about the people I had met that year, and it made so much more sense to me that I had written it.

I do feel that *Clearstory* is all about story: its myth and meaning, its power and purpose. So whether I'm featuring a guest, promoting a new book or a forgotten author, or playing a song, they are all connecting by that same thread. It's also why I chose the name.

A 'clearstory' is a architectural design that allows the light to flow into dark spaces, and I think that's exactly what story does in our lives – brings us the light.

How do you choose writers for your show?

I have a lot of books that are sent to me by publicists from publishing houses, agents, and authors with a pitch, so I do discover a few gems that way.

Most of the authors and other guests I feature are either writers I have met on the road on tour, heard present at a function, or read and enjoyed their work.

I also love to feature people who are doing original, creative work of great variety. As I mentioned earlier, the creator of Art-O-Mat® for instance, the founder of Book Crossing, and soon, Wang Ping, the force and founder of the Kinship of Rivers Project that bridges people from the Yangtze River in China to the Mississippi of America.

What advice would you give someone who wanted to get into radio?

Well, I think one thing is to relax and be you. Not to try to put on a show, be the show, go overboard. Be real on the radio like you would in front of a friend no matter what type of show you want to be a part of. And that community radio is a great place to showcase what is creatively independent about you or your idea.

What can the Nashville community do to help promote your show?

Listen. Often. Tell a Friend. Twitter, Facebook, and blog about *Clearstory* when it's playing or anytime. And of course support your local community station, which provides commercial-free, original programming in cities across the nation and gives a great opportunity for artists of all types to be discovered.

(Listeners can tune in to *Clearstory* on WRFN from West Nashville and pockets scattered everywhere at 107.1 FM, as well as listen live and stream the show from <http://www.clearstoryradio.com>, on Wednesday's at 12:00 p.m. or Sunday nights at 6:00 p.m.)

Clarksville Writers

Gearing up for the 8th Annual Clarksville Writers' Conference by Roy Burkhead

In the days following the Clarksville Writers' Conference's seventh event, Christopher Burawa sat down with us to reveal what makes this annual event so special, as well as to share details about the 2012 session. (Mr. Burawa is a local poet and the director of the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts at Austin Peay State University.)

2nd & Church: Thanks for speaking with us Mr. Burawa; we appreciate your time. You have such great heavy hitters participating every year: the keynote speaker, the presenters, the

We also stay true to the mission of the conference, which is to provide an affordable creative and supportive environment for our attendees. So, we invite exceptional authors who are also exceptional teachers.

2nd & Church: Exceptional participants, indeed! Would you share a memorable moment or two from the 2011 event? How were William Gay's events?

Christopher Burawa: William is a Tennessee treasure, and we are so grateful to him for com-



The 2012 Clarksville Writers' Conference will run June 7 & 8, 2012 and will be held on the third floor of the Memorial Union Center on the campus of Austin Peay State University.

speakers! How do you go about getting all of these people involved, and who will be filling these roles in 2012?

Christopher Burawa: We do have a great track record for bringing in great keynote speakers. And all the credit for this goes to Patricia Winn. Patricia is the founder of the conference, and she has this gift for finding the right people. Patricia is an ardent reader and attends book festivals around the Southeast region.

She has a knack for picking authors whose books or interests complement the mission of the conference—which is to honor the Southern literary tradition in all its forms.

2nd & Church: How was the event in 2011 different than the first one, seven years ago? Will 2012's gathering be different in some way from last year's event? How do you go about keeping each year fresh?

Christopher Burawa: I would say that there are a couple of things that keep us in focus and "fresh." We stay focused on serving emerging writers who don't have the university creative writing backgrounds and who have busy lives and who feel compelled to write.

ing to our conference. His craft talks are always popular with our attendees because this is a writer who worked for years as a construction worker but came home and put in time writing and honing his craft.

But it's not just William who is inspirational in this way. Tom Franklin worked all types of jobs as he was making his way into the literary world. But I heard this same story from almost all the writers at the conference this year, and I think that's the message we want our attendees to hear. Talent, of course, is important but so is perseverance.

2nd & Church: In terms of literary agents on site, any success stories to share from over the years? More agents coming in 2012?

Christopher Burawa: We have had success stories. The agents we invite don't necessarily cover all the genres and subgenres, but they know people who do specialize, and they recognize original writing when they see it.

To date, we have had over a dozen books that have found publishers. I don't know where along the contract line these books are, so I won't share particulars.



TOP Photos by Wendy Welch

2nd & Church: Is the conference mainly a Clarksville operation or does it pull in people from other states and cities? How is the literary community in Clarksville? Based around APSU or including surrounding areas?

Christopher Burawa: The conference, as a program of the Clarksville-Montgomery County Arts & Heritage Development Council, is for the citizens of our community and county. And it seems to me that after a few years, the conference quickly gained a reputation in Middle Tennessee and in the Southeast region.

In the past few years, we have had attendees come from as far away as California, Oklahoma, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

That said, we are reaching out to educators in the county and in the five counties surrounding

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us. We are diversifying our offerings and bringing in a few authors who have experience teaching in schools, and we hope that this new side to our conference will be as far-reaching as our workshops for emerging writers.

