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Vacation Bible School

by [William Jack Sibley](#)

I cannot tell a lie, it was the cookies that forever changed my heathen ways. The life of a heedless wastrel was spared me many years ago due to the redemptive power of Oreo's showing up in the nick of time and keeping me on the straight and narrow. The following is a cautionary (and mostly tongue-in-cheek) tale of one five-year-olds personal journey toward salvation and atonement.

Each summer my siblings and I would spend several weeks with my maternal grandparents in George West, Texas. To say that Granny and Granddad were devoted Baptists is roughly the equivalent of calling George W. Bush a Republican. For all I knew it was an entirely Baptist world back then. Even our dog "Moody" was a Baptist. (I know, I baptized her myself.)

When it was suggested by my granny one morning that I might like attending Vacation Bible School at the church for a whole week, I was immediately skeptical. Even at five I knew that nothing with the word “School” in it could possibly be worthwhile. I didn’t mind a whole day devoted to church going; Sunday school in the morning, church service afterwards, Training Union in the evening, followed by another sermon after that. But an entire week of pretending to be an angel? What did they think I was made of anyway?

After much cajoling and grandmotherly prodding, my two brothers and I were deposited on the steps of the First Baptist Church. As she drove away in her Buick Roadmaster, no doubt relieved to get us out of her hair for a few hours, we stared at the foreboding brick façade with all the zeal of condemned men. Soon we were whisked off by a cluster of happy, jolly Christian ladies who were bound and determined that we experience good, old-fashioned, wholesome FUN on our week “vacation” if it killed us (or them).

Just as I expected, my age group appeared to be bunch of similar droopy types who no doubt would’ve rather been anywhere else. The nice ladies soon had us busily gluing macaroni on cigar boxes, sprinkling glitter on Bible scenes and finger painting our way through the New Testament. Then it was over to the piano for some rousing hymn singing and marching with imaginary fishing poles as we practiced being “Fishers of Men.” We warbled and wiggled our little hearts out to “The Bible Tells Me So” and “This Little Light of Mine.” We then hunkered down on the floor and one of the ladies began reading to us about someone named Zaccheus who climbed a sycamore tree somewhere. This seemed the golden opportunity for a little shut-eye and I was just getting comfortable when all of a sudden everyone jumped back on their feet for some fervent hand-holding prayer time. Next thing I knew we were being ushered out the back door to go chase a kickball around the church lawn. Slowly I began to ascertain the method behind all this animated activity; they were literally going to wear the devil right out of us. A whole week of “uplifting liveliness”! I’d never make it.

I stumbled over to the sparse shade of a mesquite tree and contemplated my escape. One side of the church was a field. Nope, there were snakes and sticker

burrs that way. Another side was somebody's backyard with a fence so high I doubted even Superman could fly over it. The other side was a highway and even if I managed to get across it without killing myself my grandmother would surely snatch me baldheaded for even attempting such a stunt. My only hope was a dicey one; right out the front of the church and onto the boulevard that lead to the Main Street of town. Surely some kind-hearted adult would spot me looking all "joy fatigued" and whisk me off to the Dairy Queen for a Dilly Bar to restore my spirits.

Just as I was about to make my dash for freedom, I glanced over to see several of the nice ladies descending the back steps of the church carrying trays of – refreshments! And not just any old kind either, it was the good stuff you only got at birthday parties and relatives homes. Great piles of Oreos, Hydrox, Vanilla Wafers, Lorna Doones, Sugar Wafers, Pecan Sandies, Chips Ahoy. They even made cupcakes; Devils Food no less! Suddenly, good little Christians were attacking that picnic table like lions of the Serengeti on a stalled Oscar Mayer truck. Thankfully, no hands or fingers were lost in the mayhem.

When granny arrived to pick us up, she couldn't get over how well behaved we were acting. "I can certainly see that little bit of church didn't do any harm to you boys. How was it?" My brothers and I looked at each other and patted the extra stash of cookies we'd slipped into our bulging pockets. I spoke up, "It was OK. Hey, you can come by a little later tomorrow if you want. We're gonna help the teachers put everything away." My grandmother shook her head in amazement. "Well that's wonderful! In fact, I think we all deserve a big old ice cream cone, what do you say?" You know, its' just downright hard not to be good sometimes.

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July Mule Issue – Submission update

A quick update —
We're reading all the submissions received for the Summer Issue of the Dead Mule (out around July 15th) and ya'll should be receiving emails soon.

If you submit after June 7th — it's just fine — but ya'll are in the next batch of readings and will hear from us by July 10th.

Valerie and Everybody but the kitchen sink.

Gossip

by Laurie O'Hare

"Hello?"

"Bea, it's me, Lucille."

"Well, hey girl. How ya doin'?"

"Oh you know, same ole, same ole. What's up with you?"

"I'm jus makin cookies for the bake sale tomorrow. Oh, wait, hang on a minute. CASEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT THERE? WELL STOP IT, AND GIT DOWN FROM OFFA THAT TRUCK. YOUR DADDY WILL TAN YOUR HIDE. Okay Lucille, I'm back. Lordy, Lordy, I swear, sometimes that boy makes my asshole wanna dip snuff. Now then, what's the news?"

"Billy Joe Monroe, Dep'ty Harding picked him up for bein' drunk agin, and I mean, he was fightin' drunk. Do you know what he did?"

"What Lucille, whad he do?"

"Well, Bea, he busted up Ole Pops' store, then gave Dep'ty Harding a black eye, sure as I'm sittin here."

"Lordy, Lordy, will that boy never learn. Hey, by tha way, I was over at County Line Auction tha other day, and you shoulda seen ole preacher Boyd. Seems he

was tryin to sell one of them huntin dogs of his, and he was showin some ole boys how well that dog could tree a coon. Only tha dog couldn't see no coon, so he wasn't cooperatin. Ole preacher Boyd, you know how he is when he's tryin to sell someim, he got down on his knees at tha bottom of one of them telephone poles, and jus like onea his dogs, he goes to howlin and barkin, and pretendin he's tree'd a coon. Tha dog was just standin there, scratchin hisself and lookin bored. It was the funniest sight cha ever seen"

"That sounds like that crazy old cuss."

"But that ain't the best part, Lucille. Some lady, she was drivin one of them fancy cars down tha highway, and there she see's ole preacher Boyd actin a fool, treein imaginary coons, and she run plum offa tha road, and right into tha ditch. She got outta that car and began cussin and screamin at tha preacher. I laughed so hard, I jus about split my liver."

"That is funny. I'da loved ta see that crazy fool's face."

"Lucille, it was tha funniest thing I've seen in a long time."

"I bet. Wish I'da been there ta see it too. Oh yea Bea, you're not gonna believe this."

"Yeah?"

"Last Tuesdy, Mary Jane's sister, you know, the one who's daughter was sent away for 9 months cuz she supposedly had tha mono?"

"Yeeeeeah, mono my foot."

"Well, Mary Jane's sister said she saw Rev'rend Parker givin Susie Walker comfortin last Tuesdy night, on a count her husband just ran off with that tramp that worked in Miss Sissy's beauty parlor."

"So what Lucille, Rev'rend Parker gives comfortin ta lotsa people."

"Yeah, maybe, but he don't usely do it at the Blue Swan motel, does he?"

"Whaaaat? You're kiddin me? Poor Betsy. Pray God she never finds out. Ya know, she worked two jobs ta put that man through that fancy preacher school in Dallas. He should be ashamed of hisself."

"Speakin of lazy, no good cheatin husbands, I think my Hank has been steppin out on me..... .Bea? Bea? You there?"

"Uh yeah Lucille, I'm here. Now uh what makes you think that?"

"Well, Gerty Norton told me she saw him up at the 76 Truck Stop up on Highway 59, and even though she said she didn't get a real good look at the woman, she said he was definly with a woman."

"Really?.....Uh.... Did she say what that woman looked like?"

"She said she was kinda heavy set, with short black hair....like you, Bea. She said if she didn't know better, she'd swear it was you."

"Did she now?"

"Yep....that's what she said. Now Bea, I've known ya a long time, but I have ta ask ya, an I hope you'll tell me tha truth.... you been messin with my Hank?.....Bea? You been messin with Hank?"

".....Naw, Lucille, you know I wouldn't do that. Lordy, Lordy, I'm a good christian woman, you know that."

"Yea....yea, I do. But Gerty swears it was you. I'm tellin ya now, if you are, I will beat you so hard, your future grankids will feel it, you can bet your ass on that."

"I know ya would Lucille, I know ya would. But you know I can barely keep up with tha man I got. Maybe he just hooked up with one of those women truckers I've seen up there lately."

"Yea, you're probably right. Well, anyway Bea, I was gonna tell ya that Spencer's Department Store is havin a sale. Tha other day, I got me the prettiest new dress, only I don't know if I'll be able to wear it this Sundy."

"Why not?"

"Well, you know how tha weather's been. Warm one week, chilly the next. Why, last week it was colder 'an a witch's tit in a brass bra."

"Well, I wouldn't worry, Lucille, that good fer nothin weather guy says it's suppose ta been nice and sunny this weekend....an he's right bout half tha time, so your chances are purty good. I gotta go, Lucille, my cookies are ready to come outta tha oven."

"Okay, Bea, guess I'll speak ta ya Sundy at church."

"Yeah, I'm really lookin forward ta church now, considerin what ya just tol me bout tha Rev'rend and Susie Walker. Bu-bye now, Lucille."

"Bu-bye, Bea."

"Hank's Garage, kin I hep ya?"

"Hank?"

"Yea? Bea? Is that you?"

"Yea, Hank, it's me. Listen, if ya stick your finger in a rattlesnake's mouth, ya can't get mad when it bites ya."

"What tha hell does that mean?"

"It's over Hank"

Click.

Southern Discomfort

by Amanda Vernor

Adeleine pours a whiskey barrel's
juice into her cup.

Plastic, a
small hole in the bottom,

it drains slowly,
and she sips, which is wasteful,

until bees greet the
underside.

The color of honey
draws them.

Or was it the scent
of a seemingly sweet nectar?

My nude body, I mention,
is not a temple but a portion

of this very earth.
She laughs, shaking her cup

of draining whiskey;

the bees buzz louder,

confused.

As if honey were the splattering sort.

The Goat Man Prophecy

the story's here... but first, the rest of Mr. Laird's Southern Legitimacy Statement:

And God said, "Take these words and treat them gently. Prepare them and mix them as you would a savory gumbo. Give them fire and give them sweetness. Give them character and give them color. Use these words to tell stories and write them down.

"And in the fullness of time, I will honor your storytelling by moving the literary capital south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Hollywood producers will come and marvel at your words. I will give you air-conditioning, and everyone, if would seem, will want to move to the land of the storytellers.

"You will elect presidents, and southern accents and words shall prevail in the halls of Congress. And, yea, even grits will be honored in the lexicons of the finest chefs. Catfish and hushpuppies? Maybe."

And the people did. And God did. And God called it, "Good." And all the people, even the Yankees, said, "Amen."

Thus it came to pass that all persons who told, wrote and read good stories became Southerners, and knew in their hearts that they were, whether they were blessed to live there or not.

and now the story by Ed Laird

Smokey and Dixie sat on opposite sides of Mam-Maw's front porch and made good-natured faces at each other. Smokey sucked in his cheeks and puffed out his lips to imitate a guppy. The light-hearted imitation was not wasted on Dixie, who turned away, ending the game.

A setting sun turned South Avenue into a wildfire of reds, yellows and oranges. Smokey raised his thin hands in front of his eyes to watch the sunlight illuminate his veins. Dixie caught the sun rays in a webbed bag of marbles and twisted the collection to create a kaleidoscope against the white clapboard house.

The quiet of the street was interrupted by three cars and a truck bed loaded with children, all yelling and laughing, riding gleefully toward an unknown attraction. Smokey and Dixie stood and watched as several adults and children passed on foot, all going in the same direction as the automobiles and all excitedly talking and motioning to each other, kicking up red dust from the road.

“What’s happening?” Dixie yelled. “Where y’all going?” She couldn’t be heard above the din.

A straggler, four yards behind, was more informative: “The Goat Man’s on the highway!”

Dixie jumped up and down, clapping her hands. “Mama, Mama, Goat Man is on the highway! Can me and Smokey go see him?” Without waiting for a reply through the screened door, she took Smokey by the hand and they started for the road. “Smokey, you have to keep up if you want to see the Goat Man.”

“What’s ... a goat ... man?” he asked between heavy breaths as he navigated the road’s ruts and tried to match Dixie’s running pace.

“Just you wait and see. I’ve been waiting for him for three years.”

After a right on Goshen Road and three long blocks to the top of Goshen Hill, they stood transfixed at the twilight scene below them. In the parking lot of the Fruit Stand stood a converted railroad car with steel wheels, now a wagon with a canopy of goat skins stretched to cover all except the driver’s bench. Surrounding the wagon were five, ten, no, more, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen goats foraging on the grassy slope that stretched upward from the wagon toward the kudzu growth. Near the front of the wagon, sitting on a three-legged stool, was a balding, bearded man clothed in goat skins. His rounded face and powerful arms looked the color and texture of brown leather; his gnarled hands stirred a bubbling pot over a fire of dry tree branches. Three baby goats cavorted in mock battle in and around the campfire.

Most of the town had turned out for the event. Cars lined both sides of the highway for a mile in both directions, and the police with red lights flashing fought a losing action to keep the traffic flowing when motorists stopped to gawk. A hundred or so persons stood in a semi-circle around the encampment

and watched as the center of attraction carried out routine chores: carrying milk to an ailing goat lying on straw in back of the wagon, mending harnesses, and placing handwritten placards of plywood against the wagon side.

Holding his hand, Dixie took Smokey across the highway where he sat down on the grass as close to the Goat Man as he dared.

“Dixie,” he said, “what do the signs say?”

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Store up your treasures in heaven.”

“Is he a preacher man?”

“I think so.”

“What’s happened to you since the last time we saw you?” an onlooker asked.

“Well, I nearly froze to death coming over Signal Mountain. Started snowing, so I just piled more goats in the wagon and we kept each other warm. Next night someone put a gash in my head and killed three of the goats. Cut their throats. I spent one night in the Chattanooga hospital, but I’m alright now. The Lord provides.”

“Do you ever get lonely?”

“Do I look like I need company?” He swept his hand around at the hundred folks listening attentively to every word.

“Do you ever wish you could move faster? Maybe get a truck?”

“No, goat speed is fine. I don’t have a definite place to go and don’t have a definite time or day to get there. Speed is not important. God gives me water when it rains, and heat when the sun shines. I don’t have to pay for gasoline. Have an oil lamp when I need to read after dark. I’m just passing through. Don’t need much.”

He spread out picture post cards of himself and the goats which he sold for a nickel apiece. Each time a customer dropped a nickel or dime in his hand, he graciously responded, “My goats thank you. They work hard and they like to live high.” He posed for those wanting a picture of themselves with him and the goats.

“Are you ever hungry?”

“Hungry? With these many goats to give me milk? Never.” To amuse the crowd, he stopped a passing nanny, gripped her teat, and sprayed milk into his mouth. The children all laughed, so he pressed the teat in the opposite direction and sprayed them with warm milk. They giggled and pulled back in pretended horror. “And I have more friends along my route than I can count. They keep me well-supplied with vegetables. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God, fresh vegetables and a little goat’s milk.” He smiled.

“Do you think you will ever settle down and get a job?”

“What need do I have for a home and a job? These goats are my job, and this wagon is all the home I need. The lilies along side the road here don’t work, yet King Solomon at his finest never looked as good as these day lilies. They greet God every morning, bask in his love all day and enter into their final rest each night. Doesn’t God, who loves day lilies that only live one day, love us even more?”

“Are you saving anything for your retirement?”

“I don’t plan to retire. I plan to be here one day and in heaven the next. Absent from the body; present with the Lord.” He pointed to the sign. “Don’t lay up treasures for yourself on this earth. Put your treasures in heaven. Lots of folks think that heaven is the dream and that this is the reality. Right the opposite. This is the dream and heaven is the reality. Reality lasts a lot longer than the dream.”

The crowd fell silent as he bowed his head briefly, scooped up a cup of broth from the pot and drank it from a tin coffee cup.

“Too many folks,” he said, “live as if they are going to be on this earth

forever. This life is just a snap of the fingers.” He snapped his fingers for effect.

“ Did you ever go to school?”

“No. Even as a young boy I had to work. My family was poor. I went to New York when I was fourteen and married a knife-thrower. I was her target in her act for the three years we was married. After three years she found a better looking target. Never argue with a woman with a knife.” He winked. The crowd laughed. “Better for man to live alone if he can. A married man has to consider his wife’s needs. I only have to consider God’s needs.”

“You sound like an educated man.”

“Well, God taught me to read the Bible. But that’s the only book I can read. So all I know is what God has taught me and what I have learned from watching folks like you. The best educations come from God and life. Most folks don’t know how to use the educations they’ve got. I ride along these highways and God teaches me a lot of things. Shows me a lot of things.”

It was dark now and the crowd was starting to thin. Smokey and Dixie sat on the ground and did not move or miss a word. The campfire and the boiling soup added warmth and aroma to the evening. The adult goats, the white ones eating the kudzu near the top of the hill, looked like floating ghosts.

“Are you a prophet?”

“Not the kind of prophet you’re probably thinking about.”

“What kind of prophet are you?”

“I don’t predict the future. I let folks see what God has already showed them, but they can’t see.”

“What’s your real name?”

“I had a ‘real name’ once. One that my parents gave me. But when I became a new man, God gave me a new name.”

“What’s your new name?”

“That I can’t tell. Goat Man’s good enough.”

“Do you eat the goats?”

“Would you eat your friends? These goats are my friends. They all have names. That’s Isaiah. That’s Jeremiah over there. This here is Mary Magdalene.”

“Them’s religious names.”

“Yes, and these are religious goats. Every one of them are saved and sanctified. Stephen even speaks in tongues when he gets mad at me.” Goat Man smiled. “The goat skins over my wagon and the ones I wear don’t mean that I eat the goats. When they enter their heavenly rest, I skin them and bury the remains along side the road. I keep their skins to remember them by. Like some of you who keep locks of your loved ones’ hair. I know where each is buried and I visit their graves.”

By now fewer than a dozen persons were still standing or sitting on the ground. Absorbed in his own thoughts, the Goat Man looked at the stars. Returning his gaze to his small congregation, he looked at Smokey, whose eyes had never left the Goat Man’s.

“What’s your name, young man?”

“Smokey.”

“Smokey. That’s a good name. For you look through a glass darkly now, but someday you will see clearly.” He stirred the embers on the fire and added more wood. “Smokey, come here and let’s see what The Great Spirit is showing you.”

Without hesitation, Smokey surprised himself by getting up and crossing the five feet to sit in the Goat Man’s lap. Though gnarled, the Goat Man’s hands were smooth as lanolin. His odor reminded Smokey of freshly bathed kittens. The Goat Man turned Smokey to face the fire. Dixie, a protector if needed, stood by Smokey’s side.

