

2ND & CHURCH

Where Tennessee's Writers Read

Issue 2: 2012

Poetry Edition

INSPIRATIONS FROM TENNESSEE POETS

Maggi Vaughn

IN DEPTH WITH TENNESSEE'S POET LAUREATE BY KORY WELLS

Evermore

NEW POEMS FROM THE PLATEAU, KNOXVILLE, COOKEVILLE, BELL BUCKLE,
NASHVILLE, AND CHATTANOOGA

IN THIS ISSUE

Whistlin' Dixie: Songwriting Genre Arrives
Retreat: To Penuel Ridge

Featured Bookshop: Mysteries & More
Killer Nashville: Q&A with Clay Stafford



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Issue 2: 2012

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In this issue

- 5 **A Word from the Editor** by Roy Burkhead
- 8 **A Musical Journey** by Matt Urmy
- 10 **Words with Music** A Q&A with Les Kerr, songwriting columnist
- 11 **Retreat to Penuel Ridge** by Roy Burkhead
- 12 **Southern Light: A Review** by Alvin Knox
- 15 **The Raven 2012** by Charlotte Rains Dixon
- 16 **Shifting the Write Gears** by Gayle Edlin
- 20 **“Chanson d’Automne”** by Renaud Rousselot de Saint C eran
- 23 **Killer Nashville 2012** A Q&A with Clay Stafford
- 25 **Afternoon of an Author** by Kate Buckley
- 26 **Comas, Commas, and Creativity** by Carole Brown Knuth
- 28 **True to Herself** by Kory Wells
- 30 **Mysteries & More** by Suzanne Craig Robertson
- 35 **Words from the Poetry Editor** by Alvin Knox
- 36 **A Gallery of Poems** ... collection of inspired works from poets across Tennessee.
- 36 **Simple Things** by Bill Brown
- 36 **Growing Up Female** by Connie Jordan Green
- 36 **Writing As No More Than Two Kinds Of Dance** by Wayne Hogan
- 37 **The Computer Triangle** by Maggi Vaughn
- 37 **Constipated Minds** by Maggi Vaughn
- 37 **Janus** by Kate Buckley
- 37 **Firewood** by Ray Zimmerman
- 37 **Tuesday Night** by Kory Wells
- 38 **Meet Our Authors**



LEFT Tennessee Poet Laureate Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn (Photo by Terry Price)

RIGHT Photo by Terry Price

A word from the editor

Raise your hand if you've ever taken a night class at college.

That can be a tough room. Once a week, lasting for a little over three hours. Many of the students in the chairs are non-traditional, and they walk into the classroom after a long workday wearing the same clothes that they put on at least 12 hours earlier. Others are there because they waited too long to register, and they are stuck with a night class. And a few others sit in the back row, shooting the professor the stink eye, just because.

I know because I am that professor from that class: English literature at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Now I teach a couple classes online from my home in rural Tennessee, but for many semesters, I taught night classes on campus after my corporate day job, and I loved it. The only thing I didn't love was the channel noise that separated me from my students. It challenged me to be creative and to find new ways to express my love and appreciation for fiction, essays, drama, and poetry.

Yes, poetry.

One of the many reasons why I loved the poetry-portion of the semester so much was because I had a great activity to go along with the traditional classroom work.

On a building next to the Hardin Planetarium, there's a 12" rooftop telescope and several 4" telescopes. I would take the students there to read poetry and view planets, moons, constellations, star clusters in the Milky Way. After all, nature has always inspired poets.

I had the students write essays about their experiences on that rooftop, and it was a joy to discover that even some of the most skeptical of students (at first) enjoyed the event.

When Alvin and I decided to focus our second issue on poetry, all of these memories sizzled, and I knew that we had made a good decision. Alvin has hustled around the state to bring our readers new poems from Chattanooga, Cookeville, Nashville, Knoxville, and Bell Buckle. That's right, Bell Buckle: the home of our In Depth person for this issue, Tennessee Poet Laureate Margaret (Maggi) Britton Vaughn. In fact, Maggi is unveiling two new poems in this issue, and we're proud to have the opportunity to publish them.

Of course, there's much more than poetry in



this issue. Our columnists have another installment of their literary adventures, there are book reviews and the profile of a mysterious bookstore in Nashville, a killer interview signals an upcoming literary conference, and a few other surprises await. And this issue welcomes the addition of the songwriting genre to *2nd & Church* with the arrival of our latest columnist, musician and writer Les Kerr.

We are gob smacked by all of the support that we've received from across Tennessee. We appreciate it, and we thank everyone and every organization.

As part of our public service mission, we make a certain amount of copies from each print run

available to the public at no cost. *2nd & Church* may now be found in Tennessee bookstores, arts centers, libraries, and cafes in Nashville, Woodbury, Knoxville, Cookeville, Dickson, and Chattanooga. A complete listing may be found in this issue and on our Web site.

While you're reading our second issue, we're working with writers and poets to form the third issue, and we're even mapping out the fourth.

And 2013 will contain some surprises, as well. But that's then. Right now, we hope you made it through the summer's heat wave and are ready for some of the best prose and poetry in Tennessee.

Happy reading, and again: thanks!

2nd & Church

Issue 2: April - June 2012

Welcome to *2nd & Church*, a literary journal by, for, and about writers and readers. We publish four volumes each year, once each quarter, and *2nd & Church* is for sale via HP MagCloud.

Readers may download a free digital copy and/or purchase a traditional paper copy by visiting us online at <http://www.2ndandchurch.com>. Own an iPad? If so, then do you have the MagCloud app? It's free and allows you to download all sorts of FREE publications, including *2nd & Church*! Fire it up and search for us. It's fast, free, and easy.

As part of our public service mission, we make a limited amount of complimentary copies of each print run available at the following locations:

Knox County Public Library (Knoxville, TN.)
Lawson McGhee Library (Knoxville, TN.)
Mysteries & More (Nashville, TN.)
Parnassus Books (Nashville, TN.)
Poets on the Square (Cookeville, TN.)
Reading Rock Books (Dickson, TN.)
The Arts Center of Cannon County (Woodbury, TN.)
Winder Binder Gallery & Bookstore (Chattanooga, TN.)

Our mission

Our goal is to be inclusive of many different types of writers and writing: creative nonfiction, technical writing,

literary fiction, W4C, poetry, translation, and commercial fiction. In addition, *2nd & Church* includes brief news and feature stories that explore the creative writing life.

What does it mean for a writer or reader to live a life of fine arts, 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 will support our mission. Send up to six poems and/or about 1,000 words of prose. For work over 1,000 words, query first.

We will consider novel excerpts, but the selection of material must be able to stand alone: be self-contained. We prefer to assign book reviews and criticism; please don't submit those to us.

And in general, we don't publish essays on craft. (Please visit us online for complete writing and submission guidelines.)

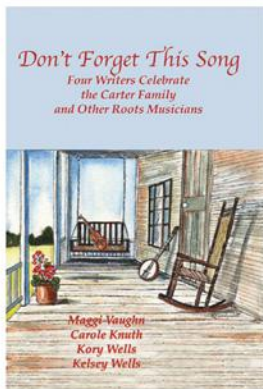


TOP Photo by Fredrick A. Dye



A Musical Journey

One great song deserves another by Matt Army



TOP *Don't Forget This Song* celebrates "the past and present of roots music in styles and for reasons as diverse as the music itself."

Try to imagine yourself on a front porch, listening to a folk song being sung by the man who would plant the roots of what would become known as American Country Music... this has been the work of four women who have brought us a new collection of prose and poetry entitled, *Don't Forget This Song*.

Maggi Vaughn (Poet Laureate of Tennessee), Carole Brown Knuth, Kory Wells, and Kelsey Wells have worked together, focusing their talents with language to paint us a living portrait that not only tells the story of the Carter family, but also melds these stories with the everyday scenery of life in Smoky Mountain country, as well as the spirit that dwells there, and mused the first inspirations of our country music tradition.

The book is a free-form collaboration...and though formal poetry does reside within, like the Haiku, "History and Culture," the collection itself, the collaboration between these women, is as free and down home as its subject matter. *Don't Forget This Song* is as much a book of praise for music as it is for the creators of it.

Instead of writing a review of the styles of writing that are employed in the manuscript, which are as diverse as the group of its authors, it is more compelling to take the time to point out the nature of the collaboration. Each author in this collection has come to experience country music, and more specifically, the music of the Carter's in their own way, in their own time.

Whether it is as a personal friend of the Carter family or as a fiddle player studying the music as a musician, this collection stands as a testimony to the universal and timeless power that resides within this early music.

These authors illustrate for us how connected we all are

to our natural environments and how our inspirations draw so much of their power from our surroundings. By writing in such detail about the landscape surrounding the Smoky Mountain region near Bristol, Tennessee, we are able to understand the music that was born there all the more.

Poetry is our way of responding to the universe. We bring all of our experience, questions, and longings into language, seeking to understand them better...to pass them on and share them with those around us, or to those who will come after we have gone. These women are working in the same tradition as the early songwriters and singers they praise in this book. They are handing down the stories for another generation to find.

This book wants its readers to experience the sounds of the South, of the region where country music was born. Its exploration of voices is one of its most compelling qualities. The voice of the mother, of the omniscient narrator, the grandfather in his rocking chair... the book is wonderfully descriptive and rich with imagery.

It's no easy task, either, putting a book together with multiple contributors. It takes a willingness to share a vision. When it is done correctly, we get collections full of diversity that offer us greater insight and enjoyment than comes from a collection by a single author.

We are taken on a river journey through an era where one of America's greatest traditions was born, given insight into the lives of the people who brought the music to life, and most importantly, given the gift of experiencing it through the poetic lenses of these four contemporary women.

And this is what great art does...spurn other great art to be made. So sit back, stay awhile, and let them take you on the journey.

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Words with Music

A Q&A with Les Kerr, *2nd & Church's* new songwriting columnist

After accepting a columnist position with us for the songwriting genre, songwriter, recording artist, and performer Les Kerr sat down with us to talk about his views on songwriting and how he plans to explore that in his column. Les brings blues, Rockabilly, New Orleans music, Zydeco, and bluegrass together to create his "Hillbilly Blues Caribbean Rock & Roll." Now based in Nashville, Kerr was born in Louisiana and raised in Mississippi in the Gulf Coast city of Pascagoula and in Jackson.

2nd & Church: Can you remember the first song that you ever wrote? If so, would you say a little bit about it?

Les Kerr: In high school, I was terrible at algebra. My sympathetic teacher offered to let me write a report on mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss for extra credit. I had been playing guitar for a couple of years and was interested in writing songs, so I wrote a song that included all the relevant facts and performed it in class. The one line I remember is, "Carl Friedrich Gauss, I think you are a louse!" At least it rhymed and conveyed my opinion of his system of complex numbers! By the way, I did pass the course.

2nd & Church: You've been a co-writer for a couple of books: *The All-American Truck Stop Cookbook* and *Tennessee*. Could you tell our readers about those projects and your involvement?

Les Kerr: I have a journalism degree from Ole Miss and was a full time broadcast journalist for seven years. Then, and since, I have written for many print publications. Ken Beck and Jim Clark approached me about writing the cookbook with them because I had been writing regularly for *Tennessee Trucking News*. That allowed me to contribute contemporary industry information



TOP Songwriter Les Kerr's first column appears in the next issue of *2nd & Church*.

and trucking lore. Aside from 200 recipes, full feature stories run throughout the book. I interviewed a 30-year plus veteran truck stop waitress, the curator of the Route 66 Museum, trucking radio show hosts, drivers, dispatchers, and other interesting people. There's a lot of Americana in between the recipes.

Tennessee is a beautiful coffee table book with photos by George Humphries that jump off the page while you look at them. I was asked to write my impressions of Tennessee without seeing the photos. The publisher wanted my essay not to be influenced by the pictures.

2nd & Church: How and when did you get involved in writing songs? Do you approach songwriting differently than writing for a book?

Les Kerr: Although I was able to pass my algebra class with a song in high school, I didn't start seriously writing songs until I was in college.

The books I've worked on had a distinct theme, and I approached them as assignments. I've never

written fiction. Most songs I write start from the heart or from something I have heard or read that spoke to me. However, I have been commissioned to write a couple of songs over the years, and I combined the approaches of writing on assignment and from pure emotion.

2nd & Church: What time of day do you prefer to write? Do you have to write in the same space/place each time or can you write anywhere?

Les Kerr: I have written songs at all hours, and if I'm moved to write at a given moment and can take the time to do it, I get my thoughts on paper. I've made up songs in the shower, hotel rooms, while driving, and at other times when I'm alone.

On the table in my home office, there are paper napkins, receipts, and business cards with new song ideas and lines for songs that I've scribbled in restaurants, at stop lights, during meetings, and so forth. If I'm working on a song that one of these will fit, I try them out when I can. If they are new song ideas, I use that stack of paper as a list of what to write next.

While I write these lines and snippets wherever I am, I usually get down to business of putting them together in a coherent form with music in my office.

My writing on book projects has always been at a computer during what could be called, *regular business hours*.

2nd & Church: Is there any specific spot that you go in Nashville to write or for inspiration?

