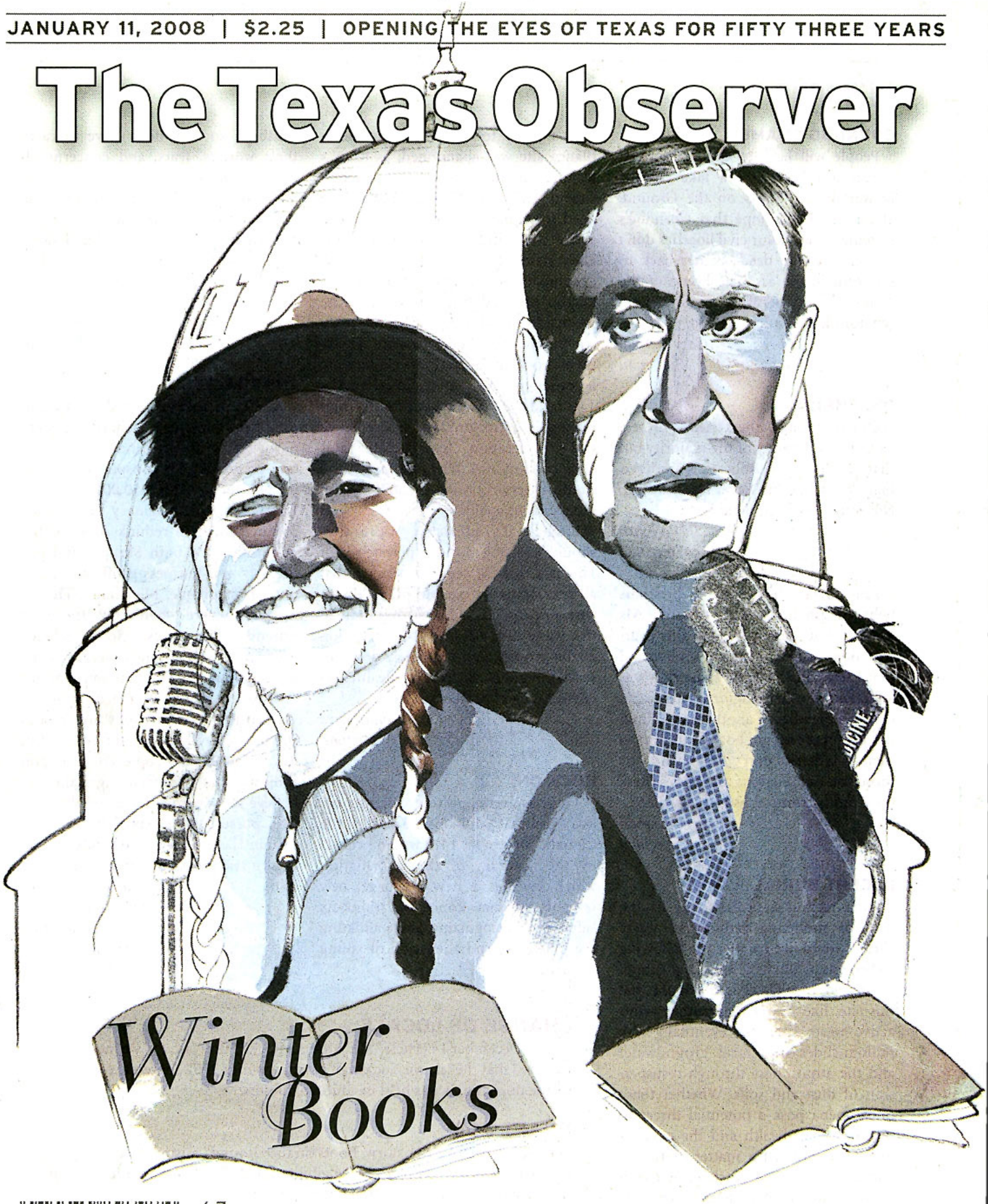
JANUARY 11, 2008 | $2.25 | OPENING THE EYES OF TEXAS FOR FIFTY THREE YEARS

The Texas Observer



Winter Books

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Dialogue

CORNDOG SHAME

People will have to choose between a real war hero and a fake cowardly warhawk. ("Boots on the Ground," December 14) I hope that Corndog's statement that "Your civil liberties don't matter if you're dead" comes back to bite him in the ass. The home of the Alamo should be ashamed to have a senator like Corndog Cornyn.

Gary Denton
Via e-mail

OH, CHRIST

Our Founding Fathers tried to protect us from the tyranny of the majority but that is what Suzy Roberts is undergoing. ("Suzy Roberts Never Had a Prayer," November 30) I applaud her.

Sheila Finch
Via e-mail

I'm sorry that some Christians behaved un-Christ-like towards Ms. Roberts, but many people in this country today don't seem to understand that Christians have the same rights as adherents of other religions. There is no reason a member of another faith could not get on the school board and pray to their own deity. I don't understand why those you call religious minorities think their rights trump those of Christians.

Becky Hickman
Via e-mail

DECENT BURIAL

As a technical professional in the field of modeling radioactive waste sites, I would like to offer the following comments ("Burying the Opposition," December 14). There is no doubt that this site, like nearly every other radioactive waste site, will eventually leak radionuclides into local groundwater and the atmosphere through resuspension of dust and soils. Whether these phenomena pose a potential threat to future human health and the environment is really just a matter of timing and rates of leakage. To claim that such a site could contain wastes indefinitely is counter to known physical laws.

It's really too bad that the Sierra Blanca site was abandoned, as from a technical point of view this is the best site in the state. There is certainly a need for some sort of low-level radioactive waste disposal facility in Texas. Each state needs to have its own, or a compact with some other state to fill this need. Sierra Blanca should be reconsidered. The state should develop an independent performance assessment model of the Andrews County site in order to assess its technical merits. This model should be used for decision making in permitting, waste acceptance, and site operation. Of course, this modeling costs money. Why not have Waste Control Services foot the bill for an independent analysis?

In general, radioactive waste sites should probably not be privately run. This is a case for public works, so that all operations are open to public disclosure and comment. Privatizing radioactive waste disposal leads to corruption of the process, and ultimately does not serve the public interests of health and environmental protection.

John Tauxe
Via e-mail

ROCK ON

This was a very uplifting article for me as a Muslim. ("Muhammad Rocked the Casbah," December 14) I was impressed by the accuracy of the information which involves a new language, new religion, and new concepts. I think its value is in recognizing and validating the loneliness and alienation of young Muslims, so they don't have to carry their worries, fears, and concerns all alone. I agree that the Prophets were all revolutionaries, and I think these punk rockers have found a good use for religion. I don't know, but I don't think God would object to that. Hats off to Lydia Crafts for putting this all together.

Mary Lahaj
Via e-mail

TORT TALES

Seeing as though famed Mississippi plaintiff's lawyer Richard "Dickie" Skruggs has just been indicted by a federal grand jury for conspiring to bribe a civil judge with $50,000, Suzanne Batchelor ["An Imaginary Crisis," Nov. 30] may wish to rethink some of her admiration for both Skruggs and predictably anti-business gadfly and book author Stephanie Mencimer. This is America where, thankfully, the First Amendment reigns. So Batchelor, Mencimer, Skruggs, and others can deny all they want the fact that abuse of our civil justice system by greedy trial lawyers costs Americans jobs and erodes the public's respect for our courts. But ask the American people. Poll after poll indicates that overwhelming majorities believe that lawsuit abuse and the parasitic pursuit of "jackpot" justice by a certain class of lawyers do indeed comprise a real problem in this country.

Darren McKinney
Director of Communications
American Tort Reform Association
Washington, D.C.

CHANGE OF LOCALE

In our December 14 article "Muhammad Rocked the Casbah," we incorrectly reported that the Islamic Society of North America 2007 conference was held in Toledo, Ohio. It was held in Chicago, Illinois.

DRAFT AGE

Our December 14 cover story "Boots on the Ground" mismatched the age of U.S. Sen. John Cornyn with his eligibility for the draft during the Vietnam war. Cornyn was eligible for the lottery, though he did not serve.

Winter Books Issue

JANUARY 11, 2008

Cover Illustration by Todd Julie

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Bob Bullock, 1998 *Tom Lankes*/Austin American-Statesman

The Man Who Ran Texas

The following excerpts are from a biography of the late Bob Bullock to be published in February by the University of Texas Press. During a political career that began with a stint in the Texas House of Representatives and ended in the lieutenant governor's office, Bullock became one of the most powerful, feared, and unpredictable politicians in Texas. He was a chain-smoking, manic depressive alcoholic who burned through wives, employees, and whiskey, and narrowly escaped indictment. He was also admired to the point of reverence for his political skills, directness, and dedication to the state he loved.

God Bless Texas
By Dave McNeely and Jim Henderson
University of Texas Press
272 pages, $27

A Turning Point In History

Bullock was appointed secretary of state in 1971 by Gov. Preston Smith on the heels of the Sharpstown banking scandal.

Inside the secretary of state's office, longtime employees greeted the arrival of their new boss with trepidation.

After the surprise announcement was made, Sybil Dickinson, who had worked there for more than twenty years and often behaved as though she were the secretary of state, walked into [Buck] Wood's office with an unhappy look.

"Randall," she said, "we've got a problem. Bob Bullock doesn't know anything about secretary of state."

"Well, there's not much to know," Wood said. True. It was the highest appointive position in state government, but one of the least demanding. The office practically ran itself.

"Oh, this is going to be horrible," she said.

"I know Bob," said Wood, who was then director of elections. "We get along fine."

His reassurances only calmed her a little. Because of his work for Smith—raising funds and attacking the governor's political opponents—Bullock had gained a reputation of being somewhat unsavory, a bagman, a hatchet man. His mood swings, his erratic veering from project to project, his growing practice of calling associates and underlings at three or four o'clock in the morning, created the perception of a loose cannon. Wood had come to know him well, and even as he tried to soothe his anxious co-worker, he sensed that the office was about to change, that Bullock, now running his own show, was not one to preside over a sleepy hollow. It was an accurate perception.

Bullock hit the door with a frenzied thirst for information. He wanted to know everything at once. He constantly pumped employees for information about their jobs, quizzed the attorneys about the range of laws that affected the office, and, drawing on advice he had picked up earlier from H.C. Pittman at the auto dealers, he believed an education came in with each day's post. He would spend hours reading the mounds of mail—much of it dull and routine, such as Uniform Commercial Code submissions or mundane corporate filings.

As much mail went out as came in, and it was far too much for one man to sign personally. As had been the custom, an employee asked Bullock for copies of his signature to be etched into a printing block. Bullock tersely refused.

Bullock called Wood and his assistant, Don Ray, into his office and asked about the signature stamp business.

"Bob, there's a lot of stuff that goes out of here every day. Most of it is just routine. It's cover letters. You know, 'Here's your corporate charter' kind of stuff," Wood said.

Bullock bristled. "I'm going to sign the stuff that goes out of here," he said. "You bring it in here and put it on that table right over there, and I'll sign it."

Bullock was proud of his signature. Over the years, he had spent countless hours practicing and perfecting it. He didn't just dash off a quick scribble; he created art. For a week and a half, he was mostly sequestered in his office, signing stacks of documents and falling further and further behind while his amused underlings speculated on the life expectancy of this new policy.

Wood arrived for work one morning and had just sat down at his desk when he heard Bullock bellow, "Buck!"

Wood walked to his door.

"Tell somebody to get in here and get this shit off my desk and get it out of here," Bullock said. "I don't want to see any more of this stuff ever again."

Wood broke into laughter.

"I know you and Don are sitting out there watching me and knowing this wasn't going to work."

"Yeah, Bullock, we tried to warn you," Wood said. "You weren't interested in listening, so we figured we would let you find out on your own."

Wood braced for one of Bullock's explosive tirades, but it never came. Instead, he joined in laughing at his own folly.

To the dismay of his friends, he was revealing another streak, one that they interpreted as the classic symptoms of manic depression. Besides chain-smoking and polishing off a fifth of Old Charter a day, he was beset by mood swings that reached soaring highs and abysmal depths. One day he would be withdrawn and morose, and steep himself in problem solving. The next, he would

be flying, and in those periods, life was one long party of all-night drinking and carousing and reckless behavior.

One night, during a bourbonized domestic quarrel, his wife ordered him out of the house, and he drove to the apartment of his friend and adviser, Carlton Carl, to spend the night. Carl was away, and Bullock couldn't get into the apartment, so he crawled into the back seat of what he *thought* was his friend's 1966 Chevrolet Bellaire. The next morning, he woke up as the car was motoring up Interstate 35, the driver unaware that he had a passenger. Bullock sat up and startled the stranger by announcing, "Hi there, I'm Bob Bullock, your secretary of state."

A Bullock in a China Closet

In 1974, Bullock was elected state comptroller. Inheriting an antiquated, inefficient office, he proceeded to overhaul it and to pursue companies that had not paid their business taxes. By that time, his reputation for extreme behaviors—personal and professional—was becoming well established.

In the reorganization frenzy of those first two years, Bullock's demeanor took twists that went beyond eccentricity. He would fire a staff member at night and rehire him the next morning. He herded his top deputies to long afternoon work sessions in nearby taverns. In the office, he alternated between roaring like a hungry lion and secluding himself poking pins into a voodoo doll representing one of his enemies. Occasionally, he took a chair beside a secretary's desk and sat for long periods, saying nothing, just chain-smoking and staring into the distance.

Always a voracious reader of history and biography, he added the bureaucratic printing output to his reading list. Most days he took home armloads of reports published by various agencies, pored over them until the wee hours, and frequently woke his top aides to give them an impulsive assignment or solicit their thoughts on how to deal with something in the Department of Parks and Wildlife or improve Child Protective Services or some other agency beyond his jurisdiction. He insisted that his department heads be available anytime he wanted them—few would dare go to the restroom without leaving word with their secretaries—and each received pagers to make sure they were never beyond his reach. Most days, he was at his desk at seven o'clock in the morning, tapping out memos of instruction or criticism to his aides. Few were spared the "blue zingers"—so called because of the color of the paper they were typed on—and few did not live in dread of them.

His gluttony for knowledge became the stuff of Capitol legend. He created a research department unlike anything that had ever existed in Texas government, one that ranged far beyond revenue estimating and the state's economic trends. Knowledge was coin of the realm, and Bullock was holding all the change. Legislators had previously relied on fragments of information from the various agencies, on the self-serving presentations of lobbyists, or on the business-funded Texas Research League. Now they could turn to the comptroller for *independent* data—ostensibly untainted by private greed—on almost any subject.

For most of the young liberals who had gone to work for him, it was, in the words of one, "the most exciting time of my life." It also may have been one of the strangest. During the campaign, he had insisted that everyone who worked for him read and reread *The Little Red Hen* and absorb its message of individual initiative and self-reliance. After taking office, he copied and distributed to each staffer an 1899 essay by Elbert Hubbard called *A Message to Garcia,* a sermon on duty, obedience, and resourcefulness built on a tale from the Spanish American War. Garcia, it was told, was an insurgent leader working from a hidden base somewhere in the mountains of Cuba, and President William McKinley needed to get an urgent message to him.

From the story:

Someone said to the President, "There's a fellow by the name of Rowan who will find Garcia for you if anybody can."

Rowan was sent for and given a letter to be delivered to Garcia. How the "fellow by the name of Rowan" took the letter, sealed it up in an oilskin pouch, strapped it over his heart, in four days landed by night off the coast of Cuba from an open boat, disappeared into the jungle, and in three weeks came out on the other side of the island, having traversed a hostile country on foot and delivered his letter to Garcia are things I have no special desire now to tell in detail. The point I wish to make is this: McKinley gave Rowan a letter to be delivered to Garcia; Rowan took the letter and did not ask "Where is he at?" By the

Eternal! There is a man whose form should be cast in deathless bronze and the statue placed in every college in the land. It is not book-learning young men need, nor instruction about this and that, but a stiffening of the vertebrae which will cause them to be loyal to a trust, to act promptly, concentrate their energies—do the thing, "Carry a message to Garcia."

Bullock wanted only Rowans at his service.

Whenever he came up with a seemingly impossible assignment and a staffer asked, "How are we going to do it," he or she would fall under an icy stare and the admonition, "You need to go back and read *A Message to Garcia*. Don't ask me how to get it done. That's your job."

No More Mister Nice Guy

During the 1975 legislative session, Bullock began eyeing the governor's office. Ultimately, he successfully ran again for comptroller. His personal life and health grew increasingly precarious.

He lived alone, drank alone, and nursed the black moods that were becoming deeper and more prolonged. At work he was indefatigable. He continued to transform and modernize the comptroller's office, played the Legislature the way Willie Mays played center field, and waged war on [Attorney General] John Hill the way Sherman marched to the sea. He partied with the women who worked for him and still used his state airplane as his personal plaything. All looked normal, but underneath, he was unraveling.

The crash came in November 1977. He and Amelia filed their divorce papers that month, and Bullock, gaunt and weary, his mental state deteriorating, found no solace in the farmhouse on the pond, where the nights were brooding and fretful. His physical condition suggested to friends that he may have been suffering from lung cancer, and they persuaded him to check into M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston. Tests revealed no malignancy—only a pre-cancerous lesion of the mouth and throat—but to no one's surprise he was diagnosed as manic depressive, a condition aggravated by excessive drinking. His liver also was damaged by alcohol, and his blood pressure was being pushed off the chart by heavy smoking. The doctors agreed to treat him only if someone stayed with him on an around-the-clock suicide watch. His top aides took turns shuttling from Austin to Houston on a state airplane.

His personal and professional lives were in shambles, and he indicated to his caretakers that he felt incapable of coping with them. Three divorces. Lawsuits for failure to pay his debts. Killer addictions. Periodic estrangement from his son. Accusations of corruption. A political future in peril. [Bill] Collier was one of the crew that rotated in and out of Houston to keep watch on him. In one period of acute funk, Bullock told him, "I want you to draft a letter of resignation for me." Collier nodded, but sat on the request for a few days until improved spirits pushed thoughts of quitting from Bullock's mind.

He was released after a couple of weeks, but little in his lifestyle or disposition had been altered by the dire warnings of his physicians. He was unable, or unwilling, to stop smoking and drinking. For a few months, he took lithium for the bipolar disorder, but discontinued treatment because, he complained, "it took the edge off of my personality."