After dipping his fingertips into a cup of goat milk, the Goat Man covered Smokey's face with his large hands and with the middle finger of each hand pressed against Smokey's closed eyes. "What do you see, Smokey?"

"I see stars and flashing lights."

"Look deeper. What do you see now?"

"I see the man with the sweet breath who hurt me!"

"Yes, and what is he doing?"

"He's underwater in the river. His hands are inside a hole...a cave under a big rock. Why is he under the water?"

"He's a noodler. He's trying to catch fish with his bare hands. What do you see now?"

"The big rock fell on his hands. He can't move! He can't come up from under the water!"

"Yes, and..."

"He's wiggling, and wiggling, and wiggling, but he can't get loose! Will he drown? Will anyone see him? Will anyone save him?"

"That's his Maker's decision. 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. Jesus said it would be better for a man to have a millstone tied around his neck and dropped into the sea than to harm a child."

"I see big bubbles coming from the man's mouth!"

"Yes, and now he's quiet and still, ain't he? Quiet and still. Don't worry, Smokey. He's no longer in his body. He's in another place. You won't ever see him again, and he can't hurt you. Ever again."

The Goat Man took his hands from around Smokey's face, and they both stared into the fire. They looked at the stars.

Whispering into Smokey's ear, the Goat Man said, "You've been hurt, Smokey, but God has marked you. Do you know about the mark?" Smokey reached and touched a scar that separated his right eyebrow when he fell against a chair while playing hide-and-seek in Mam-Maw's house.

"Yes, the mark," the Goat Man said. "The mark is to remind you of God's promise. The mark will disappear someday but not until you are an old man and have been healed of the hurt. You will have to become an old man before you can become a young man. Do you understand me?"

"No, sir."

"No, you're too young, but someday you will. Every bad thing that happens to you that you don't understand leads to something good, either in the dream or in the reality to come. Joy comes from pain. Laughter comes from tears. Triumph comes from defeat. You can bank on it. You have a great adventure ahead of you, Smokey. You and me will meet again someday, somewhere. Here's something to remember me by."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a necklace of small shells and dropped it over Smokey's head. "They're pookas. A Cherokee Indian, a holy man, gave them to me. Never take them off. Not even when you bathe. They'll protect you from further harm."

Smokey saw his mother and father step out of the car that pulled alongside the encampment. Smokey and Dixie ran for the car. "Mama, Mama, I talked to the Goat Man!" Smokey rolled down the window and stuck his head out the window as the encampment receded. The Goat Man, illuminated by the campfire, was still standing, smiling and looking at Smokey.

"Daddy, I'm hungry. Let's go get hamburglars."

"We have to go straight home, Smokey" his mother said. "We have to take Grandma back to her old home. Her Cousin Willy has died."

"What happened?"

"He drown."

Smokey shivered, sat very still, and said nothing. Dixie grasp his hand and held it all the way home.

Delilah

by Regina Williams

My day was a total disaster. I'd had to stand with my nose in a circle on the blackboard an hour for slapping Misty Collier. She started it by calling me a doody head. Things went downhill from there.

Walking home, I had almost reached our driveway. It was more like two paths through the middle of a dense forest, but driveway was what daddy called it, so mama and I did to.

Inside Mr. Tanker's field sat a large flatbed truck with a wench on the back. It reminded me of a tow truck I had seen on the highway once. Three men were standing around waving their arms and shouting.

As I got closer, I could see they were trying to load something on the flatbed. Mr. Tanker was a cantankerous old man, going mostly to fat. When he talked his cheeks moved with the rhythm of his mouth. Even closer now, I recognized Billy Joe Watson and Buddy Lee Simpson, a couple of no accounts that lived in the trailer park on the other side of town. They were hooking something on the wench.

They yelled, cursed and walked back and forth, trying to figure out how to get the lump on the ground onto the truck. Finally, Billy Joe started cranking the wench. The first thing I realized was they were drunk as Cooter Brown. Don't ask. That's what daddy always said when he saw somebody falling down drunk.

Second, I realized what they were trying to haul up on that truck. Delilah. My stomach heaved. I leaned over, breathing hard, trying to get stuff to stay where it belonged. I could feel the heat leave my body and I shivered.

Delilah was a mule. She was also my friend. In fact, at this very moment, I had half an apple in my lunch pail, saved just for her. Now, these drunks were trying to pull her up by her back feet.

"Gosh dammit, Billy Joe," Buddy Lee screamed. "What in blue blazes are you doing? It's a hunnert degrees out here. Let's get this over with."

They tried again. Delilah came off the ground, but her back legs caught on the flatbed. I could hear ka-thunk, ka-thunk as Billy Joe raised and lowered the wench. My stomach turned over and bile rose in my throat. I swallowed it down, afraid of what would happen if those men saw me.

“Gol-durnit,” Mr. Tanker yelled. “Stop it. You’re givin’ me a headache.” He staggered around to the back of the truck, beer clutched tightly in one hand. “You boys ain’t worth a copper penny,” he said, sitting his beer can carefully on the ground behind him. Grabbing Delilah’s legs, he yelled over his shoulder, “Now try it.”

Billy Joe raised the wench again, but Mr. Tanker was having problems holding the legs straight and they caught again. “You’re ‘bout worthless as a opossum on the side of the road,” Mr. Tanker yelled. “Hold it.”

I didn’t want to look, but I couldn’t drag my eyes away. I could hear daddy’s voice in my head as he complained about the spectators at a bad car wreck a couple of months ago. “They ain’t nothing but a bunch of vultures, just waiting.”

I felt like one of them vultures as I peered through the pole fence rails. I hadn’t even realized tears were coursing down my cheeks until one splashed on the back of my hand.

“Put yer back into it.” Mr. Tanker’s loud, drunken voice pried my eyes back to the horror unfolding in front of me.

“It’s hung up,” Buddy Lee said.

Mr. Tanker threw up his hands, bent down for his beer and almost toppled head first in the grass. He finally got straightened up, but he was swaying back and forth like a strong wind bends the trees.

I kept wondering what happened. Delilah was fine when I’d gone out this morning. She’d followed me down the fence, braying softly, wanting a treat. I’d given her half the apple then patted her soft brown muzzle, telling her she’d get the rest this afternoon. Now, she’d never eat another apple. The tears started again.

Mr. Tanker wound up and let loose with a mouthful of curse words so bad they made my ears hurt. The mule’s legs were still making that awful ka-thunking sound.

I would be nine years old next week, but it felt as though I aged a lifetime watching them trying to load my friend. She might not feel it, but she deserved better than three drunks taking her to her final resting place.

“Hey kid.” I looked up.

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Summer 2005 Fiction

[Sense, Truth, Mystery](#)

by Jane Elkins

I was bred and born in the briar patch of Goldsboro, NC, in 1960. I have lived in North Carolina my entire life except for four long years when I went north to college in Virginia. My parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on back to the 1700's are all from the South. My husband hails from Wilmington, North Carolina. His mother was born and reared in Mississippi. I think White Lake, North Carolina, is just as fine a place for a vacation as any beach or foreign city. I not only have eaten pit-cooked pork barbecue but also have cooked it (in said pit). When I want my husband or daughter to stop doing something, I say "Whoa, Nellie!", a saying I got from my mama, who got it from her daddy, who said it to his mules in Wayne County tobacco fields. The following close relationship exists in my family: my father's sister Rebecca married my mother's first cousin Roscoe, and Becky's and Roscoe's children are thus my double cousins, related to me on both my father's and mother's sides. I can belabor a

point, as illustrated in the preceding sentence. And the most important things in life are family, the land, friends and neighbors, God, and good stories. Thank you for reading mine.

The Lemonade Stand

by Steve Gullion

I have witnessed a bloodhound sleeping on top of a doghouse. Also, this story is based on true events. My daddy really did operate a still 20 miles from IRS headquarters.

Windy

by Ronn Venable

Well, since y'all asked so nicely - My great-granddaddy hailed from North Carolina and left us his diary of the Civil War. He wrote that the Yankees let him kiss his horse good-bye, before they made him a prisoner of war. They took him from North Carolina and he ended up in a prison camp outside of Indianapolis, Indiana. I guess he stayed in Indiana, because my daddy moved from there to Southern Ohio and married my momma. I was born just north of the Mason-Dixon - close enough to hit it with a rock.

After spending most of my younger years shoveling shit outta barns and spreading it around the fields in Ohio, when I was old enough, I moved myself south and found my roots. Most people think I moved because of the 'outhouse incident' from years before. My daddy knew how to hold a grudge. But he got over it, after I explained to him that we all thought it would be really funny to tip the outhouse over with him in it. I was lucky, I was the youngest and my brothers got the belt first. I think Daddy was worn out by the time he got to me.

When I got a few hundred miles south of that river, I was so comfortable, that I called it home for the next twenty-five years. Even took the time to marry a pretty

redhead and raise three fine, sons. There were still lots of barns around and I didn't have to do the shoveling. Lots of outhouses too, but I'd learned my lesson.

Now, circumstances have brought me back to where I started, by the banks of the Ohio River. The outhouse is gone and I can't hurl a rock near as far as I used to be able to, but whenever I hear Bill Monroe or get a strong whiff of fresh cow shit, I know where my heart is. Near as I can figure, I'll always be south of somewhere.

Never will get used to boiled peanuts, though.

Ghost on Black Mountain

by Ann Hite

I'm southern because I was born and raised in Georgia during the sixties by a large extended family, who believed the South was a country of it's own. I was raised eating fried pork chops, corn, okra, squash, and buttermilk with cornbread crumbled in for desert. My granny taught me to respect my elders and vote a straight democratic ticket at all costs. But, mostly I learned to love literature. My first short stories were Flannery O'Connor. I love the south with all her defects that is why I remained her when given a chance to run. It is why my characters reflect stories only a true southerner can tell.

The Voice of Understanding

by Jason Kennedy

I have a way to go to be Southern, being English by birth, but I married my Southern girl in Alabama and now have in-laws called Willie and Billie and a momma who fixes the best sweet tea.

I crave sweet potato pie.

I attempted clogging at the Bluegrass extravaganza in a mall in Florence, AL, this weekend.

South 40s

by Samuel E. Douglas

I was born on a mill village in Rock Hill, South Carolina, the son of two mill workers. I lived my early years on another mill village in Chester, South Carolina. My father was a doffer, and my mother was a spinner in the Springs Cotton Mills. We lived in the mill's house, bought from the mill's store, and started school in the mill village elementary school. My entire youth till age 18 was spent in North and South Carolina. At 18, I joined the military, spent the next 28 years traveling the world, and then came back south to retire.

But mostly I believe I can prove my southernness by knowing that you spell y'all Y'ALL and not ya'll as it's spelled throughout your website.

****Ed note:** Both spellings are considered correct. Preference is based on one's region. There are at least two pronunciations—*Yoo-all* and *yawl*. Don't believe me? Look it up. Debate at your leisure but leave us out of it. We're too busy fishing for gar to discuss such trivial matters.

Pedestrian Peddling

by Steven Stam

I was raised in Jacksonville from age four on, since I have memories at least, and have attended NASCAR, most notably the Daytona 500 and Pepsi 400 since age eight. I do eat grits, with Jelly and butter, and frequent Waffle House, where the grits are often served a tad cold but edible. And yes, when I eat I drink Sweat Tea and Sweat Tea only, nothing like some flavored water dumped into a bucket of sugar to go with a meal.

Fish Gutz

by Verna Austen

Ok, so technically speaking, I don't live in the South but don't let that fool you. I have a Southern soul. The humidity feels like home to me, the sweet way you say ya'll and include even me in your crowd makes me feel like I belong. I'm Southern because I really believe there are only two kinds of music. Because I like my cornbread without sugar and don't you dare go anywhere near it with anything green either. My favorite beverage is sweet tea, not iced tea and just because the growing season where I live is shorter than yours doesn't mean my garden isn't as good. My favorite thing to eat is garden supper and if you're over at my house, I will insist that you eat too. Then we'll sit on my porch all night with my dog, Boo, who has all four of her legs. All the best writers are Southern, they're the only ones who know how to tell a story right. And they wouldn't be caught dead writing the poor me crap that unfortunately is popular now. My inner Southern lady would like to thank you in advance for reading my story.

[Fishin'](#)

by Linda Dickinson McCurdy

I guess the strongest proof I can offer of my Southern roots is that when we used to visit my cousins in New Jersey, they would pester me and my sister to say stuff. "Say 'dog'," they'd say and howl when we replied, "Dawg." "Say 'you all'," they'd request and we'd oblige with, "Y'all." (They never did realize we complied so that we could hear them utter things like 'Youse' and 'cah'.) My parents were Northern transplants but I was born and bred in Florida (I swear, there are still parts of Florida that are authentically redneck and not suburbs of New York or Massachusettes!) We lived in a trailer across from a biannual pig farm and I've had a cow flop fight with the boys who lived behind us, not to mention having partied in the woods across from the cemetery that my dad's buried in. I married a Marine and now that he's done travelling from pillar to post, we've settled down in Willow Spring, North Carolina, just a stone's throw from T's Tackle and the Sunday night mud bog pit...

[Markers on the Mountain](#)

by Scott P. Baron

Why am I southern? THAT is an excellent question. I never did rightly fit in, but I don't fit in anywhere, really. Here I go: Born in D.C. (yes, somewhat international and all, but still south of the Mason/Dixon line), lived in Lorton, and Alexandria and Anandale Va until I was 10, then moved to Miami. I must clarify that I do not believe Miami to be a southern town but it is right near some! Then my folks and I moved to Raleigh, NC in 1973- not much of a boom town. We lived within walking distance of the fair grounds and I did have to explain to a poor girl once how to tell the difference between the boy and girl cows (sic)! I was also one of 4 jewish kids in my school and yes, I was told that I killed Jesus; I explained that I was twelve but that didn't seem to clarify the poor boy's thinking, bless his heart (ok, I am laying it on thick, but isn't what this is for?—fun?) I went to college at UNC-CH (GO HEELS! And any other UNC school, of course) where I discovered southern writers and learned from a few such as Jill McCorkle (name dropping!).

So, why the hell am I here in Michigan? Education (phd), job, money, and now my daughters live here. We do get back to Raleigh and I INSIST that we go to Clyde Cooper's for bbq; I also have to explain to my yankee friends that it is NOT cooking out on your grill! and that it is heaven on a plate. I also love authentic Brunswick stew and what would a meal be without hushpuppies?

I don't have a yard dog, but I do have a bird dog.

[My Study of Love and Judo](#)

by Geoff Balme

I drink tea that's sweet and eat cornbread that ain't. I somehow feel responsible and guilty all the time, I'm polite to all, I put my enemies back on their horses and I let them tilt at me again!

I raised chickens and rabbits in the dirt in my backyard before and

after school. My daddy took me hunting on Sundays. While I stood frozen and dumb, amazed at the birds and the four-leggers who sprung from their hiding spots, my daddy would shake his head at me, and with an expert shot, drop them. His shot was so expert he had time to chastize me with a look - before he took down the quarry. Hell even the dogs would look disappointed in me.

I rarely rode my horse, and instead just enjoyed feeding him til he looked like a barrel with legs. But when I did ride him I tried to joust - I jousted against posts, and bottles set on rocks - and fell off... losing to branches and made the horses laugh and laugh.

I fall in love too much. Girls have told me, I'm TOO SWEET. Every summer I forget about the chiggers and I get well over 300 bites on my ankles that make me lose about a week's worth of sleep - and so I write these insane stories.

I practiced getting rid of my "Y'all", and "might could" - because I wanted to be a punk rocker, and I never knew that I could be a southern punk. I'm always miles behind.

Charlie's Bridge

by Lowell Mick White

There are three reasons why I consider myself to be Southern:

1. I am from West Virginia. Yes, the Mountain State (and my ancestors) sided with the Union in the Civil War, but West Virginia is south of the Mason-Dixon Line, and Appalachian Culture is closely related to if not an actual subset of Southern Culture.
2. I presently live in East Texas – which is Southern.
3. I once got drunk and had reckless sex with a (female) cousin in the bed of my pickup truck.

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Summer 2005 Poetry

and there's more where this came from, check back...

Thoughts from a Hammock

by Dorothy Allen

I grew up barefoot in red dirt country. I still climb trees as an 18-year-old, and I bet if you cut me open my veins would carry sap and I'd have widening rings to show for all my years. I squelch mud between my toes; I eat pimento cheese at every family gathering; I live with eight dogs, all of whom came sauntering up to the front porch in weather of varying ferocity, not one of them a recognizable breed. I swim in the river in the summer and don't flinch at snakes, fish, or arachnids. I am a knowledge-loving, blackberry-pancake-eating, thunderstorm-dancing Southern woman, and don't you forget it.

Three Poems

by Donnie B Cox

At long last, I am going to re-legitimatize myself. After 28 years of freezing my ass off in Massachusetts, I'm moving back to my old hometown of Laurens, South Carolina. The home of the one and only, the infamous—"Ku Klux Museum & Redneck Shop"—and that's no joke folks... it's right on the town square, across from the old courthouse.

Three Poems

by Ann White

I don't have any dead mules on the lawn but there are pecan trees in the back and they make those sweet potato casseroles extra special or if a really sweet dessert is called for then occasionally, I'll create a pecan pie with a half gallon of dark caro syrup and a bunch of hand-hulled pecans. My entire neighborhood was a pecan orchard once. I can't figure how they survived the huge oaks with their olympian roots that crisscross the asphalt trail in the park, cracking and buckling it just like a California earthquake. This is Northeast Florida. There were some people who said my hometown was really southern Georgia what with the drawls and traintracks and Baptist churches. It's a peculiar place: Southern without the chivalry; franchised country cookin'; white collar poverty; unenchanted beaches. I have a love/hate relationship here that keeps me poised and fascinated at the same time. Just a few years ago, we elected our first Black sheriff - his predecessor said it couldn't be done - we showed him differently. Anytime you talk Southern for any length of time, you're bound to scratch the surface of a few deep land mines. Racism. Misogynism. Religious bigotry. Illiterate adults. Pit bulls and greyhounds. Anger and beauty all churned together.

Three Poems

by Jenny Sadre-Orafai

Jenny Sadre-Orafai is a Southerner because she often refers to herself in third person as a "G.R.I.T.S." She only began to label herself this after she was reminded of how much Southern men love G.R.I.T.S.—at least that's what the

pick-up truck's bumper sticker said. And, only true Southerners know what the *hell* she is talking about.

Three Poems

by Robert W. Duvall

Southern Curriculum Vitae

I was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama.
I have a ghost brother who was born and died within hours of his first breath. A year later I was born, but Mama never saw any connection. My elder brother's name is Rufus, but we call him "Bo"
My first witnessed act of intercourse was between my two dogs in the living room just before the family left for Sunday night services. Schizophrenia runs on my daddy's side of the family for three successive generations, and so I view all my children's eccentricities through a dark pathological glass.

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Summer 2005 Essays

[“The Backyard Dog” and “The Front Yard Dog”](#)

by John Kernell

Oy, am I ever Southern-ish. I lived on a farm outside of Columbia, SC, as a boy, and fell off a big white mule while riding it bareback to impress my sister and scare my mother while my father was training to fight Germans at a nearby Army base. I succeeded...in falling off the mule. Nobody cared. Yee ha.