Les Kerr: No, but I try to look for it wherever I am. Many of my songs are about places where I've spent a lot of time, like Nashville, the Gulf Coast, Mississippi, Memphis, and New Orleans.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



Retreat to Penuel Ridge

Trio of writers provide path to inspiration by Roy Burkhead

From Nashville, go west for a little over half an hour. The 20-mile ride along I-40, US-70, River Road, TN-251, and Sams Creek Road will nestle the traveler near the Cheatham Wildlife Management Area at a place called Penuel: Ashland City's Penuel Ridge Retreat Center.

The center's name comes from the Book of Genesis, in which Jacob wrestles with God. Now, for those wrestling with their words and seeking creative inspiration, they can come to this place, as well.

"I believe strongly in the retreat format and have found both from personal experience and also anecdotally from clients that it's a marvelous way to jumpstart your work," said writer Terry Price, one of the retreat leaders for Time, Space, and Words Writing Retreat, lasting from September 27-30.

"For a writer, going on retreat is the ultimate luxury," said Charlotte Rains Dixon. (Charlotte is the other retreat leader.) "When you give yourself time

and space to write, your creative mind opens up to all kinds of new possibilities. "Terry has the gifts of knowledge of his field combined with a good ear, which makes him a marvelous mentor."

These writers met in 2003 at The Writer's Loft, Middle Tennessee State University's non-residency Certificate in Creative Writing program. Charlotte was one of the first mentors, and Terry was one of the first students. Both are graduates of Spalding University's MFA in Writing program, which was the model of (and inspiration for) The Writer's Loft. Both are mentors at the Loft, and for a time, they were co-program directors.

"I'm excited to be working with Terry again; this retreat gives us a chance to produce another project together," Charlotte said. "As Terry always says, he has the left brain, I have the right brain, and together we make a whole brain!"

And what does it take to pull off a retreat, other than a tremendous amount of preparation? "The Number One thing to know about pulling off

a successful retreat is to pick a partner like Terry," said Carolyn Flynn.

Carolyn was a retreat leader with Terry at the center earlier this year, and they'll be putting on another one there in early 2013. "At the retreat we wanted, above all, for people to be able to come to write; first and foremost, we wanted people to have a committed, deepening relationship with the page and with their Muses."

"When I first decided to write, coach, and mentor full time, I knew that retreats were going to be integral to my offerings," Terry said. "I've been on many retreats and know how valuable it is to get away to learn, breathe, and write."

In addition to time to write, Terry and Carolyn give aspiring writers something else, and it happens every Tuesday morning.

According to Carolyn, "The Free Conference Call for Writers: Crafting the Writing Life" came about as a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

Southern Light: A Review

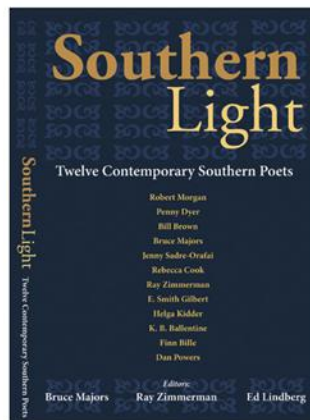
How this eclectic collection of poems captures the imagination through narrative, lyrics, and humor by Alvin Knox

"We made John's Place an icon," declares the first line of Bruce Major's "Flying Like Angels." I'm sitting in the parking lot at John's Place now. Yes, it's still here, some thirty to forty years after the time frame of the poem, and if the mops and bucket outside the backdoor are any indicator, it's still open, though now a shorter stone's throw away from a much busier Highway 70. Some icons die hard and die slowly, despite the changing world around them.

There's a kind of ingrained stubbornness to some things, to some places, to some ways of life, but even rock succumbs to erosion, as the broken and catacombed limestone of central Tennessee attests. The tension between change and resistance to it is implicit in many works found in *Southern Light*, a collection of poems by twelve Southern writers edited by Bruce Majors, Ray Zimmerman, and Ed Lindberg (Ford, Falcon & McNeil Publishers, 2011). Captured in the diverse voices of this volume is a chronicle of cherished pasts and inevitable change.

One of the best aspects of *Southern Light* is its focus on a relatively small number of poets, allowing the voice and range of each to be more fully experienced and explored than is typical of more broadly based collections. The volume opens with a group of twenty poems by Robert Morgan, many of which recall, in some manner, a time past, and they do so with a quiet elegance. Poems remembering family members ("When He Spoke Out of the Dark," "Uncle Robert," and, less directly, "Heaven"), early church experiences ("The Gift of Tongues" and "Bellope"), and the childhood ritual of "Firecrackers at Christmas" are captured with "an ancient / lull almost unheard but coming / along the world's edge over / clay and subsoil" ("Broomsedge").

Other poems, such as "Radio," "Inertia," and "Radiation Pressure," remind us of the science and technology that drive current human advancement, but



they do so with a melancholy note of resistance "as our way / weeps away to the horizon / in this eye where the past flies ahead" ("Rearview Mirror"). Stylistically, as well, Morgan's poems refuse to rest: narratives and lyrics, moderately long to relatively short, there's even a pantoum, a traditional verse form based on repeating lines ("Audubon's Flute"). Regardless of their content or style, however, the poems are consistently arresting in their language and ability to capture the sublimity of human existence.

The eclectic nature of the opening group of poems is indicative of the volume as a whole, and, as one is drawn through the pages, the range of the collection becomes only greater.

Poems of remembrance and faith and science/technology are joined by poems about relationships and doubt and art, and the sections introduce the perspectives of new voices, those of the poets themselves, certainly, but also, at times, of voices created by the poets' imaginations.

The variety of language and style also increases; predominantly concrete narratives are found in close proximity to highly imaginative and figurative lyrical poems, and predominantly serious poems are virtually juxtaposed with poems that employ overt humor. Often, a single poem creatively blends content so that the poet's role as a chronicler of events merges with his/her faith, humor becomes a vehicle for social commentary, or a storm becomes a vehicle of change.

In Penny Dyer's "Awaiting the Fall of Babylon," the poem's speaker offers us a retrospective narrative of a child living through the Cuban Missile Crisis, a child who "believe[d] in the invisible, / the plutonium wind that crept through the / oak trees," a child who "prayed / while I waited for the Lord's second coming," and who, through the perspective of her Christian faith, sensed and illuminated the tension of the event: "The breath of God hovered."

BOTTOM Photo by Kristy Galbraith Dye

Ray Zimmerman's "No Hair" uses a short line and sing-songy rhyme to create a satirical commentary on health care: "new prescriptions / pay how? / Everyone wants / my money now." "From the Night Porch," by Bill Brown, witnesses the beauty of an approaching Southern thunderstorm, where "storms are like the future, / three miles away / closing fast."

This kind of twining of ideas makes it difficult to categorize and catalog the 183 poems in *Southern Light*, but that difficulty is exactly what makes the collection an engaging reading experience. With the turning of each page, something new, and often unexpected, awaits. On page 108, you encounter Jenny Sadre-Orafai's application of the Hansel and Gretel fairytale trail of breadcrumbs as a means to "lose" an unwanted husband: "I ache for your failure. I refuse you clues. / I await your unsafe return." A mere nine poems later, you're reading Rebecca Cook's "Stones," a lament of disconnection with the natural world, wherein the speaker grieves, "I can't hear what the stone is saying to me, / it speaks too softly. I sit with my face down / because I am ashamed." After a few more pages, E. Smith Gilbert (a pseudonym)

contemplates the relationship between God, the Devil, and Death. "Each one affectionately kissed the other. / They dressed alike, as they should, / close to being triplets." There are Helga Kidder's ekphrastic poems ("O'Keeffe's *Purple Petunia*," "Discourse of Pleasure," "Calla Lilies"), K.B. Ballentine's observations of the natural world ("Daybreak at the Old City Park," "Frost Line," "Unnatural Trend"), Finn Bille's poems recalling a house fire ("Mug," "Silence of Ashes," "Starling"), and Dan Power's explorations of the hardships of agrarian life ("Third Missed Payment," "Third Generation Farming," "Aching Hands").

In a cover blurb for *Southern Light*, Earl S. Braggs notes the voices of this collection are "keenly perceptive and understanding, western, yet universal"; he is accurate in that observation. This is a book where every reading produces another dog-eared page, and another, and another. But the clouds are gathering dark and low over the parking lot of John's Place. I feel the urge to tear "Flying Like Angels" from the book and tape it to the tavern's door, but there's a rumble of thunder in the distance, and I know, that like the other poems in *Southern Light*, I'll want to return to it another day.





The Raven 2012

A writer's reaction to the gothic horror flick depicting Edgar Allan Poe's last days by Charlotte Rains Dixon

I was alone in the theater the afternoon I saw *The Raven*, the current movie about the last days of author Edgar Allan Poe. The movie portrays a serial killer who re-enacts Poe's famous murders. Think "The Pit and the Pendulum."

I was instantly transported to the streets of Baltimore, Maryland in 1849 (apologies to residents of Baltimore, but to me the city looks about the same today, as far as I can tell—grim and dirty). So it came as some surprise that I had the dickens of a time coming up with anything to write about. This state of lack required an evening of wine and an entire day of obsessing over potential topics to rectify.

I could write, I figured, about how actor John Cusack looks so much like the grainy photos of Edgar Allan Poe one can see on the Internet that it's uncanny and how at first I thought I wasn't going to like Cusack in the role at all. At first I thought I wasn't going to like the movie. And then Cusack and the movie entranced me, gore and all. But that's not enough material for a column in a magazine.

So maybe I should write about the first scene in which we get to see Poe, which establishes him as a broke, drunk writer. This scene shows him in a bar, trying to finagle a drink from the bartender who is having none of it because Poe still hasn't paid an overdue tab. Angry, our hero yells to the crowd that there will be drinks for whomever can finish the line "Quoth the Raven..." The crowd boos and jeers until one brave soul yells out, "Nevermore!"

In researching Poe's life, research being what we writers do when no other option presents itself, I learned the following from this pithy

quote on the Web: "He was the first well-known American writer to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career." So, life for a writer in previous centuries was much the same as it is now.

Or perhaps I could write about the enduring fascination with Poe and the books and movies that have been written and made about him through the years. Books that have been written about Poe include novels too numerous to list, as well as a slew of biographies, of course. Movies about the man seem to be a growth industry lately. There's a 2011 horror film called *Twixt*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, with Poe played

couple of days is amazing. Furthermore, the cause of death and his whereabouts during his last few days on earth are a mystery, one that many have attempted to solve. This is the clever conceit the movie takes as its frame—explaining what happened to Poe during those last days. And it is the mystery of his death that incites my interest with the most urgency as I flail about, attempting to write this column.

There's something downright poignant about the story of his last days, particularly because Edgar Allan Poe is one of America's favorite literary heroes, a man responsible for inventing the detective fiction genre, for God's sake. And yet we

There's something downright poignant about the story of his last days, particularly because Edgar Allan Poe is one of America's favorite literary heroes, a man responsible for inventing the detective fiction genre ...

by Ben Chaplin. A 2011 comedy called *Lives and Deaths of the Poets* featured Poe. And rumor has it that besides *The Raven*, there's yet another film about Poe coming out in 2012, written and directed by Sylvester Stallone, called (originally enough) *Poe*.

All this for a man who died at age 40. Yes, 40. I think I knew that, but learning it again in the numerous biographies I've read over the past

don't know what killed him, what he did, or where he was during his last days. The mystery writer begot an unsolvable mystery of his own. Here's what we do know: Poe left Richmond, Virginia on September 27, 1849, supposedly on his way home to New York. Yet five days later, he was found delirious in Baltimore, Maryland. The movie places

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

Shifting the Write Gears

Bike writing the miles to a first novel by Gayle Edlin

When I had insomnia and the doctor said, “Make time to exercise; it’ll make the most difference,” I found time to exercise. In retrospect, it wasn’t that difficult. After all, at that point it wasn’t as if I was sleeping in the wee morning hours ... why not fill the void of sleep with prescribed exercise? That shaky start turned into a habit, and that habit did help put my insomnia to rest, as my doctor said it would.

It struck me that when your physical welfare is on the line, there’s a galvanizing effect up to and including extremes which would otherwise cause you to scoff. (“What? Me, exercise? At 4:30 in the morning? Pshaw!”)

Desperation masquerading as insomnia may have made me a morning person, but I am not one of “those people” by nature. It was physically painful for me to leave my bed—even when I wasn’t able to sleep in it—and stagger out into the dismal predawn gloom, hobbling down the road in a gross imitation of a real runner. But I was so miserable under the grim auspices of sleeplessness that I was willing to try anything. I was willing to fight for my fortune ... my physical fortune, anyway.

As much as I might wish it were otherwise, I’ve short-changed my mental wellness more often than I’ve paid it in full. And I’m not alone: there are scores of artificially chipper posters in private businesses and public buildings alike, each one dedicated to touting the specific physical health benefits of exercising. But as for mental soundness, the ubiquitous and vague suggestion, when it is included in trite buzzwords and stamped on a placard at all, is simply to “reduce stress.”

As writers, we know that writing can help

us with stress; writing is a need that demands to be met. Before I’d had a child and a job that stipulated more hours than the 40 per week I was prepared to give it, I’d practiced regular creative writing with excellent results. Writing is what writers do, but figuring out when to do it can prove as tricky as gleaning insightful information from a poster on a corporate campus wall.