Clarksville has an old and distinguished literary history, being home to Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Thomas Mabry, and Evelyn Scott. Benfoly, when Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon made their home there, was something of a mecca for authors—especially those associated with the Fugitives. And the tradition lives on here in Clarksville.

The Austin Peay State University creative writing faculty include poet Blas Falconer, novelist and short story writer Barry Kitterman, and creative nonfiction writer and poet Amy Wright. Certainly a part of the literary scene in Clarksville revolves around the APSU Visiting Writers Series, but we also have published authors living within the community: David Till, Malcolm Glass, Mitzi Cross, Mike Shoulders, and many more.

I moved here from Arizona two and a half years ago, and I was amazed at how many literary communities there were within a 100-mile or so circuit around Clarksville: Murray State, Bowling Green, and Vanderbilt. But each region of Tennessee has incredibly rich literary traditions.

I think, though, that we offer experiences for novice and emerging writers that you won't find anywhere else. And we keep the cost of our conference low, and that has meant a lot to our attendees—all of whom, like most people in our community, have felt the pinch of the recession.

2nd & Church: Okay, let's get the shameless promotion out of the way. Please verify the time, place, and date of the 2012 conference, as well as the mailing address, phone number, and web address. All that sort of stuff.

Christopher Burawa: The 2012 Clarksville Writers' Conference will run June 7 & 8, 2012 and will be held on the third floor of the Memorial Union Center on the campus of Austin Peay State University.

The Clarksville-Montgomery County Arts & Heritage Development Council sponsors the conference, and anyone interested in learning more about the upcoming conference can visit www.artsandheritage.us/writers.

For questions, contact Katie Kennedy at the Clarksville-Montgomery County Arts & Heritage Development Council, PO Box 555, Clarksville, TN 37041-0555 or at 1-931-551-8870. (Also, our conference receives support from the Tennessee Arts Commission.)



LEFT Photo by Wendy Welch

RIGHT Photo by Wendy Welch

Sulphur Dell

Excerpt from novel-in-progress: *An Angel's Share* by Terry Price

It was Wallace's sixth birthday and Dickie's tongue had not tasted whiskey in two and a half days. His thirst deepened with each passing heartbeat. The scarred palm and fingers of his left hand once soberly worked tool and die but were rendered useless exactly a year ago, when his drunken fist missed Delores and slashed through the glass storm door, shattering it, a shard slicing across the wrist and palm, severing tendons. The doctor said he would have bled to death had Delores not called the ambulance and wrapped and held his hand in her skirt, sitting next to him as he lay, passed out, on the kitchen floor. He couldn't bend the calloused fingers anymore, would never make a fist with it again. Dickie rubbed the scarred palm up and down his thigh until the shakes settled down. Thank God, he was given a chance to be with his boy today, on his sixth birthday. Dickie knew himself to be a mean drunk, but drunk or sober, he had never hit Wallace. Would never hit him. Never. His boy.

He sat in the bleachers down the first base line of Sulphur Dell ballpark, right where he told Delores he'd be. Dickie felt a kinship to this old park. It was under appreciated, located next to the town dump that frequently caught fire, a lowland that flooded in spring when the Cumberland overflowed its banks, a basin easily filled with coal smoke from surrounding plants. Known for its sulphur spring, the great Nashville newspaperman, Grantland Rice, referred to it as Sulphur Spring Dell, and, eventually, just

Sulphur Dell. But it had other names. The acrid smoke and smell of garbage from the landfill earned it the nickname, "The Dump." The playing field was flat until halfway between the infield and the outfield fence where it contoured upward with a small "porch" carved out on which fielders would stand, awaiting balls in play. The Vols, Nashville's minor league team, learned to play the angles but the park became known to visiting teams as "Suffer Hell."

Dickie wanted to meet Wallace and Delores out along Summer Street, beneath the new sign that read "Sulphur Dell, Baseball's Most Historic Park," but Delores didn't want to be seen with him. He glanced back and forth between the entrance and the visiting pitcher who delivered, right off, a fastball right to the plate.

The right handed batter lined it foul into the first base grandstands where the crowd cheered and a fan caught and held up the souvenir.

"Dad!" Wallace called out. A man followed with his hands on Wallace's shoulders, a brawny man in a royal blue tie and a summer red sport coat. Dickie looked down at his white short-sleeved shirt and khaki cotton pants through which he had sweated and wondered if the smell of stale whiskey came from his pores or his clothes. He didn't even have money enough to buy his kid a cola.

Dickie put his hands in empty pockets and made his way down as Wallace pulled away from the strange man's hands and grabbed Dickie around his legs and squeezed. Dickie

rubbed the boy's blond hair with his scarred hand and patted his back with the right, but kept the man's gaze until they were face to face.

"Delores wanted me to make sure you were here," the man said. Dickie wanted to backhand the smirk from his face, but he didn't take his hands from Wallace.

"What are you?" Dickie asked. "New boyfriend?"

"That's Delores' business," the man replied.

"Not yours, as I see it."

"You're walking around with your hands on my son. That's my business."

"I'll be back here at three to get the boy. You both better be here."