As a quasi-retiree, I lived in Charleston, SC, for seven years before moving as far South as you can get without driving into the Gulf of Mexico, which I've also done, too. Yes, I have.

When I saw that “having a yard dog” was a good Southernish thing to do, and having two was probably even better, I thought I would tell you about mine.

Also, I have been writing two weekly columns for The Mississippi Press for a couple of years now. A much-sanitized, much shorter, version of the following essay was published under my byline a couple of months ago in the

weekly “Ocean Springs Press” that they throw at the foot of people’s driveways around here. I say “much-sanitized” because my picture runs next to my column and I’m sick to death of death threats at the Post Office from the way I do talk sometimes.

[Notes from a Runner’s Journal—Vienna, Virginia](#)

by Steven Bills

I have paddled down the Boga Chita River in Mississippi on a Sunday afternoon without being eaten by snakes. I’ve visited a cane mill and heard tobacco chewin octogenarians describe how civic minded the clan really was in its better years. My arteries remain clogged because of all the fried catfish, hush puppies, and banana pudding I sloshed down with sun brewed ice tea. The first Easter I visited a Baptist Church in Mississippi I couldn’t help but reiterate “He’s aliiiiive” the rest of the day. I met Bob Livingston and his wife at a ship launching in Louisiana and still can’t believe he would cheat on her—it’s a Press conspiracy—Dan Rather should be investigated further.

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Dead Mule Archives

Just because they're past Mules -- don't think they're not Good Ol' Mules. We've added over 75 stories, poems and essays in the last few weeks. And don't forget to check the MuleReprise link for some Tim Peeler, F. Brett Cox, Scott McKenzie, Bob Thomas, Lanny Gilbert, Mark Kreuzwieser, John Nettles, Travis Ray Cole and more...

You know the drill -- click on Edit, then Find in this page... and go from there. Or you could use the search page, but you have to type the entire name in the search window for it to work.

Writers should note: Online publications bear no archival responsibilities nor is there any "publication rule" requiring magazines to offer continuous access. Those published on the Dead Mule should save copies of the work WHEN it is featured on this literary journal and such pages should be saved in HTML and writers can then utilize such pages for use as tear sheets.

[Lookout Mountain Up Ahead](#)

by Gideon C. Kennedy

I wrote this poem during a weekend trip I took with my grandfather, the hawk, and my father, the dove, on a tour of Civil War battlefields. While I went more as a favor to my grandfather than anything else, I found that the experience and the memory of it stir up more thoughts and emotions than could be accounted for here.

Pawn

by Miriam N. Kotzin

I grew up south of the Mason-Dixon Line—or where it would have been had it dragged east about fifty miles. I live twenty miles from a Confederate graveyard, and make irregular but not irreverent visits there.

Grits, sure, kind of runny with butter, black pepper, and eggs over so easy the egg can be cut up and mixed in with the grits in itty-bitty bites to make it last, till the coffee with chicory's down to the last inch in the pot it was boiled in.

Biscuits, shucks, to eat my biscuits, you pull them out of the air where they float, just waiting for you to drizzle them with warm honey.

And if you want it, I'll let you have the real recipe for cake made with co'cola.

To be Southern is to say, It'd be best if you come the end of the month, though you can come at the beginning, too, sugar. And someone else hearing that knows you'd better not show up before the fifteenth.

A Supersonic Sense of Hearing

by Danielle Giardino Mutarelli

I am actually from the north, but please don't hold that against me. We can't help where we are born. I claim southern roots, though, thanks to my grandfather who was raised in the hills of North Carolina. There is a painting out there by artist Jeff Jakub titled Junior and the Rumfeldt Boys. The painting shows NASCAR

racing legend Junior Johnson and the Rumfeldt boys running moonshine. According to family legend and knowledgeable sources these are my relatives. I love the slow pace and the hospitality. The south seems to savor life a bit more than in the rest of the country.

What do you think is southern? I think one of the most beloved southern traits is the ability to tell a good yarn, whether it be truth or fiction. It's all in the tale. I have eaten grits, but if we're talking southern cuisine, I'd prefer a nice slice of pecan pie.

I may be from the north, but you bet your bottom dollar my mamas an icon. Sadly, I do not have any yard dogs, and I've got squirrels up the behind to prove it.

College Student/Security Guard Mauls Armadillo With Shovel

by Barry Dunlap

Why Southern? Growing up in the Deep South means that I automatically assume that the waitress will bring "sweet tea;" I call mosquitoes "flying alligators." I love seeing the trees change colors in January, and I don't ask too many questions about my ancestry.

Four Poems

by JF Gregoire

Why are you southern? I s'pose I could say I was born in Fort Benning, GA, and that I was raised in Livingston Parish, but, that is merely nothing more than logistics. I say I'm southern because I know when you should serve hushpuppies instead of cornbread.

Why could you be southern? n/a

What do you think is southern? The ability to glisten instead of sweat and being polite even when you're flipping some off

Do you eat grits? Yes, with eggs for breakfast and with cheese as a side dish.

Is your mama an icon? Yes ma'am, God rest her soul.

Do you have yard dogs? I did, but, they've all disappeared under the porch, hadn't seen 'em in years.

Story #11 Evening Chatter

by Celia McClinton

A single star glimmers just above the western horizon, by then no more than a slender line of magenta, when the first of that night's screams rends the thin desert air. Nurse sighs deeply, rises, and mutters, "Pardon me. Time I break out the tranquilizer darts."

Story #10 The Hypothesis

by Celia McClinton

Across the road, at the RoadKillGrill, two of last night's revelers looked on from their sleeping bags, fascinated by the naked blonde, both arms raised above her head, the butcher knife gleaming in the morning sunlight. One of the revelers, the long, skinny one with the straw hat who would later swear that flames blazed from her nostrils, whispered to his companion, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman."

Story #9 34 BK 194

by Celia McClinton

He was gone for a month. Crippled dwarfs guided him through a maze of dark, wicked, grim deformities half hidden in a murky haze under an orange sky. Strange glistening beasts hunted on paths of rock as wide as rivers while others of their type ate forests and soils, biting far down into the bedrock. Black rain

flooded the earth and filled its rivers with a torrent of celadon-green acid leaving behind only stinking eruptions oozing phosphorescent pus.

Story #8 The Sullen Tint of Lead

by Celia McClinton

Then they moved into a dawn that was bleak, bare and infinitely forbidding, and she realized she was more frightened than she could ever remember. A simple pincher movement, fifteen of them along the contours from the right flank, fifteen from the left flank, 50 yards apart. Through the sparse grass, dry, prickly, its sharp seeds penetrating their fatigues and burrowing into her skin as if their red meat was the soil for germination.

Story #7 Icy Nights

by Celia McClinton

“So I called your daddy, Celia. About dawn, what with the ice and all, he comes along with an ambulance creepin’ behind. And they took Clarence away. He died in the hospital that evening about supper time. Alcohol poisoning.

Story #6 A Different Light

by Celia McClinton

His interest faded. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back on the tree and tried to remember what he was doing before the sparkle had captured his imagination. He opened his eyes and was surprised to find the mountain shrouded in deep fog. *Well, that happens often on this side of the mountain, the fog moves. Sudden.*

3 Poems

by D.B. Cox

I'm still a southerner because:

- * I can play guitar better with a long-neck Bud—than I can with my fingers.
- * I still believe Al Queda terrorists had something to do with the death of Dale Earnhardt.
- * To me, tornados still sound like freight trains.
- * I don't know it's Friday night until I hit somebody.
- * I don't know it's Saturday night until I hit somebody.
- * I still buy my liquor in those little mini-bottles.
- * I still remember how to gut a rabbitt.
- * Every time I go back to my old hometown, I go to the weekend dance at the V.F.W. (where there's always plenty of guys to hit).
- * I'm still holding on to my confederate money (just in case).
- * I have an 8X10 glossy of Walker Percy hanging in my living room right next to my velvet image of Jesus in the "Garden of Gethsemane".

Mulegate-- Essay

by Rex A. Horne

I was born and raised in South Carolina and as I tell everyone, I speak Southern not English.

Grits are God's gift to humans and I carry a bag in my luggage when I travel so that I'm sure to have my proper fix each morning. I know that Moonshine is not something in the sky but out of a Mason Jar and I know that all good Southerners get a hound dog in heaven.

My story is about a dead mule, of all things. It's true, may God be my witness, as we like to say.

Story #5

What Gobbledygook!

by Celia McClinton

“It happens. He dumps her for his secretary, Alice Small, and Martha wants to get even. She starts collecting incriminating documents, things certain to peeve the NCAA. They are the photocopies in a brown business envelope. Martha was going to cut a deal with the NCAA but she was murdered first.”

Story #4

The Third Attempt

by Celia McClinton

The two had a reputation across campus for, well, sorcery, but Bobbie’s reputation was more formidable than Celia’s. It was widely believed that Bobbie could divine the answers to a math exam before the exam had been written. This would have been an impressive stunt but Celia knew it wasn’t true.

Story #3

Academic Honesty

by Celia McClinton

I noticed that something was very wrong as Dr. Cozen was handing out the exams. A student blatantly crossed himself before he took the exam from Dr. Cozen. Looking around the room I saw another student periodically touch a copy of the New Testament while another student held on to a rabbit’s foot like it was a life preserver.

Story #2

Porkchop's Seven Mountains

by Celia McClinton

Anyone approaching the boundaries of The Donaldson Mountains quickly learned

that the **No Trespassing** signs meant business.

Story #1

Shepsters

by Celia McClinton

Celia McClinton can be anything she wants to be, whenever she wants to. Consequently, she becomes frightfully confused when she tries to write a formal biography, and inevitably says to hell with it. She enjoys autobiographical liberty because she lacks physical substance. She's a fairly normal southern girl otherwise—serious and intolerant of nonsense. Her only manifestations are found in her writings. Her short fiction and essays have appeared in the Spillway Review and The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature where she is also the Fictional Editor. In *Plots with Guns*, she has recently praised dueling as a rational approach to conflict resolution, and she sometimes reviews books for *Popmatters.com*. She is currently working on two books, *Witches Way*, and *Chicanery: Stories and Essays of Academic Absurdity*. She, of course, denies that she is fictional and holds that her creator is a figment of her imagination, not the other way around.

Whiskey and Words

by Laurie O'Hare

legitimacy statement: Born in Texas, I was raised in the delta of Arkansas (Val and I actually went to the same grade school, though not at the same time) I spent some time in the hills there where I learned to drink moonshine and shy clear of survivalists and marijuana growers. I must be southern because ever time I talk to a northerner I hear, "I just love your southern accent." Every Thanksgiving I force my Canadian husband and northern father-in-law to feast upon cornbread dressing (no white bread for them) and dumplins (ummm, dumplins). And of course, one of my favorite movies is *Gone With the Wind*. I have two huge dogs

that frighten whoever comes to the door. One's a little prissy, but the other would make a fine yard dog, if I had a yard.

Friday Night Supper at the Crawfish Café

by Lisa A. Mason

I am southern. I was born in Shreveport Louisiana, and have lived most of my life in south Texas. Yard dogs? Got five, two being the state dog of Louisiana - the Catahoula. They even pile up on the front porch on hot afternoons and refuse to move for food or company.

Mamma? Yep, she's an icon. She's from Natchitoches, Louisiana- the town where they filmed *Steel Magnolias*. Her baby sister went to school with the playwright, Robert Harling. (Does that make me southern royalty?)

I prefer a little tea in my glass of sugar, and if I want to fish, I just step out to the pond in my backyard.

The Dead Mule September 2004 Chapbook

by Alyssa Hayek

Is a person a Southerner by default when they've been raised in close proximity to a Southern grandfather? Or a Southern raised father? If so, I qualify mightily. Maybe it was the fact that my mother knew that green beans and potatoes, along with a good helping of cornbread, is most definitely a meal. Or it could have been those black-eyed peas Pop-pop was always willing to share. Anyway, if that isn't enough, I'll have to rely on the fact that I'm now a Virginian.

Moonpies and Porkrinds

by Catherine Claiborne

I'm not southern; I'm southwestern, from Texas to be exact. We used to go

fishing when I was little and loved to stay at our lake cabin, which was a trailer with no running water and no heat. After I skinned the catfish we caught, Papa Curly deep fried 'em in a Fry Daddy. Granny made the potato salad with mustard and a little ash from her cigarette. I never did like grits but I had to eat them when I was little so as not to offend my Aunt Bird. I piled on the butter and pepper and ate my obligatory two bites. Our yard dog was a Schnauzer named Heidi that Papa Curly always called Howdy. We had to shave her after ever summer to get the “coco burrs” out of her beard.

Where I'm from, the place where you put your feet in a car is called the flow board, “Thank you but we eat already” is an acceptable way to decline someone's offering of food, “warsh up” is what you do before meals, kids ride on top of the tool box in the bed of the truck and peppered white gravy ladeled over torn pieces of Mrs. Baird's white bread is considered a vegetable.

Dinner wasn't ready until the sweet tea was brewed and jacked up Broncos didn't ride right until a tape of Rush (my cousins) or Patty Lovelace (the grown folks) was played. It was a down and dirty hellavu time, but somebody had to do it.

My First Lost Love

by Clint Hall

I am southern because not only do I love NASCAR, but my fiancée also runs her own NASCAR website. The first gift I ever bought her was a Bobby Labonte jacket. My mother also calls me Clint after Elvis's character in ‘Love Me Tender.’

The Last Ride of General Lee

by Elizabeth Roberts Hamel

I think I could probably be considered a Southerner because:

I never walk up to someones front door empty handed; I'm always carrying food or booze.

I firmly believe that good cooking requires such key ingredients as pecans, Crisco and bourbon.

I hate wearing shoes.

I'm a yellow dog Democrat.

I've never seen snow, and don't care to.

I'm not afraid of alligators, hurricanes, dead bodies or speaking my mind, even when it costs me.

I once shouted **Yankee go home!** at a car with New York plates in the parking lot of the local Winn Dixie. I was four years old at the time. My predisposition towards diplomacy hasn't increased much since.

I married a Pensacola boy who can cook cheese grits and fry up catfish like no one else.

I've got a porch dog.

I can make the county's best mashed potatoes, shoot any kind of gun, steal anything not nailed down, trade the juiciest gossip and pick up a snake, all in one mimosa soaked afternoon.

As anyone who lives in the South can tell you, it is a place of extremes and contradictions: we are known for our friendliness, but remembered for the Civil War, often thought of as hicks, but producers of bucketloads of presidents, senators and nobel laureates.

[Peculiar Homecoming](#)

by Jennifer Brown

Now, whether or not being from Missouri makes me Southern depends on who you ask. Ask those Missourians who call it Mi-soor-ee and believe that Branson is beneath them, and they'd say absolutely not! Ask those who call it Mi-zoor-a, they'd proudly show you their confederate flag and offer you a Milwaukee's Best and a whoop to prove it. We just never could seem to make up our minds whether

or not we wanted to be Southern, and it pretty much is left to the individual.

I knew how to squish a tomato worm with my thumb before I could talk. I ate turnips straight from our garden, cleaning them up just by wiping the mud on my shirt. When I turned eighteen, what I wanted more than anything else was my very own pickup. Our highlights of the year are heading down to the State Fair, taking our couch to the drive-in, and the annual buffalow-chip-throwing contest at a local festival.

Do those things earn me the right to call myself Southern? Hell yes!

I don't eat grits, but I do like fried okra. I once had a yard dog, but our mean neighbors made us give her away. Now we have a droop-eared basset ambling around the place, does she count?

The Day They Cut Down John Q. Public's Tree

by Thomas Lee Rhymes

Why are you southern? Raised in North and South Carolina. Enough said.
What do you think is southern? Anyone who thinks that family is more important than today's trends.

Do you eat grits? Why are instant grits an abomination? Yep. Grits have always been the best when they are made by the loving hands of a grandmother. Red eye gravy and "cat head" biscuits complete the breakfast.

Is your mama an icon? Aren't they all?

Do you have yard dogs? Nope. Well, not unless you count the yearly influx of snowbirds.

The Zippy Dish

by Angela Carlton

Being Southern, first and foremost... I was born in Marietta, Georgia and went to college in Auburn, Alabama. Yippee!

The Day Daddy Died

by Sam Smith

Agog Ages Ago

by Ed Lynskey

Ed's an old Mule favorite... his credentials are impeccable.

Grandma Got a Glock

by J.R. Salling

Southern legitimacy: Born southern, raised southern, educated southern (mostly), married a yankee (carpetbagger), moved to Ohio (cold)

How Charlie Trippi Was Almost Elected Governor of Georgia

by John Ryan

Father a Texas cowboy. His father a Confederate veteran from KY. Rest is lost.

Mother born in SC. Her family all cotton planters on both sides. Her paternal grandfather killed by Yankees in VA along with several great uncles. My wife a GA girl. Her paternal grandfather captured at Vicksburg. Her great grandfather fought in the Texas calvary. I was born in TX. We have lived in GA, LA, TX, NC, VA, the southern part of Mass. and Conn, and Sydney Australia. I have a BS from GA Tech and PhD from UNC (no yard dogs). Wife has degrees from GA College and U. of Ky. We enjoy spoon bread, greasy beans, corn pone and other delicacies. (Im partial to clear corn whiskey. I may submit a story about the time I

introduced some Yankees to white lightning). We still celebrate June 3 as a holiday and I treasure my great grandfathers Yankee sticking knife.

*In Pedigree add FL to states lived in.

Note that Sydney, Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere.

Thus, we have always lived in the South.

Bus Driver

by Marie Griffin

Torch

by Jayne Hunter

Indian Summer

by H. A. Fleming

Livin' or Dyin' on L'eau Fraiz Bottoms

by Allen Dean Petray

I was born and raised in Arkansas, have lived in Alabama, Mississippi and for the past twenty years in north Texas. In regard to the explanation of being Southern, I would have to relate to the great pianist Horace Silver in describing jazz, 'If you need an explanation, then you ain't got it.'

Giving and Taking Away

by Braxton Younts

Born in North Carolina, weaned on beer and oysters, I lived there for twenty-seven years. Suddenly I moved to Seattle, where my three-year search for non-gourmet grits has finally paid off. But hot, buttered grits cannot cure all

homesickness symptoms.

Genetic Cooking

by Pauline Lipscomb

I was born and raised in Southeast Kentucky, then transplanted to Alabama. So, if we're being technical, Southern Hillbilly might be more appropriate. Some people are saddened by thought that Southerners, especially hillbillies, don't wear shoes and like to fight a lot. But if you ask me, if you've never been in a good barefoot fistfight, that's sad.

The Chicken Shack

by Scott L. Sanders

Southern? Born in Atlanta, now live in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. My best friend's favorite saying is, "If you can't piss in your own yard, then you're yard ain't worth a piss." My mother still talks about how she and her sister sat in lawn chairs in the back of my grandfather's pick-up truck when he'd take them to church on Sundays. My wife says, "Golly Ned," when she gets surprised. In the spring I fry my potatoes with ramps—the smelliest wild mountain onion on Earth.