I found it downright irritating since there I was, out running in the barely-lit hours of the *ante meridiem*, and the ideas I had for writing were sparking with almost enough energy to light my path. A side benefit of exercising my body was that my mind was falling into step, too, exerting its ability to generate new thoughts and new stories that I longed to write.

Necessity, cliché has it, is the mother of invention. For me, it was not necessity so much as fickle circumstance that inspired me to consider multitasking when it came to exercise and writing. I developed a stress fracture, and my preferred insomnia-preventing activity, running, was not going to be an option for six weeks. In the interim of requisite impact reduction, I turned to a seldom-used stationary bike in my basement—it was the single most boring thing I’d ever done in the name of physical activity.

The ideas that had illuminated my running days kept coming, and with the monotony of riding my basement bicycle drew me to impetuous consideration: multitasking. Mornings were my time to exercise and exercise inspired me to write: perhaps I could combine the two?

My first bike-writing stand was not so much



TOP Photos by Gayle Edlin

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

BELOW Photo by Tim Hursley and courtesy of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum



... Words with Music continued from page 10

I live in Nashville and still travel to the other places. Combining memories with my current experiences usually provides inspiration.

I have mentioned Rotier's Restaurant in Nashville and The Rendezvous in Memphis in songs and have written a complete song about The Camellia Grill in New Orleans, so I guess some restaurants inspire me. My waistline would also attest to that.

In 2005, I was commissioned to write a theme song for Cookeville, Tennessee, and I spent time there observing and researching. That whole area is beautiful, and I incorporated what I saw into the lyrics. My friend Bryan Cumming wrote it with me, and our song is called *Highlands of Tennessee*.

2nd & Church: What sort of tools do you use to write songs? If we could look in on you during a songwriting session, what tools and items would we see? Computer? Typewriter? Musical instruments? Dictionary or thesaurus? Notepad and pencil? Something else?

Les Kerr: I write on legal pads and have a couple of fountain pens I enjoy using, although anything that writes will work as long as I can get the words on paper. Usually, I have my guitar, as well, because words and music work together in guiding the structure of a song. The dictionary is always handy because I like to make sure the meaning of a word is what I want to convey, if I am unsure about it.

2nd & Church: What do you start with? The words? The melody? The chorus? Do you build a

story around a piece of music, or do you create music to help tell a story? Some other scenario?

Les Kerr: There's no set pattern but lyrical ideas come first most of the time. Many times, however, a phrase will "sound musical," and a melody seems to develop with it. One song where words and music occurred simultaneously is "New Orleans in the Spring." The lyrics were published in a poetry anthology, and I am very proud of that.

While I have created some melodies that seem to call for words first, mostly, the lyrics guide the melody for me.

2nd & Church: Listening to your music, it's easy to see literary hints and references. What have been some of your favorite novelists, writers, and poets? Favorite books and stories? You reading anything at the moment? You have a favorite magazine?

Les Kerr: My favorite authors are the best storytellers. Hemingway and Twain come to mind immediately and Faulkner to some extent. I like Faulkner's early work before he realized he was Faulkner – *New Orleans Sketches*, *Mosquitoes*, and *Flags in the Dust*. The plays of Tennessee Williams have also fascinated me.

I've read many of John D. MacDonald's mystery novels and more recently, James Lee Burke. Biographies inspire me. *The Autobiography of Will Rogers* and *The Yogi Book* by Yogi Berra are always on my desk. Any page in either will make me think. Hunter S. Thompson is also a favorite. He was a reckless genius, and I find his view of the

world and descriptions of his own exploits to be compelling.

The late New Orleans poet Everette Maddox could really hit the nail on the head. I knew Everette, and his poems have a great way of cutting through to truth.

I also love Rudyard Kipling's poems because he told great stories, and his meter could easily be adapted to music. In fact, Jim Croce recorded a song version of *Gunga Din* prior to his commercial success. I think Kipling's poetry beyond *If* and *Gunga Din* is too often overlooked.

Now I'm reading *The Magic of Thinking Big* by David Schwartz. While words and music bring me extreme personal pleasure, together and separately, I have chosen them as my business, and I'm always trying to learn new techniques and attitudes that will help move my career forward.

Favorite magazines: The New Orleans-based music publication *OffBEAT* and *Islands* magazine.

2nd & Church: Can you talk a little bit about some of the things that you plan on exploring over the next three or four issues in your column with *2nd & Church*?

Les Kerr: How and why writers write, their personal motivations, and why they chose Nashville to pursue their craft will probably surface. The variety of music styles beyond country that are being written in Tennessee, including blues, jazz, and gospel are also interesting, as well as some "under the radar" songwriting events and gatherings.



LEFT The Laurel Theatre, about a block from James Agee Park, in Knoxville, Tennessee's Ft. Sanders neighborhood. Agee grew up in Ft. Sanders and placed his novel *A Death in the Family* there. The Knoxville Writers Guild holds its meetings in the theatre, which is run by Jubilee Community Arts. (Photo by Gary R. Johnson)

... The Raven 2012 continued from page 15

him on a park bench, but most bios I read locate him on the streets outside Ryan's Tavern. A printer named Joseph Walker sent a letter requesting help (love that the mail was reliable enough in those days you could send a letter on an urgent matter) to a doctor named Joseph Snodgrass, who knew Poe. Despite Poe's unkempt, haggard appearance, Snodgrass turned his care over to yet another Joseph, Joseph Moran, who tended Poe at a local hospital. (Interesting side note: part of his haggardness stemmed from the wearing of shabby clothes, which were believed not to be his, because that would have been uncharacteristic of Poe.)

Poe repeatedly called out the name "Reynolds," and to this day nobody is sure to whom he referred. It might have been a local newspaper editor of some repute or a local judge. Then

again, it might have been made up because the only eyewitness to Poe's decline was the doctor, Joseph Moran, and his credibility was later called into question, seeing as how his story changed repeatedly as he wrote and lectured about Poe's death through the ensuing years.

Moran assigned the following last words to Poe: "Lord, help my poor soul," though this, too, has been disputed, with critics declaring that Poe would hardly be capable of such sentiment, let alone the well formed sentence, in his delirious state.

Whatever his last words, Poe died on October 7, 1849, and any medical and death records that were kept have been lost.

Countless theories about Poe's death have been advanced since then. Some say it was murder, others suicide, since Poe suffered from

depression. Alcohol is often mentioned, as is laudanum, a common painkiller at the time. Other theories include rabies, cholera, syphilis, and influenza. Yet others propose that it could have come from the practice of cooping, in which men (women didn't yet have the vote) were often drugged and forced to vote repeatedly for a candidate. Matthew Pearl, author of the recent novel *The Poe Shadow*, believes Poe may have died of a brain tumor.

But we may never know for certain. Which leads this modern day writer--practicing the same art of words over a hundred and fifty years after Poe's death--only one choice: read as much as possible about the man, inhale his classic works, and emulate him by writing, writing like the wind. Oh, and go see the movie. It'll be out on DVD by the time you read these words.

... Retreat to Penuel Ridge continued from page 11

way to promote the retreat, with the larger goal of building an audience for all that Terry and I were offering to writers to reach their dreams."

"I was aware of others who were using the phone conference format to present different subject matters and thought it was a great way to connect with other creative," Terry said. "By going live every week, there is a great energy that takes place. By recording the calls and uploading as podcasts, you give your potential listeners flexibility to listen according to their schedules."

And do these retreats, conference calls, and so many other approaches help?

Carolyn, who also has a MFA in Writing from Spalding University, finished her novel manuscript (*Searching for Persephone*) one month after her graduation, and she's revising a short story collection.

Terry is wrapping up work on his first novel (*An Angel's Share*), as well as revising a short story collection. And in February of 2013, Vagabondage Press is publishing Charlotte's novel, *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*. So, any aspiring authors would do well to pack those bags, head west, and listen to what these folks have to say and share.

UPCOMING RETREATS

- *Time, Space, and Words Writing Retreat (September 27-30, 2012) Penuel Ridge Retreat Center in Ashland City, Tennessee.* (Terry Price and Charlotte Rains Dixon - Retreat leaders)
- *Magic Time - a WriterSpace Retreat (January 31-February 3, 2013) Albuquerque, New Mexico* (Terry Price and Carolyn Flynn - Retreat leaders)
- *Chianti and Creativity Writers Retreat (March 9-16, 2013) Castello di Colognole, a beautiful castle in Greve-in-Chianti in Tuscany, near Florence* (Terry Price - Retreat leader)
- *Magic Time - a WriterSpace Retreat (April 18-21, 2013) Penuel Ridge Retreat Center* (Terry Price and Carolyn Flynn - Retreat leaders)

"We aim to offer the writer the best of all worlds, encouragement and support for their writing, a convivial atmosphere, and plenty of peace and quiet to work on their own," Charlotte said. Learn more about these writers and their projects at <http://www.terryprice.net/>, <http://www.wordstrumpet.com/>, and <http://www.carolynflynn.com/>

Free Inspiration Available Each Week

Need a little boost to get your creativity going? If so, then each Tuesday morning, join Terry Price and Carolyn Flynn for *Crafting the Writing Life*, their free weekly literary conference call.

How to join in? Just before or at 10:00 a.m. central time, dial in at: 1-626-677-3000. When prompted, enter participant access code: 1776137. Your call is muted until you press *6, after which you will be unmuted and may ask your question or make a comment. Although the call is free, your own long distance charge, if any, will apply for those calling outside of the 626 area code. Spots are limited and participants will be allowed on a first come, first serve basis.

And if you can't join them live, look for their podcast to appear a few hours after the call at www.terryprice.net, or you may download them from the iTunes Store by searching for Terry Price and Carolyn Flynn!

Joining a Retreat

To learn more about how to prepare for September's Penuel Ridge retreat, check out Terry's Web site, in addition to his Q&A with us, online at www.2ndandchurch.com.

“Chanson d’Automne”

...or the challenge of translating poetry by Renaud Rousselot de Saint Céran

When Roy Burkhead – 2nd & Church Master Puppeteer - told me the general theme for this issue was poetry, I became nervous as I was not well ‘versed’ in the matter (pun intended). Moreover, as a Frenchman and small contributor to this journal, I wanted to give a French ‘flavor’ to my column.

Reconciling all these elements proved challenging: How could I tie together poetry and ‘French seasoning’ while writing for an American audience? The answer came from an unlikely source: this journal’s release date itself. Scheduled to be published around June, it dawned on me that one of the most famous French poems had strong ties to D-Day. There was my French-American connection!

My second challenge was to find an English translation that did justice to the original, to share it here. As an occasional translator in the technical field, I was curious to see what hurdles one encounters when translating poetry.

Paul Verlaine’s first stanza from his poem “Chanson d’Automne” (*Poèmes saturniens*, 1866) has remained one of the most famous and iconic coded messages used during World War II, thanks in part to movies such as *The Longest Day*:

*Les sanglots longs
Des violons
De l’automne
Blessent mon cœur
D’une langueur
Monotone.*

The first three lines were broadcasted by the BBC on June 1, 1944 to let the French Resistance know Operation Overlord was to start within two weeks. The last three were broadcasted late on

June 5 and indicated D-Day was imminent. It was a signal for the resistance to ramp up their sabotage operations to weaken the German army. I’ll stop here this concise historical sidebar and focus on the poem instead. Here are the last two stanzas that complete it:

*Tout suffocant
Et blême, quand
Sonne l’heure,
Je me souviens
Des jours anciens
Et je pleure*

*Et je m’en vais
Au vent mauvais
Qui m’emporte
Deçà, delà,
Pareil à la
Feuille morte.*

Paul Verlaine uses the symbolism of Fall to depict his state of mind. Here, Autumn is not synonym of blazing colors and abundant crops, but rather a season of sadness and melancholy signaling the dusk of the poet’s life.

This poem is made of short three- and four-syllable lines built on a combination of rhymes called “rythmus tripartitus,” meaning the same rhyme is repeated after two lines (AABCCB).

*(...)
De l’automne
Blessent mon cœur
D’une langueur
Monotone.*

This is important because this structure

becomes hard to mirror when translating the poem into English. This explains why a quick Google search brings up a (too) literal translation such as this one:

*The long sobs
Of the violins
Of Autumn
Wound my heart
With a monotonous
Languor.*

*All choked
And pale, when
The hour chimes,
I remember
Days of old
And I cry*

*And I’m going
On an ill wind
That carries me
Here and there,
As if a
Dead leaf.*

Although close to the original text, this version is rather dry and uninspiring. Gone are the rhymes and the musical tone of the French version (carried away by an ill wind, I presume). Here the translator sticks to the original poem, with the clear intention to focus only on rendering its meaning.

This version also lacks cohesion, as the three- and four-syllable lines creating the musicality of the French version have been replaced by a “cacophony” of 2/3/4/6 syllable lines. Unsatisfied with this translation I kept looking for a better one.