Dickie heard the perfect crack of baseball against bat, a beautiful thing, a sound from his childhood. Spectators shouted and squealed and someone yelled, "Look out!"

The man turned toward the shouts and there was a second crack, as the ball ricocheted off his left cheekbone onto the grass. He crumpled in a dull and deep thud.

"Oh my God! Get a doctor!" a woman shouted.

Wallace raced and retrieved the ball and held it high as Dickie knelt down to the motionless man. He rolled the man over and, in one deft move, put his left hand on the man's forehead and, with his right, felt inside the sport coat pockets, removing a wallet. Leaning down to check his breathing, Dickie stuffed the thick wallet inside his own shirt. The man lay there, his eyes open but unfocused, still not breathing.

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... Sulphur Dell continued from page 30

Dickie slapped his face back and forth, an apparent attempt at resuscitation.

A concessionist ran and stooped down to the man. Dickie then stood and went to Wallace still clutching and staring at the baseball. "Doc is on his way," the concessionist said to Dickie. "Do you know him?"

"Never seen him before," said Dickie. "Just trying to help." The man's cheek and eye socket began to match the blue of his too tight tie.

Dickie guided Wallace up into the stands as a flock of blackbirds scattered above the pavilion, calling and crying. Play resumed and the pitcher hurled a slow, roundhouse curve. The batter took a vicious cut and got all of it, lofting it high, down the right field line, staying fair long enough to clear the wooden outfield fence with the thirty-foot tall screen atop. The outfielder turned and tripped up the hill falling on his face while the batter trotted around the bases. A

stretcher was placed beside the fallen man, now breathing again.

Dickie pulled the man's wallet from his shirt, opened it and thumbed through the bills with his right thumb, then called to a passing vendor.

"A hot dog and RC for the boy and I'll have a beer." Dickie looked down at his boy with his new baseball and swallowed hard, his tongue dry like a leather ball glove. "Wait boy," he shouted. "Make that two RC colas instead."

Strawberries

Flash fiction by Gregory Plemmons

Twins: I'd hoped for identical. Frances knew this. She knew this the same way she knew many things shoved to the edge of our membranous marriage, engrained in a matrix of silence. No matter. Things still trickled through. Secrets still shuttled between us, if by no other means than osmosis. I'd wanted identical twins, in the same selfish way that one hoped for a boy or a girl. What better way would there have been to watch the whole nature-nature debate unfold from the playpen? Right in one's den? Double feature, no intermission. When the doctor announced we had both a boy *and* a girl, Frances, bone-tired on the gurney, caught my quick look of dismay. She snatched it up like a hawk and she never forgot it. Held onto it tight till the end. There would be nights when we drove back from vacation--Linny and Nate in the backseat, not sleeping. Fully awake from the sugar and caffeine, blooming with questions in germinal darkness: *How far up is heaven? Why do we die? How did you meet? Did you want a boy or a girl? Did you know we were twins?* And sooner or later, one would ask the inevitable: *Did you ever wish we'd been identical?*

"Of course not," my wife would say, over and over. "I've never had matching anything. Why should I have started with you two?" she'd smile. Sometimes I kept silent. Sometimes I chimed in.

"It made it easy to tell you apart. Identical twins would be boring," I'd say. And if I happened to glance over at Frances that moment, I'd see my falsehood clutched there on her lap like a cheap handkerchief, in the glow of the dashboard. It was one thing to lie to one's children. Another to lie to one's wife. Mimicry offers

some forms of protection. But never enough for a marriage. And the truth was that I'd wanted identical--*fraternal* made things more complex. There was testosterone now, there was estrogen. Sexes. Nowadays you can find these things out early with ultrasounds. The sighting of phalli has become quite the sport in Bombay and Beijing: *Ahoy! A boy!* But not then. Even in '70, one didn't discover the sex of one's infant till it squeezed its way out on the table.

Of course they came early; twins usually did. They weren't due till July, but Frances went into labor the last week of May. Just as her summertime garden was peaking. Cursing her bed rest, she tried to keep busy, puzzles and crosswords and her Agatha Christies. Staying indoors was a curse and a penance; like me, she loved being outside. I brought her clipped roses, hibiscus, gardenias. But what she craved most were the strawberries in season. Each day I stopped by the Market off Meeting Street--the farmers fresh in from the islands with produce. Tomatoes and okra, sweet Wadmalaw onions. And flats full of strawberries, fragrant *Fragaria*. It was easy to see why they belonged to the rose family--the bouquet of their redness, all gathered and glistening. A few still unripened, pinched pale at the crown like a nailbed.

I can still see her, devouring her fruit. Biting those berries, some big as a plum. "The big ones never have any flavor," she'd say, her mouth pooling with juice at the corners. "Why is that, professor? Diluted by size?" She'd thump her belly with the tip of her finger, the same way I'd seen her check for good melons. "Look at my belly. *Enormous*. I'm huge. I hope the same rules

don't apply to these babies. I want our twins to have *character*, Louis. I want them both to have *flavor*."

"I'm sure they will, darling," I reassured her. "Enough for us both. And then some."