Hog Killing

by Jim Booth

Mr. Booth is about as southern as they come... he's an old Mule friend.

The Rock of Life

by Mark Brickhouse

What makes me southern? I was raised in Texas, where everything burns you, bites you, pokes you, or stings ye. I understand the meaning of "smatteretchoo." I

know what ramps are; a wild super-onion that grows in the mountains of North Carolina. I remember what them yankees did to us back in 1864 like it was yesterday. I value the court house, the barber shop, the combine, cattle, and the front porch as archetypal symbols. Finally, I know what caliche is; and what red-clay mud is supposed to look like. So have a glass of sweet tea, and tell 'im I said, "Hi, ya'll!"

Me Again

by Emma Feldshtein

My mama's no icon, nor do I eat grits. I suppose I'm not doing myself any favours if I admit to not knowing what a grit is! Thought so...

I do have a yard dog though! And I think that Faulkner is wonderful. And I love the language of the South, the slow, lazy, descriptive manner of the literature. And, there are those of us who believe that many in the South developed such a strong love of the land from us Irish. Who could forget Scarlett O' Hara and her pa?

Another Graduation

by Elaine Drennon Little

As for the statement, you've heard it all before...

Which is another way of saying—Ms. Little's a Mule from way back

Dear Artis & Shorty

by C. E. Maxwell

I'm southern 'cause:

Highway 64 is the only road I know. The family's strung out all along it. Keeps things simple. We don't have to make a lot of turns when we visit each other.

We had a rusted Jimmy sittin' in our yard for a couple a years. The neighbor wanted it so we moved it over to his house.

The dogs use a kiddie pool in the summer to cool off. We kick 'em out when we want to take a bath.

As a kid I ate dog food, (tasted like corned beef hash). I made a soup of wild onions, salt, and water, then puked my guts up. I snuck up on a sleepin' dog once, then wondered why I got bit on the lip.

I know the value of persimmons. When they're hard, they can be used to break up dogfights. When they're gushy, you can set a bunch of 'em down on somebody's driveway you don't like. When they step on 'em, looks like they landed in a pile of dog -. Stuff tracks real good all over the carpet.

Evenin's are spent outside. That way you can hear all the arguin' goin' on. Beats TV.

I'm southern 'cause North Carolina was where I was born an' I been too lazy to move somewhere else.

The Ride

by Newt Harlan

Why are you southern?

I was born, raised and educated in Texas. With the exception of the 4 years during the Vietnam Era that I spent riding around on airplanes, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force, I've lived the almost 64 years of my life in the same town where I grew up. I spent the past 35 years travelling around Texas, Louisiana, and the Gulf Coast areas of Mississippi and Alabama trying to sell steel products, and my vacation travels were usually in the rest of the South. If that ain't southern, a pig ain't pork.

What do you think is southern?

Southern is sitting on the front porch at the old home place in a creaky old porch

swing, while shelling black-eyed peas with mama and Aunt Helen or by yourself as you try to sort out your thoughts. Southern is gathering up at the local watering hole on a hot August afternoon, quenching your thirst with an ice cold beer while wiping the sweat from your brow and bitching about how hot and muggy it is. Southern is knowing how to milk a cow and raise a vegetable garden. Southern is that first smell of salt air as you get close to the coast after several days inland. Southern is knowing what Poke Salat is and where to find it and how to cook it without poisoning everyone that eats it. Southern is when half the town turns out to bale old man Jackson's hay and work his cows because he's down sick with the cancer and can't do it himself. Southern is smiling and speaking to everyone that you meet on the street and waving at every pickup you meet on the road, even if you don't know them. Southern is planning a "benefit" at the local icehouse on a Friday afternoon and raising \$12,000 on the following Sunday afternoon for that new family in town who lost everything they owned when their trailer burned down; no questions asked—it ain't charity, it's just the way we do things in the South. In short, southern is more than just geography, heredity, attitude, or environment; southern is—well, southern is just southern.

Do I eat grits?

I eat grits for breakfast with my eggs, preferably fried sunny side up, so I can mix the yolk in with the grits.

Is my mama an icon?

Sadly mamma has been passed for too many years now, but when she was still here, she was definitely an icon.

Do I have yard dogs?

Doesn't everyone? I have A yard dog, but "B.J.-the-destroyer" makes up for 4 or 5 regular dogs. He's a mostly Lab cross and he's behaving pretty good right now, but that's only because the sonofabitch has destroyed everything of value that he can reach in the yard. Otherwise, he's pretty good at controlling the squirrels and meter-readers.

[Property Assessment](#)

by Jessica Handler

My southern legitimacy statement? I'm southern because I grew up in Atlanta and believe that "might could" is not grammatically incorrect in context. Southern is the smell of variegated privet all night, knowing how to pronounce cicada (the first syllable is not "chick") and carefully examining their fully formed bug carcasses on pine trees as a kid. I eat grits because Pat Conroy made me eat them before I could call myself southern. My mama is not an icon because she's from Boston, but she's a great mama. I don't have yard dogs, but I have yard cars. (See essay.) I'm also a feature writer in Atlanta and a student in the MFA program at Queens University of Charlotte. My writing has been published locally and nationally, and I dig dead mule.

Jack's Hat

by Sarah L. Courteau

I was born and raised in the Ozark Mountains of Northwest Arkansas. In the summer, I never wore shoes except to go to town. We didn't have running water, our outhouse sat out at the end of our garden plot, and going to town meant a trip to the feed store, the auto parts store, the IGA grocery, and Mr. Quick, where you could get a hamburger for 25 cents. We bathed in a metal washtub once a week, on Saturday night. We ate watermelon chilled in the well, butchered our own meat, and made our own soap and hominy. Southern enough for y'all? Below is a brief essay on a cranky character in our family—Jack the donkey—who may have sired a couple of The Dead Mule's namesakes.

Silver Dollar Santa

by Bonnie-Lyn Ray

I am Southern because I was born and reared in Louisiana; because I am a former Queen Dixie Gem Peach, and my best friend was the Soybean Queen; because my grandfather had me convinced that the nearest Thrifty Liquor was his pack-a-sack; and because my family tree forks to the right just a bit (I married my 6th

cousin whom I met on a blind date at a Lesbian Christmas party).

The Distance Between Us

by Jason Shimotake

Why are you southern? I'm not.

Why could you be southern? I'm a Jewish Japanese American. Do I need to say more? Oh, and see answer for question below.

What do you think is southern? A inclination for the light-hearted and a love to tell stories of not only of ones own misfortune, but of other peoples' misfortune as well.

Do you eat grits?

Religiously? No, I'm not Protestant. On occasion, yes.

Is your mama an icon? She's my mouse icon, anyway.

Do you have yard dogs? Yes. That's not a joke. Honest.

Know Me Now

by Steven T. Lohse

Mr. Lohse is a Mule friend, he's proven his southern-ness when we published *Ye Sasquatch Is My Friend*.

Texas Street Bridge

by Lee Ann Sontheimer Murphy

I have three yard dogs - Gus, Charley Floyd, and Lily. I like grits and gravy. All of my family but the two great-grandfathers who came from across the waters are of a Southern heritage. My family fought in the Civil War for the Confederacy. My great-grandmother Annie, left at home on the farm while her man went to fight, was forced to cook for a band of Yankee soldiers who showed up. Not only did they eat her good home cooking but carried off most of what wasn't nailed down.

Many Mansions

by Drew Mayer

Born on the very southern tip of NJ, I've been following a kind of reverse compass pointed magnetic South ever since. Why else would a co-worker make her secret banana pudding for me and return from trips home to her home in the Piedmont with brown paper sacks filled with Rolets and Moon Pies? This boy has spent quality time prowling the caves of West Virginia and reading Flannery O'Connor by flashlight. And right now he'd like nothing more than to tell you a story...

A Mighty Fine Fellow

by Zan Nordlund

Why are you Southern?

The rest of them Damn Yankees say so. RI is, after all, the very last 1,214 square miles of New England before you hit the Mid-Atlantic or water. And I make a right smooth sweet tea.

Why could you be Southern?

I spent two decades in Tidewater. I know the secret to good collards, and mackerel cakes with dill sauce, and even sausage balls. I can also serve up a mean biscuit and gravy.

What do you think is Southern?

Anything below Montreal.

Do you eat grits?

Well, yes. Doesn't everyone? But not the instant ones. Those are for people who live in Montreal.

Is your mama an icon?

My grandma was, and though she looked all sweet and innocent she could make

you sweat butter if you got her ire up. I want to be just like her.

Do you have yard dogs?

Have a Cocker Spaniel with ears at least a yard long. Does that count?

Shakespeare's Daughter

by Tim Denevi

Well, the story itself will hopefully serve as a kind of southern legitimacy statement. But there's more. My best friend is a poet from Alabama, and he's my main editor, reading list suggester, southern provocateur. And I am quite the Faulknerian myself, his literature representing a Southern past I've worked into my own. And as for stereotypes, I've always been one to listen to the stories of my neighbors on the porch while throwing back a few Busch Lights or Natural Ice's, and I've never been afraid to rearrange the seating and letters of the local restaurant after one of those nights.

THE OLD MAN, THE BASS, AND DOG: A SOUTHERN FABLE

by Bart Yavorosky

Why am I southern?

Two reasons.

First, I came home.

We may leave to study, search for love, earn a living, seek adventure or opportunities, but a true Southerner always returns home, even if it's only in a pine box.

Second, I been bit by chiggers.

Super Bowl Jim

by Antonia Lantz Inman

For nearly 100-years, my mother's accident-prone Arkansas family have owned a

logging company in their small town. Throughout my childhood, my mother would tell my sister and myself cautionary tales about the high risk business of logging. My relatives had been crushed by trees, ground by chipping machines, and electrocuted in the logging yard. In some of the more bizarre deaths, some of my great uncles have been killed by trees leaping into the middle of the highway. However, Great Grandma was disappointed to learn that my uncles were drunk and the trees (although gashed) remain rooted by the side of the road today. I believe a few of my uncles remain rooted in jail, but we'll have to save that bit of information till we visit on the swing out back and sip margaritas together in my California home.

My grandmother spared me a Southern death from exposure to southern trees when she moved west to seek a second husband after the first one broke in a bar fight during World War II.

I was taught to live by a strong moral code that dated back to my presbyterian forebearers. Interesting gossip, good barbecue, Pat Conroy, a love for travelling faster than my ability on horses, and my love for poetry and a delight in eccentricity were drilled into me by my southern relatives.

Sadly, my dogs won't hunt. I hope you find my stories do.

A Tale of Two Festivals

by William Sammons

Mr. Sammons offers up some more of his festival observations—these two are about First Night and the Second Annual Morehead City Chocolate Festival. He's going to the Azalea Festival the first weekend in April... stay tuned.

Texas

by Elizabeth Tarver

A Man Given to Appetite

by CL Bledsoe

As for my proof of southern legitimacy, well, I was born and raised on a catfish farm in eastern Arkansas, just at the North end of the Mississippi delta. My father raised rice and soybeans, along with catfish, buffalo fish and cattle. Some people consider Arkansas part of the Midwest, I have heard, but they have obviously never been there. Culturally, eastern Arkansas, especially the southern, delta part, is very similar to Mississippi culture. Hence the catfish. If this doesn't sell you, I should mention that as a boy, I owned a dog named Dawg, and was friends with a guy who came in third in a county spitting contest, though he claimed it was rigged.

Invertebrate

by David Dennis

I was born and raised in South Carolina, where I lived my whole life until early 2002 when I moved to Florida. I played high school football, and grew up thinking Hulk Hogan was the bravest man alive. My grandmother's sausage gravy and biscuits are the best food in the world, and I get chills when I see a Palmetto tree after being away from home for a while. I always go to church, and I think barbecue sauce that isn't yellow is sacrilege.

The Truth Behind the Bastard Choir

by Bobby Jo Bishop

My name is Bobbie Jo. What more do you need? That's as southern as you get!

Blue Danube Bayou

by Kay Sexton

How Southern am I? I grew up in a place where, if you walked down the street with a man, his wife knew about it before you turned the corner.

My husband comes from the same town we can pick out of any line-up the distant cousins hes never met, just by spotting the shared family features. Sometimes they deny theyre relations but we know, you know?

Take two steps from our front door and youre in the salty ocean; any more Suthn than that would make you a furriner, you have to agree.

My mother would not thank me for talking about her in public, but my twelve year old tells me that I am, myself, an icon. An icon or a perhaps a joke, hes not entirely sure which, but its one or the other.

The only problem is that I was born on the wrong continent. Southern but British.

Snake Story

by Bruce Strauch

Am I Southern?

a. I spent the first five years of my life west of Spout Springs and east of Vass so far back in the pines you had to lay flat on your back in the middle of the day to see the sun.

b. I am a bona fide Southern Colonel at the Citadel in Charleston, SC.

c. I did the mule drawings for Jake Mills' article in Southern Cultures.

d. Along with genuine "Chapel Hill character" Bland Simpson, I am the co-creator of the South's most perfect cocktail, to wit:

Chill a short Blue Ribbon in the freezer approx. 20 min. There should be a faint slushy effect but otherwise it should flow freely.

Open and take a long draught.

Fill the empty space with Wild Turkey. Do not shake; it bruises the Turkey. And it will make a mess.

e. This story is to be published in nine months by *Southern Psycho Tales* by

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Hog Day Honeymooners

by David Terrenoire

Small Town...

by Lisa Morgan

Poems

by Travis Ray Cole

Running on Empty

by Tammy Wilson

The Call

by Jeff Martindale

The Fourth

by D R Peak

Paper Bullets

by Louella Bryant

Essay

by Celia McClinton

Essay

by Derek Jenkins

Poem

by Terry Lowenstein

Leaving Home

by Karl Kazaks

How I Learned to Play Booray

by Linda Young

Poetry

by Tony Doyle

Essay

by Elizabeth J. Westmark

Poem

by Phillip B. Young

Poem

by Vernon Welman

Marilee and Papa Jack

by Wayne Scheer

Them Bees They Done Saved Dickie's Soul

by Jonathan Farlow

Poem

by Gideon Kennedy

Laundry Trains

by Thomas Scott McKenzie

Thunder and Putsy

by Rusty Barnes

Giant Rat Eatin' Frogs

by Mark Boss

Poems

by Daniel Hoda-Shook

Poem

by Shelly Reed

Poems

by Tim Peeler

Mississippi Boys: A Recollection

by Marion Rosser

Poems

by Jeff Kersh

Beige

by Eric Hudson

Poems

by c nolan deweese

Old Friends

by Steve Cartwright

Poems

by Carter Monroe

Poems

by Pris Campbell

Poems

by Bryan Brown

Poems

by Gerald Bosacker

Thin Blood

by Kathy Perry Blue

Old Time Religion

by Beverly Jackson

Rory and the Kudzu Monsters

by Virginia Lee

Family Reunion at Granny Wray's

by Rhonda Palmer

Barbeque Blues

by Bill Riales

The New World

by D. L. Wiebe

Spindown

by John Biggs

Lucky Cocks

by David Barringer

Ye Sasquatch Is My Friend

by Steven T. Lohse

Winesaps

by Danny L. Ingram

Death and the Co-Worker

by Noah Hoffenberg

Midnight

by Daun Daemon

A Rose By Any Other Name

by Bob Church

Touch-Up

by Lori Blosser

Neighborhood Characters

by Lanny Gilbert

The County Commission Meeting

by Aunt PittyPat

My name is Aunt PittyPat

I write stories for the Higgens Corner Clarion. Most people believe most of what I write about. That is because I am an old fashion Southern story teller and we know how to make folks really believe in what we are talking about

Now most local folks know that I was born just aways down the road at a place called Pavo in the year 1935 and at this old abandoned dairy. It was during the depression and so you must remember that at that time money was a little on the scarce side and you could not be too choosy as to where you “Put your hat”

Amazing Grace

by W. F. Stokes, Jr.

From humble beginnings in south Alabama, I've succeeded in maintaining the status quo over 55 years. My wife and I reside on a cattle farm in Kemper County, Mississippi where we manage a two herds of Angus/Brangus cattle, at least three yard dogs (though we've had as many as six), an emu, a very independent cat and two horses (one of which is blind). Our best cows have names and respond to their names. The emu is a volunteer and just showed up in our heifer pasture about six years ago and decided to stay.

The dogs, Abby, Punch and Amos Moses, are more or less useless except for keeping the armadillos and skunks chased away from the house at night. Amos Moses is the third dog we've had that could smile. Recently, Amos Moses got the 20-pound Christmas ham my wife had out thawing – but that's another story.

I love college football but not NASCAR. I don't understand why basketball games aren't two minutes in length, since it's only the last two minutes that count. I believe country stores are the backbone of America, especially the ones that open early and close late. All soft drinks are Cokes and I don't know what "pop" is. Chicken can be prepared any style as long as it's fried or bar-be-cued. Bar-be-cued ribs are slow-cooked over fire and coals, sauce is applied as the ribs are eaten. Real bar-be-cue cannot be cooked on a stove or in an oven, no matter how much sauce is applied.

Pecan pie is pronounced pe-Kon pie, not Pea-Can pie. Adding butter and/or cheese to grits is okay but adding sugar is a crime. I know people that have been too drunk to fish. In the south, a toboggan is knit head wear that covers the ears – not a vehicle to ride in the snow. "Far" has two distinct meanings depending upon it's usage – I.E., He moved far away; the house caught a-far. "How's ya Mama'n'em," makes sense and is an accepted inquiry.

The Tale of Virgil Oakes

by G. Emil Reutter

I am not southern, although I do live in the southern end of Bucks County in Pennsylvania but I could be southern or as some say a permanent Yankee due to having a lady friend in the area of Booneville, North Carolina. I have eaten Grits in Brunswick Georgia and instant grits are just like instant coffee, really what is the point? The Lord has blessed the ground my mama walks on and if you don't believe it ask each of her kids. I have a dog who likes the yard but is not a yard dog although I know a few folks not from my parts who have yard dogs.

The Man From the Garden State

by D. L. Wiebe

Wiebe's been here before... check out "The Lost Highway" for his southern legitimacy statement.

True Lies

by Wenonah Lyon

Southern Status: Still southern, but working at escaping it, hanging on by the skin of my teeth, but Dead Mule still keeps me honest.

The Last Cotton Field

by Philip Wallace

I was born in Memphis, very distant cousin to the Presley clan or so I'm told by my mama. Grandmamma in North Mississippi never owned a television or an air conditioner. She did have indoor plumbing, but the bath tub was broken so all of us grandchildren bathed in a tin tub bucket. Grandmamma in Middle Tennessee had an outhouse and a well. I watched her break her hip coming back from that well as I played atop the rabbit cage. I bragged about having Cherokee blood in

me and I always wanted to be an Indian when I played cowboys and Indians with my cousins. My Daddy cooked fat back bacon and hog jowls when he was given the chance to cook. When wasps stung me, tobacco juice was rubbed on the sting. I used to ride with my Daddy down gravel roads where wed always stop on old creek bridges to stare into the water below. Family Bible's where all I had to read in my Grandmamas' homes. When my family ran a restaurant in the early 70s in Ripley, MS I would entertain the customers by singing gospel songs and then I would dance to Dueling Banjos.