Then, I stumbled upon this interesting version by Walter A. Aue, translated into English from a German adaptation:

*The sobbing calls
from the fall's
fiddles' moan
through my breast
languidest
monodrone.*

*All out of breath
and pale, as
hours fly
my eyes behold
the days of old,
and I cry,*

*and I'll be gone
to wild winds thrown,
tossed aside
once to, once fro:
like wild winds blow
leaves that died.*

This version is not as literal as the previous one. Here, the sobbing violins have been replaced by moaning fiddles, the author doesn't remember the "days of old" but rather "behold" them with his eyes, and the wild winds appear twice in the last stanza, where the French only has it once. These small changes indicate how difficult it is to translate poetry.

The author had to adapt the text in order to stay close to the AABCCB rhyme structure of the French version. He does miss the rhyme in the

second stanza ("All out of breath/and pale as") and comes a bit short in the third one ("and I'll be gone/to wild winds thrown").

As I kept prospecting the Web I came across two additional versions worth sharing:

The first one is from Arthur Symons (*Poems - 2 vols. First Collected Edition. 1902*)

*When a sighing begins
In the violins
Of the autumn-song,
My heart is drowned
In the slow sound
Languorous and long*

*Pale as with pain,
Breath fails me when
The hours tolls deep.
My thoughts recover
The days that are over
And I weep.*

*And I go
Where the winds know,
Broken and brief,
To and fro,
As the winds blow
A dead leaf.*

Once again we see how the author had to adapt the text to create the rhymes in English. Unlike the previous version, however, this one doesn't "miss" a rhyme. The repetition of "winds" in the last stanza leaves me unsettled however.

The second one, my favorite, is from C. John Holcombe:

*Inconsolable winds
Bring violins,
And autumn's part
Is monotonous
And languorous,
Pain to the heart-*

*Suffocating, pale
Halting and stale
Slowly hours creep,
Gather and fall
As I recall
Past days and weep.*

*Tossed this way
And that as winds may,
One with the grief
Hither and yon
Carried and gone,
Dead the leaf.*

Here, not only does the rhyming structured mirror the French perfectly, but he also avoids the repetition of "winds" in the last stanza. Repetitions are somewhat frowned upon in French, which makes this version a better one in my book.

This brief and superficial look at a few translations of "Chanson d'Automne" goes to show the great difficulties encountered when translating poetry (and any type of literature, in general). Achieving perfection is impossible as differences of languages and syntax are often in the way. The concept of "lost in translation" comes to mind. I have to say that while slightly different from the original, these versions have their own interesting flavor, *nest-ce pas?*



... Shifting the Write Gears continued from page 16

inspired as it was from ignorance kludged. It involved a ladder, a board, a 25-lb counterweight, and a laptop computer.

While far from pretty and just as unstable as its sounds, my makeshift structure was nevertheless functional. I poured my ramblings out of my head into that computer with disturbing rapidity; what was even better was that this practice increased the efficacy of my workout rather than hampering it.

It turns out that when I write fast, I bike fast, too.

However, the delicate balance required to position the pieces meant that this setup had to be temporary, and so I consulted my engineer father who began constructing an actual desk, just the right size to stand over my bike. As my insomnia was thwarted and my new desk materialized, my written wanderings became more focused, too.

I didn't talk about my methods much, as I was concerned that descending into a dank, cramped basement to ride a stationary bike and simultaneously write might seem to some to be as unsavory a multitasking event as sitting on the toilet while conversing on a cellular phone. But whatever awkwardness I internalized in the beginning dissipated as my page count increased.

Somewhere between running my way to a stress fracture and writing the occasional personal essay, I'd hit upon a bit of free-writing that sounded like the beginning of a novel. And somewhere between my dad finishing my desk and my stationary bike becoming my first choice for exercising and writing, those few paragraphs steadily grew, eventually becoming a 140,000-word tome.

People who find the time for physical exercise are much lauded, and they should be. But we writers need to write for mental exercise, and we

should hold this desideratum as sacred as any physical assignment dictated by our doctors. It is no testament to good health to be sound in body when one's mind is burgeoning and burdened with untold stories.

You may not write well on a bike, but have you considered even a few moments in your car while you wait for your kid to finish track practice? Or trading one lunch a week with coworkers for a pre-prepared sandwich and your laptop? Whatever time you can find, whatever seemingly ridiculous happenstance happens to present itself—up to and including a ladder, a board, and a 25-lb counterweight—you can make it work for you.

(Although in that last case, I do suggest that you build or buy a desk as soon as you can.)

As writers, we create whole worlds. We can—we must—spare a little of that creativity for making time and space to write.

LEFT Photo by Terry Price

BOTTOM Photo by Zach Simms

Killer Nashville 2012

Annual literary events, opportunities spark the aspiring

In the weeks and months heading into 2012's Killer Nashville, founder Clay Stafford sat down with us to share his thoughts on the upcoming events and the many opportunities available to writers.

2&C: You have a MFA in creative writing, teaching at the University of Miami and at the University of Tennessee. And you've been an actor on "Days of Our Lives," you've offered studio support on shows like "Miami Vice" and "Magnum PI," you've just completed a CD / music project with author Jeffery Deaver, and you're a bestselling author, filmmaker, and nationally-recognized public speaker. Killer Nashville could have easily never happened, but you made room in your life and schedule for it. What inspired you to start Killer Nashville, back in 2006?

CS: I've always had an interest in education. When I decided to go back to school to get my MFA, my work was already in 14 languages. I went back to school because I wanted to teach at a college level. Teaching is the greatest profession on the planet. Unfortunately, I didn't realize it until I started teaching or designing curriculums that it was hard to make a living at it. Then in 2006, a friend of mine, Robbie Bryan (CRM at B&N in Cool Springs) and I were talking. What we didn't have in the southeast was a literary conference specifically for writers or readers of thriller, mystery, and suspense. We thought, what could we do to fill that need? But it wasn't enough to fill it. It had to solve what was missing at most conferences in general. I've attended many conferences over the years, and a through-line of many is the "big fish in the small pond" syndrome. When I go to an educational forum, I want to study with someone who



is better than I am. If someone is going to talk to me about writing, publishing, promotion, etc., I want to know what credentials they are bringing to the table. Are they New York Times bestselling authors? Have they won major awards? What is their sales distribution? How many units have they sold? How were their books actually made into legitimate independent or Hollywood films? If someone hasn't sold more or done more than the person who has come to learn, then why are either of them there? With this in mind, I set the parameters for creating an event that would offer benefit to any writer regardless of his/her level. We created a forensics track for writers specifically of crime literature so they would have a resource for getting their facts right. We created a fan track for those who are writer groupies, including free books signings. Fans don't have to pay to see their favorite author. And we created The Claymore Award [<http://www.claymoreaward.com>] to help authors get published by legitimate, traditional presses. Killer Nashville is all about connections and relationships: connect authors with new readers, connect authors with publishing personnel,

connect authors with resources.

2&C: Killer Nashville seems to offer the public a large amount of resources throughout the year that are free. The conference itself is a volunteer-produced event. There's an active Facebook community, and a newsletter. And this year, Killer Nashville has started a new FREE blogging schedule: 52 guest bloggers for 52 fantastic weeks, located at: <http://killernashville.wordpress.com/> Can you talk a little about the philosophy behind these types of public service-oriented aspects of Killer Nashville?

CS: Killer Nashville has never been about money. As you noted, the people who work with Killer Nashville do not get paid. They are just good people. They want to see other writers do well. It's a spirit of giving back. Too often, writers are taken advantage of. That makes us sick. Our agents, editors, publishers, attorneys, bestselling authors, forensic experts, booksellers, and volunteers are all there for our attendees. And we've had some amazing results. Maggie Toussaint inscribed in a book that I was a "patron saint of writers." I'm not, but what I am is the "face" of about 50 dedicated volunteers every year who do fit that description.

2&C: Killer Nashville was started in 2006 and has attracted bestselling authors from across the U.S., Canada, and beyond. This year, New York Times Bestselling Authors C.J. Box, Heywood Gould, and Peter Straub are the guests of honor. Why Nashville? Was Music City always the choice or did you ever think of putting the conference someplace else?

CS: Just look at the name. Killer Nashville was created for Nashville.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Afternoon of an Author

Talking with Maggi Vaughn in Bell Buckle, Tennessee by Kate Buckley

Recently, I had the pleasure of interviewing Tennessee's Poet Laureate, the folk poet and humorist Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn. An hour's drive south of Nashville, I arrived at the tiny town of Bell Buckle, an historic and Mayberry-esque place I was itching to explore before my return to the "big city." I had a feeling I'd arrived at the right place when I saw the yard brimming with folk art and sculpture. On the phone, Maggi had invited me to come right on in the back door. I did as she advised and my eyes opened wide—every square foot of wall, ceiling, and surface was studded, hung and adorned with all manner of art and artifact.

This gallery of a home and studio is where Maggi receives her many and varied guests (PBS's Bill Moyers stopped by on his way to a reunion). She's an avid art collector, her tastes tending to brightly-colored primitive and folk art. Literary treasures also liberally embellish her rooms: a table, Jelly Cabinet and small bust all commissioned carved from a tree collected at Mark Twain's grave, as well as a rocking chair that once belonged to William Faulkner.

From the seaside/mermaid-themed bathroom (Maggi was raised in Gulfport, Mississippi) to the electrically bright sculptures sprouting like kinetic ghosts in every corner, this is a place that invites far more than a cursory glance. I asked Maggi if she's any criteria for her collecting; her reply: "I know it when I see it."

This is also where Maggi, a professional songwriter and self-proclaimed "poet of the people," pens her anthems and odes (she's written songs recorded by Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty as well as the official bicentennial poem of Tennessee). This is also the home of her imprint, Bell Buckle Press, which solely publishes Maggi's work. She advises people to put out their own books, saying: "If you wait on someone else, you

may never get published."

Mostly, Maggi sells her books after speeches (churches, funerals, clubs, etc.) and is a marvel to listen to on the subject of marketing. In fact, on Maggi's advice, Shirley Hall started her own imprint, "Jumper Jane," in order to self-publish her own children's books. She's been so pleased with the results that, out of gratitude, she's now over

speaking several times a day and spending Christmases together. This intriguing friendship flourishes despite Maggi's reservations of her friend's endeavors: On Carole's pursuit of spiritual practices and Reiki, Maggi opines, "I can't clog my brain up," and of the Religion of Abraham Movement (RAM), she says, "Honey, it drives me insane." Yet, it's clear that these two very different women both

It's a duty to help everyone out. Never turn anyone down.

at Maggi's almost every day, assisting in any way she can.

Though not academically trained as a writer, Maggi's publishing process is involved: she pens her books longhand, then employs a typist, then her editor corrects the grammar and syntax, then it's back to the typist, then a collaborative effort to design the book with a type-setter, and lastly, the type-setter delivers the book digitally to an off-site printer. Maggi, by standards of contemporary poetry, is biblically prolific, putting out up to two books per year.

She's an outspoken advocate of her own process and who can blame her? She says, "I know I'm not the best poet in Tennessee, but I'm a poet of the people." She thinks academics turn people off. Maggi sees publishing as a pragmatic business: academics = no money; populist poetry = you're in the green.

She turns tender when talking of her longtime friend and editor, Carole Brown Knuth. Carole, a breast cancer survivor turned Reiki Master, Abraham-movement adherent and retired professor of English at Buffalo State University, not only edits Maggi's manuscripts, but they also

love and revere one another.

Maggi Vaughn sees her role as Tennessee Poet Laureate for life as ambassador-for-small-town-USA-to-the-world, and further explains her obligation as: "It's a duty to help everyone out. Never turn anyone down. Travel and speak as much as I can."

Despite my reservations to a few of the previously stated opinions (I don't think everyone should publish, and do think academics enlighten people; disclaimer: I have an MFA), I came away charmed.

Maggi takes her role seriously and gives light and dimension to more than a few people's lives. It's difficult to apply standards of the academic (or urbane) when standing toe-to-toe with a Statue of Liberty in the front lawn or a woman named Shirley describing just how a person called Maggi Vaughn has changed her life.

To that end, after my visit with the fascinating Ms. Vaughn, I took myself even more off the beaten path to the Bell Buckle Historic District. I parked my car and prepared to wander about for a spell. This blink-and-you'll-miss-it charm of a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

Comas, Commas, and Creativity

An editor's note on Maggi Vaughn by Carole Brown Knuth

I have been Maggi Vaughn's editor for almost twenty years, and though I know her well, this poet of the people never ceases to amaze me. Whether talking with friends over lunch at the Bell Buckle Café or speaking to a group of several hundred, she has the uncanny ability to charm her audience anytime, any place, anywhere. It is no wonder she is often termed one of Tennessee's great natural resources.

My first encounter with Tennessee's beloved poet laureate occurred many years ago at the Southern Festival of Books in Nashville when we were introduced by a mutual friend, Georgia author Janice Daugherty, who knew I had been looking for a poet to include in the undergraduate and graduate courses I taught on Southern Women Writers at Buffalo State College. I attended Maggi's session and knew long before she finished reading that her poetry would be a meaningful complement to the mostly prose content of my syllabi.

Graciously, she gave me copies of all her books and made suggestions about which ones she thought might be most effective in a college classroom; I decided to teach two of her poetry collections the very next semester and was pleasantly surprised to receive funding from my department to return to Tennessee to do a taped interview with her for use in my classes. Even though I am a native of South Carolina and was brought up in the South, nothing could have prepared me for the uniqueness of the Bell Buckle scene.