"My grandmother said if you crave strawberries and you don't get them, your baby'll be born with a strawberry birthmark."

"I don't think you have to worry, my dear." Frances could eat a whole pint in one sitting; she could finish a flat in a week. "Sounds like an old wives' tale to me."

"I'm nervous," she told me. "About having two. We haven't had one yet. Much less two."

"We'll manage," I told her. "We can always hire Wilkie." Wilkie had helped out my family for years with the children. But Frances had already declined any assistance; she'd wanted to raise them herself.

She sat at the edge of her bed with a thousand-piece jigsaw, sifting through quarter-sized fragments of puzzle. Her fingers were puffy, she struggled with sorting, removing the straight-edged into a small pile. The front of the lid was a photo of Switzerland--crisp alpine peaks, flowered mountain chalets. It looked inviting, compared to Mt. Pleasant, the full brunt of summer already arrived.

"I'm going to get bed sores before I get through this." Frances glanced down at her belly. "I pray to Jesus these twins come before I'm done with this puzzle."

"They will. You'll finish. It's all trial and error. You just have to keep trying until a piece fits."

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... Strawberries continued from page 32

I looked at her belly, its strange new convexness. Oviparous fullness just waiting to tumble. "I suppose it's like parenting. Solving a puzzle. See what will work and what won't."

"They're not experiments!" Frances erupted. She pounded a fist on the flimsy card table; pieces of Switzerland jittered and trembled. "I wish you'd stop saying that everything's fine! You say it's all instinct. But what if it's not? What if we don't know what to do when they get here? When they get colic or come down with fever? What do we do?" Her eyes were now runny, cheeks streaming with tears, as she stared at the lid of the box. Her mother had died when Frances had been very young. Loss now returned like a letter, forgotten--slipped in an envelope, posted anew. She tossed the box lid to the floor. "I just have this feeling something bad's going to happen. Like we're a couple of Swiss village idiots. Pretending that everything's all hunky-dory. When there's a Nazi or avalanche waiting."

I went over and held her for several long minutes. Until the quivering stopped. "Nothing bad's going to happen," I said as I cupped my ear close to her belly. I'd had some hearing loss when I'd been younger; even with two hearts, my gesture was useless. I lifted her gown and I tried to draw closer; her belly was moonlike, all puckered and squiggled. Scribbled with stretch marks, our four-handed future: Frances glanced down with a shudder.

"I've heard rubbing baby pee will help to get rid of them. I don't think I'll try *that*," she said. "Isn't there something else I can put on these, professor?"

I leaned up and lowered her gown. "Sorry, my dear. They're permanent changes. There's nothing I know of that works."

"I don't believe it." She looked at me, skeptic. "We can transplant a heart. Put a man on the moon. But we still can't figure out how to get rid of these eyesores?" She gave a quick shake to her belly, disgusted. "What use is science, then? Please tell me, professor."

What use indeed. Twenty years later, it gave her six months; she stretched it to ten and a half. During her chemo, her food tasted funny; things she'd once loved she now hated, detested. Boiled eggs and coffee, fried oysters and peaches--all of them left her now wanting, estranged. But somehow her craving for strawberries returned. Dormant, in waiting, like famished cicadas. They weren't in season so Linny bought frozen; she tried to revive them at home. Blend them with ice cream or yogurt or Jello. Whatever it took to keep Frances from thinning.

"All this time I've been eating them. I never knew." Frances looked at me one day, quite startled. "Linny told me the seeds are all found on the outside. Those yellow things. You probably knew that, professor." She held up a spoon of pink pulp in the air as if she'd discovered a brand new elixir. "Imagine wearing your ovaries out like a jacket. Too bad we're human," she swallowed and smiled. "We might've seen this thing coming."



LEFT Courtyard and Birth of Apollo Statue, Schermerhorn Symphony Center. Photo by Steve Hall/Hedrich Blessing.

RIGHT Schermerhorn Symphony Center, home of the Nashville Symphony. Photo by Steve Hall/Hedrich Blessing.



... Literary libations continued from page 20

made it happen; it takes effort to get together, but it is one of the most rewarding things we've ever done.

"Literary Libations is just a quiet chat in a pretty hotel with friends - a perfect way to spend an evening."

Well, sometimes it can be quiet. The weather, the traffic, the holiday season can reduce the gathering to a side conversation between a duo or among a trio.

Even so, sitting at the bar in the Prime 108 Lounge during Literary Libations, one never knows what new friendships may be formed, say with a successful author and songwriter like Les Kerr.

"I enjoy being around other authors in a completely social situation where the subject of conversation may or may not involve writing," Les said. "One reason that people like J.T., River, and others can write such interesting books is that they are interesting people, themselves; it's fun to swap tales with them about writing and about life."

Among his many musical and literary accomplishments, Les is a co-author of the books *Tennessee* and *The All-American Truck Stop Cookbook*.

But those intimate settings can be rare.

Many times, the duos and trios are enhanced by groups of quartettes totaling as many as 20 writers, filling the lounge and spilling out into the lobby. This ensemble electrifies the place with spontaneous eruptions of excitement, support, and camaraderie.