His personality was clearly edgy entering the election year. He and his staff, working on state time, put together an elaborate re-election strategy in the fall of 1977, mostly at state expense: News releases individually tailored for local newspapers, tapes for local radio stations, color slides for television stations, and extensive use of his card file of local officials and contributors. Collier complained to Bullock about the bank of secretaries outside his office with "Bullock Campaign 1978" stationery in their typewriters. Bullock took swift and efficient action. He put room dividers in front of the secretaries' desks so Collier could not see what they were doing. January proved that it was all a wasted effort. No one, Democrat or Republican, challenged Bullock for the comptroller's office. The absence of opposition may have convinced him that a year of bad press had left him unscathed and bulletproof.

Drunk School and Beyond

In 1981, Bullock entered alcohol rehab at a California clinic. Friends and employees wondered which of the two Bullock personalities would return.

Long considered a man with an evil twin, the duality of his personality was summed up in a popular saying around the comptroller's office: "Bob is as noble as John Kennedy and as barbaric as Idi Amin, and always at the same time." But the Idi Amin side generally was chalked up to booze. Was it possible that the bad Bullock had been exorcised?

The tales Austin's bureaucrats and politicos reveled in telling about him were more likely to involve savagery than benevolence, but his close friends swore that he was not without feeling and sentimentality. Somewhere, wrapped up in that spring-loaded bundle of implacability, they said, was a tender heart. Claudia Stravato, who worked for Bullock and became his friend, told *Texas Monthly*, "He had to put on such a brusque exterior, but he was soft as mud inside. He could cry at the drop of a hat."

And here are Bill Collier's words, written about the Bullock he knew in better times, in better moods, before things went wrong and the *other* Bob Bullock threatened to take over completely:

Christmas Day, 1976. I was spending the day alone at a rented farmhouse, broke, broken by a nasty divorce, trying not to be miserable, concentrating on cleaning the wild duck I had shot that morning on the pond out back. The crunch of tires on gravel, sound of the door opening: In walked my employer and friend Bob Bullock ... and his constant companion, a bottle of Old Charter.

"I knew I would find you out here cryin'," Bullock said.

"I wasn't crying," I protested.

We had drinks. Bullock told of a horrible Christmas he spent alone and sick in a rundown hotel room after one of his divorces. Then about another Christmas when he and other misfits got together to cheer each other up, but he wound up hiding in a back room so he could cry unnoticed.

We both cried. We had more drinks.

"I love you like a brother," Bullock said.

He gave me the bottle and fifty dollars and saw me off to San Angelo, where, he reminded me, a woman who cared about me was waiting. He was right, and it was a good Christmas after all.

There were about 3,000 employees in the comptroller's office in 1977, and it would have been nearly impossible for Bullock to know all of them. But like a politician running for mayor of a small town, he was intent on knowing at least something about each one, or as many as a cranial database could absorb. He sat for hours in his rocking chair reading personnel files and tucking away tidbits for future use. Then, in a conversation with a staff member, he would mention an item of personal information he had gleaned from the files—alma mater, birth date, number of children. Was it to let them know he was interested in them or to let them know that he knew things? Was he Kennedy or Amin at that moment? No one could be certain. The employee might be pleased that the boss was interested in him or her. More often, he or she was nagged by the questions. *Has he been checking up on me? Why?* Now and then, they found that he used that information about them in ways that were contradictory to his public persona of a politician given to wrathful rampages and vengeful plots.

A few months after he became Bullock's chief of staff, Ralph Wayne's fourteen-year-old daughter was killed in an automobile accident in Brownwood. After attending his daughter's funeral, Wayne returned to the Austin townhouse he had rented but had not taken the time to furnish with a television. In his bedroom, he found a large Sony Trinitron and a note from Bullock: "I know you won't be sleeping much, so I thought this would help."

A couple of days later, Wayne flew his private plane to South Padre Island, rented a condo, and planned to spend some time working through his grief by reading and walking the beaches and jetties in solitude. He spent a day on the sand under a gloomy overcast and returned to shelter before the rain came. He stayed up all night, finally fell asleep at six o'clock in the morning, and was awakened by a knock on the door at ten-thirty.

Wayne, telling the story to *Texas Monthly*:

I opened the door and it's Bullock. He said, "You all right? Family's looking for you. Hell, everybody's looking for you."

I said, "Yeah, I'm all right."

He got up and left. He knew the numbers on my airplane and tracked me down. Found it at the Cameron County airport.

Even Ben Barnes, an old nemesis about whom Bullock had once vowed to "tell a lie a day" for the rest of his life, got an unanticipated glimpse of a curiously conciliatory comptroller. After losing his race for governor in 1972, Barnes returned to Brownwood to work for his friend and benefactor Herman Bennett. For nearly a decade he had no contact with Bullock. One day, out of the blue, he received a phone call: Bullock was flying into town and wanted to meet at the Brownwood airport. Not knowing what to expect, Barnes agreed, and the two met in a hangar where Bullock's plane was being serviced. It was a short but memorable encounter.

"We've hated one another long enough," Bullock said. "We ought to be friends."

They shook hands, and Bullock departed. A few months after that meeting, Barnes moved back to Austin to join with John Connally in a commercial real estate development business. They had been masterful politicians, but, at least in this instance, were hapless businessmen. Their development company began at a time when the Texas real estate market was in a silent decline that was about to become a thunderous collapse. The day after they filed for bankruptcy protection, Bullock showed up at Barnes' office, handed him $10,000, and said, "Just pay me back when you can."

Employees told of thank-you letters coming to his office from people they had no idea he had helped. At Christmas time, he received cards of thanks for favors he had rendered but had not discussed with anyone.

"He helped hundreds of people," said Nick Kralj, the Quorum Club owner and sometime political operative. "He would help people who were not capable of reciprocating in any manner."

Ann Richards: Friend or Enemy?

Bullock was elected lieutenant governor in 1990, when Ann Richards defeated Clayton Williams for the governor's seat Bullock had long coveted. The two tangled almost immediately.

"Hairy-legged lesbians," is how Bullock came to refer to Gov. Richards and her female staff.

Certainly, the inauguration had been a Bullock-Richards lovefest, but it wilted quicker than a rose in the desert. Bullock sized up the governor's staff as incompetent, indecisive, too cautious, and in one respect, too fiscally conservative. One thing that didn't help was that the new lieutenant governor had offered a job to Susan Rieff as an environmental adviser. Rieff accepted, but then was asked to go to work for the new governor. She chose to work for Richards, and Bullock, to say the least, didn't forget.

Richards instituted the ritual of having the lieutenant governor and the House speaker to the governor's mansion each Monday morning for breakfast and policy discussions. Bullock found the menu decidedly petit. After one breakfast, according to Speaker Gib Lewis, Bullock had about $100 worth of groceries delivered to the governor's mansion, along with a note: "Next time, I'd like to be fed."

Some of those close to Bullock felt that his resentment of Richards involved more than her breakfast menu or the performance of her staff. He had held some of the most important positions in state government for three decades, but couldn't seize the gold ring. She had risen quickly from a *lowly* county commissioner to the *insignificant* position

Bob Bullock and Ann Richards

Photo by Senate Media

of state treasurer to governor, and was a rising star in the national Democratic Party to boot. *It should have been him.* With an eye on the political future, Richards tried to avoid controversy; with no political future, Bullock was as brash and impatient as ever. The clash of styles was inevitable.

Early in the session, Bullock attended a gathering at the governor's mansion, where Richards was entertaining newspaper editors and editorial writers from around the state. On the turf of a governor dancing in glass shoes, he sported steel-toed boots.

"Texas needs an income tax," he declared from the grand staircase in the governor's mansion, responding to the editors' questions about the unhappy budget prognosis. He had said it before, had he not? Not exactly. Not so emphatically. For a quarter of a century, Bullock had been warning the Legislature that an income tax "should be looked at" or that it was "inevitable" as Texas ran out of revenue options. Bullock's predecessor, Bill Hobby, had called for an income tax in late 1989, but as he was on his way out of office and not facing another election. Now Bullock was saying the time had come, saying it in the governor's new house in the presence of influential opinion-makers. He was the polecat at the prom, and the odor of an outcast topic was as welcome as fire ants.

The reaction was swift, clamorous, and negative. "We literally had two fax machines melt into the corner over the weekend," said Paul Hobby, Bullock's chief of staff.

Rumors started to circulate that Bullock was terminally ill. Why else would he so forcefully attempt political suicide? So convincing were the rumors that friends called his office to inquire about him. Word of his imminent passing reached his old friend Clinton Manges, the South Texas rancher whose on-the-edge financial dealings had landed him in bankruptcy court. "Hey, Bullock," he said, "I got two hundred grand stashed away that nobody knows about. Let's go around the world. One last good go."

Hobby was impressed by the devotion of Bullock's pals. "Here was Clinton Manges, admitting to fraud on a federal court to take his friend Bob Bullock around the world and blow his last two hundred grand," Hobby said. "That tells you about ... the way people felt about him."

Some of the storm also blew against Richards' door. Bullock's dropping of the income-tax bomb in the governor's mansion was greeted with about as much enthusiasm as if he had fouled himself. Richards hadn't campaigned against an income tax and hadn't ruled it out. But her stock response when asked about it while campaigning was that she didn't think one was necessary. For Bullock to have outed the idea in that gathering of newspaper folk, where it was sure to zoom around the state like a ricocheting laser beam, not only upstaged the governor, but was going to make an issue-packed legislative session even more difficult. A number of people thought it was a good idea, and agreed with Bullock and Bill Hobby that it was long overdue. But if there's a right time for the right idea, this wasn't it. Richards was still testing her wings as governor, and now Bullock had provided a large and turbulent headwind. *How dare he?*

You've Got to Kiss Me First

The closeness of Bullock's relationship with Gov. George W. Bush mystified political observers. Though the Republican governor was not exempt from "it"—Bullock's temper—he and Bullock worked together better than Bullock and Richards had. In 1995, Bullock fell from a deer stand and broke both wrists, then contracted pneumonia.

Recovered from the pneumonia, Bullock returned to the Senate and continued to run it in the manner in which the senators were accustomed, with sound and fury.

Sen. Rodney Ellis, an African-American from Houston, had introduced a bill in the 1993 session that would have resulted in more black judges getting onto the bench. It failed, and he came back in 1995 with another, this one to appoint some judges in larger counties. Bullock knew the bill would be difficult and controversial, so he sent [David] Sibley, [Ken] Armbrister and [John] Montford to meet with Ellis and work out a compromise. Ellis considered their proposal, but decided to stand firm.

He got a call from Bullock.

"They tell me you didn't want to compromise," Bullock snapped.

"No I didn't," Ellis said.

"Well fuck you, you black motherfucker," Bullock shouted. "You've got to show some leadership. You can't have everything you want."

Startled, Ellis tried to calm him. "Governor, I've always supported you," Ellis said.

"Fuck you," Bullock said.

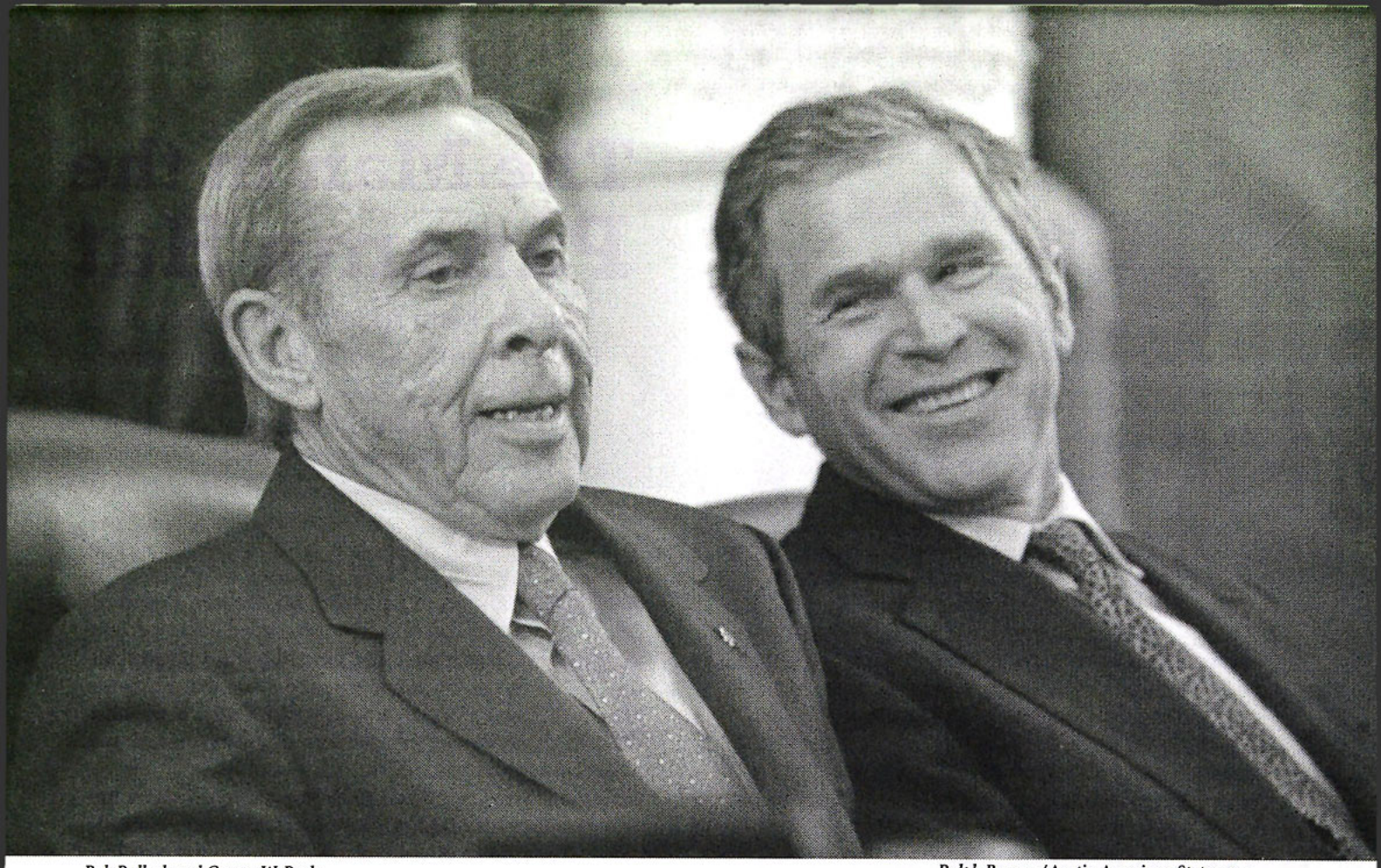
Ellis invoked the name of Mickey Leland, a popular African-American former Texas House member from Houston, on whose congressional staff Ellis had once worked. Leland was one of the black legislators who had forgiven Bullock for his segregationist votes when he was a House member, and had been killed in a plane crash in Africa that precipitated Ellis's move to the Senate.

"Fuck Mickey Leland, too," Bullock said.

Ellis was so distraught that he left his office and walked around the Capitol grounds for a long time, trying to figure out what to do—about Bullock and his judicial appointment bill. He talked to Sen. Eddie Bernice Johnson, another African American, who told him, "Do what you've got to do." He decided he would not compromise just to get along with Bullock. How would he get along with him? He called Jack Roberts for advice.

"Ellis, if he cusses you out, that means he likes you," Roberts assured him.

Rather than keep Ellis' bill from advancing to a vote, Bullock presided over its passage in the Senate, but, to no great surprise, it died in the House. Bullock later called and told Ellis, "You're a great Texan." He confided that he had stood with Ellis on that bill "to make up for voting for that poll tax" in the late 1950s. He invited Ellis and his wife to join him and Jan on a trip to South Africa after the session closed.



Bob Bullock and George W. Bush *Ralph Barrera/* Austin American-Statesman

Gov. Bush also received the it Paul Hobby had foretold. It was precipitated by Bush's appointment of Catherine Mosbacher, the wife of Bullock's 1990 Republican opponent, to the Department of Human Services board. He had no legal obligation to consult with Bullock, but giving him a heads-up courtesy might have avoided it. While Bullock was still smoldering over the Mosbacher affair, Bush showed up in the Senate uninvited. Governors don't have Senate floor privileges, though that prohibition is generally ignored.

Bullock, watching Bush meander from desk to desk during a floor debate, laid down his gavel, stepped down from the podium and walked over to the governor, got close to Bush, and said, "You're a cocky little motherfucker, aren't you?"

Bush, taking Hobby's advice, smiled and moved on.

Those who had to deal with him could see little evidence that a 20-foot fall and a near-death experience with pneumonia had taken any starch out of him.

But the friendship between the new governor and the grizzled, combative lieutenant governor developed into a warm one. "I think that Bullock initially had a very good political relationship with Governor Bush, beginning with the governor's election," said Jack Martin, Bullock's close confidante who managed the lieutenant governor's part of their joint inauguration. "But as time passed Bob developed a true and deep personal affection for the governor. What I saw between those two men was as deep a friendship as I have seen."

"Their friendship was based on straight talk, constant communication, and sharing a public policy agenda that always placed the people of Texas first and foremost," said Reggie Bashur, a top aide on Bush's gubernatorial staff. "They agreed on many issues, but when they had a difference of opinion on an issue, there was an abiding respect and unwavering spirit of cooperation."

[House Speaker Pete] Laney recalled an episode when that friendship defused a potentially serious conflict. During one of their weekly meetings, Bush and Bullock were at an impasse over a detail in one of Bush's cornerstone issues. Bullock was unwilling to compromise.

"I'm going to have to fuck you on this one," he told the governor.

Bush stood, walked over to Bullock, and kissed him.

Sputtering and wiping his mouth, Bullock said, "What the hell was that all about?"

"Nobody ever fucked me without kissing me first," Bush said. ■

Longtime political writer Dave McNeely was a reporter and columnist for the Austin American-Statesman *for 26 years, and continues to write a syndicated column for Texas newspapers. Jim Henderson, a veteran Texas journalist and Pulitzer Prize finalist, is now a freelance writer. He previously worked for the* Dallas Times Herald *and the* Houston Chronicle.

Bob Eckhardt

The Man in the Panama Hat

Gary A. Keith reclaims the legacy of Bob Eckhardt, the quixotic progressive.