The railroad village of Bell Buckle where

Tennessee's state poet resides is also home to several renowned artists, the famed Webb School, the RC-Moon Pie Festival, plus a host of antique malls and novelty shops. The community sometimes bills itself as "progressively backwards" and is filled with the kind of colorful characters politely referred to in the South as "originals." It was not until shortly after my interview with Maggi that I discovered she is the Original in a town full of originals. We were having lunch in the Bell Buckle Café at a table crowded with local residents whom Maggi had been telling about a rapidly approaching deadline she had for a poem the Governor had asked her to write for a special event.

We were all laughing and talking when Maggi went silent suddenly and looked almost catatonic. The shocked look on my face must have been pretty obvious because the lady sitting next to me leaned over and said, "Don't worry, she's all right. We see this all the time. She's just in one of her comas composing away. She'll come out of it directly, but if you really need to talk to her, just say, 'Earth to Maggi, Earth to Maggi,' and she'll be herself again."

Before I could take this in, a man at the end of the table called out to me, "I want to know two things: 1) Are you married? and 2) Do you do anything besides try to communicate with the comatose?"

Naturally, everyone fell out laughing, and about that time Maggi "came to" and began scribbling something on the back of an envelope. When she was done, she handed it to me and

said, "Honey, could you edit this for me? I don't do comas or much else regarding punctuation, grammar, or spelling. And I *really* hate semi-colons, so don't use them unless you absolutely have to. But otherwise this is a real good poem."

Later, when I had a close look at what she had written, I saw there was no punctuation, there were several grammatical glitches, and as for spelling, well, I won't even go there. Of course, one can't be too picky about a poem drafted in the middle of the Bell Buckle Café by someone the locals readily identified as being in a poetically induced coma. However, Maggi genuinely seemed to be looking for someone to edit for her, and apparently I had just gotten the job. Now, after so many years as her editor, I am quite adept at ignoring her so-called comas and know for a fact that though she doesn't do comas, her creative juices often flow at flood force.

Many of the books authored by Maggi Vaughn have been taught with great success in elementary, middle, and high schools as well as colleges and universities across the country. On my campus, the student enthusiasm her work generated prompted an invitation from the English Department for her to come to Buffalo to give a campus-wide lecture and speak to several classes. Thus began a relationship between Tennessee's poet laureate and Western New York that lasted for many years and which included poetry readings at multiple venues in the area as well as many in-services, writing workshops, and conference presentations.

Maggi came to Buffalo State at least once

a semester, much to the delight of students and faculty. My colleagues invited her to teach classes in areas as diverse as children's literature and Mark Twain because she had books on both topics being used as in-class texts, and my department chair even named her as his first choice to cover a class for him when he was ill. Of course, it was the students who really adored Maggi. As soon as one of them would spot her in the halls, the word would go around the English Department: "Maggi's back!" Her unique poetic voice with its blend of southern humor, keen wit, down-home wisdom, and pithy philosophical observations resonated deeply with the undergraduates and even more so, I frequently noticed, with those in my graduate seminar who were already teachers themselves and who thoroughly enjoyed teaching Maggi's works to *their* students.

One thing Maggi Vaughn would never claim to be is an academic, yet she can hold her own in any academic environment with even the snootiest of intellectuals, and she loves poking fun at intellectual snobbery. One of the most cogent comments about her in this context comes from Franklin, Tennessee author Bill Peach, who maintains that Maggi is "an academic genius in a plain wrapper." This, in my view, is perhaps her greatest appeal: she is utterly without guile or pretense, she speaks and writes from the heart with an ecumenical spirit, she totally engages her audiences, and her works range from the serious to the poignant to the hilariously funny. Anyone of any station from any walk of life can appreciate these qualities.

The power of place to fuel an author's creative energy is a well documented phenomenon, and the works of Tennessee's poet laureate offer enlightening examples of the meaningful interconnections between place and artistic process. Maggi is often called "the Tennesseppian" because she hails from an agrarian family that has lived and worked in middle Tennessee for many generations, but she spent most of her growing-up years in Gulfport, Mississippi, before returning to Tennessee as an adult. As she says in "Soil and Sand," from *Kin*, "The thick earth of Tennessee / gave my life foundation / and the salt from the Gulf / put spice in my soul." In these regions, both southern yet topographically distinct, she found a double-sourced poetic muse, and she returns again and again to the fertile imaginative fields inspired by that muse not only to reap rich thematic and imagistic harvests but also to excavate a unique poetics of place.

Throughout Maggi's works, regional landscapes become part of the imagery of feeling as well as the touchstone for memory; she has a special reverence for southern songs and stories, a fact perhaps best illustrated by her assertion that from early childhood she tuned her ear to the country music coming across the airways from the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. That music passed into her soul and sounds through the many volumes of her poetry and prose. Her long-standing claim that her poetic voice derives from country music is given even greater validation when one knows she is an author whose songs had been recorded by singers such as Loretta Lynn, Ernest Tubb, and Conway Twitty long before she became Tennessee's state bard.

Her first book, *Grand Ole Saturday Nights*, originally published as *50 Years of Saturday Nights* by *The Tennessean*, is written in the voice of the Opry, and many of the volumes following that (including *The Light in the Kitchen Window*, *Kin*, *Acres That Grow Stones*, *Life's Down to Old Women's Shoes*, *Bell Buckle Biscuits*, *Foretasting Heaven*, *America Showing Her Colors in Black and White*, *When the Great Ship Went Down*, and *Mary Rebecca, Bubba & Me*) are informed by the same themes found in country music. These vivid and deftly wrought books tap the richness of country music as a storytelling medium to create memory-laden narratives of release and realization that speak to specific aspects of the history and heritage, the culture and customs of Maggi Vaughn's South.

The latest publication Maggi has been involved with is entitled *Don't Forget This Song*, a collection that celebrates the Carter Family and other roots musicians. Four of us—Maggi, yours truly, Kory Wells, and Kelsey Wells—contributed poems and/or prose pieces in honor of the American roots music we so love. Maggi's contributions to this book demonstrate yet again that country music often forms the connective tissue of her writing.

That said, *Don't Forget This Song* has been out less than a year, and Maggi is already halfway through her current work-in-progress, a collection of poems about Walter Anderson, a renowned 20th century painter and naturalist from Ocean Springs, Mississippi. *Shades of Walter Anderson* shifts poetic focus back to coastal Mississippi and pictorial art, but that is a shift easily accomplished for a poet with a double-sourced regional muse. This new book will be a welcome addition to a body of writing that resonates with regional sensibilities yet evokes the universal and never fails to offer sustenance for the soul.

Maggi Vaughn's personal and artistic identity is intimately welded to her goal of being a poet of the people, and the following piece, aptly titled "The Poet," from *The Light in the Kitchen Window*, perfectly distills the essence of her poetic purpose:

*The grit I tracked on the avenue
Came from the ruts in the road;
The crossover was not easy.
The avenue knew not the hum of my song,
But the song not hummed
Will die unsung,
So I hum it.
The word on the avenue
Came from the language on the hill;
The crossover was not easy.
For the word not said
Will go unread,
So I speak it.*

While this poem speaks for itself, I always view it as a lovely affirmation of a tenet set forth by Louise Gluck, poet laureate of the United States from 2003-2004. Gluck maintains that poems endure not as objects but as presences, and she writes, "When you read anything worth remembering, you liberate a human voice; you release into the world again a companion spirit" (*Proofs & Theories*, p.128).

MAGGI'S WORKS

- Grand Ole Saturday Nights*
(published by *The Tennessean* as
50 Years of Saturday Nights)
-
- The Light in the Kitchen Window*
-
- Kin*
-
- Acres That Grow Stones*
-
- Life's Down to Old Women's Shoes*
-
- Bell Buckle Biscuits*
-
- America Showing Her Colors in Black and White*
-
- The Birthday Dolly*
(co-authored with
Carole Knuth)
-
- Foretasting Heaven: Talking to Twain at Quarry Farm*
-
- When the Great Ship Went Down*
-
- You're Laughin' Ain't 'Ya, God?*
-
- When Grown-ups Play Children's Games*
-
- Mary Rebecca, Bubba & Me*
-
- Don't Forget This Song*
(co-authored with Carole Knuth,
Kory Wells, and Kelsey Wells)
-
- Produced Plays*
-
- Wishful Thinking*
-
- While the Dew Is Still on the Roses*
-
- I Wonder If Eleanor Roosevelt Ever Made a Quilt?*
-
- Testament of Guilt*
-
- I Never Heard Me Laugh*
-
- CD
-
- Maggi Vaughn, A Southern Voice*

True to Herself

A conversation with Tennessee Poet Laureate Maggi Vaughn by Kory Wells

Maggi Vaughn knows what she likes, and she's not timid about expressing it. Even if you don't know her, this fact is evident as you approach her house.

A late Victorian cottage painted teal with burgundy accents, its front yard is overtaken with seaside vignettes. Colorful Adirondack chairs, a curvy, carved and painted mermaid, an old dinghy cocked sideways, shipwreck-style, and numerous other art and artifacts audaciously celebrate her childhood home of Gulfport, Mississippi – right in the heart of land-locked Bell Buckle, Tennessee, almost 500 miles away.

When I arrive, Maggi's supervising the hanging of a mosaic fish rendered in tile and bottle caps by artist Sherri Hunter. "Honey, I'm redoing the kitchen," she sings out. "I redo it about every three months. It's my outlet for creativity, because I don't cook." Kaleidoscopic chaos consumes every available surface as she readies her newest collection, vintage enamelware and small appliances in every color imaginable, for display. A royal blue blender. A red mixer. A yellow toaster oven. A green double boiler. Tea kettles in teal, red, gold, and more. One hundred forty-something rolling pins, many of which her friend Shirley Hall has recently spray-painted chrome. "Maggi trades and sells and buys like a farmer," says Shirley.

An astonishment of art and collections almost eclipse the entire house and studio, where items like brightly painted typewriters, a bust of Mark Twain, and William Faulkner's rocking chair proclaim Maggi's first passion: writing. Tennessee Poet Laureate since 1995, Maggi has been writing poems, prose, plays, and songs for most of her seventy-three years. We settle in the den to discuss the creative life she's shrewdly built and encourages others toward – a life of inspiration, risks, triumphs, occasional doubts, and a unique combination of practicality and optimism she applies to reaching and entertaining audiences with her words.

Kory Wells: After you mentioned your brassiere, of all things, on a live radio show (the WDVX

Blue Plate Special) we did together last year, I've come to believe you'll say about anything in person or print. Tell me about claiming your voice.

Maggi Vaughn: I grew up listening to country music – the old country music. The 40s and 50s and 60s.

As soon as I could walk over to the radio and turn the knob to listen to country music, I did. I listened to the Grand Ole Opry every Saturday night and was backstage at the Opry every Saturday night when I lived in Nashville. I listened to how those country singers could turn a phrase. For instance, Hank Williams: "Did you ever see a robin weep when leaves begin to die?" When you hear a line that like, you see an image. I learned to try to turn phrases and do concrete images like that. Country music is universal, and it gave me my voice.

KW: You are not, as you would put it, an academic poet.

MV: I have a lot of friends who are academics. They write for the page. I write for the ear. A poet visited the other day. She showed me a poem where on one line she had all of a sentence except for the last word, which was on the next line. I asked her, "Why did you do that?" She said, "I wanted the white space after the word to make that word stand out." The word was *silent*. Well, most people aren't going to say, "Oh my goodness, all that white space makes that word stand out." Most people are going to see a dangling word there.

There are two kinds of poets. There are the ones who want to make a living at this and sell books. Then there are the ones who teach, and write in the summer and put books out for each other. One of them once told me, "Maggi, I write rhyme, but I hide it." I laughed and said, "If you're ashamed of it, why do you rhyme?" I know they're trying to be clever, but clever doesn't sell to the mass audience.

KW: You've been serious about selling books for a long time. When did you quit your job in advertising at *The Banner* and *The Tennessean*?

MV: I was 43, and I went to New York City for a week for the first time in my life. I looked around, and there was just this world there, moving. Fast paced. Art galleries, museums. I thought, "This is what I'm supposed to be doing – pursuing what I was born to do." I came home and quit my job. It was 1982, and we were in a recession.

Minnie Pearl was a good friend of mine. I told her I was quitting and moving to Bell Buckle to write. She started laughing and said, "Bell Buckle is perfect for you. But making a living as a writer?" I stepped out on faith and moved here. My only regret is that I didn't do it sooner. So you can do this, but you have to work at it.

KW: That brings me to something you and I have talked about before. As you know, I've got a poetry collection (from March Street Press). My experience as an emerging poet is that it's hard to sell poetry, even to an enthusiastic audience. But over the years you've certainly –

MV: I've sold a lot of books.

KW: You've sold a lot of books. How do you account for that?

MV: People in the audience come up and say, "Oh my god, Maggi, you wrote my life. We grew up like that." They relate to it. And they stand in line.

KW: Does your platform – the fact that you are the state Poet Laureate – help you get that audience?