From each writer, there can be a glow pouring from electronic devices (each with a secret message) and ambition. But superstition and modesty prevent many from sharing these

secret goals and bragging of accomplishments that hang on the horizon.

Even the bartenders know not to ask. They pour mean martinis and potent pints—keeping a good secret, as well.

But Jack knows. Jack always knows, from his position at the end of the bar. He's not on a bar stool. He's on the wall: a lithograph.

Ron Wood of the Rolling Stones created Nicholson's likeness, and it ended up a few feet from the bar. He has a sly smirk and that famous raised eyebrow, as if he knows all. And on the upper floors and roaming the hallways, there are the ghosts of Mae West, Rudolph Valentino, Huey Long, and Al Capone—all patrons: prior, of course.

Back on the ground floor, in the bar, there are the writers: hardbacks and soft covers, alike. Not far from many of those are supporting cast members—the spouses, who smile patiently and support with interest, celebrating accomplishments and encouraging. After a few aperitifs, food arrives from the hotel's restaurant: organic vegetables, hormone-free meats, sustainable seafood, artisan crafted cheses.

And floating through the air above, slowly, is the sound of a unified dialogue, made unattributed by the lateness of the hour, the clanking of glasses and silverware, the roar of the aspiring.

"They're taking Fridays off...They're..."

"Bullshi.."

"I'm fed up with fads..."

"If the authors needs to..."

"I want to be a writer, I don't want to..."

"I'll never be a Facebook person....I love it... I'm trying, but I'm over it..."

And this local event has even spread across the country.

"On the last Monday of each month, we invite writers to this informal gathering to eat, drink, and trade stories," said Charlotte Rains Dixon of Portland, Oregon. "Our first few events were great successes, with over ten writers in attendance; we even outgrew our original location."

Charlotte is a west coast writer with strong literary ties to Nashville and Middle Tennessee, which includes writing for *2nd & Church*.

Back in Nashville, J.T. said, "I do a lot of traveling, as do so many other writers, to conferences and festivals, and every time, I return reenergized, ready to sit down, focus, and write. That's what Literary Libations does, as well, albeit on a smaller scale. It's invigorating to talk books with no mandate, or expectations, or pressure to buy, or dress up - just a moment in time to come together and chat."

"Attending Literary Libations has been on my to-do list since its formation," said Catherine Randall, a local journalist and creative writing student. "Getting together with so many other writers in various stages of their careers and from different genres is not only motivating, it's also encouraging: the commendatory is priceless."

"Everyone is taken seriously, regardless of how novice or experienced; I have it on my calendar for the rest of the year."

Literary Libations may be found every fourth Thursday of the month, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Prime 108 Lounge in the Union Station Hotel. It is open to writers, journalists, poets, agents, publicists, book sellers, publishers, creatives, librarians, book readers, and lovers of the written word! No invitation is needed.

See you there!

Literary Highway

Creative writing at 85 MPH across the double-yellow lines

by Roy Burkhead



TOP Photo by Kristy Galbraith Dye

This morning in Louisville, Kentucky, I learned about the curve of the sentence from writer Sena Jeter Naslund, followed by a lecture on Faulkner at Missouri State University. During my lunch hour, I slipped into the Southern Festival of Books down in Nashville and heard Rick Bragg read from his book, *The Prince of Frogtown*. And on my way home, I will listen to the late Don Swaim speak with the late Larry Brown and Lee Smith about creative writing. And who knows where I may end up this evening after my family goes to sleep.

Oh yeah, and I did it all for free without ever leaving the inside of my iPod.

I never intended to be a road warrior.

Indeed, two years in London, England revealed to me the luxuries of mass transit. Once back home in rural Kentucky, America involved more Texaco's than trains, and living in the South has been...well, there's not many commuter rail stops on the narrow, blacktop lanes that I travel each morning and evening.

I am a 21st century literary migrant worker: I live outside of Nashville, teach creative writing and literature online at Western Kentucky University, and each day drive across middle Tennessee to my corporate writing job. Total time in motion each week: about 20 hours.

When I earned a MFA from Spalding University back in the summer of 2004, the fantasy of living a life of fine arts was alive and flowing strong in my bloodstream. And month and year by month and year, that fantasy faded as I entered middle age and assumed the responsibilities attached to that stage of life.

Despite the six hundred miles I put on my automobile each week, this is the most immobile period of my life. My wife and I are involved in a great experiment: to raise our children ourselves, without daycare. I work full-time

during the week, she works full-time on weekends, and we flip flop the childcare. Each of us split my modest vacation and sick days when a break is required. The situation leaves little time for literary conferences, workshops, residencies, and MFA alumni events. And when time off is taken, more often than not, the hours are spent on home maintenance, catching up on chores, and tickling toddlers.

The situation left me feeling jealous of my creative writing peers and friends who had the flexibility associated with being retired, self-employed, single, or without small children. It occurred to me that if I wanted to continue to study and become a serious writer, I would need to be creative and nontraditional.

As a result, I've had to scrounge for material (known as 'content' to people in the generations from the far end of the alphabet) to help me learn my craft during the time of day when I am alone: inside my automobile.