By Brant Bingamon

All Photos courtesy of UT Press

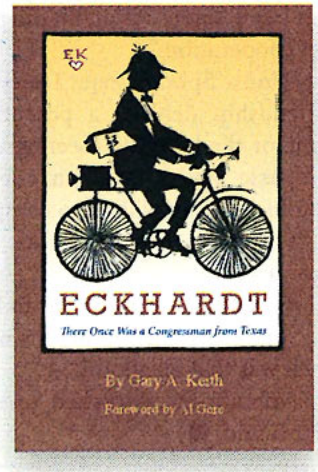
Fellow eccentric Maury Maverick Jr. described Bob Eckhardt as "98 percent genius, 2 percent village idiot." Two percent is probably lowballing it, but none would dispute that Eckhardt was a remarkably perceptive guy, a populist politician with an amused mien, thick drawl, and naughty streak.

Eckhardt: There Once Was A Congressman from Texas is the first biography of the homegrown progressive since his death in 2001. Given the depth of research, it may be the last. The book counts as political science and Texas history. But its greatest accomplishment is reclaiming a crucial figure who is already fading from public memory. Gary A. Keith, a political scientist and assistant professor at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, has done posterity a favor.

"Bob Eckhardt was an intellectual giant who made an indelible mark on the work of the U.S. House Of Representatives during the 14 years he served in that great institution," former Vice President Al Gore writes in the book's foreword. "He was a Shakespeare-quoting, Renaissance man of high principles who had a lust for life that included a love affair with the Constitution and a consuming passion to craft legislation in the public interest."

For four decades—including stints in both the Texas House and U.S. House—Austin-born and bred Eckhardt was a leading figure among Texas progressives. He was also a character. His manner of expression was courtly and ornate. He collected obscure and lyrical turns of phrase, and worked them into his everyday speech. Chairing a subcommittee in the U.S. House, he declared, "Seniority is like a frigid, flirtatious shrew. When I was courting her, she made me miserable. Now that I have her, she gives me no satisfaction." During a debate in the Texas House over whether to delete information on parentage from birth certificates, he said, "I am not so much worried about the natural bastards of this state as the self-made ones."

Literate and droll as he was, he was also wild. Before ever meeting him, his third wife, Celia Morris, had observed the congressman eating at Scholz Garten in Austin, "cutting his bread with his pocketknife and plunging the bread into his



Eckhardt: There Once Was a Congressman from Texas
By Gary A. Keith
University of Texas Press
448 pages $34.95

Bob Eckhardt, JFK and LBJ

gravy, swirling the bread around, then eating it with a look of immense satisfaction." Keith writes, "She was not amused." He describes Eckhardt's lifestyle when he was between wives: "The floor of his apartment was completely strewn with dirty clothes, books, and kitchen items. He would prop his typewriter on two empty whiskey cases close to the gas heater, typing away in a cold apartment." Apparently Eckhardt lived like this at the end of his days, when his supply of wives had been exhausted.

Then there is the matter of Eckhardt's style of dress, which was splendiferous. He was known, especially in later years, for wearing rumpled seersucker suits, gaudy bow ties, and large panama hats. Combining these with his long, thick, gray hair and blunt cigar, Bob Sherrill wrote that he had a "Spanish-moss quaintness and an elegant corniness that people tend to associate with Southern politicians."

As Keith says, the sort of guy you'd like to have a drink with.

Eckhardt was born in 1913 at 2300 Rio Grande in the heart of Austin's West Campus neighborhood. He descended from Prussian nobles who began homesteading the Hill Country in the mid-1800s. Like them, he was a romantic, a classicist, a progressive, an intellectual, and a believer in human rights and civil liberties. He also believed in having fun. As a boy, Eckhardt rode horses, drew on sidewalks with chalk rock, wrote poetry, and sculpted obscene body parts with Johnny Faulk and Jack Kellam from clay dredged from the banks of the Colorado River.

This carefree life stretched into high school and then into his studies at the University of Texas, where Eckhardt encountered a generation's worth of operators who would dominate Texas politics for 50 years. Amazingly, Creekmore Fath, Jake Pickle, John Connally, Allan Shivers, Bernard Rapoport, Tommy Sutherland, Fred Schmidt, Hector Garcia, Gus Garcia, Henry B. Gonzalez, D.B. Hardeman, and Stuart Long, were all his classmates at UT. Most became lifelong allies or adversaries. He couldn't help but get swept into politics, running and losing against Pickle for president of the student assembly.

During these years, Eckhardt added beautiful, strong-willed women to his interests. He met and wooed roommates Orissa Arend and Julya Thomson, falling in love with both. The former became his wife in 1942 and bore him two girls. The latter became his long-term lover. His refusal to give up the affair ended his marriage in 1961. Orissa, suffering from bipolar dis-

order, killed herself four years later. By then Eckhardt had broken off his relationship with Thomson and married Nadine Brammer, another beautiful, talented, and strong-willed woman, and the former wife of Billy Lee Brammer, author of *The Gay Place* and former *Texas Observer* editor. With her, he had another daughter and was a stepdad to Nadine's three kids from her marriage to Brammer.

Eckhardt came of age politically in the 1950s. The political junkie unfamiliar with this era of Texas history should read up—it's impossibly fascinating and perverted. The agreed-upon starting point is 1952, when Ralph Yarborough challenged Allan Shivers for governor. The story goes that Yarborough, the magnetic populist, bumped into Shivers in the Capitol and announced his plan to run for attorney general. Shivers, the establishment autocrat, informed him he need not file: A candidate had already been chosen. The incensed Yarborough filed in the governor's race instead.

That angry reaction began a six-year cycle of endless campaigning, not just for Yarborough, but for Eckhardt and the entire liberal wing of the Texas Democratic Party. Yarborough lost for governor in '52. Between '52 and '54 (governors served two-year terms then), he put enormous pressure on Shivers with nonstop crusading in every corner of the state. Eckhardt stumped right along with him.

Shivers responded with demagoguery. He declared his unalterable opposition to integration. He called a special session of the Legislature and pushed a series of bills that outlawed the Communist Party and mandated death for its members. He charged that Yarborough was controlled by unions and the NAACP, which in turn were controlled by communists. The smears culminated in the notorious "Port Arthur Story," a television spot created by Pickle that turned a labor strike in Port Arthur into a communist plot to destroy the town.

Businesses showed "Port Arthur Story" throughout the state and helped Shivers defeat Yarborough by a few thousand votes in the '54 primary. After the defeat, liberals decided they needed a statewide newspaper to deal with such situations. About 30 met at the Driskill Hotel in October. They decided to purchase *The State Observer* and install 24-year-old Ronnie Dugger as editor. Eckhardt drew up papers for the sale. Dugger, with Eckhardt's crucial backing, was granted complete editorial control. He renamed the paper *The Texas Observer* and turned to Eckhardt for artwork and cartoons.

Eckhardt had found expression for his creative side in various ways all his life. He'd executed murals and paintings during his years at UT and written poetry and journalism as well. Cartooning was his big thing, though. He'd drawn cartoons compulsively since childhood and published many anonymously in the '40's in *The Texas Spectator*, a precursor to the *Observer*. "He created logos for the various sections of the *Observer,* as well as a cartoon for its first issue: a man with a cane, top hat, long braid, and topcoat, saying, 'I do not agree with anything you say, and I will fight to the death your right to say it.'" Dugger was delighted. The two became close friends. Eckhardt drew nearly 100 cartoons for the *Observer* between 1954 and 1990.

In 1957, Yarborough and the liberal Democrats cashed in on six years of campaign frenzy. Yarborough was elected to the U.S. Senate. With liberal power cresting, Eckhardt jumped into a race for a state House seat from Houston. With his connections to labor and the contributions of longtime Yarborough operatives like Frankie Randolph, Eckhardt began a stretch of 22 consecutive years in public office.

Eckhardt loved the work. Keith writes that he "would mull over the bills, listen to the debate, then go sit on the carpeted steps going up to the speaker's desk, scribble out an amendment, plop it on the desk, and wait his turn at the mike." With his friendly, accommodating style, even the segregationists liked him. And he understood not only how to write a bill to make it do what he intended, but how to move it through the sausage grinder.

His first success was the Open Beaches Act of 1959. As he prepared for his freshman term, the Texas Supreme Court issued a ruling allowing beachfront landowners to drill for oil. Some owners thought the decision allowed them to fence their beaches. The ruling disturbed the Eckhardt family, which had for years frolicked on the Galveston beach.

The newly elected representative went into lawyer mode, researching common law. He sent editorials to newspapers. He did interviews. He talked to every member of the House and signed up more than half as co-sponsors of a bill to get the fences taken down. Keith writes, "They may not have known it, but those legislators were signing on not just to a bill to overturn Luttes [the ruling allowing fences], but also to a historical understanding and a legal philosophy that Eckhardt had coaxed from his studies." Eckhardt harmonized elements of Roman and Spanish law, old English law, and the practices of early Texas settlers to arrive at a notion of "the commons" as applied to Texas beaches.

Developers attacked. Even with public opinion overwhelmingly on his side, Eckhardt had to beat back amendment after amendment on narrow vote margins once the bill hit the floor. By reminding fellow legislators of the bill's support (and even dropping his usual decorum on occasion—he uncharacteristically threatened that he would "burn" a fellow congressman if he voted against the bill), he prevailed. In years since, the Open Beaches Act has served as a model for similar measures in California and Oregon. At the end of his legislative career, Eckhardt considered it his best bill.

Eckhardt served eight years in the Texas Capitol and then won a U.S. House seat. Over 14 years in Washington, he pursued the same interests he always had: fair taxing (he spent his life trying to tax the oil and gas industry), civil rights, consumer protection, and safeguarding the environment. His efforts helped clean up Galveston Bay and the Houston Ship Channel, create the Big Thicket National Preserve, regulate toxic substances, improve automobile safety, and ensure the continuation of product safety regulation. Keith writes that "his fingerprints were all over the Alaska Lands Bill, Superfund, Clean Air Act, Securities Act, and Federal Trade Commission Warranty Act [and] he became the chief craftsman of the Toxic Substances Control Act."

As the years went by, Eckhardt focused more on policy and began getting mixed reviews on constituent service. He'd never been an enthusiastic or disciplined campaigner. He wrote that his supporters "demand that I demean myself. ... They think, 'Yeah, he gets elected to that high and mighty office of representative, place 2, but look how silly he looks jumping up as high as he can with his shirttail hanging out, nailing a political placard out of reach; look at him with his pockets all bulging with stuff about himself, trudging through the supermarket parking area.' It's sort of like a fraternity initiation. When you've done enough demeaning exercises to hate yourself and everybody around you, they think you're fit for their company—and I suppose you are."

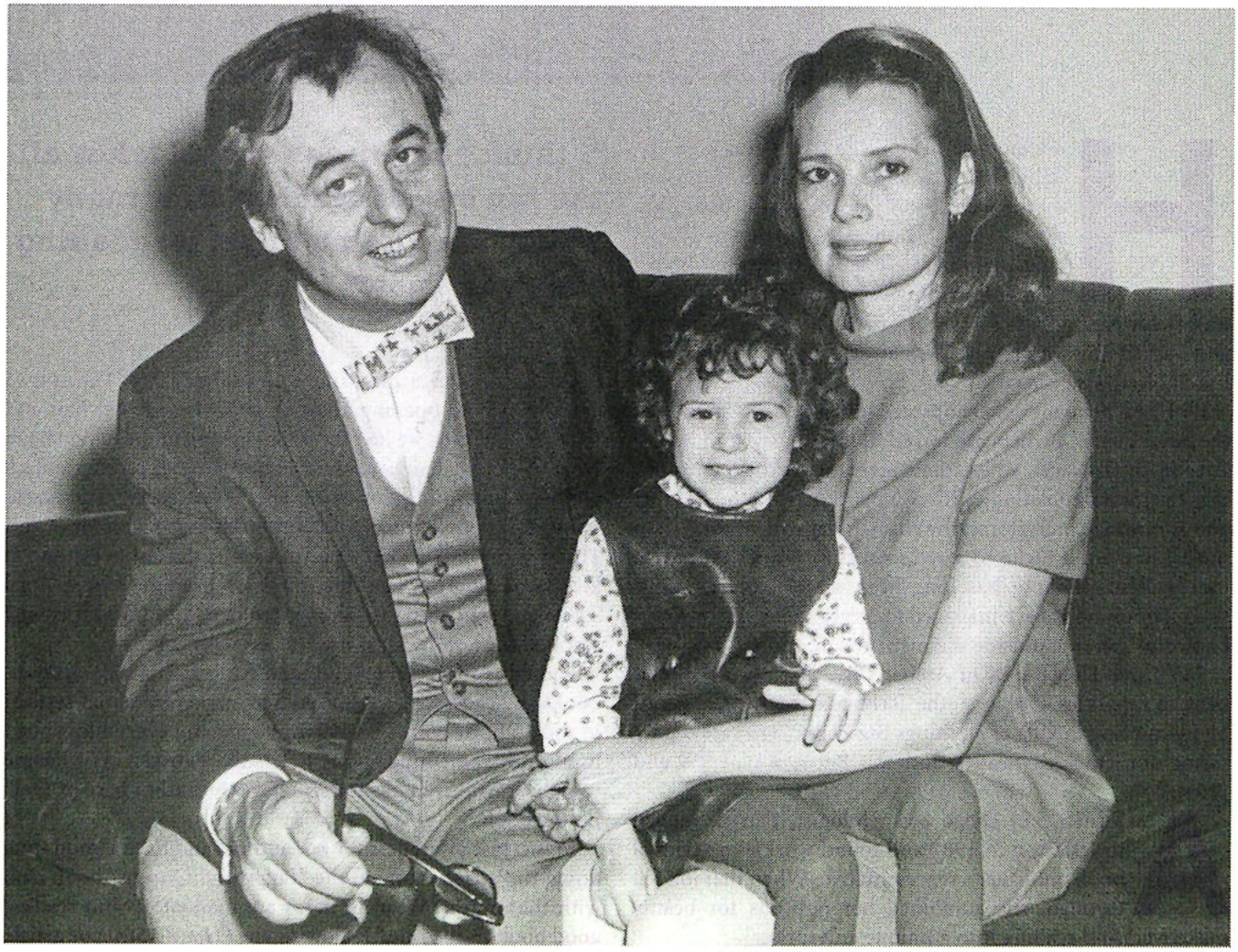
By 1980 only 28 percent of his constituents recognized his name. This, along with his unrelenting attacks on the oil and chemical industries, finally caught up with him. Big oil mobilized. The religious right, a new phenomenon, did so as well. Eckhardt's record of consecutive victories ended at 23. A new political age dawned.

He tried his hand at lobbying, but he'd had heart surgery in 1978 and hadn't been the same since. "His doctor told him to cut back his drinking to no more than one drink a day," writes Keith. "So, he would fill the tallest glass he had with his scotch or his wine and drink that one drink." Booze was blamed for a stroke in 1988 that temporarily stole the famed orator's power of speech. In retirement, Eckhardt liked to spend afternoons sipping whiskey in his backyard tree house. It's one of the places Keith visited him and saw that Eckhardt never gave up his whiskey.

Keith quotes Eckhardt extensively throughout the book. Reading those words creates a certain cognitive dissonance. It's taken for granted that politicians relentlessly focus on their work to the exclusion of a larger life. In Eckhardt's case, the politician never snuffed out the man. In his quotes, we encounter Eckhardt the artist, Eckhardt the lover, Eckhardt the craftsman, Eckhardt the philosopher. But the most disconcerting thing about his words is the vulnerability in them. After his 1958 campaign, he wrote that he'd blocked "that unguarded door of the imagination. I've blocked it in the campaign. I pass out these little cards and brochures and say 'good morning,' 'how are you today,' 'may I give you one of my folders,' 'thanks.' But the door leaks a little." ■

Brant Bingamon is a writer in Austin.

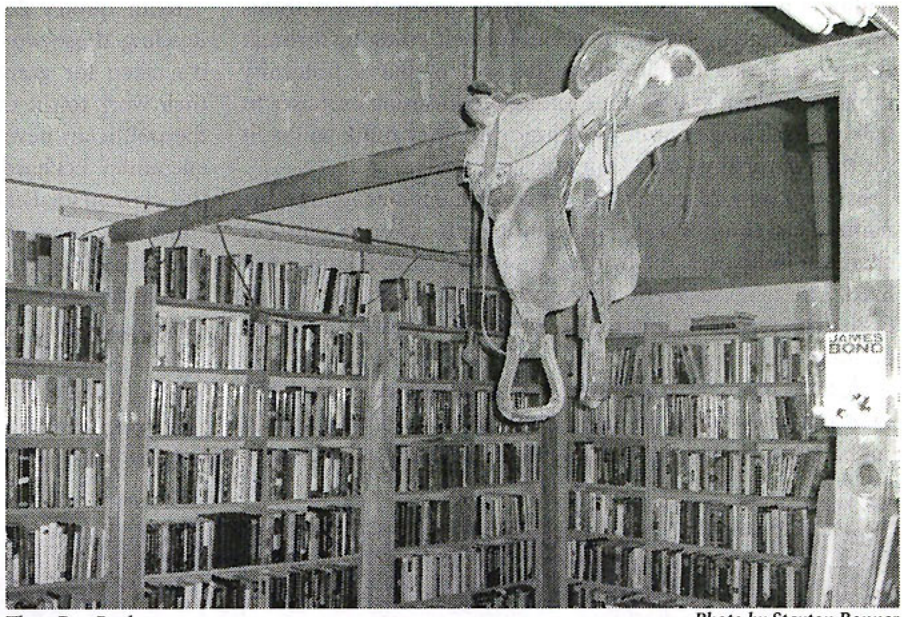
Bob, Nadine and Sarah Eckhardt.



Bound and Determined

Imagination helps small bookstores survive

By STAYTON BONNER



Three Dog Books *Photo by Stayton Bonner*

Hidden deep behind the East Texas pine curtain, Beauty and the Book is almost certainly the world's only beauty salon-bookshop, where visiting authors are treated to a facial and perm before talking about their books. "The funny thing is that the authors love it," proprietor Kathy Patrick says. "Christopher Cook walked in, and I asked him who last cut his hair. He replied, 'I did.' And I said, 'Well, you can tell.'"

With independent bookshops struggling to hang on in even the largest cities, owners are forced to become even more creative in small places, where their inventory of titles outnumbers the local population. With competition from the Internet and sprawling chain stores, the rural, independent bookshop must carve out a niche to stay competitive. In a state where independent thinking has long been an ideological staple, several bookshops have managed to create successful business platforms catering outside the mainstream.

For Three Dog Books in Archer City, that means specializing in rare titles. Out west, the Terlingua Trading Co. hangs on by catering to fans of all things Big Bend.

And for Patrick's Beauty and the Book, it's perms and prose.