MV: I think it does. But before I was ever Poet Laureate, I had books out, and people were buying them. A lot of people don't even know what the Poet Laureate is. They'll ask me, and I'll explain. And let me say this: By far, I'm not the best poet in Tennessee. But when Tennessee picks a Poet Laureate, they want someone who can go to the little crossroads of Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, as well as to New York City and Chicago and places like that, and people everywhere relate to that poet.

When I first started traveling, pretty much in the Northeast, I thought, "Oh my lord, they won't know a biscuit from horse doo." But they do,



because even people in the big cities have roots in small towns, and they understand.

If you want to sell poetry, don't try to impress anybody. People who buy books don't want to be impressed. In this fast world today, people don't want to take the time to look up something and research the meaning. Now don't get me wrong, there's a small group who are eager to do that, but most aren't.

KW: Charlotte Pence says something similar in the book she recently edited, *The Poetics of American Song Lyrics*. In the introduction she acknowledges that a poetry audience "may not want to spend the time learning how to read a particular poet's work." She also says that the audience for poetry is limited by "relying on academia to be both bullhorn and bully pulpit." After being Poet Laureate all these years, what do you think about the public "getting" poetry and the potential audience a poet can reach?

MV: I've gone to places like Chamber of Commerce conventions where they'll say, "Maggi, when I heard a poet was coming, I said, 'Oh, not a poet.' But you caused me to love poetry." Only because they heard their stories in it. They get it.

"Is That You, Mama?" is my most requested poem, because everyone's got a mama. They think about losing their mama, and they just start bawling. Men who weigh 300 pounds run out of the room.

KW: What about what Charlotte says about the potential audience relying on academia? To a measure you have to acknowledge that's true. As Poet Laureate, you get a lot of invitations. Your audiences are ready-made for you, in places where people aren't necessarily expecting poetry. The rest of us don't have that, usually. And I've learned that most people – often even prose writers – think they don't like poetry.

MV: Kory, people want to laugh. They want to laugh, or cry, and think, but not too hard. People

don't want to spend all day looking at a poem and figuring it out. So...what was the question? (Laughter)

I know a lot of the state poet laureates. A lot are academics, but nobody wants to follow me in a reading. They'll read something and people say, "Wow," and they are great poets. But when I read, people understand it perfectly and relate to it so much.

Sometimes when I'm with the other poet laureates, I think, "I don't have it," because of the way their words flow. But they say, "Oh, Maggi, you've got it. Your voice is so unique. You're true to yourself, and people love you." It makes me feel good that these PhDs get it and respect it. Once I heard some poet say to a group, "Not everyone can write a poem." That made me so mad I could just die. Right there you're discouraging some child who's trying to write.

KW: You started writing young, I know, but I don't think I've heard exactly how you got started in country music.

MV: I wrote my first song when I was in third grade. I went to Mama and said, "Mama, I want to be a poet and a songwriter. Here's my first song." The title was "Here I Sit Alone at the Bar." Mama looked down and said, "Are you sure you don't want to be a nurse?"

I signed with Surefire Music in 1960 or 61. Teddy Wilburn said, "There's a girl singer you need to write with." Her name was Loretta Lynn. We hit it off and started writing together.

KW: Loretta has mentioned you in her new book, *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics*.

MV: That tickles me to death. Four of my songs are in the book. Loretta says I was a "great lyrics writer," but not much for melodies. (Laughter)

Country music resembles poetry in many ways, but at that time, producers didn't want it to be too poetic. I've seen interviews on TV that make me think they're writing country music to

formula now. If you want to ruin something, write formula. Back then, they didn't get up and say, "I'm going to write a metaphor today."

KW: Are you saying that a person can be a great songwriter – or writer – without being able to label every literary device?

MV: Oh, yeah. I had a teacher say to me, "If country music just didn't use those double negatives and incorrect grammar." But that's the voice. Take Vern Gosdin's line, "That just about does it, don't it?" It wouldn't work to say, "That just about does it, doesn't it?"

KW: There's a story from your songwriting days that I'd love to hear again – about writing on paper sacks?

MV: There used to be a store in Nashville on Church Street called Chester's. It was a woman's clothing store, kind of high-end. I had come to Nashville to write music.

KW: And you were how old?

MV: I was 21. Chester knew I needed a job, and he had opened another store on Nolensville Road. It had seconds and sale items.

I love recitations. Jimmy Dickens did them, Porter Wagoner. The music and the voice. One night at the store, it hit me about mamas. I wrote twelve recitations about mamas on brown paper sacks. People were walking out with merchandise, and I couldn't have cared less if they carried the whole store off.

The next day Chester fired me. I said, "OK, that's fine, but I've got my sacks." In the late sixties, I recorded them. I know some people say, "Inspiration – that's crap," but sometimes when it hits, you've got to do it right then.

KW: When did you switch from being a writer of songs to a writer of poetry?

MV: I was recorded by some pretty big names, but when you write a song, an artist may hold

Mysteries & More

It's not a mystery that makes this partnership work by Suzanne Craig Robertson



TOP Photo by Terry Price

Mysteries & More, a bookstore in southeast Nashville, carries about 20,000 stories: 19,999 mysteries and one romance. The story of its owners, Greg and Mary Bruss, is no mystery. It's a love story.

Married 41 years, the couple opened the 1,300-square-foot store in 2008, after Greg retired from nearly four decades "married to the phone company."

An avid reader of all types of books, Mary long ago read Carolyn Hart's mystery *Death on Demand*, whose main character runs a bookstore filled with nothing but mysteries.

"I thought 'one day wouldn't that be so much fun,'" Mary says.

So when Greg retired in 2007 he told her if she wanted to do that, they needed to do it right then.

"She had stayed home [with the children] – gave up her nursing career – and I wanted her to live her dream," he says. "She does the part she loves, and I do the rest." Hands folded in her lap, Mary keeps her eyes on him, smiling. "I'm in charge of books," she says.

He and Mary had met in the Army – she a nurse on her way to Thailand, he coming home from Vietnam – and they settled in to raise two children, who are now grown and living in Arkansas and Vermont. She also worked at – and loved – Barnes & Noble for five years, setting up a store from the ground up and working in every department. Now they own the only bookstore in Tennessee devoted strictly to mysteries, and Greg is treasurer of the national Independent Mystery Booksellers Association.

Mysteries & More—"Books to Die For!" it says over the door—is in Lenox Village, a mixed-use development with houses and businesses all together, connected by sidewalks filled with children, bikes, parents pushing strollers, and dogs on leashes. When the Brusses went to look at the potential space they put a deposit on it that same day – not just for the store, but for their home, which is the second story of the same building.

With the friendly neighborhood and vacation-like

wraparound porch, the Brusses are now a neighborhood staple, keeping a bowl of water and treats on the porch for passing dogs. On the Fourth of July, they give free hot dogs and have games for everyone. They host a book club on the fourth Tuesday of the month ("walk in the door and you can be a member").

With a mystery "on every subject imaginable" for adults and children, Mary will help you find exactly what you like. The latest trend is "cozies," which she says is the sweet side of mysteries, with settings like sewing, cooking, and fashion. Mysteries & More has all types of books that involve murder, "locked door" mysteries, puzzles, thrillers, suspense, and horror. They carry some nonfiction by local authors, but the bulk is fiction.

"I can read these because they're not real to me," Mary says, her voice quiet.

Greg boasts that Mary can find a book on any subject, and her proudest moments are when a customer comes back in to get another book by the same author she recommended.

"We hand-sell books, and people appreciate that," she says. They readily admit that although some days see a steady stream of customers, other days are, uh, dead. But that doesn't bother them.

"On our busy days we say if it was like this all the time, it wouldn't be so much fun," Mary laughs.

Ninety percent of their stock is used books, but readers won't find books that *look* used. When they started out, her criteria for her store — which has been achieved — included that the books would be organized alphabetically, would be clean and "not smelly," and the shelving would not be too high. The entry and aisles would be wheelchair-accessible and the books in pristine condition. In fact, Mary washes down every cover, unfolds every dog-eared page, and erases pencil marks with care.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Mysteries
& More
books to

Mysteries
& More

books to die for!

6
9
6
5

OPEN

... Mysteries & More continued from page 30

Although at a recent store event many of the customers were aspiring writers, the Brusses laugh at the thought of being writers themselves. No, they are not writers, but they are readers. When he was working, Greg says he seldom read books for fun, but now he makes the most of his time.

"Reading for pleasure is a gift," he says. "It's wonderful to get lost in a book. I had not experienced that for 40 years."

Greg and Mary are the only employees, so they don't take many trips, but when they do travel, there is a friend who Mary says "works and babysits the store, bless her heart."

What readers see in the front is only part of the love story – behind a curtain at the back where the office is, Greg has built shelves up every wall,



TOP Photo by Terry Price

across the middle of the room, and even up above the stairs. These hold books waiting for space on the main floor – plus some of Mary's "personal

collection," which Greg estimates to be between 2,000 and 3,000. "Some of these authors I love, oh my heavens!" she says.

The Brusses spend their days off – Sunday and Monday, although if someone must have a book on Sunday they have been known to open up – searching for more books, going to estate and library sales and Goodwill, and searching eBay. They take trades for store credit, too.

"It's great to find a gem," she says.

Mysteries & More, 6965 Sunnywood Drive, Nashville 37211, is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and offers 20 percent off on any new book they order for you – not just mysteries. Mysteries & More may be found online at: <http://www.mysteriesandmore.net/>

... Killer Nashville 2012 continued from page 23

2&C: If someone reading this is thinking of attending next year's events, but has not yet made the decision, what would you say to that person to tip the scales in favor of attending?

CS: Talk to someone who has been to Killer Nashville before. Word-of-mouth is our sales person. For the wannabe writers and unpublished writers, they should talk to the dozens of authors who have been discovered – literally – through Killer Nashville by our publishers, agents, editors, and Claymore Award judges. Speak with the writers who couldn't get anyone to acknowledge them until they placed in a Claymore competition or gave a pitch to some of our industry guests.

Margaret Fenton made her publishing deal in the Killer Nashville bar. How much more Hemingway is that? Talk to those who have found new publicists, agents, and other representatives who have taken their established careers to a new level. Talk to those who have visited the Killer Nashville Crime Scene and have forged invaluable relationships with law enforcement officers with whom they would have never been able to access except through this conference.

And talk to those who came knowing nothing about the business – or worse, those who had been given false info – who now have the working mental tools and resources to achieve the level of writing that they want to achieve. Go to our websites www.KillerNashville.com or www.ClaymoreAward.com and see all we have to offer and the value for the price. Compare the success rates of our attendees to those of other conferences and award programs. Compare the caliber of our special guests and attendees.

2&C: For those who are coming, what sort of

things should they bring with them to help them have the best possible experience while there?

CS: An open mind. A desire to learn. A defined objective. If you have a book, a couple of copies of your manuscript stowed in the car should you need them. If you're published, make sure your books are in the bookstore to sell.

An appointment time for our free agent/editor/publisher round tables. Business cards. Means to buy plenty of books to be autographed (you never know who might show up). No other plans for the four days. Plenty of paper.

2&C: The event's objectives are to assist writers of all writing genres and formats to develop a better understanding of the craft of the mystery, thriller, suspense, and true crime genres. If a writer from outside of these genres wants to try his/her hand writing a thriller or mystery novel, are there any specific tips you can give him or her to get started? Any pre-requisites?

CS: We are branded as a conference for thrillers, mysteries, and suspense. But look at the schedule: <http://www.killernashville.com/schedule.html>. Ninety-percent of what's on that schedule is applicable to any writing, from memoir and nonfiction to romance and children's books: any writing.

If a person has no interest at all in our genres, they could still come and walk away with a wealth of information as well as an agent or a publishing contract. Remember, our agents and editors represent more than just thrillers and mysteries. They're looking for all forms of good writing. As far as prerequisites, there are no prerequisites for Killer Nashville other than a desire to get better than where you are now. If that is at ground zero,

that's perfect; you haven't learned any bad habits. If you've got a following, we're going to connect you with mentors who are bestselling authors to help take you to that next level. If you're already a bestselling author, we can turn you on to marketing techniques and movie tie-in suggestions that can help you grow even bigger. All you have to do, regardless of your level, is just show up.

2&C: One of the best things a writer can do is be a good reader. What are a few books (in terms of both the craft and examples of good novels) that you would recommend someone outside the genre reads in order to get a good foundation in the genre?

CS: Every day, I recommend a different book to those who follow me (<http://www.killernashville.com/buybooks.html>). I read continuously. I read everything. On this page, I daily recommend a book that is either a mystery, thriller, suspense, literary, or reference. If you're looking for something to read, I'll turn you on to a new book every day, 365 of them each year. Scroll down to the bottom of that page to see a backlog of some of the books that I've previously recommended.

To learn more about Clay Stafford and his projects, check out any of the below Web sites. In addition, he's offering our readers something extra. Go to www.ClayStafford.com and download a FREE song, "Your Shadow," by Jeffery Deaver, Clay Stafford, and Ken Landers. The lyric is from Jeffery Deaver's new bestselling book "XO."

www.KillerNashville.com
www.ClaymoreAward.com
www.ClayStafford.com
www.AmericanBlackguard.com
www.JefferyDeaverXOMusic.com



... Afternoon of an Author continued from page 25

street is bordered by railroad tracks; bracketed by farmland and Southern gothic structures straight out of the aforementioned Faulkner, and though half the shops were closed, it was still a delicious slice of Americana.