I discovered early on that reading at high speeds didn't go well with a commute that involved paths like "the ridge" and places with the word "lost" in the titles. And once my car started drifting across the double-yellow lines, I jumped to cassettes. (Remember those?) Thirty minutes on the first side; thirty more on the other. That worked well for a while, but all that manual flipping back and forth combined with 50-plus cassettes bumping and clanking together to drive me nuts. And it didn't take long before the prices of all that stuff drove my wife (aka: my chief financial officer) nuts, too.

And then, MP3 players materialized out of a science fiction short story, and these new contraptions played much more than cassettes. Unlike their plastic counterparts that contained only a certain amount of music and

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blue, plastic tumblers and pulled pillows from backpacks.

The actors and their swordplay could be heard from behind the stage as they bobbed, weaved, and thrust; a dance theater's performance allowed for the impromptu practice.

The set lights glowed as the sun hinted at setting, and the beam of light sent a signal to the crowd that it was the last chance for it to restock its provisions of pulled pork, monster brownies, and grilled cheese sandwiches.

The sun touched the horizon, and a woman tapped her companion on the shoulder, pointed across the semi-circle, and said, "For \$500, you can purchase the Royal Box Seat; you even get your own serving wench with lots of cleavage."

"Lots of cleavage?" the man asked, trying to peer into the blue tent.

"Yes: lots!"

Nearly dark, a political rally from 19th century Chicago left the players chanting "Montague, Montague, Montague, Montague." The Capulets arrived with a song that encouraged audience participation, and they worked the crowd, which had settled in to relax, sip hot drinks, and use what was left of the sun to read the following in the program:

"Everything we do—from our summer Shakespeare in the Park event to our Shakespeare Allowed! reading program at the downtown library—is designed to bring the greater community together to enjoy the enrichment of great literature." And then, the darkness increased, Venus set, and Denice Hicks rose to say "It's Showtime, Folks!" while the first of the stars began to appear.

Act I, Scene III marched across the stage, and Lady Capulet asked Juliet, "How stands your disposition to be married?" The star-cross'd lover gave her reply while blue and yellow spotlights, police sirens, ambulances, and passing vehicles scratched at her dialogue.

"O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" said Romeo.

Actors paced quietly in the back of the stage, perhaps practicing their lines or exercising jitters. A spotlight interrupted the night with an artificial day, and couples snuggled close against one another in reaction to the dropping temperatures. Saturn set, followed by the very young as the day's end caught up with their yawns. Act II, Scene IV hastened the intermission with Juliet's: "The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse."

The horn of a barge or train competed with the city's sounds, and Jupiter and her moons rose.

The moon—a waning gibbous—started to rise, glowing red on the horizon. A thousand people sat in a silent semi-circle under a cloudy moon. The temperatures continued to drop, and the crickets chirped.

A little after 10:00 p.m., actors at the side of the stage prepared for their time on the stage, and over time, Romeo screamed over his dead Juliet, just as he has done since the 17th century in big city theaters, small town high schools, and public parks.

Ever since, it has been much ado about something. Something, indeed.

"Apprentice Company auditions (for Shakespeare in the Park 2012) are April 21, Equity auditions are April 27, and Open Call Auditions are April 28," said Hicks. "First round of call backs will be on April 29.

"I'm asking to see one, two-minute Shakespearean monologue and a song written before 1950; an accompanist will be provided, or you can accompany yourself, sing a capella, or use a compact disk. We'll begin taking appointments March 1."



... Literary highway continued from page 36

audio lasting from the start of the tape to the end of the tape, MP3 players contained a seemingly-endless amount of content, most of it free and worthwhile—delivered clank-free.

So, during my lunch hours and into the evenings, I started my journey of locating, downloading, and importing free literary content into my small, square iPod's greedy belly. It's been filling and educational.

Aspects of Revision? There! William Styron and Barry Hannah? There and there! Short Story Cycles; The Art of the Interview? Of course, both there!

From deep within all of this data and pixels, jewels and golden nuggets have appeared over and over again. For example, I learned an important survival tactic from George Saunders. A recorder was playing during one of his readings, and someone "captured" that content and placed it on then net, at which time—probably around 3:15 a.m.—I grabbed a hold of it.

When he was an aspiring creative writer, he worked in a corporate position. He spoke about giving himself a George Saunders Grant for the Arts. He spoke about slipping away between technical projects to remote parts of the building to speak ideas into a tape recorder.

In short, he taught me to do what you can, when you can, in any way you can—whether you're on the road driving at 85 miles an hour or in your basement office—writing at 85 miles an hour.

Use the following links to start your own digital literary journey, but be careful if you hear George out there talking. What he says just might inspire you to go off in unanticipated directions at high rates of speed.

Sources of Literary Audio Programming

<http://wiredforbooks.org/swaim/>

For over a decade, the broadcaster Don Swaim produced the show *Book Beat*. Focusing on writers and books, each episode lasted two minutes and went out to a national audience via the CBS Radio Stations News Service.

These small programs and their full 30-45 minute, uncut audio interviews are available (at no charge) for download in a MP3 format.

<http://forum.wgbh.org/>

Boston-based WGBH Forum Network provides academic and literary podcasts and lectures available for online viewing and most as free MP3 downloads.