A former San Diego cosmetologist, Patrick moved to Jefferson in 1987 and found work as a regional book publisher's representative. When that job fell through, she combined her passions for beauty makeovers and reading into a unique enterprise.

"I think sometimes school takes all the fun out of reading. How many points am I going to get for reading this, you know?"

"*Oxford American* magazine sent author Carol Dawson to cover the grand opening," Patrick says. "I made her hair and makeup, and then we had the book-signing in the dryer chairs. We gave her big hair, and she had brought her mother's black backgammon mink fur coat. She was wearing sunglasses. About 225 people came, and everybody just had a lot of fun. That feature was called 'Hairdresser to the Authors,' and it kicked me off. They had three pages on us in the March-April 2000 issue, and after that hit the stands, every author traveling through the South called me and asked to come by."

Though Patrick initially attempted to sell a wide array of books in her shop, she realized her market potential resided in the author events. "I started off carrying everything, but I found out something about Jefferson," Patrick says. "People usually don't buy books unless I have the author here or I talk up the book."

To increase awareness for her authors and have a good time doing it, Patrick founded the "Pulpwood Queens" book club, with the motto, "Wearing tiaras are mandatory and reading good books is the rule." Following the *Oxford Magazine* article

on her shop, Patrick and her queens were featured on Oprah's Oxygen Network and "Good Morning, America." Patrick says the club's popularity—it has spawned chapters across the country and internationally—can be explained by her simple mantra. "Books can entertain, enlighten, and they don't all have to be homework," she says. "They can be fun. I think sometimes school takes all the fun out of reading. How many points am I going to get for reading this, you know?"

With a book of her own entitled *The Pulpwood Queens' Tiara-Wearing, Book-Sharing Guide To Life* set for national release this month, Patrick is hoping to continue reviving reading in small towns. "My bookstore survives because I'm kind of bringing the big city to my small town," Patrick says. "Authors who come here have this real one-on-one experience with their readership, which they don't get to experience often in other places. Both parties get a lot out of it."

"I might sell one of those books a year, but I think it's important that it's there on the bookshelf."

Three Dog Books overlooks the edge of the plains in downtown Archer City, a blinking-red-light town best known as the home of author Larry McMurtry and location for the 1971 film, *The Last Picture Show*. Owned by Cody and Julie Ressell, Three Dog's weathered stone shop front is often more frequented by UPS trucks than walk-in customers. "Open by chance or appointment," a sign in the window reads.

"Everybody's online these days in the antiquarian book business," Cody Ressell says. "I know people who are pushing 90 that are online. I mean, really, you have to be very, very specialized and have an old list of customers to make it without selling through the Internet."

Dealing mainly in old and rare selections, the antiquarian book business is more akin to the world of antique dealers than the conventional book trade. To find antiquarian books worth selling, dealers often sift through countless stacks of dusty and worthless books before coming across the proverbial diamond in the rough.

Luckily, the Ressells can cull a lot of their stock from their friends and business partners at Booked Up, McMurtry's neighboring shop. Since moving from Washington, D.C., to Archer City in the '90s, McMurtry has established one of the nation's largest antiquarian bookshops in his hometown. Not wanting to hassle with the Internet, McMurtry began working with the Ressells to sell the best of his collection online.

"Since Booked Up is not online, it's good to go through there and find the things that are worth selling on the Internet," Julie Ressell says. "These would be cases where there's only one copy of a book or just a few copies. Not anything common. There's lots and lots of stuff there that's pretty obscure and weird. They might not all be worth a lot individually, but cumulative sales on the Internet add up. At this stage, we still need to sell lots and lots of $50 books and a big one every now and then."

Cody Ressell adds, "The other year, we sold a book entitled *A Tour of Jamaica* for $14,000. It had hand-colored plates and was from the 1700s at least, a memoir by some British consulate."

Despite the impersonal nature of the Internet, the Ressells have worked hard to build relationships with repeat customers, a practice essential in the antiquarian book world.

"It seems to me that the real booksellers are always going to have customers because people who love books are always going to want to deal with shops that they know and are comfortable with," Julie Ressell says. "There are real personal relationships of trust that we build with our customers. They want to know where the book came from and what you know about it, and they'll be perfectly happy to buy other things from you that they're interested in. It takes trust because there's so much out there that's sold as something that it isn't. Books are presented as first editions when they're not or are sold with facsimile dust jackets. There are lots of tricky things. On eBay, there are people who subscribe to our newsletter that they receive every week, where they're updated on what's come into our store and what's gone on to auction."

Looking out at the towering mountains of Big Bend National Park, the Terlingua Trading Co. bookstore is nestled within a gift shop next to the Starlight Theatre in Terlingua's dusty and historic ghost town. Betty Moore, a former *Texas Monthly* production director who left Austin for Terlingua in 1985, runs the store. She also works as a river guide and helps the Peregrine Fund release birds of prey into the wild.

"Tom Gaffaney actually started the store with a couple shelves of books and then expanded it," Moore says. "He's a golf caddy at some big course in New York who comes down here in the off-season. After a few years, the bookstore got a pretty good reputation, so that foundation was built by him. When I would go out of town, I would visit different bookstores and bring him back lists of things to order. When he quit the job in 2000, I took over."

Dealers often sift through countless stacks of dusty and worthless books before coming across the proverbial diamond in the rough.

Understanding visitors' infatuations with the Big Bend region's otherworldly beauty, Moore stocks her store with an in-depth regional selection. "Sometimes people get here and they think they're in a foreign country, you know?" Moore says. "This place just really captures the imagination in a way that other places don't. They want to know more about the wildflowers, birds, geology, and Indian history. We carry

just about everything that I know of written about this area. However, I also take a lot of pride in carrying contemporary fiction and lesser-known stuff like Billy Lee Brammer's *The Gay Place* or John Henry Faulk's *Fear on Trial*. I might sell one of those books a year, but I think it's important that it's there on the bookshelf, you know?"

Purposely keeping the shop a one-room operation with tasteful Southwestern decor, Moore likes the intimacy it affords her visitors.

"To me, the shop's small size and my ability to interact with people make it fun," Moore says. "The bookstore is known primarily through word of mouth, and I think it's that personal relationship that's kind of hard to find these days. Going into a really large store like a Barnes & Noble is great, but I think what we have is just another step further into being able to really relate with the people."

Moore periodically hosts signings, and her biggest draw occurred when Kinky Friedman stopped by during his campaign for governor.

"A friend of mine, Kim Beckwood, had heard he was going to come through Alpine on his travels around the state," Moore says. "She wrote him an e-mail saying, 'Hey Kinky, we live in Terlingua, which is about 90 miles south of there. There aren't many people here, and it's really hot right now, but gee, we'd love to see you.' It turns out that he said yes. We had four days to prepare, and I rushed getting books here for the signing. I could not believe the number of people that came out of the woodwork. There were hundreds of people, some in costumes, and they were carrying silly signs for him. It was really, really fun. We presented him with a replica of the big beer opener that we keep on the wall in the trading company. It was kind of like a key to the city." ■

Stayton Bonner is a writer in Austin.

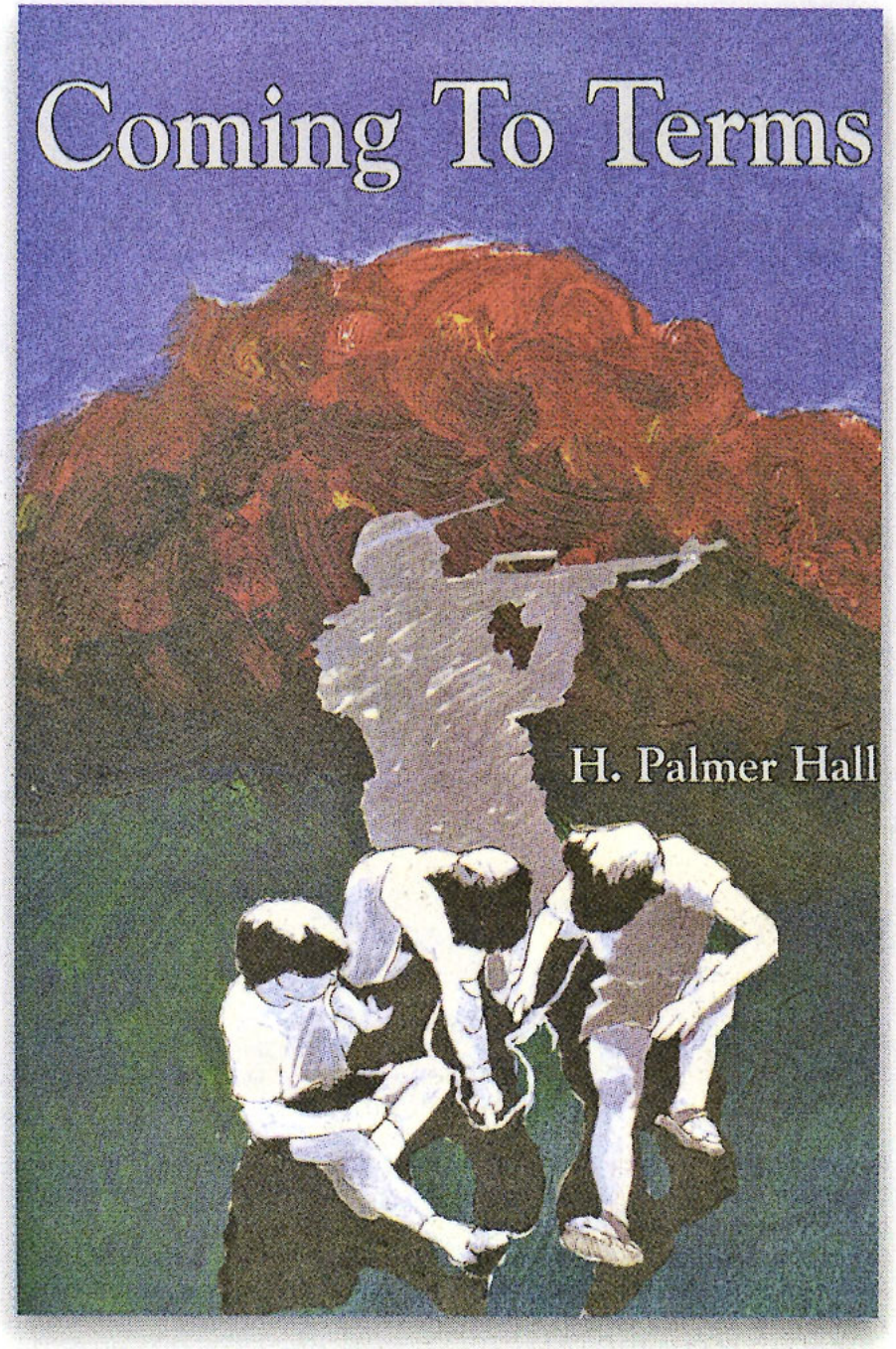
From the Big Thicket to Vietnam and Back

BY MARIAN HADDAD

Coming to Terms
By H. Palmer Hall
Plain View Press
159 pages, $14.95

Reflections from Pete's Pond
By H. Palmer Hall
Pecan Grove Press
31 pages, $5.00

To Wake Again
By H. Palmer Hall
Pudding House Publications
22 pages, $8.95



Three years ago, San Antonio poet H. Palmer Hall came across a notice that National Geographic was going to air a live video stream on its Web site that would allow viewers to watch a pond in Africa. The pond had been built on a game preserve in Botswana because poachers were killing elephants that left the preserve's safety to drink at a nearby river. It was dubbed Pete's Pond, after its builder, Pete Le Roux.

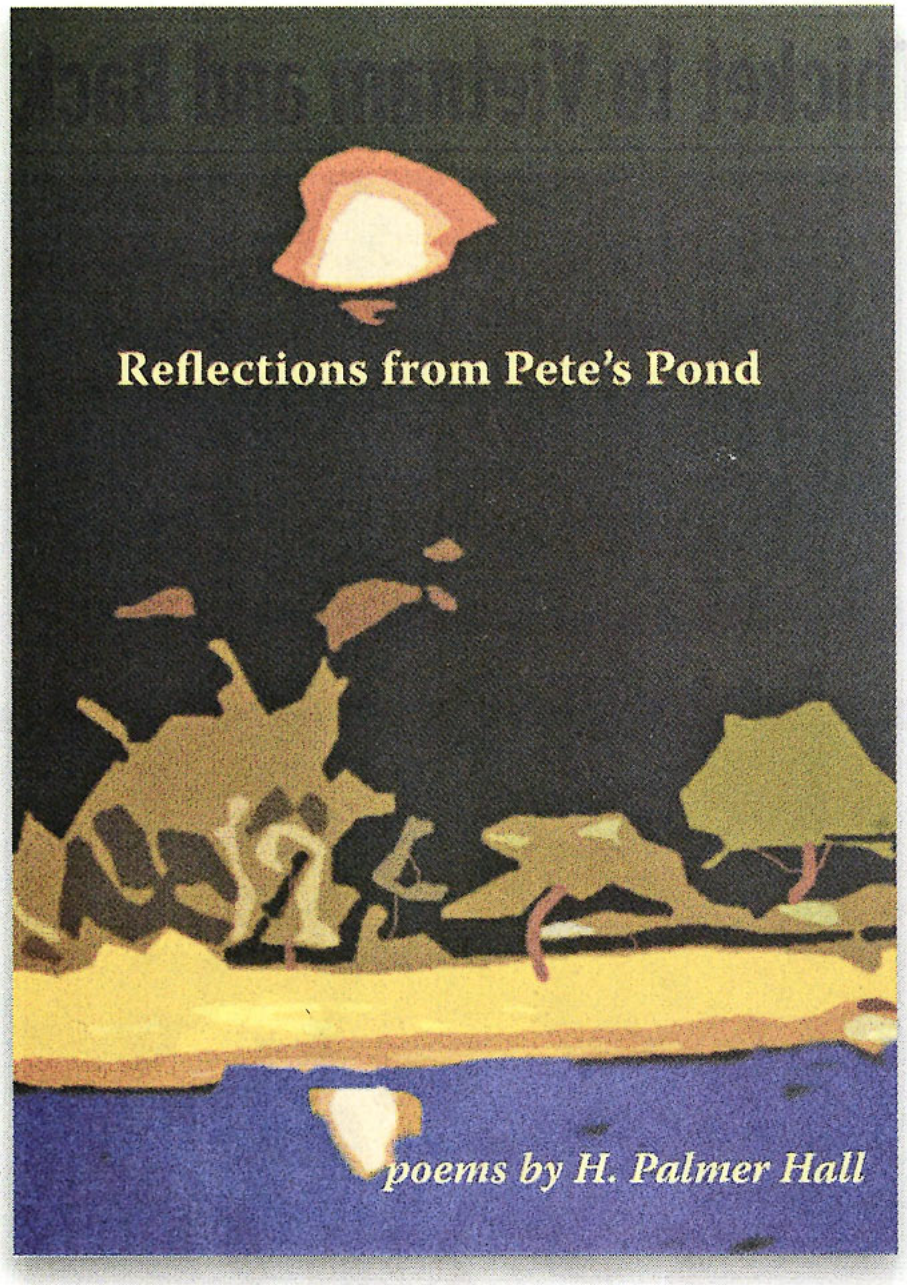
"I logged into it and became fascinated," Hall says. "It was a three-year process, as the live stream runs from about May through December. I joined this discussion group, maybe 12 aficionados of Pete's Pond; I began writing poems about what happened at the pond."

Hall ultimately published *Reflections from Pete's Pond* through Pecan Grove Press, the small publishing house he has run for almost 18 years. Pecan Grove will celebrate its 20th anniversary this fall. (The press has also published my work.) He struck up a correspondence with Le Roux, and the collection of poems wound up on sale at the Mashutu Game Reserve.

Pete's Pond is one of the many wells from which Hall, 65, has drawn during a literary career that has established him as an icon in San Antonio. Hall has been library director at St. Mary's University in San Antonio since 1978. One year after arriving, he also took the reins of the Louis J. Blume Academic Library as well as teaching creative writing and other courses at the university.

An accomplished poet in his own right, Hall has used his publishing house to help launch other poetic voices. Lately, he has begun drawing the accolades many think he has long deserved.

Hall was a recent nominee for a Pushcart Prize for his poem "Vietnam



Roulette," which appeared in *The Valparaiso Poetry Review*. The poem begins: *They thought a little game might be nice, / an American version of Russian Roulette, / ... Like the Texas / lottery, only you win, you lose, and the only / thing you bet's your life. That's how / the game works. Only, they forgot / the props.* Hall also wrote an essay on John Balaban, a poet and conscientious objector to the Vietnam War who spent his life trying to understand the Vietnamese people; it appears in the same issue of *The Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

Hall's seventh book, a collection of essays titled *Coming to Terms* (Plain View Press 2007), has just hit the shelves.

His Pecan Grove Press now enjoys a national and international presence, receiving approximately 300 manuscripts a year for consideration. The press has published 85 books, some by new poets, some by poets who've published multiple books: Glover Davis (professor emeritus at San Diego State's MFA program); Patricia Fargnoli (current poet laureate of New Hampshire); James Hoggard (former poet laureate of Texas); Larry D. Thomas (current poet laureate of Texas), Thomas Whitbread (twice winner of the Texas Institute of Letters Poetry Award for best poetry book of the year), as well as new and promising poets such as Jill Essbaum.

Born in Beaumont, Hall lived there for 20 years, earning his bachelor's degree in speech and English at what was then Lamar State College of Technology (now Lamar University). From a young age, Hall wanted to experience life with a keen eye, to take in the adventurous happenings of the world.

In his early 20s, Hall left for New York to experience the World's Fair, where he found himself selling hotdogs. He then returned to Silsbee, Texas, a rural area at the edge of the Big Thicket, where he taught English for two years. The rest of his life would expose him to the stark realities that he documents in detailed and compelling fashion in his many collections of prose and poetry.

Hall went to Vietnam from Southeast Texas as a young man, which is why the subject of war is so present in his work. He spent 1967-68 ("probably the most important year") in Vietnam: the year of the Battle of Dak To and the Tet Offensive and the siege of Khe Sanh. In his poems and essays, Hall feels safe enough to enter the political and personal explorations of a soldier in the midst of an unforgotten war.

Hall shares his entry into that space of war: "As soon as I had decided to go to grad school, I was drafted into the Army between my teaching deferment and my student deferment in 1964. I went to basic training and attended 74 weeks of language school in Washington, D.C., to learn Vietnamese, in which I was once conversational."