[It's All in the Maul](#)

by Tom Sheehan

Southern legitimacy statement: In 1950 I spent 4 months of U. S. Army Basic Training with the 278th Regiment Combat Team activated out of Tennessee for the Korean War. I was one of two "Yankees" on the Ft. Devens Football team that went undefeated that Fall, most of the team from Tennessee. Just before I retired in 1991 I spent two weeks in Elizabethton, TN and Bristol, TN and visited some old comrades including poet Dan Crowe from Kingsport. All of them most memorable days.

[The Sinkhole](#)

by Samantha Brewster

I am a Southerner by the Grace of God.

The innate beauty of the smells of a hot Georgia summer with thick porkchops and string beans simmering in fatback appeal to my inner Southern Child. I know the glory of cornbread, crisped golden in my Nanny's blackened iron skillet and sweet tea, so thick with sugar it is almost a syrup. I am appalled when I venture out of my beloved South, to find that Yankees can't fathom the corn morsels that sing to me of summer mornings, swimming visions of my Nanny, barefoot in her kitchen and slathering butter in the middle of my bowl of grits.

I perfume my air with the scent of the magnolia trees, blooming outside my screened and open window.

Tears sting my eyes when, at the laser show each summer, on our famous Stone Mountain, Elvis sings about Dixieland as I gaze, wet-eyed as my Confederate fathers brought to life by laser light to walk again on horseback off the mountain face. Glory, Glory, Alleluia.

Night Air

by Tracy Whitaker

Miz Whittaker established her southern legitimacy long ago... she's a Mule favorite.

The Horse Dancer

by Kevin Blankenship

Southern Legitimacy Statement: I've published with you before, but here is my southern legitimacy statement anyway: I followed intensely the feud between Jerry "the King" Lawler and "Superstar" Bill Dundee.

Dropping the Ball

by Russell Bittner

I might have a yard dog or two if only I had a yard. But I live in Brooklyn. Hell, I don't even have a garage. Or a burnt-out old Camaro on cinder blocks under which that dog could lie on a steamy summer day.

I think Carson McCullers is southern. And Eudora Welty. And Flannery O'Connor. I've never even figured out if Faulkner was human, much less southern. Molly Ivans, I suppose, is also "southern" and I'd take her for her wit

alone—with or without barbeque sauce. But that would also make Bush southern, and I don't much care for him.

Tumbleweed Blues

by Phip Ross

Why are you southern? Technically, I'm not.

Why could you be southern? I'm a picker with a crooner's voice, fish, spit tobacco from 10-foot and can hit a nail head. I like heat.

What do you think is southern? It's my Floridian cousin, a down to earth rascal who can make prison guards chuckle and women flush. Plus, he fishes. He can cook steak like no other and give the darndest tittie twisters.

Do you eat grits? Why are instant grits an abomination? I don't much get the chance to know grits around my woods.

Is your mama an icon? My mama is everybody's mama. That makes her everybody's boss: The CEO. You best make her happy, or she'll "can" you right alongside last summer's beets.

Do you have yard dogs? I have a yard hound. Last week some guy called 911, no joke, cause he said we acted like we owned the whole world just because my hound was hunting rabbits across the street. I started for my shotgun when he 'bout stepped on my property.

Light Heavyweight

What All I Already Knew About Boxing

by Marc Phillips

Given the choice of a great retroacting, I would not be me. The reasons are mine. I would be from Texas all over again though, and only. Some years ago, I would have said that with a grin, and added that traveling taught me thus. I say so now reverently, sober as a judge, and add that sitting still is how I learned it.

On Being Southern

by Parker Blount

Southern: Default Setting

Vacation Bible School

by William Jack Sibley

Why are you southern?

That's the way mother and daddy planned it.

Why could you be southern?

Not could—am, is, are and always will be.

What do you think is southern?

Grace, pride, melancholy, cruelty, kindness, charm...and a certain dreaminess that comes from too much heat, humidity and a fondness for eccentricity.

Do you eat grits? Why are instant grits an abomination?

Love grits—(in Texas a good bowl of pinto beans serve much the same purpose.)

Is your mama an icon?

Oh God—did you have to bring her up?

Do you have yard dogs?

Alas, my dear “Chula” passed on last spring after 13 years of faithful ranch duty.

I'm waiting for my next dog to find me.

Tiltawhirl

by Chris Duncan

Duncan studies at Queens University of Charlotte, North Carolina. That's southern, dammit. The story is longer than our usual length, and it is a rare moment when we publish over 3,000 words. [just so ya'll know—and let us know if it's just too much, reading this long a story...]

Child Evangelism

by Fred First

My first memories are southern smells: of wisteria and zoysia grass and summer ozone lifting from warm sidewalks after a storm. In those sultry days the drone of cicadas rose and fell while the screened-in porch glider squeaked back and forth and I drifted off to sleep with my head in momma's lap and feet in grammaws. We went barefoot and pretty well lived in our bathing suits from March to November in Birmingham and caught lightning bugs in mayonnaise jars months before they appear here in the "south" of Virginia. We played outside until dinner was ready—always something fried and with ketchup—then went back out 'til way past dark, hiding and seeking, peeing our pants with the excitement of summer nights. My internal rhythms will always be southern, and for that, I am thankful, even though some of the external markers of my heritage have faded.

I lost my drawl when I went to college (Auburn) and mixed with a more cosmopolitan crowd. I moved from the deepest south because—I have to confess—I couldn't stand the heat, so I got out of the kitchen. After grad school we moved to the mountains of southwest Virginia where we have real winters and cool summers and not so many biggie-sized mosquitoes. Now, I think of myself primarily as "mountain southern" because my preference is for higher and cooler places, and for maybe not quite so many rank and file pine trees that grow in rows acre after acre—the 'new southern forest' disturbs me. But I miss the sweetgum and winter-blooming wildflowers. Sometimes I even long to smell the Kudzu, and this is a sure sign I've not lost my southern upbringing.

The house we live in now (in rural southwest Virginia) had two outhouses (his and hers, I suppose) the first time we saw it. We have a porch dog and a porch cat. In the corner of the county where we live (there's a single traffic light in the entire county) there are six people per square mile and the pace of life is slow—a very familiar cadence for a boy who still carries Alabama in his bones. When you pass a stranger on the country roads in their 4WD truck or Subaru (the only choices with our winters), both you and they lift one or two fingers off the steering wheel

in a neighborly wave. It's the way things are done around here.—

The Dines Southern Mining and Other Disasters

by Bryce Martin

I was born in Kansas, near Joplin, Mo, in the hilly not the flat part. My great-grandfather was born in Memphis, Tenn., and I understand the Southern language, the food, the way of thinking, and best of all, its writers. I like the Southern Gothic style and, although I do not normally favor women writers, my all-time favorite writer is Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor is right up there, too. All the rest are men, including Harry Crews. I don't understand "low fat Buttermilk." I realize, too, that those not familiar with the South do not know that a glass of buttermilk, with cornbread dunked in, and a spoon constitutes all the makings of a meal. The same for a bowl of white or Navy beans, large white limas, or pinto beans, ham hocks, along with some cornbread and chopped white onion. That is a meal.

The Satchel

by Jayne Pupek

Although I must confess to marrying a Yankee, I was born and raised in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. And yes, I love grits with pan gravy, am not afraid to put the worm on the hook, and drank enough castor oil as a child to slip my way out of anything.

Millie in Pearls

by Catherine Talley

I was born, reared, and have lived my entire life below the line of Messrs. Mason and Dixon. Although I know that doesn't qualify as the true south, I also became a fisherwoman at the age of three, only a few years before I fell in love with the work of Tennessee Williams. To this very day I drink

ice tea in winter (and call it ice tea instead of ‘iced tea’), create the best gumbo for hundreds of miles, and can take apart a motorcycle and put it back together with the best of them. Oh, and I still know enough to call strangers by their proper names.

Trailer Trash

by Thomas White

White’s Southern Legitimacy Statement: He’s lived in trailers and shotgun cracker boxes, driven muscle cars and hay wagons, eats cornbread and puts salt and butter in his grits.

A Morning Stroll

by James Ladd Thomas

“Well, y’all have a good time down there,” said Bruce as he stared at the boy with the sunglasses.

Death in Colfax

by Sam’l Irwin

I’m double Southern. That’s quite a feat. You see I come from the land of the Dixes. You know, where they got the name. That’s right, I’m from south Louisiana, the home of the ante-bellum bi-lingual ten dollar note with the word “dix” printed all over it. Dix, of course, is the French word for ten and it is really pronounced “deese,” but the Americans that poured into Louisiana, especially after that whuppin’ Colonel Jackson and Jean Lafitte put on the redcoats in 1814, couldn’t say “deese.” They said “dix.” The land of Dixie. So you see I’m descended from the Acadians of New Brunswick, that hardy bunch that wouldn’t pledge allegiance to the King of England in 1759. At the same time, I also claim the lineage of a redneck from the piney woods of north Louisiana. I’m just as

likely to say “poo yai” or “dang” in exclamation or greet you with a French “Comment-ca vas?” or a southern “How ya’ll doin’? How’s momma and them?” I like okra and tomatoes and corn bread and milk, only we Cajuns call it couche-couche (pronounced cush-cush). So when I meet folks from Mississippi or Alabama or Georgia and they hear my Cajun accent they say, “You sure do talk funny!” To which I reply, “I like the way you talk.” Then they admit, “I like the way you talk, too.”

Time Passages

by Kim Smith

I am southern because I have always had yard dogs. Big ones. Mean ones. Ones that chase the garbage man, the light, gas and water man, and even me, on occasion. Having yard dogs is true Southern-istic, and interesting on some days.

Takedown

by Gary Glauber

There’s something so very southern about wrestling (even if they do it up north), kind of like NASCAR—you can take it out of the south, but you can’t take the south out of it.

Lazarus Rise!

by Lisa Morgan

Southern legitimacy statement: I’ve lived in NC all my life. I’ve got a yard dog with rabies and my diet consists of grits, sweet tea, and Raisin Bran.

Gabriel's Horn

by Ann Hite

He came out of the woods onto a road, searching for a landmark. A car flew by almost running off the road, slamming on his brakes, spraying gravel and dirt. Damn! Caught! Then, he knew the car. "Get in the car, Buster."

Little Wheel

by Okuma Skinner

Why are you southern?

Well, the obvious answer here is genetics, but it's of course more than just birthright. I'm Southern because I appreciate the things that living in the South can bring an artist or writer. The rich history of the South brings endless opportunity for stories both historical and modern. I live in Pensacola, the city of Five Flags, born and raised. Flying over my head and heart are the flags that have flown over this great city in the past. I've visited the ruined forts of the Civil War, and can appreciate the honor and bravery of the men who gave their lives within. I love my family, though I may not always like them, and treat all women I meet like a true Southern gentleman should. I know and love Southern food, and know why it's so important to us. And most importantly...I have that wonderful half-arm tan that any true southerner should have.

Do you eat grits? Why are instant grits an abomination?

Grits are the foods of the gods. I love 'em, especially with cheese, bacon, **HOMEMADE** buttermilk biscuits, and a nice tall ice cold glass of pure Florida Orange juice. Instant grits are an abomination because it eliminates all the love that goes into cooking breakfast for your family, that and they taste like cardboard.

Is your mama an icon?

No, of course not. She's a goddess.

Do you have yard dogs?

I have a porch dog...she's a black lab named shadow, and she's the best dog I've ever had. But I've had many dogs, and all of them were yard/porch dogs.

Bishop's Story of How Bastards Do Fly and Heads Sometimes Roll

by Beverly Bishop

Maybe she was having a bad day. I should not blame me. Who should I blame? It turns back around to me, and how I received the message, the lack of separating fact from fiction.

The Door

by J. Garvin

Southern Legitimacy Statement—I was bred in Pittsburgh, PA., and headed south to the great state of West Virginia in a 1984 Dodge Ram pickup truck to begin the first year of what would snowball into an eight year college adventure. Just before the southern voyage I slapped a dixie horn* under the hood and ripped into her every time I caught sight of the “Welcome To West Virginia” sign hovering like an angel above the patchy, ‘70 mph’, stretch of I-79 just outside of Mount Morris. I loved that truck. And I loved that horn. Long story short, the truck got towed for being illegally parked. She was missing for six days when a ransom note appeared on my front door. The truck was being kept at a bone yard sixteen miles north and Bo Dean (that’s me) didn’t have enough money to pay for the tow and the ‘keep’ fees. So, I had to forfeit her.

I loved that truck.

* The horn mysteriously vanished from beneath the hood of the truck. It may have been drunken pirates, though no one will ever know.

Waiting for Lisa

by Bill Fullerton

I’m a good listener; always have been. Especially at Christmas.

Especially here inside the cemetery—just sitting and listening to the rain, hearing the story, and waiting for Lisa.

Black-Eyed Susan

by Darlyn L. Finch

She'd ruled out hanging. She didn't want to die ugly. Abruptly changing lanes into oncoming traffic? That seemed likely to cause disfigurement, not to mention how unfair it would be to the other driver.

What's in the Basement?

by Heather Mickler

How Southern am I, deep inside? (Inside is pronounced insiiiiide). Well, I was born in Georgia and grew up in Alabama. I guess you should say I'm so Southern I'm related to myself. I have a big, brawling, rollickin' family. We all have short middle names including: Barbara Ann, Tracie Lee, and me? I'm Heather Kae. I have a Master's degree in English, sure, but from perhaps the most Southern college in the universe—Auburn University! Where, I learned to write.

The Painted Ceiling

by Jon C. Picciuolo

“Forty years ago Sherman torched my granddaddy's home, so the General would hardly welcome my company now. Anyway, I'm not going to hell anytime soon. And if I do, it'll be because of what you and I have been doing these past few years.”

COUNTDOWN TO RAPTURE AT THE TONGUES OF FIRE TABERNACLE

by Phoebe Kate Foster

They choose not to recollect, however,
that they, the elect, did not escape last year's flood
when it rained on them almost as many days
as it did to Noah. Only they had no ark,
no saving grace to keep them from the curtains of water

A Place on God's Earth

by Will Sammons

Ma and Aunt Sylvia cleaned the bird. As they did it Dave and I told them the story of how we had snuck up on it in the woods and smacked it in the head. "It must've been loopy," Ma had said. I agreed. I felt strong. I felt cool and invincible. I felt like I had a purpose, momentarily snatched and focused. A place carved out for me on God's earth. Most of all, I felt and feel.. lucky.

The Hyenas of Mdabia

by Celia McClinton

Fat'ma and I sat on the bank eating oranges, our bare feet dangling in the Dead Sea. The currents of water heavy with salt swirled around our toes. The clammy, sullen air clove to a land that faded into haze. It was hot.

My River of Strange

by Valerie MacEwan

I walk over to the ironing board and Velma stops me. "I'll get that," she says as she slowly extricates herself from truck cab, grabs the ironing board and throws it into the truck bed on top of a washing machine without a lid, 3 giant lawn bags full of aluminum cans, and a yelping sorry looking old bloodhound, who moves aside just in time to escape being smacked with the legs of the ironing board as they unfold in mid-flight.

Police Story Or Things Just Ain't the Same in this Part of the South

by Donald Lamkin

I am Southern. I am Texan. God's blessings are great. I know what clabber is and I know I've driven too far north when I ask the waitress at the IHOP for sweet milk and she starts to put sugar in my glass... more...

Your Umbrella

by Paul Gilberry

100% Florida Native. I have lived in Virginia and Georgia, and a part of Connecticut that makes Martinsville on a race weekend seem like Cannes in May. As for things that are southern...Heat lightning. REM and bad beer and good beer. James Lee Burke. My friend who I lost touch with, Marty Noe. They are all southern. My Chevy Monza, which was 'Chicken McNugget Brown' was southern. I don't eat grits, but most things instant are abominations. My Mom kicks ass in spite of her being from Pennsylvania. And we have a yard dog, but no yard.

The Lost Highway

by D. L. Wiebe

Just one of his Southern Legitimacy Statements—My wife and I have attended fifteen fife & drum picnics at Othar Turner's (R.I.P.) place in Gravel Springs, MS, I know where to get good corn liquor, I've been to Panther Burns, and I've driven the levee from Rosedale to Friar's Point in a black 1974 Eldorado with a 454 cubic inch motor; a big dog in the back seat guarding the ice chest.

What Is Southern?

by Suzannah Gilman

What makes me a southerner? Earthquakes, mostly. It's why I was transplanted at the tender age of 4 from California to Central Florida, pre-Disney. Orange groves and sandy soil, both of which I instantly took to. Add to the mix some relatives from Georgia and Texas and Tennessee, and you can see why I never reclaimed my status as a California Girl. My idea of a perfect evening is having iced tea, cabbage, cornbread, country ham and applesauce on the front porch with my kids, and no pesky mosquitoes to swat away. Wanna know more? Read on—it's what my essay is about.

The Girl With Pomegranate Cheeks

by Tony Pennay

I am a second year Master's student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa whose favorite possession as a youth was my Arkansas Razorbacks T-shirt. My mom bought me the gray XL T-shirt with a smoke-snortin' hog thundering behind the bold and imposing Arkansas. I was raised on the writings of Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner...

Southern Celebration

by Amber Bryant

Driving through West Tennessee at dusk with the window down, the first thing I notice is the peaceful silence and dark roads lined with mysterious trees. When I finally reach my destination, I notice Main Street is alive with color, even though it's dinnertime and there's not a soul in sight. In front of the town's lone bank sits a stage decorated with colorful streamers, waiting patiently for tomorrow's festivities.

Homecoming

by Jerry Mansfield

I am a southerner through and through, having spent the first forty years of my life in beautiful East Tennessee (and I can put the right inflection on “How 'bout them Vols?” to prove it). I am southern because I had cornbread at every meal as a kid and have even taught a few native Californians how to prepare this delicacy. I salt my watermelon as God intended and know how to mix the proper ratio of butter and jelly. All soft drinks are “cokes,” and when ordering tea, I still specify if I want it “sweet” or “unsweet.” I pronounce “you all” as one syllable, and the S-word as two. As a story-teller, I cling to the axiom that it’s always better to be a liar than a bore.

Danny

by Neal Dorenbosch

I’m southern by proxy. By that I mean a few years ago my wife and I got the notion to move to the Deep South . . . the deep south of Utah, that is. We live in “Utah’s Dixie,” which was originally modeled after the real south, including an attempt at growing cotton. We have the red sand and sweeping pecan trees of the south. Religion rules the day, and there are more churches than McDonald’s here. Common license plates read “Dixie Hare” or “Dixie Rat” and until recently the community college logo was the Confederate flag. Every third person you meet could have walked out of a Flannery O'Connor story.

Pastimes include fishing, monster truck rallies and bashing the U.N. Concealed weapons are more abundant than valid driver’s licenses. Our neighbor just added a second tough shed to his trailer. He now has more square feet for his power tools than he has living space. My wife and I both hold college degrees and we home school our daughter. Our favorite pastime is drinking beer and playing “quarters” while we discuss geopolitics, philosophy or Creole cooking. Living here offers a goldmine of quirks and pathos.