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

Apple's iTunes MP3 software program offers something called iTunesU, with the "U" standing for university.

The software is free and allows the listener to access and download free online programming (known as podcasts) from a centralized source, verses spending hours, days, and weeks browsing from college to college. (This program will work on computers running either Apple or Windows software.)

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

At a glance: Q2, the poetry issue

Ink hits paper in June of 2012 for our first-ever poetry issue, featuring Tennessee Poet Laureate Margaret (Maggi) Britton Vaughn.

Soon, she will be sitting down in the Bell Buckle Café with poet Kory Wells to talk poetry, prose, and goodness only knows about what else!

Whatever it is, it will be worth the wait. Poet Kate Buckley takes a trip to Bell Buckle to poke around Maggi's printing operation, the Bell Buckle Press.

And you'll also see a review of Kory's and Maggi's latest literary endeavor, *Don't Forget This Song: Celebrating the Carter Family and Other Roots Musicians*.

Together with Kelsey Wells and Carole Brown Knuth, these four writers and poets "celebrate the past and present of roots music in styles and for reasons as diverse as the music itself."

And in case you were wondering, yes: Maggi is our In Depth feature for our second issue, and we are so excited that she's taking the time to speak with us and share with us her views on the craft of poetry.

Alvin Knox, our poetry editor, has a few surprises in store for everyone, as well.

He's on a search for poetry from new and veteran poets from around the state, and there's a review of *Southern Light: Twelve Contemporary Southern Poets*, edited by Ray Zimmerman, Bruce Majors, and Ed Lindberg. *Southern Light* is a diverse collection authored by a dozen southern poets.

Columnist Charlotte Rains Dixon reviews Hollywood's latest take on Edgar Allan Poe, Gayle Edlin continues her adventures in the land of technical writing, and Renaud Rousselot de Saint Céran once more translates for us his misadventures in Middle Tennessee.

And we have a few other items of note to share with you, including a feature story on area writer Terry Price and one of his latest literary projects, *Magic Time – a WriterSpace Retreat*, held at the Penueel Ridge Retreat Center, in Ashland City, Tennessee.

By the time you read this, you will have a couple weeks left to register for it. If you do miss it, not to worry: there's another one starting up in September, entitled *Alone with Pen Naturally Retreat*.

We hope that you're enjoying our first issue of *2nd & Church*, and when you're done, check us out online for Web-exclusive content.

LEFT Photo by Terry Price

Our contributing authors

Get to know a little more about the Q1 contributors

PAIGE CRUTCHER

<http://paigesprose.blogspot.com/>

"A Conversation with Best-Selling, Award-Winning Author J. T. Ellison"

Paige Crutcher is a wordie, writer, book addict, blogger, National Authors Examiner, and columnist for *authorlink.com*. Visit her articles at: <http://www.examiner.com/authors-in-national/paige-crutcher> or follow her on Twitter: @PCrutcher.

CHARLOTTE RAINS DIXON

www.charlotterainsdixon.com

Column: "A Non-Resident's Love of Literary Nashville"

Charlotte Rains Dixon mentors entrepreneurs and creative writers from passionate idea to published and highly profitable. Charlotte is a freelance journalist, ghostwriter, and author. She is Director Emeritus and a current mentor at the Writer's Loft, a certificate writing program at Middle Tennessee State University. She earned her MFA in Writing from Spalding University and is the author of a dozen books, including *The Complete Guide to Writing Successful Fundraising Letters* and *Beautiful America's Oregon Coast*. Her fiction has appeared in *The Trunk*, *Santa Fe Writer's Project*, *Nameless Grace*, and *Somerset Studios*, and her articles have been published in *Vogue Knitting*, *The Oregonian*, and *Pology*, to name a few. She has just finished her novel, *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*.

PEGGY SMITH DUKE

<http://www.dukeperformance.com/page6.html>

Feature Story: "At Play-Developing Emerging Playwrights"

Peggy Smith Duke is a freelance writer and poet living in Middle Tennessee. She has published broadly for over 40 years, most recently in *Subtropics*, *Christian Woman*, and *Minnesota Review*.

GAYLE EDLIN

<http://www.gcedlin.com/>

Technical Writing Column: "Warning: Do Not Eat Batteries"

Gayle Edlin excelled in undergraduate mathematics and chemistry but floundered in graduate studies in physics. Through an unlikely sequence of employment events, Gayle made her way into technical writing where she flourished ... at least on the surface. Technically satiated but creatively starving, Gayle stumbled across a writing group and seized the chance to

join it. Sparks flew and before she knew it (i.e., five years later), Gayle finished her first novel, which she is now revising in preparation for seeking a publisher. Gayle also enjoys photography and takes frequent walks to indulge both this interest and her love of nature. She is seldom at a loss for words in the written form, but frequently stumbles over them in speech.