After basic training, Hall was sent to Fort Hood, Texas, and trained for six months with the 198th Light Infantry Brigade. He was shipped to Vietnam via San Francisco and landed at Chu Lai in August 1967.

"I stayed till the end of July 1968, after which I was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland, to work at the National Security Agency, which later expelled me for marching in peace demonstrations and signing a petition against the war." Hall received an honorable

discharge in December 1969.

Hall has also edited a Pecan Grove anthology containing Desert Storm poems, *A Measured Response.* A recent poetry collection of Hall's, *To Wake Again* (Pudding House Press), contains poems that deal with the second Gulf War and the current Iraq war. Robert Bonazzi, an accomplished poet-writer and literary critic, described Hall's poems as "deeply meditative and compassionate" in the *San Antonio Express-News.* But Hall is not limited to writing about war-gone-bad, as he also touches on a variety of other subjects from nature to racism.

In his new book, *Coming to Terms,* Hall offers essays exploring the year he spent in Vietnam; as well as growing up in East Texas in the Big Thicket; the unthinkable murder of James Byrd Jr.; and other topics including thoughts on "Getting Married" and on solitude and walking or driving alone. "But I have seen an eagle fly in the Hill Country and dolphins near the islands and leaves turn red on maple trees," he writes. "And I have been alone with all this, free to be a part of it without having to tell anyone else what I am thinking. That's worth the long drives."

In "Driving through Milwaukee," Hall takes us into his own dream works. He exemplifies dream-telling in such a lucid way that the reader feels that familiar disassociation endemic to dreams, that place where things make sense only in a gray and discombobulated space.

Hall takes these dream moments that swim into each other, allowing the reader to wade through *his* dreams. His ability to create that place is astonishing, allowing the reader to feel the murky reality of non-reality, where nonsensical things make their own sense:

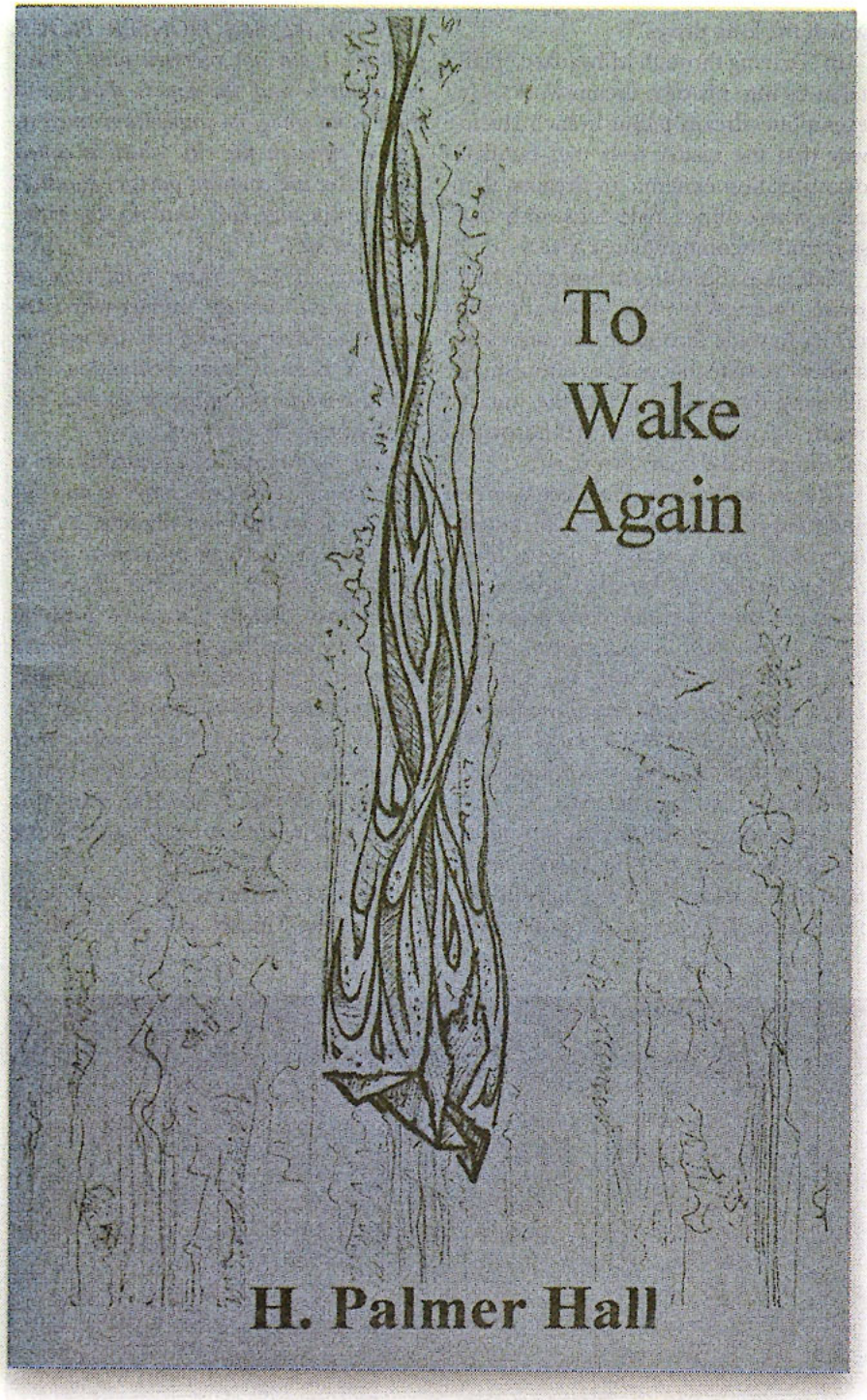
I am in the house on Rio Grande Street and I am in Milwaukee and I am sitting in an old chair. Linda, who never lived there, is on the floor, her cheek against my knee, her long dark hair flows down my leg as I drive past an exit sign that says Khe Sanh-20Km. We were never lovers, Linda and I, for some reason neither of us has ever figured it out, but it's right somehow that she is here in Milwaukee as the world is coming to an end.

... Dreaming of Milwaukee and thinking of the past I drive by some kind of flour mill, a strange building tall and not very wide or long, old red bricks and huge letters on the side, PIONEER FLOUR, perhaps. I am not married and I have no children and the top is down and there is no smog, no unpleasant smell as I drive through the city which is called Milwaukee but contains parts of Houston and Austin and San Antonio, the cities that bred me ...

I question this dream from time to time, almost wake up, wonder why I am in Milwaukee and why I am driving and whether there is some destination and why the world is coming to an end, but the dream doesn't answer.

A big man in dreadlocks moans into a microphone as the walls move in and out and the green light hits my face ... I am dreamdriving through Milwaukee and I am on something ... and the city begins to shimmer ... where Milwaukee becomes something more than Laverne and Shirley ever thought it could be and Linda and I are making love, not moving, just the smooth vibrations of the car rolling over the freeways of the city and the world is coming to an end. When Hall reads this piece, it is mesmerizing; he is as strong a reader as he is a writer.

The essay at the core of the book is "The Big Thicket and the Death of



James Byrd Jr." In it, Hall says of the Big Thicket, *It's the land that produced me and that produced James Byrd and that also produced three men who could look at James Byrd and not see a man, three men who could only see a thing that they called a "nigger." Three men who beat up James Byrd and tied him to the back bumper of their truck and dragged him for miles ... dragged him until parts of his body broke off the main trunk ... dragged him until his head separated from his body and lay beside the road.* Not afraid to detail the intensity of a happening, Hall unabashedly takes us into the shocking truth of racism.

In his opening essay, Hall writes, *I am thinking, too, about the year I was seven years old and my doctor told me I was going blind in my right eye ... I am thinking mostly about poetry and only a little about surgical "procedures" and about how everything these days is a "process." ... is movement toward something or, perhaps, away from something else ... To walk across the street is a dangerous thing ... and to write a poem can also be dangerous, as dangerous, at least, as crossing a street with our eyes closed ... I was seven years old ... I did not think about poetry then, but the place was poetry and the place was dangerous ... Poetry is dangerous, I think, if it is poetry worth doing. Poetry is risk taking, pushing yourself and your words out there into water so deep ... a single wave can drown you ... that single moment of awareness.*

Readers can look forward to another Hall book of poems, from Turning Point Press, in 2009 titled *Foreign and Domestic.* "They're poems about my whole life: Vietnam. James Byrd Jr. The Big Thicket. A poetic version of the essays in *Coming to Terms,* plus poems about the Persian Gulf wars," Hall says.

As to poetry's current state, Hall says, "We have a very strong contemporary poetry scene. A lot of people lament the various writing programs in colleges and universities. I think it's a combination of some jealousy, a genuine feeling about a whole lot of bad poetry in the country, and there is a lot, but there always has been. It just hasn't survived for us to read. I have this book on Civil War poems, and 90 percent of it is sheer dreck, because the editors included poems for political reasons. It's not just an edition of the great poems of the Civil War, it tries to be all-inclusive, and there is so much crap in that book that's important for political and social reasons, but not for literary reasons.

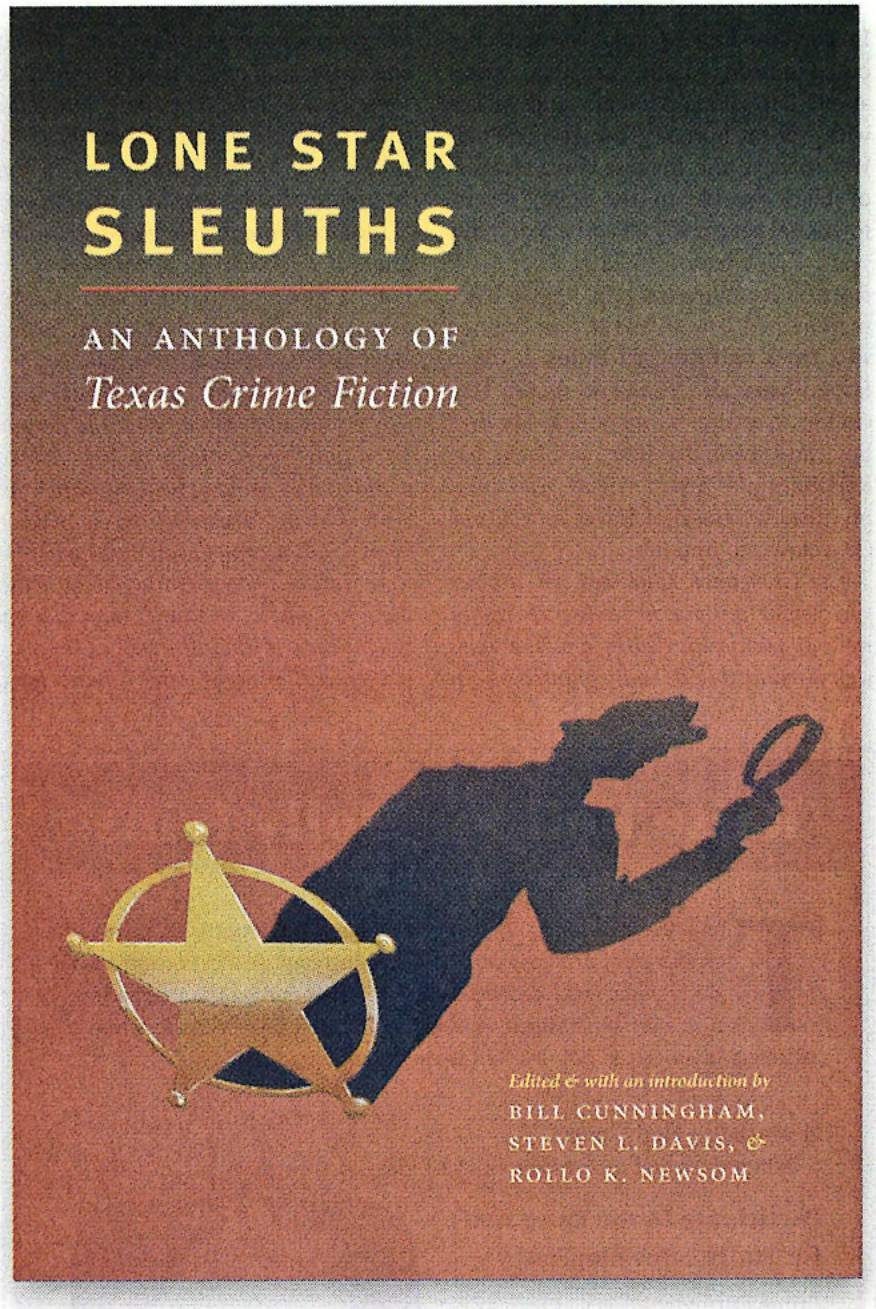
"Let's remember, in any generation, maybe 10 percent, if that much, of what's published is going to be really, really good." ■

Marian Haddad, MFA, poet-essayist-manuscript consultant, lives in San Antonio. Her chapbook Saturn Falling Down *was published at the request of Texas Public Radio. Her full-length collection of poems,* Somewhere between Mexico and a River Called Home, *was published in 2004 by Pecan Grove Press.*

A Statewide Investigation

BY STAYTON BONNER

Lone Star Sleuths: An Anthology of Texas Crime Fiction
Edited by Bill Cunningham, Steven L. Davis, and Rollo K. Newsom
University of Texas Press
304 pages, $25.95



If squinting survivors straggling across the Lone Star state years after some manmade apocalypse wanted to learn about the Texans that came before, they would be fortunate to stumble upon *Lone Star Sleuths: An Anthology of Texas Crime Fiction*. Far from the clichéd, cowboy-and-wildcatter stereotypes of old, the heroes who populate the anthology cover the dark corners of a modern Texas not touted in tourist brochures. Imagine Bob Phillips, the Prozac-perky host of *Texas Country Reporter*, as a hard-drinking, skirt-chasing collection agent with an impending divorce and a snub-nosed pistol.

The anthology features 30 excerpts from Texas' best mystery novels, grouped into seven geographic sections: El Paso and West Texas; Austin and the Hill Country; Houston and the Gulf Coast; Dallas-Fort Worth and the Panhandle; East Texas; San Antonio and South Texas; and small-town Texas. Each excerpt begins with a brief history of the author and some commentary on the regional relevance. The stories take the reader from the mean streets to the posh districts to the rural outposts as protagonists pursue their culprits. Woven into the mysteries is a compendium of the state's most controversial issues, providing a crash course on Texas' current condition.

"While a very real affection for Texas exists in these books, the portraits will not always please boosters of the Lone Star State: There's rampant pollution along the upper Texas coast, wasteful water usage in West Texas, white racists in East Texas, gang activity in San Antonio, religious intolerance in small towns," the editors write. "This is not the stuff of glossy literature. Call it realism. And it's perfectly suited to crime literature."

Modern Texas is one of the most ethnically diverse states in the country. Reflecting this fact, the crime fiction protagonists come from a variety of backgrounds and hold a wide array of jobs. "Now a private eye can also be a rock musician, funeral director, game warden, advertising executive, stand-up comedian, priest, English professor, fashion stylist, football player, herb shop owner, librarian, chef, birdwatcher, salvage boat operator, and lesbian forensic

chemist," the editors write. "There is even room among their ranks for a Jewish country-and-western musician and provocateur named 'Kinky.'"

Often, the mystery is just a means for exploring regional cultures and issues. In *The Two-Bear Mambo*, Nacogdoches-based author Joe R. Lansdale writes about East Texas' violence and racism with offbeat humor. Though the Piney Woods have the highest concentration of black people in the state, several towns are practically all white. For many years, Vidor had a Ku Klux Klan bookstore on its main street. In 1998, a black man named James Byrd Jr. was chained to a truck and dragged to his death in Jasper. Lansdale's protagonists are Hap Collins, a white, womanizing, good ol' boy, and Leonard Pine, a black, gay Republican. When a friend goes missing, the two buddies travel to fictional Grovetown to find her.

The Grovetown Café was not a place you would mistake for a French restaurant. It was overly warm and the walls were decorated with badly painted ceramic birds and squirrels, and there was some of that really bad hillbilly music you hear from time to time but can't quite believe it. It's not even AM radio pop. It only plays in ancient towns with jukeboxes that have glass cases coated gray by oily hands. It's like generic heavy metal and rap. Who listens to this stuff on purpose? It sounds like some kind of joke. The sharp little notes clung to the air and stuck to my head like prickly pear thorns. They went well with the stench of old grease from the kitchen.

I waded through grease and music and found a stool and sat down and waited. From a back booth a couple of guys stared at me. They were in their thirties, healthy-looking, but they had the attitude of men with "back problems" on workdays. It's a mysterious ailment that seems to descend on a large percentage of the redneck population. I couldn't help but think they were drawing a check from somewhere. Some kind of compensation. Maybe they were watching me nervously because they thought I was an insurance man that had caught them without their back braces.

I figured, at night, after a hard day of smoking cigarettes, swigging coffee, and cussin' the niggers and liberals, they'd buy a couple of six-packs, go home and pass out in front of the TV set after beating the wife and kids, a half-eaten bag of generic-brand potato chips clutched to their chests.

Then again, here I was judging people I didn't even know. I was starting to be just like the people I despised. They were probably a couple of nuclear physicists on vacation, stopping in here to soak up the homey atmosphere.

"That nigger out there will want more'n a couple of them patties," said one of the men in the back. "A nigger likes a peanut pattie. Next to what a woman's got, and a watermelon, ain't much they like better."

I looked at them and smiled sadly. I began to understand why so many clichés persist. Too much truth in them.

Austin-based author Jesse Sublett, a former lead singer and bass player for the 1970s punk band the Skunks, began writing mystery novels in the 1980s. His detective, Martin Fender, can't pay the bills as a musician, so he works as a skip tracer at a collection agency. Like fellow musician Kinky Friedman, Sublett gives the reader droll insight into the music business under the faintest pretences of a mystery plot. In *The Rock Critic Murders*, Sublett's first book in the Fender series, the author sets his narrative against an economic boom transforming Austin from hippie haven to bustling metropolis.

Live music was also down on account of the real estate boom. Because in a city with more live music venues than either LA or Manhattan, things had always centered around a downtown area no more than a couple of miles in diameter. And in that area, skyrocketing land value called for maximum use for maximum profit. High-rises were in and clubs were out.