Aunt Sis Had a Mule

by Linda Easley

The evening after the funeral, Grandma opened the curio cabinet against the kitchen wall and handed out Sis's mule collection to my aunts, uncles, and cousins. She knew exactly who had given each one to Marie

Bubba Biscuit: The Loneliest Man in Littlemore, Kentucky

by Nance Knauer

I believe that peanuts make cola taste better. I understand that biscuits and gravy can be served any time of the night or day, but taste best around 2 in the AM, just after the fair has closed down. I know that most dogs and horses are smarter than me, I just don't like to admit it. If that's not southern, then I've been living up north too long.

Torch

by Jayne Hunter

She didn't tell me she was seeing someone new. She let me believe we still had a chance. I would bump into her in the grocery store or the post office, and she would feel that flicker of heat between us.

Pet Deposit

by Jayce Scott

'Why are you southern?' - Born, raised and make the conscious choice to be a Southern gentleman everyday. "Why could you be southern?" - Walk with kings yet converse with common folk. That's my motto. "What do you think is southern?" - Just about the damn best breed of homo sapien around. "Do you eat grits?" - oh yes...garlic cheese are my favorite. "Is your mama an icon?" - Well, icon is kind of not what I had in mind. Bi-polar sounds better. "Do you have yard dogs?" - My family always had... I have since brought the breeds in doors.

Down in the Chronic Lonely

by Dave Clapper

Southernness: Well... my mom lives in about the closest thing I've ever seen to a plantation house down in Williamsburg. And I use y'all comfortably, fully knowing that the plural is all y'all.

Three Pomes

by Alex Stolis

southern? Florida State football. What else you need? grits? hell, why not—yard dog? a black lab and a mutt—here are some (three) pomes

thank you for your hospitality and consideration.

The Deal Closer

by David A. Jones

Southern Statement: I was born in Kentucky and raised in South Carolina. As a child, I grew up on the outskirts of a trailer park, bordered by a forest and a pulpwood mill. My next door neighbors were a girl named Tangila and her brother Bucky. My best friend up the unpaved road was nicknamed booger. My earliest memories are of hours spent with my dad in the local feed and seed, a glass- bottled pepsi in my hand and the smell of fertilizer in my nose. I spent summer days digging in the sand and dirt with one of my mama's dinner spoons so I could lay in a hole like our two german shepards under the eaves of my parents' house. I'm a southerner by blood and tendency, and no matter where I go, the south goes with me.

A Sense of Place

by Michael Graber

Backyards on that block knew no boundaries. From a second story sleeping porch window, the yards assumed a patchwork appearance. Without fences, small details highlighted segments of a larger whole.

Coastal North Carolina's October-fest

by William Sammons

Will, the newest member of our Mule staff, writes about Southern Festivals and happenings. Everyone give him a nice welcome...

The Way Some People Grieve

by Ed Lynskey

Ed's one of our oldest Mules. No, he's not a octagenarian, he's just been on the mule since we started. The quintessential muleman.

Reunion

by Danny Lee Ingram

I am Southern, born and raised in the northwest Georgia Appalachians to where I returned after many years. My cabin sits a stone's throw from the Chattahoochee National Forest, the side where the morning sun awakens the squirrels and rabbits of Taylors Ridge. My dog Zach guards the yard, and my cats control the varmint population while deer stand staring at me from the forest as I write. I'm saving my pennies for a chest freezer to put on the front porch, as soon as I get around to building a front porch. I plan on doing that when I get a "chainch."

Concerning Isabel's Coming and Going

by Helen Losse

Just a quick poem, from a fellow hurricane watcher. Think of it as an appetizer for Corey Mesler's chapbook.

[Can't Forget, In Daleville: My Beloved Summer, Setting Out](#)

by Katherine Darlington

But I close my eyes and reminisce about the one summer Daleville and I were introduced and

I fell in love.

[The Ravine](#)

by Kevin Blankenship

Why I am Southern:

The other day, the concept of Southern pride hit me, when a guy in an old rusted orange Ford passed me on the parkway. He had long hair and some kind of scraggly beard and was driving in the left lane which is illegal here in Kentucky. As he passed and went on his no-muffled way I felt an odd sort of kinship since I realized that given a couple of runs of bad luck and hound dog I would be him. I guess that is being Southern, waiting for the runs of luck out of the hills and wondering what may be up around the next curve, either a mansion or an outhouse but round here they both are beautiful.

[Chime Children](#)

by Celia McClinton

If Celia were any more southern, she'd be on the 50 yard line during homecoming at Georgia Tech, wearing the homecoming queen crown.

[Incident 'Round the Campfire](#)

by Jeffrey Long

Simon, his legs crossed Indian-style and his elbows on his knees, sat rapt. The heat from the fire brought out a little sweat on his upper lip; it was a warm summer night for a huge campfire. His gaze shifted slowly from Mr. Danny to the living flame of the fire...

Windsor, North Carolina

by Valerie MacEwan

Hurricane Floyd sucked the life right out of eastern North Carolina.

One town, Windsor, NC, faced with rising water and the promise of severe flooding, had to move more than people and furniture out of the path of the Cashie River. Citizens of Windsor had to relocate their buffalo, miniature horses, goats, chickens and even wallaby—from Livermon Park and Mini-Zoo. Right smack in the middle of downtown ...

Transplant Reject

by Albert W. G. Ervine

First, my qualifications:

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Grew up in North Florida—Tallahassee, mostly.

Flunked out of Georgia Tech during WW II—perfect timing.

Survived the war and eventually graduated from Auburn.

Long exile in yankeeland earning a living.

Transferred to Arkansas, where I retired eighteen years ago.

Living on a family compound north of Little Rock with wife, sons, dogs and cats.

Grandpa Charlie's Mule

by Stan Higley

This here's a mule story. It's southern...it's a mule.

Life Lessons

by Elaine Drennon Little

I was born somewhere near Albany, Georgia in the late fifties. Adopted, my birth certificate reads “unknown” under actual place of birth, but the folks I know as Mama and Daddy took me home from Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital when I was five days old. My first home (and only home for twenty years) was on their farm in little-known Newton, Georgia, thirty miles south of Albany. My mother liked to be referred to as a “homemaker:” She left us for that big Southern Baptist Convention in the sky nine years ago. Daddy is a retired county agent, and at the age of 82, still runs his thousand-acre peanut, cotton, and cattle farm from the cab of his pickup. Though his tractor driving days have been over for a few years, he still plans to get in better shape and get back out there. He still has the first dime he ever made, hasn't thrown away one blessed thing since 1962, and still loses sleep over changes in the weather. He gets up at dawn every day and doesn't need an alarm clock.

What do I think is Southern? My family is, to me, an icon of the middle class South Georgia folks I grew up around. Am I, in particular, Southern? I'm not sure. I've never lived outside of Georgia (well, there was the eight months in Tennessee, but....) so I guess I am by that definitive. I love grits, great with breakfast but even better with catfish, which CANNOT be cooked properly in chain restaurants, only in family owned Jim Walter buildings that don't serve alcohol. (And I LOVE a good drink as much as anyone- I don't know WHY folks who serve liquor can't cook catfish, I just know they can't.) But since I was a small child, there are things about the South that bother me, and I lot of those things find their way into what I write.

Several years ago I began a book written from the perspective of a teen-aged girl of the South in the 70's. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that most of the

characters are based on my family and my life, but it's not exactly a documentary, either. I have sent out to other publishers two "short stories" taken from the second chapter that stand okay on their own, if you're interested. I thought about sending them, but after reading everything in the September issue, I felt that maybe this was the time to get someone to look at the **WHOLE** issue, not just the asides.

South Georgia has for years been **COVERED** in small, blue-collar private schools. They were started for black/white issues, for religious issues, for substandard education issues—whatever the excuse, they just kept building them. As a teacher in **PUBLIC** schools in North Georgia—I still don't get it. I see how they started, maybe, and I truly believe the people were **TRYING** to do what they thought was the right thing, but—didn't it really get out of hand? And now they seem to be trying the whole thing all over again with the "charter school" concept..... Enough soapboxing. If this isn't an issue to be touched, thanks for listening anyway. Perhaps I could change my name and just send the short stories. Anyway, whatever happens—I've really enjoyed reading *Dead Mule* all summer. Keep up the wonderful work!

And for the record.....I have two yard dogs (a chow and a Heinz 57/pit/boxer/hound) and three yard/house cats, all which came from the pound.

Our October Poet of the Month

A Gnomology of Poems

by Corey Mesler

This month's poet is the owner of Burke's Book Store, in Memphis, Tennessee, one of the country's oldest (1875) and best independent bookstores. He has published poetry and fiction in numerous journals including *Pindeldyboz*, *Orchid*, *Black Dirt*, *Thema*, *Mars Hill Review*, *Poet Lore* and others with readerships in the single digits. He has also been a book reviewer for *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*, a paper which now only runs reviews of Oprah books, audio literature and Gap Ads.

A short story of his was chosen for the 2002 edition of *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best*, edited by Shannon Ravenel, published by Algonquin Books. His first novel, *Talk: A Novel in Dialogue* appeared in 2002.. A poetry chapbook, *Chin-Chin in Eden*, is just out from Still Waters Press. He also claims to have written, "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves." Most importantly, he is Toby and Chloe's dad and Cheryl's husband.

Let's give a big Mule shout for Mr. Mesler. He's just what Mule readers need.

[Saving Grace, Looking for Romeo, Foxy Claire](#)

by Pris Campbell

I've published in the Mule before, but just to remind you of my Southern qualifications, I was raised in South Carolina and my great-grandfather fought in the Civil War and owned a mule:-)

[Mr. Piggly Wiggly](#)

by AJ Searle

Ms. Searle's been with the Mule for so long, she's family. Just check out the archives... ya'll will see how southern she is.

[Essence of Elvis](#)

by Elizabeth Tarver

Southern legitimacy statement: I've lived in the South all my life and while I don't have yard dogs, I've always had yard cats. Got a bad case of ring worm from one of them dang things as a kid, but that's another story, as they say. Y'all published my story "Texas" in the December '02 Mule, so I reckon I was deemed sufficiently Southern at that time. And today, as I drove to work listening to my Alison

Krauss and Union Station Live CD, I felt very Southern indeed.

[The Cotton Mill](#)

by Danny P. Barbare

[The Mule's Very First Poet of the Month](#)

by Terry Lowenstein

Thus in the house
the fireplace grate sits empty,
its mouths open wide
like a young bird awaiting food.

[Morte D'Eden or Tom Sawyer Meets the Rolling Stones](#)

by Jim Booth

Velma

"More geese than swans now live,
More fools than wise."

—Orlando Gibbons

Jim Booth's novel *Morte D'Eden or Tom Sawyer Meets the Rolling Stones* now available.

[Gravity](#)

by Danny Lee Ingram

Ya'll are going to think we're crazy (well, inefficient to say the least) but we found Danny's story in a random folder and know we accepted it but shitfire and save matches, we figured we'd just stick it on this Sept. Mule because we can't

for the life of us remember what month we're *supposed* to print it in.

The Massage Parlour Girl and Mission Statement of a Punk

by Felix Cheong

FELIX CHEONG was the recipient of the Singapore National Arts Council's Young Artist of the Year for Literature Award in 2000. His three books of poetry are *Temptation and Other Poems* (1998), *I Watch the Stars Go Out* (1999) and *Broken by the Rain* (2003).

His work has been published in newspapers, poetry websites, foreign journals and 6 anthologies of Singaporean poetry. Among the festivals Felix has been invited to are the Brisbane Writers' Festival, the Queensland Poetry Festival, the Hong Kong Literary Festival, the Singapore Writers' Festival and the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

As a literary activist, Felix has been involved in promoting Singaporean literature abroad. He was instrumental in leading a Singapore contingent of writers on 3 successful reading tours: The Philippines (January 2001), Australia (July 2001) and the US (April 2002).

Felix completed his Master of Philosophy in Creative Writing at the University of Queensland in 2002. He is currently a freelance writer with two Singapore-based newspapers and also teaches writing at a tertiary institution.

Ladies Sing the Blues

by Vince Carducci

A fabulist or one of the more flatulent members of the so-called rock-critical establishment might write something to the effect that the blues was born at the crossroads between West Hell and Diddy-Wah-Diddy. A more down-to-earth genealogy is contained in Zora Neale Hurston's work from the Federal Writers' Project in Florida.

[A Tale of Two Louisses](#)

by Vince Carducci

Populist hagiography represents the 1950s as a culturally homogenous period, but it was also the decade in which the U.S. Supreme Court rendered the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision striking down the “separate but equal” doctrine that had been in force in America since the end of Reconstruction.

[Trying to write a "Southern Poem" from a cubicle in downtown Manhattan](#)

by Jennifer Murphy

One of our favorites from way back...

[Poems](#)

by G. C. Smith

I'm submitting to Dead Mule 'cause I'm a Southern boy from Beaufort SC. When I ain't writin' stuff, I'm fishin', crabbin' and shrimpin' in the local salt flats. Staying out long hours on the boat keeps my neck red. An' that red neck is proof positive that I'm a southern boy.

[One-Up](#)

by Lad Moore

“I am a legitimate Southern storyteller. I usually run out of truth before I run out of words.” And, Mr. Moore has long been a friend of the Mule. If we ever get the goddamitlurlenewwherethehellarethey archives back online, you'll read much more Moore.

[The Kinda Guy I'd Like To Be](#)

by Geertjan Wielenga

My southern legitimacy statement: Let's just say that I'm Dutch in Vienna, Austria but in my next life would prefer to be a southerner in Vienna, Georgia... for reasons explained in my poem.

[Speaking, Flowers, and Migration](#)

by Sharon Gates

Why am I Southern? I could give the standard genealogic answer –ala the movie “Sergeant York,” when the traveling salesman asks the old timers gathered at the general store “How’d you fellas get into these mountains in the first place?” and the grizzled old man shaves another curl of wood off the block he’s whittling and says “we were BORN here...”

It’s true. My ancestry goes back generation after generation, and hardly ever moves out of the mountains of Western North Carolina. My Southern heritage shows up often in my poetry, where my mama picks creasy greens and fries fatback, my daddy chews tobacco and listens to his coon dogs run on the mountain and Aunt Mary.... what can you say about Aunt Mary? She believes everything on her television is real but swears that the moon landing never happened - it was just something cooked up by those TV people... go figure.

And yes, I love grits. Just don’t put any sugar on them. The sugar is for the sweet tea.

There goes—next come the poems. (Don’t stomp any cabbages on my behalf. I’ve followed the guidelines.)

[Poems](#)

by Shane Allison

Why am I southern? I was born and bred in Tallahassee, Florida.

Do you eat grits? Uh, huh!! I like to mix grits with my eggs and bacon and toast. That's good eatin'.

Is My mama an icon? I will let you be the judge of that by these poems.

Do I have yard dogs? No, but my neighbors always got some kind of pit bull dog in they yard.

Poems

by Richard Allen Taylor

I am a proud native of the Tar Heel State and have lived in several southern climes: Charlotte, Atlanta, Savannah, North Texas (east of Ft. Worth is considered part of the South) and Tokyo, Southern Japan. My Mama and Daddy used to invite our Yankee neighbors over for a "Pea Party" and serve up genuine southern field peas seasoned with fatback. One of my favorite places to visit is Charleston, South Carolina. I love the warm sultry nights there, where silken breezes rise up from the harbor where the Cooper River meets the Ashley. I like to watch the ships at night, plodding like old mules past Patriot's Point and into the fog beyond Ft. Sumter.

What I Call the South and Stonewall Fell

by E. William Martin

Two very fine poems...

Kudzu, Strolling Through the Woods, and Sunday at Grandma's

by Regina Forsythe

I am Southern poet, who born and raised in the South. I've only been out of the

South three times, once for 6 days and 7 nights in Hawaii (in 1977), a weekend in St. Louis (in 1992) and 1 1/2 hours in Cincinnati (in 1968). I don't think those three trips corrupted me, but you never can tell about these things. I now live in the heart of Tennessee, only three miles from the geographic center of our lovely state.

I want to submit three poems (Kudzu, Strolling thru the Woods, and Sunday's at Grandmas) to The Dead Mule, I'm only sorry I don't have a mule in any of them. I blame this on my family's move to the big city when I was 17. I'm sure I would be full of mule poems had this not happened.

Ivory and Grace, Underground,

by Reese Belew

Why are you southern? I was born at Flow Hospital in Denton, Texas, 1961. I was raised on the farm in Denton County. I am a sixth generation Texan; before that my ancestors lived in Tennessee, Louisiana, and Indian nations. I have 3 graduate degrees, which makes it even more important to maintain my native spoken dialect. I don't talk the way I write. But I can write the way I talk. I am proud of my class (rural and lower), and my region. We are in identity and in fact something within but different from the USA.

What do you think is southern? All that is from and of the South. The various dialects we speak, the traditional foods we eat, a distinctive flavor identifiable as southern in a particular thing, like southern rock, or a southern style of storytelling. Examples: white gravy, kissing all relatives on the cheek, teaching girls how to handle guns, expecting everyone to know how to swim.

Do you eat grits? Of course my parents tried to make me, but I hate them. My parents eat up them awful thangs.

Is your mama an icon? I don't know if she's an icon, but she was a youngun-beatin' terror.

Do you have yard dogs? No, I have a yard pig. I bottle-fed him. Now he sleeps in the house I built for him. My dog also plays in the yard with my pig, but the dog sleeps with me in my bed. We go everywhere we can together. My pig used to ride in the truck, too, but now he's too big to ride up front with me and the dog. So when my pig goes he rides in the back.

A Squirrel Tale, It is Dark, Last Night, Down, Hush, and Deer Water

by E. William Martin

I feel I am a southerner and I salute the Jefferson Davis Monument beside my house every morning, remembering what are forefathers went through.

Green Green Grass of Home, Every Hearth a Home, and Arbor Day

by Patrick Erickson

I could be southern because I have a fondness for Magnolias, Mint Juleps and Antebellum plantations, and, of course, dead mules and the School of Southern Literature!

Do I eat grits? If you got 'em eat 'em! (I like mine with plenty of Tabasco. In Texas it's called Texas Champagne.)

My mama is dead. And that's as archetypal as you can get.

We have no yard dogs, but we do have six dog-wise indoor-outdoor cats.

Gerty's Place, Legacy, and True to his birth-rite

by Maggie Shurtleff

Maggie's poem **Gerty's Place** was originally sent as her "Why I'm southern" statement. We liked it so much, we asked her if it could be considered a poem and published. She approved of our plan.

Aisle B, last shelf on the left

by K.A. M'Lady

“Redneck,” Hill-rod,“ and “Yahoo,” the stereo-typical adjectives are endless when evaluating the persona of those considered to be from the south. One does not however, have to live directly in the south to be included in this concept. Usually I only have to look out my living room window to note the comparisons which begin with the old Dodge truck that is driven into the yard every winter when the snow plows converge upon the blizzard covered streets.