After procuring an iced coffee (I'd wanted an iced tea, but, "We only have Sweet Tea, Shug."), I sat on a bench and watched bumblebees laze and the odd train rumble by, generally charmed

to the teeth and then some. I highly recommend a visit—any town that features "Daffodil Days" and the "RC – Moon Pie Festival," well, what's not to love?

And here I must disclose, I was raised in the South—am, in fact, a ninth-generation Kentuckian, albeit one who has lived out the majority of her adult life-to-date in Southern California (I divide my time between Laguna Beach and Nashville).

So I know all about Moon Pies, and peanuts and Coke-Cola (which is how both my great-grandmother and grandfather invoked that Southern symbiosis), and cane pole fishing in the pond, and storytelling and front porch sitting and all the rest, except, I must say: I do believe in progress. I believe in academics. I believe in both celebrating and challenging the past. And am glad for folks like Maggi Vaughn who easily invoke both.

... True to Herself continued from page 29

it for years and never record it. Poetry books, if you put out your own book, you have control. You don't have to sit and wait. It's out there. So I started publishing, and then I met Carole Knuth, a professor at Buffalo State. Carole's the one who really kicked me into gear. Because of her, my writing got better.

KW: I know Carole's dear to you. And speaking of friendships –

MV: I had lunch at Maya Angelou's not long ago. I took her two of my books. Can I read you a short little letter she sent me?

KW: Yes!

MV: "Dear Ms. Vaughn – Thank you for your vast heart to feel the human despair and joy. Thank you for your keen hearing that you write poetry as music for the human ear. I have enjoyed *The Other Sun of God* and *When Grownups Play Children's Games*. As I concluded each poem with a little remorse, I thought, 'I was going to write that poem and she not only beat me to it, she captured its meaning and shared it with all of us.'"

When I got that letter, I was walking on the ceiling. For someone of her caliber to write me... and she caught what so many people have – like Lee Smith and Fred Chappell. They all say my poetry is music. She read those books and saw what I was trying to do.

KW: You also had a nationally-known visitor in Bell Buckle recently.

MV: Yes, Bill Moyers from PBS came through Bell Buckle and looked me up. He said he'd heard of me and I said, "Oh, good grief, you have not." He said, "I have, Maggi." I sat on a bench in front of the old stores of Bell Buckle and started reading him poetry. A crowd gathered. Not for me, but because they recognized him. He loved it. He said, "You know Maggi, I went home years ago

to Stamps, Arkansas, and did a documentary on Maya." I flipped over some pages and read him "Going Home with Maya," that I wrote the night I saw that program, I was so inspired. He kept saying "I can't believe it!" They told me he got on the airplane with a bunch of my books under his arm. So it's been a good year for me.

KW: That story of Bill visiting reminds me that over the last couple of years as I've gotten to know you –

MV: You come to visit and we talk poetry.

KW: I'm not the only one! I've realized this place is like a turnstile. So many people come here to see you.

MV: All the time. There are three types who come. There are the people who have written their family stories, and I tell them to go to Kinko's and make copies to give to their children and maybe sell a few copies to their friends. There are the people whose writing is great, but I help them find their story.

And then there are those who come and are really good poets, and I tell them, "Today, in poetry, the bottom line is that publishers want to be in the black. They don't want to be in the red. If you believe in yourself, put your own book out." There's no stigma in that any more. Robert Frost, Whitman – they self-published. Whitman not only did *Leaves of Grass* fifteen or seventeen times, he also wrote his own review under another name. (*Laughter*) Some people who visit me say, "Oh, I don't want to put my money into it." I say, "Then why would a publisher want to put their money into it?"

KW: Your house and studio are quite an experience. The first time you invited me to visit, you told me you had art on the ceilings, but I didn't take you literally.

MV: I'm a nut for art. That and the writing go together. Michael Bush, who lives here – dear, dear friend, great artist. These are his paintings on the ceiling. Very contemporary. He comes every day to see me, sometimes twice a day. If he doesn't show up I have withdrawal. He'll bring something over to see what I think, or I'll read him a poem. We critique each other. I wouldn't take anything for Michael.

KW: And your studio –

MV: I love going out to the studio. But I can write sitting in this recliner. I can go to the Bell Buckle Café with noise all around me and write a poem. I can write with the TV going full blast. Sometimes I write better when there's noise. When I sit down to write, I can write twelve poems at one time, but then I have to do something else and refresh.

KW: Besides redecorating the kitchen, you've been on another new project recently.

MV: I latched onto Walter Anderson because I love his art. I grew up in Gulfport, and he was from Ocean Springs, twenty miles away. His story intrigues me. He was bipolar, but a genius painter. I'd say ten or fifteen academic books have been written about him and his art. You've seen that stack of books in the chair.

KW: I have.

MV: But no poetry book has ever been done about him. I met with his adult children last year, for a week. Interviewing them, going back to the home place with them. They couldn't have been better. He lived for his art, and they understand that now. I came home and started writing this book. If I get passionate about something, I just have to do it.

Words from the Poetry Editor

Technology opens doors to a universe of poets by Alvin Knox



TOP Photo by Terry Price

Recently, a non-poet asked what I thought was the “new thing” in poetry today. I pondered a second, and I began to say, “the e-book,” but the moment’s hesitation was enough to save me from an overly simplistic answer. More accurately and more inclusively, I responded, “the Internet.” It was, after all, the Internet that made the e-book possible, as well as many other new ways of sharing poetry, criticism, and poetic fellowship. A poetic super nova has been unleashed by the Internet, and like a celestial explosion, it is a beautiful thing, at a distance.

Up close, there are dangers. Not so long ago, in a galaxy now far away, the filter of traditional publishing tended to protect us from an excess of “bad” poetry. Going into a bookstore, one could count on a large percentage of the poetry represented to be “good;” that is to say, the editorial process insured that the poetry we encountered was, at least, well-crafted, and it often introduced poetry that was stylistically and critically challenging. There were, of course, exceptions, but they tended to be found in the “local authors” section, a loose collection of self-published books of poetry, short stories, local history, and recipes scattered haphazard across tables near the entrance in much the same way the asteroid belt protects the inner planets of our solar system. The Internet super nova has blasted away this gravitational organization, and poems, both good and bad, race at near

light speed with equal chance of finding an audience. Or so it would seem if you’re standing at the center of the explosion. From the outside looking in, however, there is a shift in probability. Since there is so much more bad poetry written than good, the odds of a person traveling through the nether space of the Internet to intercept a good poem are significantly less than those of encountering a bad one. The Internet today is saturated with poetry written by the untrained, based on the less-than-stellar examples to which they too have been exposed. It is a vicious cycle.

But every new planet, every new star is born from some cosmic upheaval, and even as the old order is being rendered, new gravitational centers emerge, and there is a new hope. Already, the forward thinking have seized upon the opportunities presented by this reorganization. Good poets who were shut out of the old publication model are using the Internet and the Internet-driven tools of self-publication to share their work. Groups of poets are coming together on dedicated websites, and the good poets—and I don’t mean just the already accomplished, but those willing to learn and to work at their craft—are energizing the field. New collaborations are being formed, and constellations of ideas and language and critical interactions are emerging. Already, the poet is looking toward a new night sky, and the moon seems a little closer.

A Gallery of Poems

Welcome to *2nd & Church's* first poetry issue with a collection of inspired works from poets across Tennessee.

Simple Things

By Bill Brown, TWA 2011 Writer of the Year

There are these simple things—
a pile of leaves and sticks to burn,
a sky to funnel the smoke, a blue

chimney with a hawk being chased
by a smaller bird that pecks its
tail and a black cow with her calf.

There's a pond turned into a hazel
eye by a grove of cedars covered
in frost. A neighbor boy across

the road tosses a baseball in the air,
hits it, slings the bat and runs the
imagined bases, slides into home.

I know he wins. The child in all
of us should hit a homerun, hear
the crowd roar. I stand, rake in hand

like a rustic in a painting. I don
my hat for art's sake and point at
something distant, lost in brush

strokes—always coming at the
edge of the canvas, out the window
of a vacant house. Old age certainly,

but not that desolate—the spirit
of winter maybe, when dusk arrives
at 4:30, then the pinks and grays

left by our sun, then night, that
little eternity with moon and stars,
completes itself when morning comes.

Growing Up Female

By Connie Jordan Green

My husband remembers wars
he and his friends fought—
two or three boys holed up
in a shack, he and Henry outside,
BB guns finding holes and cracks
in the walls, emptying their weapons
randomly into the openings. And later,
wild rides with under-aged drivers
in their fathers' borrowed cars,
tires squealing on Dead Man's Curve.
He climbed cliffs and dared buzzards,
declares one lifted him with its huge
talons, set him down in a grassy field,
safe for one more war.

Courageous, my sisters and I crossed
the turnpike behind our house,
waded the creek where run-off
from a battery shop rainbowed
the surface, returned home
to tie sleeves of chenille
bathrobes around our waists, twirl
on our toes, rose-colored fabric
swirling around us, barefoot ballerinas
whose lives flowed on a swell of music.
War intruded only as flickering newsreel
at Saturday's matinee, our minds rejecting
the images, nimble as Ginger Rogers
dancing backwards across the screen.

Writing As No More Than Two Kinds Of Dance

By Wayne Hogan

There's a descriptively sparse,
short-chunky-sentence writing
that's like the Texas Two-Step
sliding over the saw-dust floor
of a crumbling adobe late-night lounge
in downtown Ruidoso, New Mexico.

Then there's elliptically nuanced,
darned-near stream-of-consciousness writing,
writing that billows and flows all
zig-zaggy like a giant unfurled sail
dragging an empty skiff over an ocean
of its own making, the kind of writing
that's like a Latin rumba and tango
all rolled into one, pirouetting
in the majestically beribboned ballroom
of the old Waldorf Astoria in uptown NYC.

There's no other kind.

The Computer Triangle

By Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn
Poet Laureate of Tennessee

It's out there somewhere
Just off the coast of Cyber,
A place where brain waves
And brainstorm disappear
Mysteriously into space,
Never to be heard of again.
Some say it is a place where
A giant Google with two big eyes
Grabs you into its domain
And eats your brain for lunch.
Others blame it on the monster
Ebay with its long tentacles
That reach around the world
Where they drag you into oblivion
And you disappear into a junkyard.
We've sent out search engines
But have only found a few Yahoos.
People have speculated that
This crash site is a portal
People pass through and
Alien icons turn you into
Emails that act as servers
In the far-off galaxy Starbucks.
It is said that centuries from now
They will search for Atlanta,
A place that was noted
In Margaret Mitchell's novel
In which blue and gray people
Existed for a time.
Perhaps they will find
Remnants of runways where
Pages landed to face a book
That is now gone with the trend.
People will discuss whether
It ever really existed.
Some will argue that it
Was a place with prissy chandeliers
And scarlet draped twitters
That got too close to Ashley's
Columns of pitty-pat ants
Which destroyed the house of terrors
And could not be saved.
Beware when you turn on,
For you might be off
To space where you
Disappear through a blue screen
And are deleted into
The Computer Triangle.

Constipated Minds

By Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn
Poet Laureate of Tennessee

There's never a movement
In these constipated minds
That clog up the system
Of the flow of thinking.
These stopped up brains
Are there in politics,
Religion, education, science,
And any other regular day
Of passing ideas around.
They go to the bowels of their
Measurement of thought
And give not an inch.
America needs a good
Flushing of the meanness
That stinks like stale concepts.
These constipated minds
Sit on their thrones
And refuse to wipe
Their minds to a clean slate
So anal ideas can be
Dropped in a room and
Rigid can become relaxed.
There should be a mental laxative.
Oh, I forgot, there is —
It's called enlightenment.

Janus

By Kate Buckley

The sound of wind, a violin, feathers
drifting down, the damp street dark as I pass,
houses aglow as I walk fast, head down
against a tympanic wind, trees etching
their calligraphy—branches bare, stripped
of leaves, of any sign of spring. January,
that two-headed beast, one face to the horizon,
the other to the past. I wind around the path,
through the gate, ivy climbs the white lattice,
unkempt. The house silvers in the shrouded light,
moths beat their eye-tipped wings. I sit and wait
till the doors bang shut. Somewhere a bell rings.

Firewood

By Ray Zimmerman

Before the old oak falls for years it stands
in rich dark soil born of leaves worms cast out.
Birds break worms' bodies in beaks, make soil.
Old branches break, fall to snowy ground.

In rich dark soil born of leaves worms cast out.
Unable to carry the load of ice
old branches break, fall to snowy ground.
Where birds assemble to gather ants.

Unable to carry the load of ice,
branches join acorns missed by squirrels
where birds assemble to gather ants
Before the old oak stands an acorn falls

Branches join acorns missed by squirrels.
Birds break worms' bodies in beaks, make soil.
Before the old oak stands an acorn falls.
Before the old oak falls for years it stands.