Things had always been tough for live music, though, and it was hard to feel sorry for club owners. Down at the street level, the clubs-as well as booking agencies, studios, and bands-often survived only by bending laws and cutting corners and using money that someone needed to lose. Sometimes the money came from drugs, sometimes it came from someone just trying to avoid a tax bite. I remember

one club that was run by men who had connections with a string of sex-oriented clubs out of Houston. When you went downstairs to get paid, they took the cash from a big steel trunk the size of a coffin. There would be four or five guys down there and at least that many guns. You didn't ask where that money had been.

[Club owners] made things work by being there and running things, but they were in the music business the way cheap hookers were in the love business.

Yeah, they were.

An ethnically diverse port city, Houston holds the largest Vietnamese population in the United States outside of California. Recently, its white community has become a numerical minority. The rise of the Vietnamese community was cemented in 2004, when businessman Hubert Vo defeated an incumbent Republican for his seat in the Texas Legislature (see, "Just Say Vo," October 22, 2004). In *Heat from Another Sun*, David L. Lindsey sends his homicide detective Stuart Haydon to the city's immigrant neighborhoods in search of a killer.

They got out and locked the car. The projects had an unhealthy reputation for gangs of teenagers, who roamed the neighborhood vandalizing and testing their ability to run petty extortion rackets. This was in imitation of a larger, citywide problem within the Asian community, which was the second largest in the nation. The Chinese tongs were well established in Houston's crime world. They were organized and efficient, and their members commanded a fearful respect within the Chinese community. They were known as "the gentlemen." The Vietnamese gangsters, however, required and received no such respect. They were considered little more than thugs and hoodlums by their own people. Their influence was supported solely by the fear they engendered within the community, which effectively sealed the lips of their fellow Vietnamese victims, making police investigation almost impossible. Though their organization differed from the Chinese, it was a potent force. The four or five gangs that dominated the Vietnamese underworld in Houston had direct links to the Oriental syndicates in New Orleans, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

They rounded the corner at the same moment Haydon identified the odor.

"Blood," he said, and their flashlights lit an open area of unspeakable carnage, great swaths of it working with swarms of black flies, grubbing among themselves to get to the source of attraction.

Though best known for his bestselling "Percy Jackson" children's book series, Rick Riordan cut his literary teeth on San Antonio-based crime fiction. His protagonist is Tres Navarre, a Tai Chi

expert with a Ph.D. in medieval literature and an enchilada-eating cat. In *The Last King of Texas*, Navarre has taken a temporary teaching job at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where the position's last occupant was murdered. Soon targeted himself, Navarre's investigations lead him to a West Side cantina. The center of San Antonio's Hispanic population, the West Side has problems with poverty and drug trafficking. Its city officials are reluctant to address this issue for fear of bad publicity and a subsequent loss in tourist dollars.

Ahead of me, the sunset faded to an afterglow behind palm trees and Spanish billboards. Turquoise and pink walls of icehouses and bail bond offices lost their color. On the broken sidewalks, men in tattered jeans and checkered shirts milled around, their faces drawn from an unsuccessful day of waiting, their eyes examining each car in the fading hope that someone might slow down and offer them work.

The rest of the block was lined with closed tiendas and burglar-barred homes. Crisscrossed telephone lines and pecan tree branches sliced up the sky. The only real light came from the end of the block across the street—the Church of Our Lady of the Mount. Its Moorish, yellow-capped spires were brutally lit, a dark bronze Jesus glaring down from on high at the Poco Mas. Jesus was holding aloft a circle of metal that looked suspiciously like a master's whip. Or perhaps a hubcap rim.

At the entrance to the cantina, I was greeted by a warm blast of air that smelled like an old man's closet—leather and mothballs, stale cologne, dried sweat and liquor. Inside, the rafters glinted with Christmas ornaments. Staple-gunned along the walls were decades of calendars showing off Corvettes with bras and women without. The jukebox cranked out Selena's "Quiero" just loud enough to drown casual conversation and the creaking my boots must've made on the warped floor planks.

Mara's friend was thinner, taller, maybe thirty years old, with a wiry build and a high hairline that made his thin face into a valentine. He had a silver cross earring and black-painted fingernails, a black trench coat and leather boots laced halfway up his calves. He'd either been reading too much Anne Rice or was on his way to a bandido Renaissance festival.

"Go home, gringo. Quit while you're ahead."

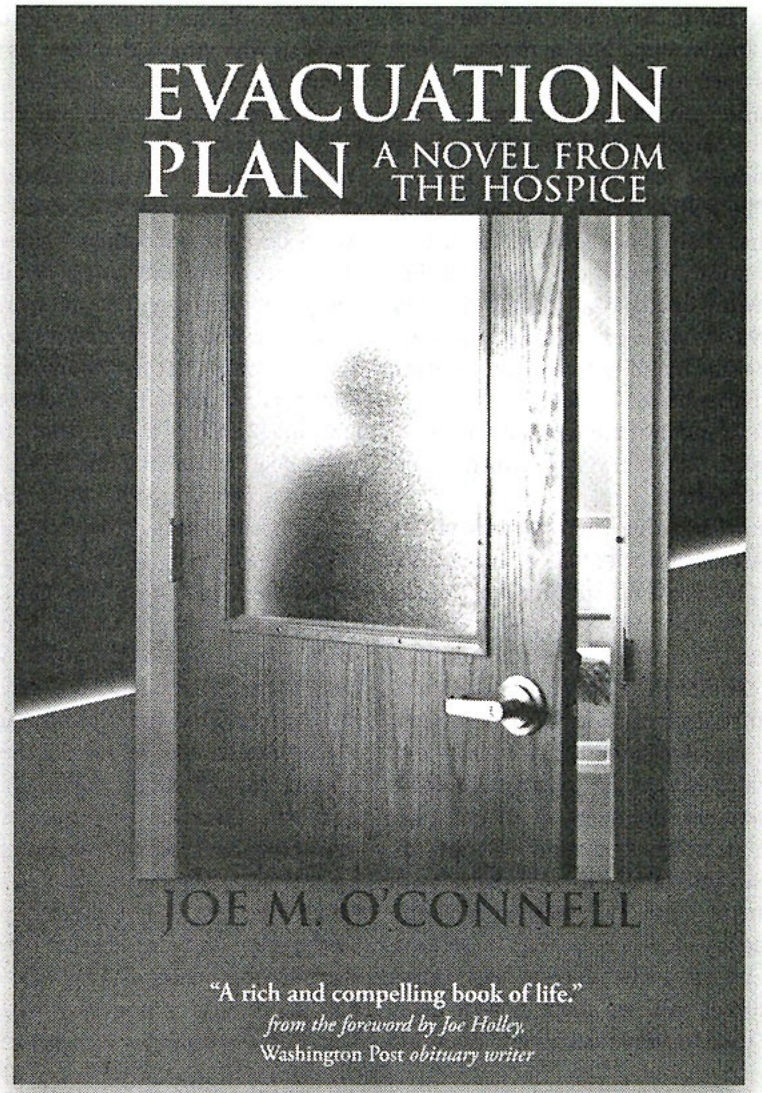
Though *Lone Star Sleuths* is an excellent anthology of Texas crime fiction, the book's uninspired cover art may cause potential readers to pass it by. A lone-star badge reflects an orange and turquoise sunset, casting the shadow of a cowboy hat-wearing sleuth holding a magnifying glass. Set against a red background, the artwork has the grace and imagination of a middle school textbook cover. With its corny stereotypical "Texas" imagery, the uninspired design does a disservice to the complex subjects tackled within the book. Like the Lone Star state itself, a peek beyond the superficiality of the façade offers adventure and insight that cannot be found anywhere else. ■

Stayton Bonner is a writer in Austin.

Checkout Time

BY JANET HEIMLICH

Evacuation Plan
By Joe M. O'Connell
Dalton Publishing
192 pages, $13.95



As the HBO television series "Six Feet Under" and Mitch Albom's nonfiction book *Tuesdays with Morrie* have shown, the subject of death can be fruitfully plumbed for dramatic potential and the lessons it imparts to the living.

The same is true for Joe O'Connell's first novel, *Evacuation Plan,* set against the backdrop of a hospice. O'Connell is a film industry columnist and short story writer who lives in Taylor. He also teaches creative writing at St. Edward's University and Austin Community College. In 2001, he was one of a small group of writers and visual artists allowed into Hospice Austin's Christopher House to observe life in the 15-bed facility. The project was the brainchild of Austin artist Benné Rockett, who worked with the staffs of *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review* and Christopher House to provide the outsiders an environment that would inspire creativity and educate the public about hospice through art and creative writing. *Evacuation Plan* is loosely based on conversations O'Connell had with hospice patients, staff, and visitors.

Readers should not expect a sad look at death and dying, O'Connell told the *Observer*. "I'm really more interested in the stories of individual people," he says. "I was really intrigued by what brought all these people to this place. Not just people who are dying, but what are the stories behind the nurse who's behind the desk? Why is he or she doing this job? What is the secret that the dying child has that the dying parent doesn't know, and vice versa?"

O'Connell aims to answer these questions partly through his semiautobiographical protagonist, Matt, a screenwriter who gets permission to wander the halls of a hospice in hopes of landing an idea for his next screenplay. But Matt is not prepared for this environment. He gets goose bumps when a patient suggests that he move a detached artificial leg from a chair so he can sit down. "The shoe and sock on it creep me out as I drop it by the wall," thinks Matt. When he shakes the patient's hand, Matt is surprised that "it's warm to the touch. Not what I expected from a dying man." When he tries to assist a woman struggling to reach for a piece of candy, a nurse swats his hand, scolding, "She doesn't need your help." And Matt is unnerved by how often the names of current patients get replaced on a dry erase board.

Matt spends much of his time in the room of patient Charlie Wright, an elderly man with advanced diabetes and other ailments. The relationship proves to be Matt's psychological salvation. Despite being close to death, Charlie gladly assumes the role of Matt's surrogate father. He sees right away that the screenplay writer is hiding something from himself. Drawing from his background as an architect, Charlie tells

Matt that what he is really looking for is not a story idea, but a model—presumably for life—and explains that a model can be either closed or open. "A closed structure doesn't change," he says. "That's death. An open structure has three dimensions, like a model house, and is open to change."

Charlie, on the other hand, seems to have accepted his fate. When Matt asks how he feels about death, Charlie says, "By golly, I guess I am going to die. Imagine that ... no worries, folks. I've got it mostly figured out." Through his talks with Charlie, Matt comes to terms with what has been holding him back in life—his inability to forgive his own cruel father before he died.

"He's going in there looking for a plot, and really the story is his own story," O'Connell says.

Checkerboarding the chapters about Matt are short stories told from the viewpoints of people he meets in the hospice. These stories often take place well in the past, sometimes when the subjects were children. O'Connell says he modeled this structure after Tim O'Brien's novel, *July, July*, about a group of 1969 graduates who come together for their 30th reunion. One story, about a hospice nurse, describes her stoic attempts to raise a poor family in a broken-down apartment complex. Another is about the facility's cook, who had a serious crush on a girl when he was very young. In another tale, we learn how a male nurse used to adore listening to his sister talk about her dreams.

"The stories are really about looking for that big moment that impacted people and changed their lives and turned them into who they are, and my idea is that we all have that story in us that made us who we are, that drew us to this point. And at the end of our lives, those will be the moments we will cling to," O'Connell says.

The chapters about Matt and the short stories demonstrate O'Connell's ability to develop sympathetic, true-to-life characters using intriguing details and compelling dialogue. The stories remind us of those times when a brief encounter with a stranger left us wondering about that person's past. In *Evacuation Plan*, O'Connell satisfies that curiosity. At one point, Matt catches a glimpse of a visitor leaving a patient's room, someone who has bloodshot eyes, wrinkled clothes, and breath that "reeks of stale beer." Next comes the man's story, "The Guy in the Hall," which describes what happened when the man, named Patrick, was in his late 50s. His parents are dead, and he reluctantly moves back into their old house after having "let my life slip by in a swift flow of idiotic failures." While walking at night, he experiences a series of unexplained, epiphanous moments as he encounters, and talks to, his former selves. The first is a young boy playing cowboys and Indians. Another is a young man driving a hotrod who talks about his first love, a young woman Patrick knows will become the teenager's wife.

Regrettably, Charlie is the only patient the reader gets to know well, and only two short stories are told through the eyes of patients. O'Connell says this was intentional because he did not want to be in the position of having to reveal secrets about death. "The only people who are going to know that are people who are dying," he says, "so I can't pretend that I have those answers." There is still much O'Connell could have revealed about dying, including agony, frustration, inspiration, and sadness, or the relief that comes with imminent death. Because *Evacuation Plan* is set in a hospice, readers are likely braced—and probably eager—to learn about those feelings and how they might affect a person on the verge of death.

Evacuation Plan also lacks cohesion. While there are, as O'Connell points out, common themes throughout the novel, such as grace, forgiveness, death, and father-son relationships, they do not provide enough literary glue to hold the book together. There are two tracks unfolding—the chapters that describe Matt's present-day journey and the short stories that describe the pasts of people he sees in the hospice. For the most part, Matt has only brief, superficial interactions with these individuals. Furthermore, the short stories do not indicate what led those characters to the hospice. The result is that the reader—while caught up with Matt's struggle—does not feel compelled to venture into the pasts of many of the characters in the short stories.

The opposite is true with Charlie for example, whom readers get to know well through his conversations with Matt. Here, the reader is eager to get inside Charlie's head, and his story at the end of the book—about his desire for forgiveness and the ability to fly—is a treat.

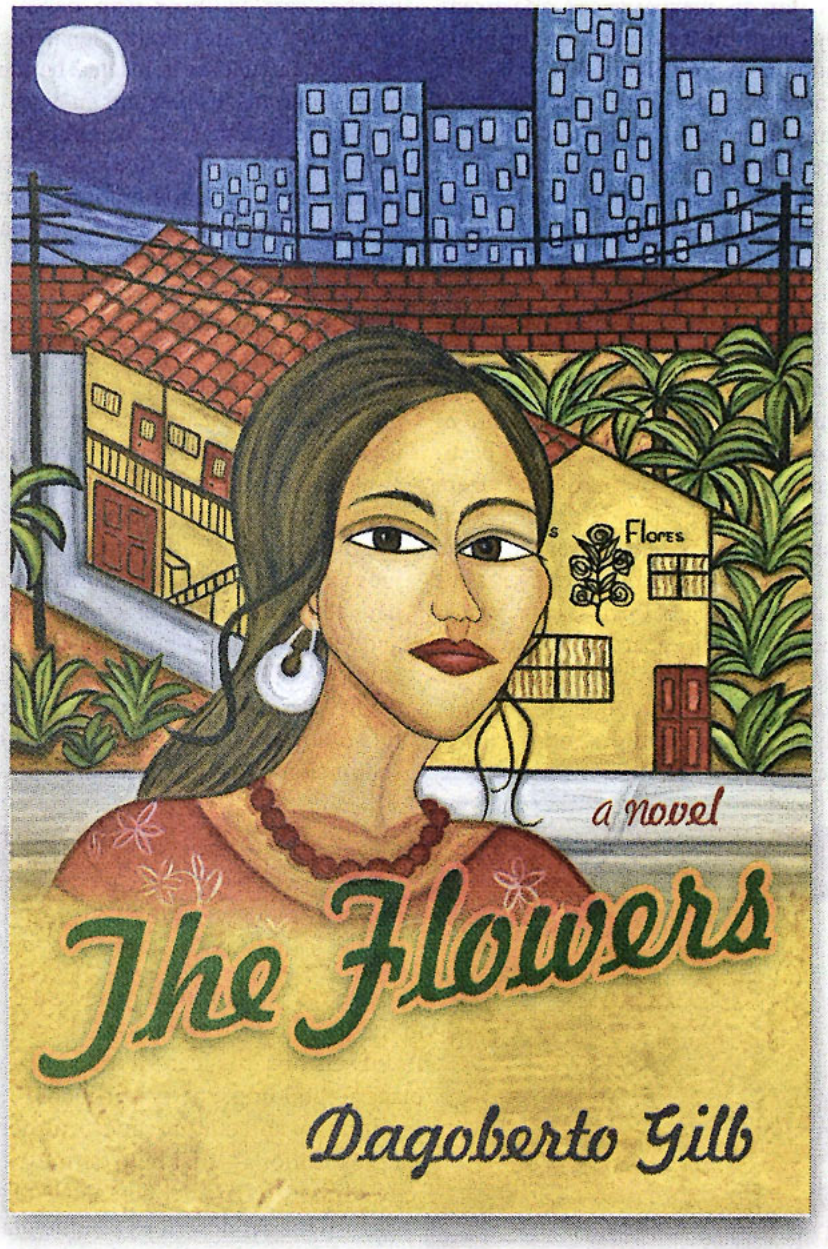
It is through O'Connell's memorable characters that *Evacuation Plan* achieves what seems to be his main goal—to show that we can learn a lot about life in a place meant for death. ■

Janet Heimlich is a freelance writer living in Austin. She has adapted one of the short stories in Evacuation Plan *to a play, which will be performed in January.*

Leaves of Sass

BY STEVEN G. KELLMAN

The Flowers
By Dagoberto Gilb
Grove Press
256 pages, $29.95



Though Sonny Bravo, the narrator of *The Flowers*, is 15, Dagoberto Gilb's novel—his second, after *The Last Known Residence of Mickey Acuña* (1994)—is not being marketed as young-adult fiction. The story of a *vato* with attitude, the book is more *¡YO!* than *YA*. It recounts the coming-of-age of a ballsy California *picaro*. But for the fact that he lacks a younger sister and an older brother, has never attended prep school, or ventured within 2,000 miles of Radio City Music Hall, and comes from a working-class Mexican background, Sonny Bravo could be Holden Caulfield.

The Flowers derives its title from a small apartment complex managed by Cloyd Longpre, Sonny's odious stepfather. "The Cloyd," as he disparagingly names the man, is a trophy hunter who has snared Sonny's sexy mother Silvia. A hard-drinking, gun-obsessed bigot who refuses to rent to blacks, he is willing to overlook her Mexican origins because of her gorgeous body and the prospect of home-cooked fajitas. ("I love to eat them tacos," Sonny overhears Cloyd say on the phone. "Now I even got myself married to a pretty little Mexican gal.") Even after marrying Cloyd, Silvia continues to turn heads, but, devoid of any culinary aptitude or ambition, she smuggles canned salsa onto her latest husband's dinner plate. A transplanted Dust Bowl Okie, Cloyd dubs his building "Los Flores," which Sonny, despite his own unsteady grasp of Spanish, suspects is not quite *auténtico*. A classmate observes that the gringo got the genders wrong: "Las Flores means 'The Flowers.' What your daddy the Cloyd has up there just means the *vato's* a dumb-ass."