J.T. ELLISON

<http://www.jtellison.com/>

"An Interview with River Jordan: *Clearstory* and 107.1 WRFN-LP"

J.T. Ellison is the international award-winning author of seven critically acclaimed novels, multiple short stories and has been published in over twenty countries. Her novel *The Cold Room* was recently awarded the International Thriller Writers 2010 Thriller Award for Best Paperback Original. She is the bi-monthly Friday columnist at the Anthony Award nominated blog *Murderati* and is a founding member of *Killer Year*, an organization that was dedicated to raising awareness for the debut novelists of 2007. J.T. has an active following on Twitter (under the name @Thrillerchick) and a robust Facebook community. She lives in Nashville with her husband and a poorly-trained cat and is hard at work on her next novel.

ALVIN KNOX

<http://www.mtsu.edu/english/Profiles/knox.shtml>

Poetry: "Going Home" and "The Tree Has Just Begun to Wilt"

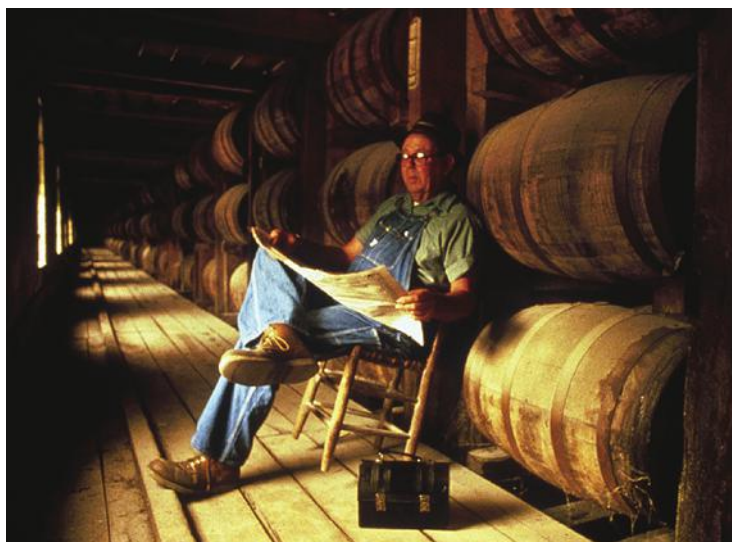
Alvin Knox received his MFA in Creative Writing--Poetry from Vermont College in 1999. Currently an Instructor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, he is one of the founding mentors of MTSU's The Writer's Loft program. His poems have appeared in various publications, including the *Southern Indiana Review*, *Algonquin*, *Frisk Magazine*, and *Tar Wolf Review*.

DAVID PIERCE

<http://www.davidwpierce.com>

Book Review: *Praying for Strangers*, by River Jordan

David Pierce is the writer of *Don't Let Me Go*, by Waterbrook Publishing—a memoir about climbing mountains with his daughter. His new book *To Kill A Zombie* was published in January 2012 by Leafwood Publishing. Currently, he teaches English at Motlow Community College in Smyrna, Tennessee and at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro.



TOP Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau



TOP Photo by Gayle Edlin

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GREGORY PLEMMONS

<http://chekhovsmistress.tumblr.com/Bio>

Flash Fiction: "Strawberries"

Gregory Plemmons graduated from Wofford College and the Medical University of South Carolina. His fiction has appeared in *Best New American Voices*, *The Yalobusha Review*, and *Yemassee*. He was awarded the Barry Hannah Prize for Fiction in 2008 and received his MFA in Writing and Literature from Bennington College. Currently, he practices and teaches pediatrics at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He is currently at work on a novel.

TERRY PRICE

<http://www.angelsshareblog.com>

Excerpt from Novel-in-Progress: *An Angel's Share*

Terry Price is a Tennessee writer, born in Nashville, about a half of a block from where he currently works. He has his MFA in Writing from Spalding University in Louisville and is a mentor in, and Director Emeritus of, The Writer's Loft creative writing program at Middle Tennessee State University. His work has appeared in the online magazine *NewSoutherner.com* and in their print anthology, *Best of New Southerner*, as well as in *Writers Notes* magazine, the online journal *BloodLotus*, and the *Timber Creek Review*, and he has had a story nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

SUZANNE CRAIG ROBERTSON

Feature Story: "From the War Memorial to Warner Park, Stories Await"

Suzanne Craig Robertson has been editor of the *Tennessee Bar Journal*, a statewide legal publication, for more than two decades. In the course of this work, she has written about members of the state and federal judiciary, recovering alcoholics and drug addicts, lawyer-missionaries, low-income people in need of legal services and those who helped them, pioneer women who broke through glass ceilings, and more. She received her bachelor's of science degree in communications/public relations from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, a certificate in creative writing from The Writer's Loft at Middle Tennessee State University, and has been a workshop participant at the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference in Grapevine, Texas.

RENAUD ROUSSELOT DE SAINT CÉLAN

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/renaud-roussetot-de-saint-céran/6/5a9/325>

Column: "From Orléans to Clarksville"

Born in Paris (12e arrondissement), Renaud lived there until he was six years old. He moved to Orléans next, where he lived until he boarded the plane that took him to Clarksville, Tennessee. After graduating from the University of Orléans, he earned a bachelor's degree from Austin Peay State University in Foreign Languages with a minor in Business. He accepted a French translation and technical writing position in Clarksville in 2006 and was recently promoted to Technical Writer II.