Tuesday Night

By Kory Wells

You're in your car outside the bowling alley
where you came as a kid, looking out
on Broad, which you cruised as a kid. Beneath
a neon ball that strikes the night nostalgic
and bright, you wait on your own kid to show.
The radio is low, and like he has
for all these years, Steve Perry sings of taking
midnight trains, something you thought you'd do,
yet here you are, same streets, same songs. Some think
less of a man who never leaves his childhood
home. But in the wistful dim, you see
the truth: some took the train to anywhere
and wound up in this lot by you. Now you
all wait, a little weary, in the dark.

Meet Our Authors

Read more about our new additions to *2nd & Church*

BILL BROWN

Poetry: "Simple Things"

Bill Brown just retired as a part-time lecturer at Vanderbilt University. He has authored five poetry collections, three chapbooks, and a textbook. His three current collections are *The News Inside* (Iris Press 2010), *Late Winter* (Iris Press 2008), and *Tatters* (March Street Press 2007). Recent work appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *English Journal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. Brown wrote and co-produced the ITV series, *Student Centered learning* for Nashville Public Television. The recipient of many fellowships, he recently received the Writer of the Year 2011 award from the Tennessee Writers Alliance.

KATE BUCKLEY

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

Poetry: "Janus"

Feature Story: "Afternoon of an Author: Talking with Maggi Vaughn in Bell Buckle, TN."

Kate Buckley's poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *The Cafe Review*, *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Slipstream*, and other literary journals. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and is the author of *A Wild Region* (Moon Tide Press, 2008) and *Follow Me Down* (Tebot Bach, 2009). A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her awards include a Gabeheart Prize and the *North American Review's* James Hearst Poetry Prize.

CHARLOTTE RAINS DIXON

<http://www.charlotterainsdixon.com>

Column: "The Raven"

Charlotte Rains Dixon mentors entrepreneurs and creative writers from passionate idea to published and highly profitable. Charlotte is a free-lance journalist, ghost-writer, 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 creative 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. Her novel, *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, will be published in February of 2013.

GAYLE EDLIN

http://www.gcedlin.com/?page_id=2

Technical Writing Column: "Shifting Gears to Multitasking"

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.

CONNIE JORDAN GREEN

Poetry: "Growing Up Female"

Connie Jordan Green lives on a farm in East Tennessee where, when she isn't gardening, she writes in a small attic study. She is the author of two books for middle-grade readers, two chapbooks, and an ongoing newspaper column. Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications.

WAYNE HOGAN

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

Poetry: "Writing As No More Than Two Kinds Of Dance"

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE



The third quarter of this year launches our third issue, and everyone here at *2nd & Church* is excited to announce the lineup. The In Depth feature for this issue is Dr. Rhea Seddon, physician and former astronaut. In addition to an interview with the Murfreesboro native, we'll be publishing an excerpt from her memoir-in-progress, *Go for Launch*. A veteran of three Space Shuttle flights, Dr. Seddon spent 19 years with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). In 1978 she was selected as one of the first six women to enter the Astronaut Program. She served as a mission specialist on flights in 1985 and 1991 and as payload commander in charge of all science activities on her final flight in 1993. This brought her total time in space to 30 days. Additional Q3 pieces include:

- Editor Roy Burkhead has been following Nashville novelist Gary Slaughter around the city's literary haunts as the author of *Cottonwood Summer '45* promotes this book,--an entertaining, richly-detailed reminiscence of home-front America during the summer of 1945, as well as details of the closing events of World War II. Stay tuned for an exploit of Gary's Road Show, as well as a review of the novel and an exclusive Q&A with the author.
- Middle Tennessee writer Amanda Moon presents

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40

Wayne Hogan lives in Cookeville, TN. His writing and artwork can be found in numerous publications, including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Quarterly*, *Abbey*, *Spinning Jenny*, *Light*, several anthologies from Kings Estate Press, and several chapbooks from little books press.

LES KERR

<http://www.leskerr.com>

Songwriting Column: Words with Music

Les Kerr is a songwriter, recording artist, and performer who merged Cajun music, blues, Rockabilly, bluegrass, and New Orleans music to create his own genre, "Hillbilly Blues Caribbean Rock & Roll." A Nashville resident since 1987, the Gulf Coast native was born in Louisiana and raised in Mississippi. Kerr has recorded six CDs and performs his original music at concert venues, festivals, nightclubs, and special events throughout the U.S. He is also featured periodically in broadcasts, including *Civil War Songs and Stories*, a PBS TV documentary aired nationwide in 2012. Having earned a journalism degree at Ole Miss, Kerr is a former broadcast news director. He co-authored *The All-American Truck Stop Cookbook* (Thomas Nelson) and *Tennessee* (Graphic Arts Books), and two of his original lyrics were included in the New Orleans poetry anthology, *Maple Leaf Rag IV* (Portals Press). Allusions to works by authors as diverse as Hemingway, Dickens, and Hunter S. Thompson have found their way into some of Kerr's music.

"Most of my songs tell stories or describe people, places, and things I've done," Kerr said. "I have always been influenced by authors and others who tell great stories in person or in print."

ALVIN KNOX

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

Book Review: *Southern Light*

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 Writer's Loft program. His poems have appeared in various publications, including the *Southern Indiana Review*, *Algonquin*, *Frisk Magazine*, and *Tar Wolf Review*.

CAROLE BROWN KNUTH

Feature Story: "Comas, Commas, and Creativity: An Editor's Notes on Maggi Vaughn"

Carole Brown Knuth is a native of South Carolina and received her PhD in English from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She has published widely on James Joyce, southern women writers, and multicultural women's literature. Dr. Knuth is Professor Emerita of English at Buffalo State College, where she taught courses in Irish literature, British Romanticism, ethnic American women writers, and southern literature for thirty-four years. Now retired from academe, she is a Reiki Master Teacher and Practitioner who works primarily with cancer patients. She resides in Buffalo, New York.

SUZANNE CRAIG ROBERTSON

Feature Story: "Mysteries & More"

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 CÉRAN

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

Column: "Chanson d'Automne" or the challenge of Translating Poetry"

Born in Paris (12e arrondissement), Renaud lived there until he was six years old. Then, he moved to Orléans, where he lived until he boarded the plane that took him to Clarksville, Tennessee. After graduating from the University of Orléans, he finished a bachelor's degree at 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 works there today, editing manuals, publishing literature, updating websites, validating literature translated into French, and reviewing safety messages. Recently, he was promoted to Technical Writer II.

MATT URMY

<http://matturmy.com/>

Book Review: *Don't Forget This Song: Celebrating the Carter Family and Other Roots*

Matt Urmy, musician, teacher, and public speaker, brings a diverse, extensive career in the arts to his role as CEO of groundbreaking mobile software company Artist Growth, LLC. Acklen Records put out *Sweet Lonesome*, his first album, in 2011, and in 2007, Finishing Line Press published Matt's first poetry collection, *Ghosts in a House*. Matt earned a MFA in Writing (Poetry genre) from Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. Renowned Tennessee poet and songwriter, RB Morris says of Urmy, "Matt's a really fine poet and songwriter, and a great live renderer of it all. He's lifted the creative warrior spirit among us, and that's what we need."

KORY WELLS

<http://korywells.com/>

In Depth Interview: "True to herself: A conversation with Tennessee Poet Laureate Maggi Vaughn"

Poetry: "Tuesday Night"

Kory Wells is author of the poetry chapbook *Heaven Was the Moon* (March Street Press). She often performs her poetry with her daughter Kelsey, a roots musician, in an act that's been called "bluegrass rap" and "hillbilly cool." The Murfreesboro duo's first CD will be out later in 2012. Kory's novel-in-progress was a William Faulkner competition finalist, and her "standout" nonfiction has been praised by *Ladies' Home Journal*. Her work appears in numerous publications, most recently *Christian Science Monitor* and *Deep South Magazine*.

RAY ZIMMERMAN

Poetry: "Firewood"

Ray Zimmerman is the Executive Editor of *Southern Light: Twelve Contemporary Southern Poets* and a former president of the Chattanooga Writers Guild. He produces poetry readings and spoken word events in Chattanooga, and he was the subject of a feature article in *Blush* magazine.

... Meet Our Authors continued from page 39

TENNESSEE POET LAUREATE MAGGI VAUGHN

Poetry: "The Computer Triangle" and "Constipated Minds"

A resident of Bell Buckle, Tennessee, Maggi Vaughn has been Poet Laureate of Tennessee for over 15 years. She is the author of fourteen books (and counting!), her first book being published by *The Tennessean* in 1975. She has written the official Bicentennial Poem of Tennessee and the official poem commemorating the Tennessee state quarter. Vaughn is the writer of the gubernatorial inauguration poems for Gov. Sundquist, Gov. Bredesen, and Gov. Haslam. Vaughn penned the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Poem for U.S. Air Force which was read into the Congressional Record of Washington, D.C. In addition to her poetry, Vaughn has written plays produced by The Barn Theatre in Nashville, The National Quilters Convention, The Galt Theatre, and many other venues. She is the only poet ever to receive a Mark Twain Fellowship from Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies in Elmira, New York. (This fellowship has only been offered to scholars who write biographies about Mark Twain.) In 2007, she received The Literary Award from the Germantown Arts Alliance chosen from writers all over the South and Southeast. Former

winners include Eudora Welty, John Grisham, and Shelby Foote. She represented Tennessee at the First National Poets Laureate Conference in New Hampshire in 2003 and was quoted in the *New York Times* coverage of the event. She has represented Tennessee in other national Poet Laureate conventions.

Vaughn's books have been taught in colleges and universities as well as in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country. She has made a major contribution to education by teaching teachers and students, from kindergarten to the university graduate level, and in giving in-services for educators throughout the country. She has traveled several hundred thousand miles throughout Tennessee and America as Poet Laureate. Vaughn received the Governor's Award as an Outstanding Tennessean in 2003. Her poems have appeared in magazines, literary journals, and newspapers, and have been read on nationwide television and radio shows including National Public Radio. She's been published in journals such as *The Thomas Wolfe Review*, *The Distillery*, *Alcalines of Radford University*, *The Elk Review*, *The Tennessee English Journal*, and several journals at MTSU. She has been included in anthologies such

as *The Other Side of Sorrow* and *Southern Voices in Every Direction* as well as in other national publications and articles. Vaughn was quoted in Ted Turner's nationwide book on country music. Vaughn was the subject of a historical 2 CD set called "A Southern Voice", a compilation of her original readings which was highlighted on PBS nationwide in 2006.

She has appeared on *Tennessee Crossroads*, *The Arts Break*, *A Century of Country Music on CBS*, Ted Turner's national TV documentary about country music, and numerous other TV and radio shows throughout the U.S.

Vaughn creates her inspiring poems that reverberate with the magical incantatory power of family and roots. As she says, "Poetry is for everyone, and we need to keep alive the message that is understood by all walks of life."

In addition, Vaughn is a well known country music songwriter whose songs have been recorded by Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, Ernest Tubbs, Charlie Louvin, and other legendary stars. In fact, Vaughn was asked to write a poem for the funeral of Jeanette Carter, daughter of A.P. Carter who is well known as the Original Song Catcher of historical country music.

... In Our Next Issue continued from page 38

The Writer's Loft, MTSU's Low-Residency Certificate in Creative Writing. The Loft is going on 10 years now, sending forth many talented writers and poets into Nashville and throughout Tennessee.

- East Tennessee writer Julia Watts reviews *Man in the Blue Moon*, by Michael Morris. In addition, she'll share her recent Q&A with the Southern novelist.
- Our poetry editor, Alvin Knox, will be presenting another batch of new poets and their work.
- Chattanooga poet K. B. Ballentine is digging into her creative city to bring our readers something special from the poetry front.
- Knoxville writer and editor Christine Dano Johnson explores Knoxville's literary history with her piece entitled, "Talking Now of Summer Evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee," as she documents and reflects on the city's literary past.

- Nashville's Suzanne Craig Robertson knocks on the door of Dickson, Tennessee's Reading Rock Books, an independent bookstore owned and operated by sisters Amy Jernigan and Laura Hill.
- In celebration of the Southern Festival of Books, columnist Renaud Rousselot de Saint Céran revisits one of his favorite French books, *Le Petit Prince*, by Antoine de Saint- Exupéry.
- Tennessee Poet Laureate Maggi Vaughn joins us once again to review *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics*, by Loretta Lynn.
- Middle Tennessee literary mainstay Terry Price shares another excerpt from his novel-in-progress, *An Angel's Share*.
- Say hello to local author Beth Terrell via an exclusive Q&A.
- Nashville poet and songwriter Matt Urmy offers his take on *Twentieth Century Drifter: The Life*

of *Marty Robbins*, by Diane Diekman.

- Columnist Gayle Edlin takes you once more unto the technical writing breach.
- Nashville writer Mike Turner checks in with the folks over at the Poet's Corner at Scarritt-Bennett Center, a popular monthly poetry reading event in Music City. Not long ago, he caught the readings of poets Malcolm Glass and Mitzi Cross, and he'll be reporting back on both the poets and the Poet's Corner event series.
- Columnist Charlotte Rains Dixon brings her unique literary point of view to our fair city.
- Les Kerr, the newest addition to our literary family, brings his songwriting experience to Nashville's table.
- And let's not forget poet Kate Buckley. She's on assignment somewhere in Nashville, looking for the perfect literary moment to share with us.