The wildest of the flowers blooming in Los Flores, Sonny becomes a reluctant resident when his self-absorbed mother becomes Mrs. Cloyd Longpre. He is conscripted into maintenance work—sweeping, painting, weeding, moving garbage cans. He takes his meals apart, mostly at the bar of a local bowling alley. Sonny finds no friends among his schoolmates, but discovers comfort wandering alone through the mean streets of his new environs. His interactions with occupants of the six other apartments in Los Flores form the focus of *The Flowers* through Sonny's own distinctive, demotic voice. Sonny is befriended by the resident of apartment No. 6, an exuberant, odd-looking man called Pink who makes his living hustling used cars that he parks outside Los

Flores. The fact that Pink is albino keeps obtuse Cloyd from evicting him because he is African American.

The most provocative neighbors are two women so different from each other that, for an inexperienced adolescent, they constitute a variation on the hoary Madonna-Whore binary.

In apartment No. 3, directly above Sonny, is randy 18-year-old Cindy, a bored, lonely, and habitually stoned housewife usually seen around the building clad in a skimpy bikini. Though terrified that Cindy's brutish husband will catch them in flagrante, Sonny succumbs to Cindy's persuasion to sexual initiation and returns repeatedly for advanced lessons. In apartment No. 4, Sonny finds a very different kind of feminine temptation, a cloistered beauty named Nica. An immigrant from Veracruz who speaks no English, Nica is hostage to her family's adversity. While her mother and stepfather are away all day laboring at menial jobs, she is confined to the apartment, forced to care for her infant half-brother, Angel. Though he can communicate with her only in halting Spanish, Sonny falls in love with Nica, or at least with his fantasy of her as a damsel in distress awaiting his heroic intervention.

Though the city is nowhere named, *The Flowers* is set in an urban jumble very much like Los Angeles, where beaches sing to those who never get to see the sea and sirens signal racial violence. Los Flores is located beside a busy boulevard just beyond an expanding African-American neighborhood against which Cloyd keeps his rifles ready. Like Gilb, Sonny's mother comes from El Paso, but in her son's imagination, Texas is a distant, daunting place: "Texas was maybe more far away than Mexico to me. Mexico was lots of people, land everywhere, mountains and rivers and oceans. Texas was all dirt, it was hats, it was way far away, it was mean hardasses." Texas is not far away from Gilb, who lives in Austin and teaches at Texas State University. But he has frequently denounced the mean hardasses who he claims dominate the state's cultural establishment and exclude Tejano and working-class voices from the literary conversation. He has clashed repeatedly with the editors of *Texas Monthly*, who rejected his submissions because, he claimed in an interview with the Southwestern Writers Collection, "... they weren't interested in the Mexican American experience from the point of view of Mexican Americans; they were only interested in confirming their stereotypes of Mexican and Chicano culture."

In a 2003 essay collection he called *Gritos*, Gilb cries out that "... even after all these years, people like me are unseen, patronized, so out of the portrait of American literature. It seems impossible that so many of the writers I have known—and yes, me, too,—with a decent record of publications by usual standards, still fight a battle for acceptance, that we are a product of an ongoing American story that is not foreign, not only about a dark exotic people, not only fascinating as so much is 'south of the border,' not just about the poor and dangerous other side of the tracks." With *Hecho en Tejas*, an anthology of Tejano writing he edited in 2006, Gilb attempted to open readers' eyes to a literary tradition that had, like exquisite mushrooms, been thriving in the dark. But a 1995 Guggenheim had already tarnished Gilb's own invisibility, and by the time he and Rolando Hinojosa-Smith received the prestigious Bookend Award at last November's Texas Book Festival, the battle for acceptance was won.

Sonny Bravo is not nearly the champion of Chicano voices that his author is. Sonny would just as soon speak in a tongue that is alien to Aztlan: French. To ingratiate himself with his new wife, Silvia, Cloyd offers her son "one big thing" of his choosing. Sonny replies: "I wanna go to Notre Dame." Cloyd naturally assumes that the boy wishes tickets to a football game, until Sonny explains: "I mean Notre Dame the church. The one in Paris. In France." Amid the bleakness of his existence at Los Flores, Sonny clings to the fantasy of escape to France. Though he seems indifferent to his formal schooling, he acquires a textbook and begins teaching himself to speak French. He says that he does it "just to mess with everybody," as if the language of Racine, Voltaire, and Hugo offers a way to declare his independence from an environment he rejects. Dropping French phrases never

fails to bring a beatific smile to Sonny's face, even, and especially, when his listener has no idea what he is saying. He admits that "I hated talking in Spanish," and, though Nica speaks only Spanish, he tells her that he loves her in French. Nica does not share his interest in Paris and longs instead to go to Spain. When she asks him whether he has any interest in Spain, Sonny admits, "I don't know, Spain seems so ... I don't know. Spanish." A boy whose feast of choice is hamburgers and french fries (albeit laced with jalapeños) seems an unlikely protagonist for an author famous for championing Chicanismo. Or else Sonny is an effective tool for exploding stereotypes.

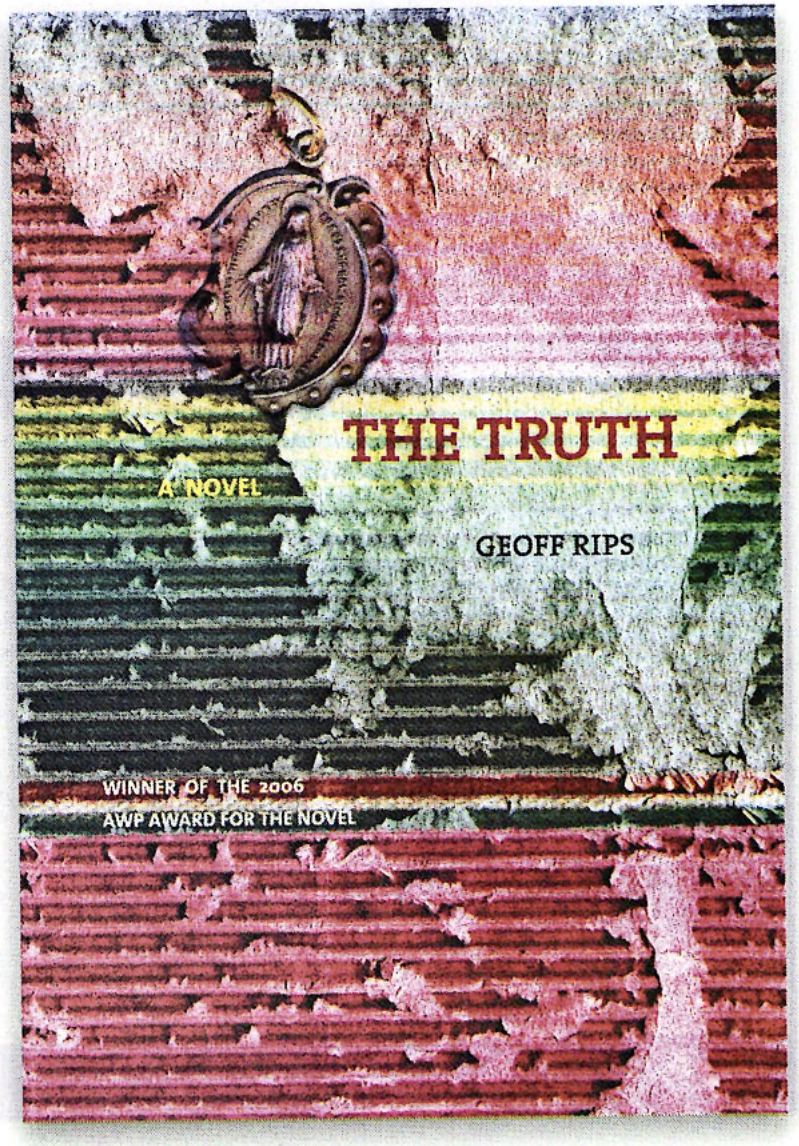
With the first sentence of *The Flowers*, Sonny informs the reader about his practice of slipping into other people's houses while they are away. Though he sometimes pockets loose cash, burglary is not the motive. Instead, he loves to imagine living an alternative life. Lying in a stranger's bed, Sonny indulges in a kind of transcendental meditation. "How would I be if I lived here?" he asks himself. "I'd let that come into me, I'd let my mind go to the show it liked. Maybe you could say I would go off to my own world. To me it wasn't mine, nothing like mine, because it would go to black. ... I'd start to see shapes floating and straightening and wiggling and see it like it was a music that didn't make sound but was making a story. Not a regular story and I don't mean one you hear some loco nut tell you, one that didn't have nothing to do with people or places you've ever seen." There, at the outset of the proceedings, in young Sonny's account of the power of the imagination to transcend and transform the here and now, is this novel's own *ars poetica*, its key to understanding Gilb's achievement. What makes *The Flowers* bloom, what lifts it beyond polemic and cliché, is its ability to transport the reader into another life. A story "that didn't have nothing to do with people or places you've ever seen," the book also lifts its seasoned author to another place in the literary order. ■

Contributing writer Steven G. Kellman teaches comparative literature at the University of Texas at San Antonio and is the author of Redemption: The Life of Henry Roth *and* The Translingual Imagination.

New fiction by GEOFF RIPS

The Miracle of la Soledad

The following excerpt is from The Truth, *a novel to be published this month by New Issues Poetry & Prose. It is written in the voice of Chuy Pingarrón, a palsied hunchback who spends his days on the front porch of a San Antonio whorehouse and is proud to be dubbed its "standard of perversion." He tells the stories of those who visit and work at the establishment, including the Midwife, who is also the house's madam, and Soledad, deemed by her mother to be a saint.*



The Truth
By Geoff Rips
New Issues Poetry & Prose
193 pages, $26

That's how things were for some time then. With the Midwife acting like the midwife that she is, the child la Soledad was finally born, and from the first minute of her life she was dressed in white as was her mother Hortensia, who chose for herself robes of a white that is almost yellow so as not to appear to rival the robes of her daughter who she said was sent from Heaven.

And you know how life is. It goes on from one day to the next, even in the lives of the saints themselves. There was the business of the house and there was the little house in back that was slowly turning itself into a shrine where Hortensia sat day in and day out with the baby la Soledad on her lap while one person then another came to pay their respects to the little virgin. And reports of little miracles that followed closely after the birth of la Soledad began to reach our ears at this time, told by some of the people who came to kiss the hem of la Soledad's white robe. An old man's dog got up from the very hole in which it had been thrown for burial. A truck of cabbages turned over covering a little boy who was saved by the strong branches of a mountain laurel bush that he was walking past and who said, when they pulled him out, that as the cabbages were falling over him he had a vision of the little virgin who lived down the street.

And there were other little miracles. A woman who was baking for the brothers at the church ran to the little house in back to pray that her cakes would rise again that had fallen when her husband slammed the door when he came home from work. This miracle, indeed, was also carried out, as I know for myself when the woman showed up the next day with a cake for the little virgin who had saved her baking and another cake for the Midwife who gave us this shrine in our own neighborhood in the first place. And this is how it went. Someone's baby took its first step. Someone's mother recovered from a spell. What I'm saying is that this was the daily progress of the life of the little virgin, and so in its own way it was the same as any other life. Some things happen. Other things don't happen. Who can tell the difference?

Hortensia for her part became more and more convinced of the special nature of her daughter. And on top of that, her own feelings about herself as the mother of this little saint also began to grow. She said that it's one thing to be a whore forever and quite another thing entirely to start out a life in the profession of a whore in order to compare everything else that comes after it in life to that experience, though she would not say such a thing directly to the Midwife even under the protection of her new position as the mother of a saint.

And I must admit that, when I first heard the stories of the little miracles, I thought that perhaps I should go to the little house in back to see what all the other people went to see, that from the way some people talked Hortensia and her baby la Soledad must have been replaced by a vision of the heavens or at least by the angels of gold you see inside the biggest churches downtown or at least by some trick of mirrors Hortensia devised. But when I looked inside all I could see was Hortensia in her yellow robes with the baby la Soledad sleeping on her lap while an old woman was touching the white hem of her dress. That's all I saw and so I saw no reason to look again very often. You can see that kind of thing anywhere you go. Even in the bars they have it.

And then she'd look around at everyone in the bar and announce, You think it's easy being the mother of a saint? You can never give in.

And I say this because in those days we used to go to Los Dos Amantes Lounge that used to be not so very far away from here. All of us would go there. When business was slow on a certain night, the Midwife would say that it was time to get out of the house altogether and she would close the house at midnight saying she would take anyone who wanted to go and Chuy who doesn't know what he wants but will never refuse a beer. We would go to Los Dos Amantes, and after the first months of the shrine Hortensia would also come carrying Soledad Mata dressed in white. We would sit there in the bar all together with the baby on the table. And the little virgin, she would all the time be saying, Ca, ca, ca, ca, and all the time one of the women would be holding onto her leg or her arm, and anyone who was in the bar could not fail to notice her, who even then had eyes that had their starting point in another world entirely.

And Hortensia was always watching everyone who watched la Soledad. No one walking by in Los Dos Amantes Lounge could fail to reach out a hand to touch the baby on the head or to kiss the baby's feet. And even as they were walking up or standing not far away captured by the eyes of purest light, Hortensia was already saying to them, Tòcala, tòcala, touch the little one, the way she almost sang it sometimes, sounding like the priest himself before the Holy Virgin, making sure every person touched la Soledad, who was herself saying, Ca, ca, ca, making sure no one looked without touching, that no one left the mark of their vision of the world, what they call the bad eye, without wiping it off again with the light touch of their appreciation. And every once in a while, someone who was too drunk to see his own salvation would stumble out of Los Dos Amantes, and Hortensia would hand the baby virgin to someone sitting next to her and run out into the street and grab the wayward sinner and start yelling, What's the matter? Are you too fucking drunk to touch the closest you'll ever get to God Almighty and all His angels? What the fuck is the matter with you, you

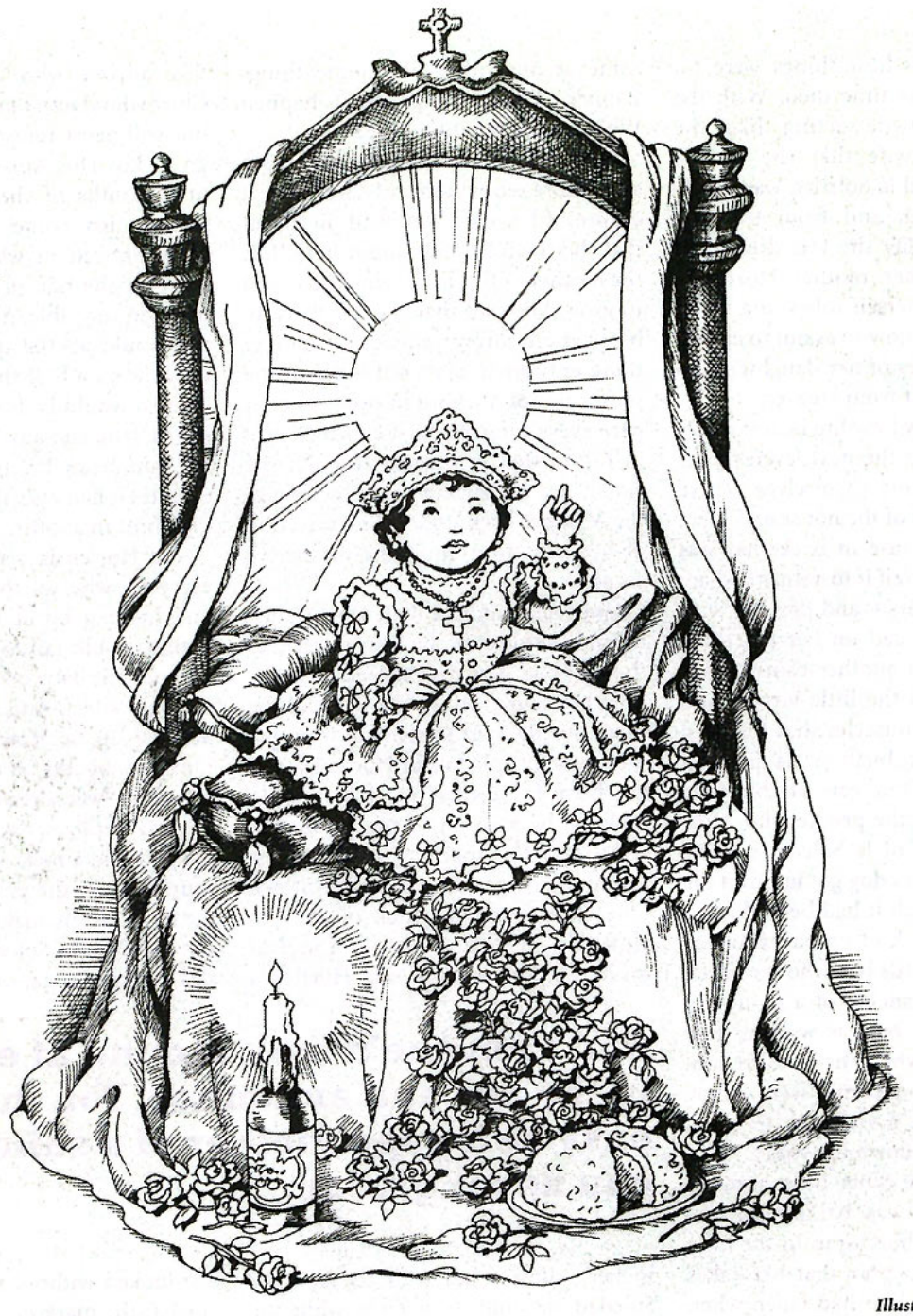


Illustration by Mike Krone

worthless, lousy goddamn shithead? Are you trying to fuck up a virgin baby saint forever? And she'd drag him back into the bar and put his hand on the baby's foot and then give the drunk a push back out the door. And then she'd look around at everyone in the bar and announce, You think it's easy being the mother of a saint? You can never give in. Then she picked up la Soledad and put her on her lap.

The little virgin herself, as she grew older, began to call to anyone who walked by, Tòcame, tòcame. She called to them in such a way that even those who had been deaf to the needs of the world for more than forty years could hear her call, the way it entered the pores of the skin and ran toward the arm that led to the hand that itself was led without stopping to the head or the foot of la Soledad.