Of course, it's not a bright red candy colored truck, sparkling in the glint of snow fall, or a truck the color of the sky, cornflower blue or the indigo of midnight. No, it's a sprayed by hand in the color of dirt in three different shades, with a hint of woodsy green added to give it depth. It's mad cow disease on four wheels loaded down every spring with shot guns, a cross-bow and a beagle named Spike. It's a truck in the distinctly effervescent scent of dead animals, dried chicken liver and crude oil.

It watching your husband, who closely resembles a tree, herd all this out to the nearest woods or farmers land to track down big-game, turkeys and the occasional tree-rat. All of which will end up crammed into my freezer by the end of the season and I'll be referring to Ted Nugent's book of cuisine, “Kill it and Grill it” for the best recipes and culinary inspirations.

Being a southerner includes the in-laws living in the guest house across the lawn out back. Your mother-in-laws linen and bleached white socks hanging from the clothes line. Family dinners on Sunday's after church, which include grilled venison back-straps, home-made corn fritters and three kinds of vegetables fresh plucked from Grandma's back yard that morning. It's driving around for three weeks with a toilet in my trunk. Owning three different boats, all of which were in the yard at one time or another, and having four boat motors on sawhorses in the garage.

It's having a husband whose perfect gift is a box of bullets and or a new gun to go in the cabinet, which is the focal point of the living room. A husband whose favorite TV show is Elk Country Journal and who just can't get enough of watching Jeremiah Johnson on the western channel every other Saturday afternoon. So whether you live in the south or not, being an all out "Southerner" is not just an image, it's an entire state of being. And God help those of us who seem to have married into it.

The Reverend's Wife and The Walk

by Kevin Blankenship

My Dad owns several caps, not baseball ones but farmer caps with high tops and long bills, ones with grain logos, gun shops and bait and tackle stores, caps that go with t-shirts with front pockets for holding cigarettes. Dad has summer caps, with little ventilation holes, and winter caps, without of course. If you have a relative with this type of collection you sure are probably Southern.

Kudzu

by Josh Velazquez

Why am I Southern- despite the wrong side of the M-D line address, the 13 years in Knoxville, TN between the ages of 14-27 (culturally formative years I might add) forever changed my genetic make-up. I get annoyed when Florida beats anyone in the SEC, Waffle House is a perfectly fine first date and I make a mean biscuits and gravy.

What do I think is Southern- Aforementioned biscuits and gravy, giving directions to strangers whether asked or not, calling work to say your car threw a rod from the bait shop, ice cold pitchers of beer on a patio when its still 100% humidity at 11:30 pm.

Grits?- Love em, better with cheese

1 Yard dog- Clark, guaranteed by the Knox county humane society to be half doberman, half rottie. Never got bigger than 25 pounds, TN hound-dog.

Knock, Shall I Compare ...?, and El Sueno de Razon

by John Calvin Hughes

I'm John Calvin Hughes, son of a son of a preacher chased out of Mississippi for plucking the flock. I'm a southern (if I spell it southren you'll get it, right?) boy who moved south and found himself surrounded by Yankees. I'm in Orlando. The folks here are sorry, the land is flat, and restaurants that specialize in "Real Southern Cooking" put sugar in the cornbread. Born in Jackson, Mississippi, went to Millsaps College and the University of Southern Miss. I'm southern. That's that.

War and Joe Kentucky, The Farmer's Wife, and Rap on American

by J. D. Heskin

As one who has published before in Dead Mule, I believe my credentials for being a bit of Southern have been established. But, should that not be enough, Chopper and Chester, my yard dogs, which, in spite of laws saying so, are never tied up. They would not like that. And, as I have indicated before, the best American writers come from that part of the US of A. One thing though, I am not as smart as southern folks. In fact, I am so computer illiterate, I don't understand attachments, so I am sending these poems as is. Sorry 'bout that. I just hope southerners can understand such northern deficiencies.

First Snow

by Gerald Bosacker

Mr. Bosacker is a Mule through and through. He's been with us for years and we always enjoy his poetry.

Poems

by Claire Fuqua

My southern pedigree is questionable, as are most. I am actually from Chicago, but all my family comes from Southern Illinois, a small town called Mattoon (pronounced: Mat, pause, toon. Actually, the fact that I can pronounce it correctly could constitute my entire southern legitimacy statement). Other relevant facts are that my father learned to drive on a tractor, my uncle died underneath one, I have eaten corn fresh pick from the field, I use the word “ice box” instead of refrigerator, “gym shoes” instead of sneakers and “pop” instead of soda, John Deere is more to me than a lawnmower and I have a Feed and Seed hat with my family’s name on it. My grandfather grew up wearing pants made out of flour sacks, and my father didn’t have indoor plumbing until he was in high school. I have participated in a parade where the biggest excitements were the restored tractors and the shriners, sleep under a quilt my grandma made and still miss her fried chicken and pineapple upside down cake. And while most of the oil has been pumped out of Southern Illinois and I’m living with easterners, I am still writing.

A Civil War Nurse Talks About the Need For Boots

by Bob Bradshaw

Southern qualification: grew up in Florida.

Ode to Calamity, Je Conquerrai

by Billy McCarley

I can think of no other way to describe my “Southern Heritage” than the submission of my poem “ODE to CALAMITY”. I hope this answers the question.

Escape, kokopelli, and Dashing With Scarlet

by Billie Lancon

Southern Legitimacy Statement

(just typing that affects my facial muscles - grinning)

Guess I'm southern because I was born in Texarkana Arkansas and raised in Texarkana Texas. Most people around these parts (Daingerfield TX) ask me where I'm from because I don't SOUND southern to them. A defect maybe... don't know.

Once, while on a visit in Boston Mass., my husband and I were accosted and fawned over like some rare species by a shop keeper. We were required to pose for a snapshot to be added to a collection, I suppose, of elusive and wily southerners. She heard my drawl. Of course, I barely could understand her dialect and wondered if she'd captured my soul with her camera.

I guess waving at strangers passing on the county road next to my home could also qualify. Strangers and friends - anyone in a truck. Like mine.

Oh, did I mention I drive a truck? I need it to tote fifty pound bags of dog food and several 22 pound bags of catfood. Also gotta get hay for the dogs every winter.

Of course, the dog food is for the four dogs and the catfood is for the thirty odd tame and feral cats as well as the 'possums that sneak up on the porch to eat at night. Love to watch the cats get snooty over 'possums eating their food.

Hmm... Southern, to me, is a state of mind and not necessarily a place on the map. Sheesh! The weatherman says Texas is midwest! Never understood that.

Not big on grits but love cornbread - and not that sweetened stuff Yankees eat either. My favorite meal is pinto beans and cornbread. Ahem.. can't forget the iced tea.

Guess you could say that Mom's an icon. She has a reputation, in the

family, as a colorful and outrageous. I love it. She's spawned a few outrageous and colorful characters and I'm proud that I happen to be one.

Think I covered the dog thing already. I do have a large rock garden in my yard with an honest-to-god cow skull in the middle.

Do ya think I'll pass for southern?

Nikki Loves Josie

by John Biggs

Biggs is one of the Mule's patron saints. He and DonnerFarms sponsored us last year. Good thing he's a fine writer. This is his 2003 version of *Franny and Zooey*.

Calgon Jesus

by Tracy Whitaker

This story is so southern, it's scary.

“You know how people claim to have seen Jesus in clouds, and tree bark and stuff? Well, this morning my mother saw His face in the folds of our sparkly green vinyl shower curtain. Yep. She ran out the bathroom, screaming and steaming.”

The Memo Pad

by Brenda Ross

Brenda is Southern in her mind, and that's all that matters. We won't talk about her living in Canada, now will we?

Melvin and Caesar

by Susan Townsend

Why do I think I'm southern? Truth is, I'm not, except by virtue of geography. I moved to southeastern Virginia from the west coast of Canada five years ago. At the grocery store here in town, I couldn't find brown rice or wheat germ, but I did find four varieties of instant grits and parts of a pig, I mean hog, that I didn't even know existed. Six months after I arrived, a van drove into the ditch outside my house. Within twenty minutes, two men in a pickup truck with a chain and a dog box in the back showed up to pull the van out. Amazed, I told my husband about it, and he only smiled.

I have learned it's possible to deep fry anything, and when someone tells me my youngest son is "a mess," it doesn't mean that he needs a bath. I now understand approximately fifty percent of what people say, and when I reply, my audience doesn't immediately say, "You're not from around here, are you?" Evidence that I am becoming acclimated include the appearance of phrases like "big ole" in my vocabulary as in, "Look honey, there's a big ole buzzard." I suppose that's about all for now.

Oh, one more thing. I like it here. A lot. Thanks for your time.

[Emily](#)

by James Greer

I couldn't help but dance around the room holding the picture over my head, couldn't help but laugh and kick my feet. The prince of darkness stood by smiling politely at the other visitors rotating his index finger around his temple.

[Country Supper](#)

by Joyce Ann Ireland

Joyce Ireland is a born and bred Southerner from South Florida. Although she grew up with Yankees in school, her southern drawl prevailed, thanks to her loving parents from North Florida and South Georgia at home. Joyce, 56, recently

retired from her day job and moved into her daughter's home in Virginia to be a stay at home granny.

The Strange Death of Randleman Stokes

by Jonathan Farlow

Mr. Farlow has grace us with his presence on the Mule before, why just last month as a matter of fact... He's sure southern.

Oh Kentucky!

by Nance Knauer

Eastern Kentucky has a beauty that an outsider can't always see. It doesn't come right away, and it doesn't exactly grow on you. No, it hits you pretty hard. Mostly after you've been there awhile, after you've pushed your way through the river mud in the spring and sucked in a bucket full of summer heat.

My Southern Belle

by L. D. Sledge

Born near Shreveport (fifty miles near) in the woods of North Louisiana. Then LSU, Law school, army, and been in Baton Rouge since. Just thought you'd know I would be from nowhere else by my stories. So here goes. Hope I have complied with the requirement. My son, John, belongs to the "Sons of the Confederacy," and has a rebel flag alongside the American Flag hanging in front of his house, one on his boat, on his hat and T shirt. I have another I will send if you feel these qualify. Pure D southern stuff.

Two Stories

Kettle Stokes' Mule

and

The Cotton Field

by Amy Jo Searle

Why I know I am southern

It's simple really. I was born and raised in Mississippi. Moved to Colorado for five years and couldn't stand it until I moved back home just last October. I have two pets, a kitten and a puppy. Their names are Miss Kitty and Marshall Dillion. Neither one are full bred and I didn't pay a dime for them. I love potted meat, "vieenie" sausages, and canned sardines...a true sign of a southerner. I use words like y'all, rurnt (ruined), squallin (crying), and numerous phrases only understood by other southerners such as Mad as a shot dog, Mean as a one-eyed snake, drunk as Cooter Brown, and my all time favorite bleedin (or hollerin) like a stuck hog. I think kudzu is pretty and I go by my double name: Amy Jo.

All fun stuff aside, I love the South. I love the summers when the humidity is thick with the smells of wisteria, honeysuckle, and magnolia. I enjoy the culture and heritage of the people that live here, rich with struggle, sadness, and survival. And unlike other places in the states, the history of the South lingers over the people and land, thickening the atmosphere, and making it unique, different from any other place on the earth.

That's how I know I am a southerner.

Once I Read A Book

by Vernon Wellman

Vern's down there in Louisiana, he needs no introduction to regular Mule readers...

Poetic License

by Danny Lee Ingram

Ingram needs no legitimacy statement, he is the Mule. He's been around so long,

we have a special stall for him in the barn.

Much Better

by Deborah LeBlanc

Myrna's preserves could soak through a three-inch slice of bread in two seconds, and her quilts looked like horse blankets, just down right ugly. The woman had no imagination or sense of design at all.

Kick Me

by Nance Knauer

I figure I have a legitimate claim to being southern as y'all have just accepted one of my yarns, and have asked to see more. That, and the fact that everyone up here in Minnesota reckons I talk funny. Damndest thing.

The Longest Train

by Joseph Young

As far as my right to call myself southern, I guess I have to rely on the fact that almost every day I'm made conscious that it is the south that has given me the music that most moves me. Whether I'm listening to the Louvin Brothers, Ernest Tubb, Lightnin' Hopkins, Jelly Roll Morton, or Bo Diddly, it's the south I have to thank for bringing these amazing musicians to light and the world. I put on their CDs, lean back, and slip into rhythms like car wheels over hot tar and smashed green turtles. I've got a southern ear, and that ear leads to a brain that becomes more southern with every George Jones song I hear.

Sweet Tea, No Lemon

by Kim Smith

Southern legitimacy statement: I live here. I've lived here. I will live here. I have always lived here. The south is my home. I love the south.
Home=southern place. What else can I say?

Cousin Dixie and the Talking Dog

by Linda Easley

Honey, I do believe I am white trash Southern. Granddaddy was a hard scrabble farmer, whose biggest crop was his twelve young'uns; Grandma was a shoutin' Methodist and a yellow-dog Democrat.

My pap was a traveling preacher man. And my mam's idea of gourmet cooking was a mess of catfish—dipped in cornmeal batter and deep fried— served with wilted leaf lettuce salad, fried potatoes, sliced tomatoes, black eyed peas, and hush puppies. Dessert was a big bowl of home made, hand-cranked ice cream and a slice of fresh watermelon. If that hasn't made me Southern, by crackies, I don't know what will.

Between Laughter and Loneliness

by Zaak Fresh

This is Zaak's first essay for the Dead Mule.

“About that time she started hearing voices.
Sometimes, that's all it takes.”

Birthed From

by Sarah Wilson

Miz Wilson will be a Chapbook Poety later this year, here's a preview of her work.

She says: "I'm a southern writer from N.C. mountains. My name is Sarah Wilson. I've been published in numerous ezines (Two River, Lotus Blooms, Wilmington Blues, etc.) and have several books for sale at Barnes & Noble, Books A Million, Amazon, etc. My newest book is Abstract Poetry. The poem "Birthed From" could be my biography."

Cotton

by Ian Millhiser

Johnny's a thin boy, golden haired and shivering as he flattens the land around him. He's brought a blanket, queen sized, which he'll lay over the broken stalks and lie down and watch the stars dance across the sky.

The Feast

by Gerald Bosacker

Gerald's been part of the Mule for so long, he doesn't have to give us a Southern Legitimacy Statement... he's family.

Gardenia Memories

Virginia Beach, Virginia 1955

by Richard Goodman

The smells of summer quietly settled down to their evening lives. My mother would put the gardenias in a boat-shaped silver bowl full of cool water.

Another Inch Toward Whatever

by Bettina Tison Bennett

Southern Stamp: I lived in a house near a lake in Virginia. The lake was named Chesdin because half of it was in Chester County, and the other half resided in

Dinwiddie County. I spent two years living on the Dinwiddie side, which is known for its cotton fields and its largest employer—the Walmart distribution center. Last year, I decided to escape the East Coast but not the south. My kids, pets and I are happily rooting a new nest in Glendale, Arizona.

The Biscuit Chronicles

by Mary Bass

Those of us who are southern usually have colorful history. I am no exception. Being brought up with a taste for “What Lightenin’” and Kudzu Wine as well as Country Fried Chicken surely gives me that color. We would have eaten no chicken unless my grandmother had raised them. One of the chores she gave me was to collect eggs. I hated it! After my first time gathering of the eggs I had more holes in my hands, from being pecked with those sharp beaks, than the target practice side of the barn where so many buckshot holes let in the major source of light.

From Campus to Necropolis

by Celia S. McClinton

Per square inch, gravesites are far pricier than resort property. Using the campus as a cemetery would only intensify land use on land already intensively used and that at immense profit to the university while less intensely used land could be saved for yet unborn generations of sports enthusiasts.

Prized Possessions

by Celia McClinton

The Old Time Fiddler and Bluegrass Festival at Fiddler’s Grove was nominated as a U. S. Library of Congress Local Legacy in November, 1999, and officially designated in May, 2000.

Good News and Bad News

by Lisa Morgan -- Grand Prize Champion

“I could use about a dollar for one these mutts,” Ruth said.

“Lemme ask you something ma’am. If Jesus were knocking at your door, would you let Him in?”

How Come Pansy Lives Alone

by Elizabeth Tarver -- Second Place

When Pansy told Joe Edwin that some folks paid for dogs, that not all dogs showed up in your yard half-starved, tail between the legs, skittish from being beaten with a belt, he took one look at Mutt and her swollen belly and started figuring.

Easter's Vengeance

by Celia McClinton - Third Place

“What other news from home?” Celia asked of her cousin, Bobbie Donaldson, who had just returned to State University from a visit to their home in Iredell County.

You Can't Make Love Among the *Monotropa uniflora*

by Celia McClinton

We went back to the campus and took a short walk in the college gardens. Norman was as interesting as a telephone pole. God, nothing but this Leviticus

stuff.

Driving Home

by Dan Allawat -- Honorable Mention

“Him, you said, ‘I promise I’ll take care of ‘him’. What makes you think if we go and call that there number in your lap that there’s gonna be any boy dogs in that litter?”

The Scent

by Nance Knauer -- Honorable Mention

He never used to stray. His duty was to stand guard whenever Layton was on the job.

For Sale or Not

by Mike Whitney -- Honorable Mention

“Tell her to pack her puppy and things. I guess the only way I’m getting a puppy today is get a child along with it.”

Newlin

by Jon Swan

It worked, by the way. Wade sold his horse. Didn’t get a thousand dollars for her like he wanted. But it was pure foolishness on his part to think that he would.

Dogwood Fence

by Danny Lee Ingram

The birds sang and the squirrels barked as Jack raised the brush, but then he stopped. MUTTS. FRESH LITTER.

Returns

by A. White

At Walmart I saw guppies. Rick bought me four - two iridescent-aqua males and two almost-transparent females. Instead of sleeping or pain pills, I fell asleep in front of the tank watching their fluid movements.

A series of strange true stories...

by D. L Weibe

More to come, this is the first installment...

He said many things, and traded dozens with Eugene Powell. He also came out four-square against spousal abuse.

A Parable

by Ron Sessum

So the newer New Nation came together again under their symbol of unity, the Great Striped Rag. This rag did take on great mystical powers because it was strengthened by the unified souls and spirit of the People, the Children of the Cause and the Others who together became We the People.

Goodbye Norman Mailer

by David Davis

I went into town again on Saturday to hit the garage sales. My furniture had to be

just right. I wanted “white trash gothic.”

Mama's Day

by Jean L. French

For a moment, there was complete silence. Sis swallowed. She should be horrified; she should see this as irreverent to Mama’s memory, but she couldn’t.

Child of Tea

by Diane E. Dees

There is no such thing as having a glass of sweet tea, though; you have to have at least two.

The April Chapbook

by Sam Smith

Mule note: The formatting of Sam’s Poetry is off kilter, we apologise and will correct this problem soon.

Wake Up Call

by Mike Whitney

No TV, no music, just serious wake-up ablutions. She lingered an extra moment, holding her smile on me while I struggled with choosing breakfast.