And in these later years, if there was this person or that one who was driven by the ghosts of his own drunkenness to go stumbling past the little virgin saying Tòcame, tòcame, without stopping to respect the mystery of her being there, then that person was stopped nonetheless, before he could fall against the fence outside the door, by the undeniable power of the voice of Soledad Mata that called the person back to her, running into tables all the way, falling to his knees before her, asking her forgiveness as she sat there on the table saying over and over, Tòcame, tòcame. To go in those years to Los Dos Amantes Lounge with Hortensia and

her daughter la Soledad was to sit in the stand of the Pope himself while the parade of the humble and the ones who feel guilty for everything they ever did walk by asking for forgiveness for their lives. This went on for several years at Los Dos Amantes until the time that someone's wife tried to solve the drinking problems of her husband with a match of persuasion that burned down the bar.

And I always think of that tòcame, tòcame and the way the woman with boils on her arm came to the door one morning asking for the little virgin she had heard about from her neighbor who had kissed her feet at Los Dos Amantes. We led this woman to the little house where Hortensia was waking up and la Soledad was sleeping in her crib with the power of her eyes turned in upon her dreams. And the woman said she came not for herself but for her sister who was lying at this moment six inches from the grave with the clothes she chose to wear in death already on her. She asked if she might touch the little virgin in the hope of carrying that touch back to her sister's bed. And she said that if her sister were cured of the rattle of death itself, then that sister would forever dedicate the life she was given back to the service of the little virgin and she would do so dressed the way an angel dresses, all in white and shiny cloth, the way she was dressed lying in her bed at that very moment, so that she might better serve la Soledad, who must be an angel herself who has stopped in the middle of flying to rest at this station on earth. The woman said this to Hortensia, who smiled with a mother's pride and touched la Soledad, who woke up saying, Tòcame, tòcame. The woman with boils got down on her knees to kiss the feet of la Soledad. And then she got up with the softness of la Soledad's feet still on her lips and ran from the little house in back.

We thought no more about what had happened, as these things must happen all the time to those who are so chosen by other people or who choose themselves, until maybe one month or even two months later when a woman appeared at the kitchen door in the early morning dressed in the white satin robes of an angel with a paper bag under her arm, saying, I am Maribel Pideperdón, come to serve the little virgin for all time. The Midwife said there was nothing to do with her but obey her desires. You cannot stand in the way of a contractual agreement with God, she said.

Hortensia herself didn't know what to make of the woman, who spent the first days and nights sleeping at the feet of la Soledad and insisted on carrying the little virgin on a blue satin pillow like a cloud through every step of her life, which was the start of la Soledad's bad habit of always being carried around. But a few days of this was too much for Hortensia, who had not only a mother's pride but also a mother's right of ownership. So, after talking with the Midwife, it was decided that the new angel Maribel would be used to cook all the meals for the baby la Soledad and for everyone else besides. And that is why, if you ask the way they all do why a woman dressed in white satin like an angel is the one who makes the coffee and scrubs the sink, I answer that Maribel Pideperdón, the one who was saved from death, washes the ash trays and the glasses in the morning smiling all the time because she's confused and thinks she's landed in Paradise itself.

And there's no need to ever ask what I think about such a misconception. But maybe I don't know everything. Maybe if your whole life has been spent with a sister who has boils and is always making your promises for you, then scrubbing the floors in the Midwife's house might be a paradise to hope for. There are so many different ideas in this life. She scrubs the floors and smiles. Perhaps this is how one acts in Paradise. I don't know. And for my own sake I hope I never find out. ■

Geoff Rips of Austin is a former editor of The Texas Observer *and serves on the board of the Texas Democracy Foundation, which publishes the* Observer. *He works as director of special projects for the Austin Independent School District. He has published various works of poetry and fiction.* The Truth *won the Association of Writers and Writing Programs' award for novels in 2006.*

Alive and Singing the Truth

This is Jimmy's road where Jimmy liked to play.
This is Jimmy's grass where Jimmy liked to lay around.

This is Jimmy's tree where Jimmy liked to climb,
But Jimmy went to war and something changed his mind around.

This is the battleground where Jimmy learned to kill.
Now Jimmy has a trade and Jimmy knows it well too well.

This is Jimmy's grave where Jimmy's body lies
When a soldier falls Jimmy's body dies and dies.

Well this is Jimmy's road where Jimmy likes to play.
This is Jimmy's grass where Jimmy likes to lay around.

–Willie Nelson, "Jimmy's Road" (©July 24, 1968)

For America, 1968 was a violent and terrible year. Our troop levels in Vietnam were just below their peak of 543,400. Operation Rolling Thunder had already dropped 864,000 tons of bombs on Vietnam. The January Tet offensive brought the war to the American Embassy in Saigon, and from there into our living rooms. The My Lai Massacre took place on March 16. Eighteen months later, we would begin to learn the horrible things ordinary young American men, turned soldiers, could do under the stress of combat.

On April 4, Martin Luther King was assassinated on a hotel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. Race riots, looting, shooting, and arson, broke out in dozens of major cities. On June 5, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in a Los Angeles hotel.

Around this time in Austin, David Zettner, a young bass player in Willie Nelson's band, received his draft notice and was inducted into the Army at Ft. Bliss near El Paso. On June 20, Willie wrote one of the greatest poems in the long and sorrowful history of war literature. His song poem is called "Jimmy's Road." Willie would call it a peace poem. It lasts 2 minutes and 39 seconds.

What did the then-35-year-old songster from Abbott think he was doing?

Willie had moved to Austin after years of trying to accommodate his idiosyncratic, jazz-inflected melody structure and singing style to the Nashville scene. He was still trying to make it as a singer. He had a recording contract with RCA. Through six years, only two of the songs he released as a performer made *Billboard*'s country Top 20. His biggest success, the mundane "Bring Me Sunshine," reached number 13. As Willie biographer Joe Nick Patoski put it to me, it sounds more like Bobby Darin than like Willie Nelson.

"Jimmy's Road" was produced by Chet Atkins and Felton Jarvis, then Elvis Presley's producer, in Nashville in July 1968. It was released as a 45 much later, in May 1969, as the B-side to Willie's version of John Hartford's "Natural to Be Gone." The delay in release may reflect concern about how the mournful message and haunting solo guitar melody of "Jimmy's Road" might play with the audience Willie was trying so hard to win over.

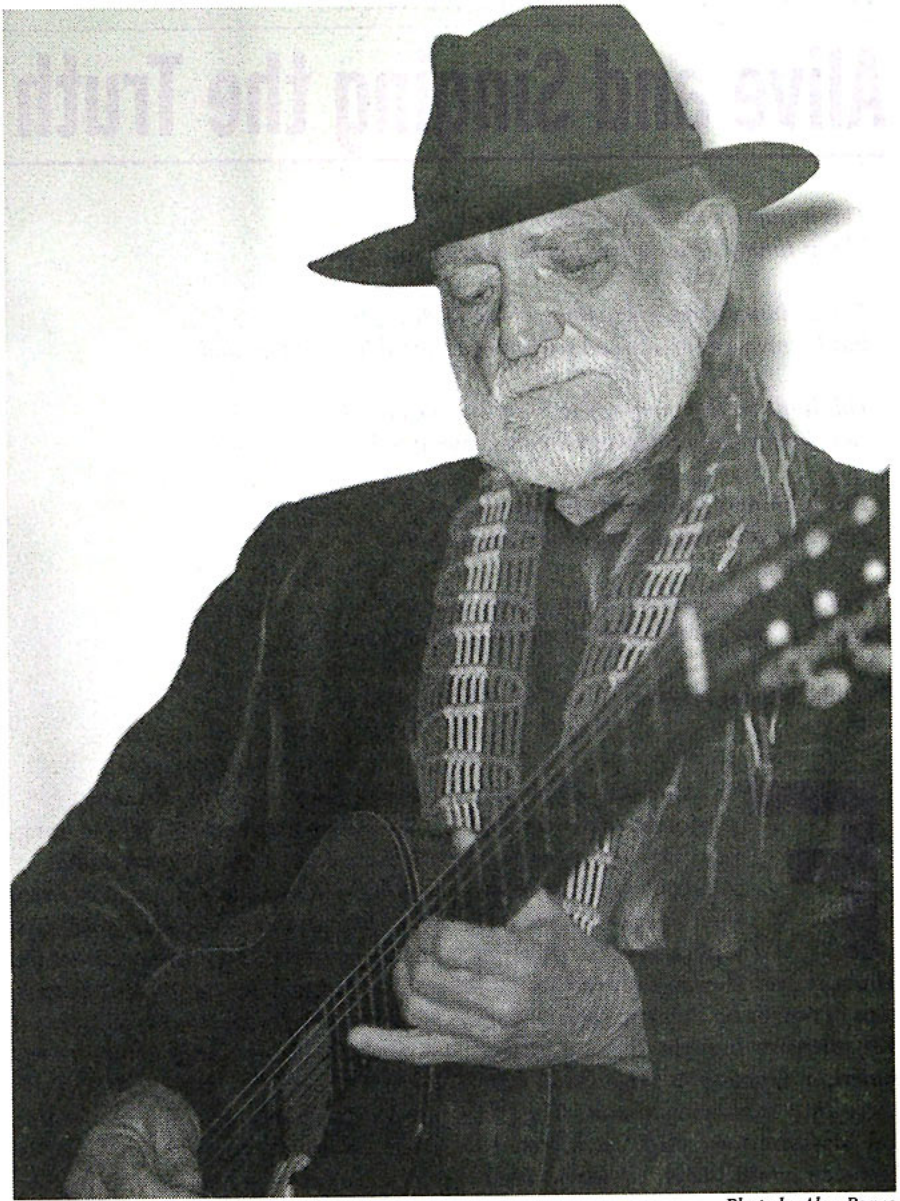
Country music had heard nothing like "Jimmy's Road." More representative, among even thoughtful country songs about the war in Vietnam, was Brownsville native and U.S. Army veteran Kris Kristofferson's "Viet Nam Blues," which played well on the country charts for singer Dave Dudley in 1966. In the song, a soldier on leave in Washington confronts a civilian protester who is busy getting signatures on a telegram of sympathy to Ho Chi Minh.

Learning this, the soldier thinks "of another telegram that I've just read/ Tellin' my buddy's wife that her husband was dead." Turning to the protester, "I said it's a shame that every man who ever died up there that far off land/Was dyin' for that you wouldn't have to wake up dead." Seven months after "Jimmy's Road" was released, Merle Haggard wrote his classic, red-white-and-blue country standard, "Okie from Muskogee." Willie was navigating uncharted waters, and his single did not chart.

Why did he take such a risk?

Willie had grown up during World War II and had enlisted in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War. Still, he told me that when Zettner was inducted, it struck him as "some sort of strange thing" that a gentle soul of artistic temperament could grow up climbing trees and playing in fields, and suddenly be learning how to kill people. Willie took the name Jimmy in the song from his steel guitar player, Jimmy Day, because "it was more euphonic." It is also sounds more childlike.

For parents who have nurtured a child to young manhood, the gentleness of Willie's guitar opening and the first image of a boy playing in trees and grass have the same effect as the traditional themes of rural peace and beauty that British soldier-poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen use to convey the horrors of trench warfare in World War I. Willie's words are plain and simple like theirs, the hallmark of our greatest war writers. Think of Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" or Walt Whitman's "I Saw the Vision of Armies."



Willie Nelson *Photo by Alan Pogue*

Even in 1969, many American families were aware of what used to be called "shell shock" or "combat fatigue," and would soon be known as "post traumatic stress disorder." Many soldiers from World War II, like my own Uncle Joey, who fought as a Marine on Iwo Jima, came home as missing persons. We had their bodies, but the war kept their minds and souls. Willie's simple phrase, "something changed his mind around," captures this awful disappearance of the people we once knew.

In the fourth stanza, Jimmy's buried body reacts in sympathy when other soldiers die in combat. As Willie explained to me, "It's like his death is in vain. Whatever he thought would happen, didn't." Soldiers die. War lives on.

The song then cycles back to the innocence all our Jimmy's have when they are kids.

"Jimmy's Road" now has a second life. It was released first in 1991 on "Who'll Buy My Memories? (The I.R.S. Tapes)," and then in 1993 on Rhino Records' "Willie Nelson: A Classic and Unreleased Collection." Willie has made a video version (released in 2003 on smn.com/peace) in keeping with his concern for peace and other humanitarian causes. Images of a child at play in a green and woody landscape surround scenes of American soldiers at war in

Middle Eastern dust and sand, and a middle-aged couple hesitantly, but tenderly, touching a name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. It can be found on YouTube.

Willie also gives out noncommercial DVDs that contain the emotionally powerful "Jimmy's Road" video, followed by the anti-Iraq War song he wrote on Christmas 2003, "Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth?" In it, Willie bluntly questions the killing, the false premises for going to war, the betrayal of Christian morality, and the passive gullibility of average Americans.

We believe everything that they tell us.
They're gonna' kill us.
So we gotta' kill them first.
But I remember a commandment,
Thou shall not kill.
How much is that soldier's life worth?
And whatever happened to peace on Earth?

Forthrightly inviting controversy, Willie told Reuters in 2003, "If you write something like this and nobody says anything, then you probably haven't struck a nerve." Nelson also sings of how information about the war has been controlled:

Now you probably won't hear this on your radio,
Probably not on your local TV,
But if there's a time, and if you're ever so inclined,
You can always hear it from me.
How much is one picker's word worth?
And whatever happened to peace on Earth?

Lost Highway Records digitally released the song on November 21, 2006, with all proceeds going to the benefit of the National Veterans Foundation.

The DVD ends with a reading, by a female voice, of Mark Twain's short story, "The War Prayer," over scrolling text. By juxtaposing "Jimmy's Road" with "The War Prayer," Willie Nelson closes a circle. Twain wrote his tale in 1904. It talks about how critics of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars were threatened with becoming social outcasts or worse: "For their personal safety's sake, they quickly shrank out of sight and offended no more in that way." It offers a scathing indictment of the perversion, through barbaric acts of war, of the great Christian commandment of love for fellow human beings. In "The War Prayer," Twain focuses on what we do in war to our enemies; Willie, in "Jimmy's Road," on what we do to our own young men.

Twain's own daughter Jean told him "The War Prayer" would be considered sacrilegious. Twain feared the effect it might have on sales of his writing, which he needed to support his family. He decided that it should be published posthumously, as it was in 1923, because "only dead men can tell the truth in this world."

By contrast, Willie's daughter Amy co-wrote "A Peaceful Solution" with him on April 29, 2007. It is available online, copyright-free, at Willie Nelson's Peace Research Institute (willienelsonpri.com/peace), founded the same month. The Institute's Web site promotes broad-based action for peace and offers links to many organizations aimed at humanitarian causes. Willie and Amy's song declares that the real war we all need to be fighting is the war to reclaim our own country. Willie is alive and speaking out, still doing his honest best to prove Mark Twain dead wrong. ■

Tom Palaima teaches war and violence studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

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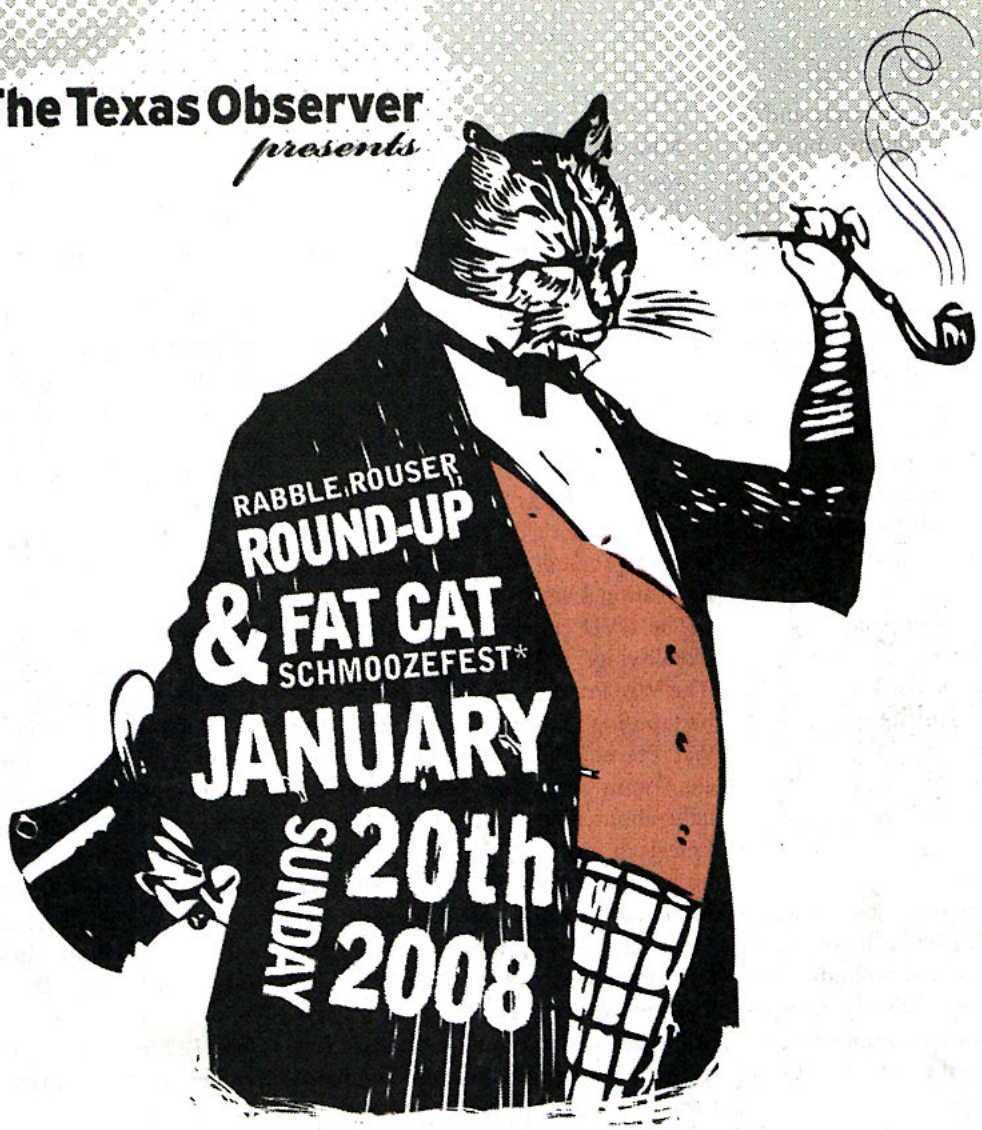

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