On Becoming A Man, Sane Sex and Lash LaRue

by David Jordan

All of these books landed in my bedroom in Panama City, Florida. All of these

plus *Sane Sex*, by T.W. Edwards, M.D. I returned most of the books to their rightful spots in the household. Almost all of them. Every one except *Sane Sex*.

Note: An *R*-rated essay. Duh, check the title.

[Up the Holler](#)

by Pam Hauck

The thin metal of the guitar strings pierced into my tender finger tips as I formed the patterns, but I didn't mind. I was playing guitar just like she did.

[Lettie](#)

by Jon Swan

Seemed strange that a half-blind woman, who couldn't see much to begin with, had, at the age of 82, developed visions.

[Grandmother Allen](#)

by Elizabeth Robertson

Grandmother Allen got up every day, washed her face, combed her hair and shaved her pale legs, even though there was no one to shave them for.

[Honey and the Hummingbird](#)

by Jennifer Prado

The lazy bumblers took notice of the girl with the hummingbird heart. The flowers opened more radiantly and the fruit grew more quickly. The man with the truck came twice a week to keep up with the overflowing crates.

Saving Herself for the Dance

by Tim Peeler

Then it hit her, what she must do. She must write her way out, must tell his story, give the full gift of his possible world. Her head spun over the roulette of alternatives, wondering where she would decide to stop, wondering what could stop her.

A New Kind of Growing Pain

by Diane Payne

They gave each other a hug in the parking lot, and as Ruby was driving away, he waved her back and gave her the Elmore James CD. “I’m hoping it will grow on you.”

Biscuits

by Cindy Ray

If Mama was singing, she was almost through talking to Vera. Vera’s not there anyway. Uncle John got lucky with a long hook on a chain and fished her out, so her body is in the cemetery of Justice Baptist Church and her soul, if the preacher tells the truth, is in heaven.

Gun Control

by Ron Sessum

Our history has been brief and violent. We still have some growing up to do. Guns have been a part of our society since our humble beginnings.

Voices

by Helen Losse

Then just as silence slices through morning,
heaven's jagged edge cuts my finger to the bone.

Aunt Beth Goes to the Electric Chair

by Lisa Morgan

“Aunt Beth'll be electrocuted by the time we get there,” I mumbled. Mama shot a sharp look at me.

Hazel placed a finger in her trachea when she spoke and the words came out in a raspy voice...

Ole' Doc Jenkins

by Tripp Howell

“Man, there's all kinds a' things out there we can't understand. It's kinda like dat woman we saw 'bout on da news that day, come up them seizures whenever she hear that Barbara Walters start talkin'.”

The Good Time Lincoln

by Ed Lynskey

The car salesman, flashing the whitest eyebrows and the bluest eyes Payne had ever seen, parted the door to the showroom. With a deft hand flourish, he ushered Payne inside ahead of him. “She's a real beauty,” the salesman said. “Mrs. Payne will be thrilled as well, I'm sure. Mercy me.”

Celebration of Collards

by Elaine Swinson

The tables are empty now; the kitchen is spotless; and the leftovers safely tucked in the refrigerator. Everyone has gone home to take up residence on sofas and recliners with a sigh of contentment.

The One-Eyed Mullet

by Stan Higley

Old Barney's one good eye was like a laser when he was ready to do mischief, when he wanted to buck, or kick, or bite.

The Rooster

by Bill Fullerton

Of the many watering holes in Hawthorne, The Rooster, located just inside the protective city limits, was the busiest. Depending on one's attitude towards drinking, The Rooster was viewed as either an oasis or an eyesore.

Humility

by Jonathan Farlow

The following story was inspired by a true account as told to me by Peggy Redding who at the time served as organist in our church. She passed away last year and this story I dedicated to her. I will never forget her kind nature, her love of life and her wonderful sense of humor.

Fat Annie

by Jim Booth

Sprawled on the ground she clutched at the grass. She started to cry. To make

herself stop, she rubbed her face against the ground, harder and harder , so hard that she uprooted grass.

Bucephalus

by Caleb Ludwick

Costumed figures and stuffed dogs posed under a low ceiling hung with Styrofoam stars and flying monkeys; Simon counted seven Dorothies.

Deacon Stropp's Pledge

by Gerald Bosacker

Arnie now considered the manual and tools abandoned, and he the logical inheritor. He really didn't need the gauges, nor had Clarence used them other than to dazzle people with his technically superior measuring tools...

Geez Chrise, My Brother

by Susanne Joslyn

“Well, I'll swan,” said Daddy.

The Trestle

by Daniel Allawat

From the corner of his eye Eddie could see John, quiet for the moment, looking down at the rocky riverbed below the trestle.

Stuck

by Tami Pearce

We thought she hated us. When we came to live with Daddy and “Mom“ and our half-brother Roy, Daryl had someone to take out his hatred on.

A Band of Angels

by bj lawry

As they sang, each hugged John, smiled at him with dark, worried eyes, patted his back, as the woman urged him to stand, put her arm around his waist and led him to the roadside and her car.

Box of Rocks

by Bill Morris

Henry Lockhart “Lock“ Davis was the first guy I ever saw deep-frying a turkey, about ten years ago and long before that particular method of redneck cookery picked up a national following.

Plowman's Burden

by Jeffrey N. Johnson

Nelson stared at the tractor, all shiny and sophisticated. It was the brightest thing he'd ever seen and he wanted touch it and climb into it.

The Dog

by Susan B. Townsend

“Check that out,“ I said and pointed to the dog, nosing the straw with great interest. “She’s wagging her tail. I’ve never seen her do that.“

(NOT a gun essay)

Gate of Arrival

by Rachel Ahmed

He looked good, taller and broader through the shoulders, and young in a healthy way, like he's in charge of his own life. He had gone to Ohio right before Sheila died, and I hadn't seen him since.

Three Poems from 2000

by Lisa Zaran

It was like a scene
out of some old
horror flick, I kept
waiting for the birds
to come, black and fierce
as night.

Mrs. Beasley

by Amy Jo Searle

It was his gun. She'd gotten from out of his truck. She'd known it was loaded.

March Chapbook, Part I

by Danny Lee Ingram

A long shot, I am Bic-Pen-to-Meter,
but let me stress my point. Five feet can run
on lines smoother, and at the last step, whip
back to the starting line. No footprints trail
my Pegasus return, catching a breath,

March Chapbook, Part II

by Danny Lee Ingram

Falling stars flash bright
in a dreamer's eye, but some
just see crashing stone.

Verbal Assault

by Kathi Jensen

She was a freak in the bedroom, and the things she did in the kitchen with a box of Bisquick bordered on criminal but that's not why I loved her.

Oral History

by Steve Gullion

another NOT gun essay... just a fine damn essay.

As I found out later, it was the age of free love, which I guess explains it, although I wish to hell somebody had told me at the time. I could have used something to smile about myself.

Leprechaun Logic

by Danny Lee Ingram

We missed St. Patrick's Day and Danny's story being here on the 17th. So, read it now and think back...

Good For The Goose

by Mike Whitney

Bill's overhand right catches Carl smack on the nose. The stocky wrangler drops to the floor like a sack of feed corn, out cold.

When They Pry My Cold, Dead Fingers

by Bill Morris

You can outlaw guns, I guess, like my Chapel Hill neighbors would like. But it would be a better idea to pass a law against loneliness.

Somebody Shot My Dog

by Ed Lynskey

Seven miles from where I live, the NRA's national headquarters is a stately glass palace visible even from Interstate 66. Real estate prices in and around Washington, DC are criminally outrageous. In other words, this fancy building doesn't come cheap.

(D)Annie Get Your Gun

by Danny Lee Ingram

No, a tougher, two-hand limit cannot be put on rifles and such because there are Arnolds out there who can easily operate one big gun in each hand.

Guns, Guns, Everywhere, But Doesn't Anybody Think?

by Vernon Wellman

There are four kinda of fellahs who use guns - the brave, the mean, the stupid, and the DEAD. I unfortunately know my party affiliation on that one.

On Naming Pets

by Rebecca Isom

NOTE: This is NOT a gun essay...

With names having such weight here, it's no wonder that Southerners think especially hard about what to name a pet. "Fluffy" or "Spot" just will not do. I like to think of it as the racehorse principle: The more pretentious the better.

Choosing The Proper Weapon

by Steven Gullion

In case you get pulled over by HPD for speeding or red-light running or failing to flip off somebody from Dallas. The first thing a cop's gonna do is ask to see your license, your registration, and your handgun.

Celebration of Collards

by Elaine Swinson

The sound of laughter surely made the angels in heaven sing, because the trials and tribulations of the world were laid aside for a short time, while we rejoiced in our endeavors.

The Death of Sweet Mister

by MacEwan's southern reading list.

Ya'll need to check out Daniel Woodrell. Seriously. His latest is out in paperback now.

Super Guest

by Gerald Bosacker

In groups, I listen so polite
and laugh at jokes I've heard before
When parties drag into the night
though I might nap, I never snore.

Three Poems

by Dyan Sandefer

She grins a gap-toothed grin,
proud to have served me well

Silver King

by Callum Macgregor

He opened the cooler, dug out the cell phone and threw it into the bay. "If there is anything more important in your life right now than catching that fish, let's do you both a favor and go home."

The Itch

by Scot Isom

Cats have scratchy tongues. Maybe if I poured something on the itch the cat would want to lick?

Mondo Erectus

by Todd Morehead

The ruts

had to have been made by others of my stripe: curious revelers, pilgrims, sneaking through the back entrance in the middle of the night.

[Ducks in a Row](#)

by Suse Ferguson

After the chin, it was his skin. The depth of the color in his skin. She hated the way the men at the apartment complex where she lived lounged around the pool until their skin turned the color of candied yams or boiled beets.

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[The Mule Keeps Doing What It Does Best... The All-South Literary Journal](#)

by Valerie MacEwan

It's about great writing. That's all, plain and simple. We were the first true Southern literary zine—celebrating an online presence since 1996—we continue to feel right proud of all our writers.

[New Items in the MuleStore](#)

by Watta Greatstore

Check it out, ya'll. New t-shirts, jerseys, baby clothes, bibs... all kinds of nice Mule products for your purchasing pleasure. We only make \$2 to \$3 per item, not much of a markup for Mule lovers. Any funds received from the store pay our server fees.

Get Your Dog a Mule Shirt. NEW!!!

[Were you in our archives?](#)

by The Mule Staff

If you were in the archives and you're no longer there and you want to be, click on the above and read on...

[Thanks for dropping by...](#)

by Valerie MacEwan

January 2004 stats show us this is going to be quite a year.

[About photos, articles and such -- ©](#)

by The Mule Staff

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[Why a Dead Mule?](#)

by The Mule Staff

Going Linux... Going Strong... OpenSource is the only literary source.

[Yes, we're really pushing these journals.](#)

by Dead Mule Journal Sales People

The ultimate in a personal publishing experience. Buy one for yourself and your friends. Click on the link to see a picture of the journal.

Mule Gear -- New Stuff

by Mule Merchandise Committee

Check out ShopMule now.

ShopMule now has this really great Mule Journal for sale. We each bought one. And finally, women's size t-shirts, junior hoodies, and more. Nice stuff. Support the Mule Shop, it pays our server fees!

Web Standard, 508 compliance and the Dead Mule.

by macewan

Why has the Dead Mule gone through the trouble of recoding the site to comply the government mandated section 508? What prompted us to shoot for compliance with the W3C's XHTML™ and CSS specifications?

Another great statement

by Ellis Agee

A classic Mule moment in southern legitimacy statements.

Ellis Agee

Why I'm southern.

Letter To A Friend

Why are we southern?

by Mule Staff

From the archives ...

Our readers write about their southernicity. This year we've started publishing southern legitimacy statements along with our articles. We figure, ya'll need to

read them too on account of they're so fun.

Here are some classic southern legit statements from the past. Enjoy.

[Who is this Mule and how did it come about? The Who We Are Reprise](#)

by Mule Staff

The Dead Mule—Going Linux...Going Strong...OpenSource is the only source.

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Been working on the Mule for so long now...

Reconstruction

by Helen Losse

One of our poetry editors offers me some encouragement. Take heart, Mule friends.

Oh where, oh where, did our little Mule go?

by Valerie MacEwan

Rather than give publicity to the cretins who destroyed our Mule, let us just say—We are back.

This is a test

by macewan

This is a blurb test

Missing Walter

by Valerie MacEwan

Part fiction, part truth—a jaundiced eye reflects Christmas past.

One of the Mules publishes a book!

by Valerie MacEwan

I love it when ya'll tell me what's up and will try to start posting...

Poetry

by Valerie MacEwan

Thanks for submitting...

Short Story Collections, our new feature

by Valerie MacEwan

Yup, you read that correctly... we're going to begin a bi-annual treat for our Mule readers and writers.

How to know when you're spending too much time in your office...

by Valerie MacEwan

Check the photo.

What's legit and what's shit?

by VMac

The topic of the discussion is Internet publication legitimacy.

Cost of Living

by Valerie MacEwan

Just pondering server fees, bandwidth, online publication responsibilities...

GIMP anyone?

by Valerie MacEwan

What software do I use for The Dead Mule? GIMP and more...

Searches that land people in Mule Territory

by Valerie MacEwan

Been checking the stat engines... got some interesting info.

Spring ain't sprung yet...

by Valerie MacEwan

Daffodils and azalea blooms, got a couple flowering pears... got my hopes up... got snow in March.

Checking about the about...

by Valerie MacEwan

Now... where was I?

It's colder than a witch's festaris.

by Valerie MacEwan

Mule additions online...

No fancy geegaws, just good reading.

by Valerie MacEwan

Oh, the mule tales I could tell... the stories and the pain, the joy, the sorrow...

Windsor, NC

by Valerie MacEwan

We always have a photographic theme on the Mule. This month we chose a town—

It's about time ya'll heard from the ass ed

by Phoebe Kate Foster

It's been hot enough to fry spit the last couple of months, and so dang humid that you like to pretty near drown when you take a breath.

Septembertime and the poetry's easy...

by Valerie MacEwan

Ya'll just got to read this.

September is just around the corner...

by Valerie MacEwan

And we've got incredible poetry for everyone.

August Is the Soggiest Month

by Valerie MacEwan

It is truly the Dismal Swamp around here.

New server for our hosting company

by Valerie MacEwan

Not to worry.

Eastern NC Auctioneers

by Val MacEwan

The only thing more fun to do than go to the NC State Fairgrounds Flea Market is to attend an eastern NC auction.

All's well that ends well...

by Valerie MacEwan

Welcome to the Mule

April Showers Brought May Flowers

by Valerie MacEwan

But what did the Mayflower bring?

May Issue just around the corner...

by Valerie MacEwan

and May is busting out all over.

[April Showers Bring...?](#)

by Valerie MacEwan

Dogs and rain...
and the April Mule.

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[Submission Guidelines](#)

by The Mule Staff wants you!

Click on link above for the real skinny on how to submit. But first, there's this:

What do we want from you?

The **Dead Mule School of Southern Literature** wants:

Southern Sweat-dripping, Bible-thumping, pick-up driving, beer drinking rednecks.

Chauvinistic, Mama-loving, hounddog-owning porch sitters.

Drinking sweet tea, eating Moon Pies, grits, and collards, frying in lard...

Mule skimmers and mud runners.

Uncouth, semi-literate, tobacco chewing adolescents.

PhDs, Scholars, Scientists, Artists, Inventors, and Entrepreneurs.

Brilliant, kind, thoughtful folks who will help you in your time of need.

Geniuses with outhouses and modems.

Do you have what it takes?

Enroll the Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, become a student of the south.

Before we read the submission, we need to know why you think you're "southern." Failure to include this information will result in the deletion of your submission. Really, we're not kidding. This is one of the most important parts of the submission process. Anywhere from 25 to 250 words (more if you need it).

In the Subject of your email, please type "Submission". And if you can't figure out how to type the word Submission in the subject line of your email, don't count on us figuring you're smart enough to write something we'd want to read. Snotty, yes, but come on...

Here are stereotypical Southern Guidelines:

1. You live in the southern US
 2. You used to live in the southern US
 3. Your submission is about the southern US
 4. Your sister married your uncle, your brother is your cousin.
 5. You or a blood relative has appeared on a Jerry Springer segment about either tornados, mobile homes, or why you love your truck more than your wife
 6. The submission is about a mule (any geographic areas acceptable)
 7. Your personal food pyramid contains one of the following: grits, collards, chittlins, fried pies, sweet potato or cheese biscuits, possum, sweet tea. pork.
- (Okay, those are cheap shots at the South. What we really want is good writing. The South is not about ignorant people anymore than it is about kudzu or grits. Oh, wait, it is about Grits.)

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We've had so many fine writers on the Mule since 1996.

Thanks for the memories...

[Fine Writers](#)

by Mule Writers

Click here for a list of a few of the fine folks we've featured online since 1996. If you're looking for someone in particular, use the *Search* or go to the Archives...and remember, we're still putting archival matter back online. We have over 300 stories/poems/essays to decipher—hence the excessively long amount of time it's taking us to accomplish a re-built archival section.

And—something else—we don't publish email addresses or biographical material (where published, where born, where lived, where worked, where whelped) concerning our contributors. It don't mean we don't care—it's just that it's been our policy since 1998. (In 1997 we did publish bios) But, ya'll should have progressed from Internet Savvy 101 to an upper-level course by now and you know how to **Google** someone, eh? Don't you??

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[Pundit and Wise One, Chief Counsel](#)

by Ruth Heinold

Librarian, advisor, engineer (U of Cincinnati, 1939), literary scholar...

[Editor/Publisher](#)

by Valerie MacEwan

Been here since 1995. I'm the first ass in the Mule Barn.

[Assistant Editor](#)

by Phoebe Kate Foster

She's been published in numerous literary journals which, after reading this bio of her, will undoubtedly disavow all knowledge of her.

Breaking News!!! Phoebe's story: **Mazzonelli's Masterpiece** has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

[Fictional Editor](#)

by Celia McClinton

Though sages may pour out their wisdom's treasure
There is no sterner moralist than Pleasure.

–Lord Byron *Don Juan*

[Contributor](#)

by William Sammons

Let's make welcome to our newest staff member. Sammons will offer up close and personal essays about Southern festivals and events.

[deadmule backend](#)

by Robert MacEwan

“I am the people - the mob - the crowd - the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?”
–Carl Sandburg, *I Am the People, the Mob* blah

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Congratulations to Flash Fiction Writer o' the Day -- David Jordan

FIRST PLACE -- FLASH FICTION (at long last)

Scooly-Pootin'

by David Jordan

As to my Southern legitimacy: when I was six and living in California, my divorced mother married an Air Force sergeant from Chattanooga, Tennessee. We visited the South and hobnobbed occasionally with relatives for a number of years, then took the plunge: my stepfather transferred to Moody Air Force Base outside Valdosta, Georgia. I attended fifth through seventh grades in Valdosta, then spent six months in Panama City, Florida, nine months in a suburb of Washington, D.C., and a year in Knoxville, Tennessee. When I landed in Cottage Grove, Oregon, as a high school sophomore, I spoke with a Southern accent so thick my football coach took to calling me “Tennessee Stud,” after the title of a then-popular country song. My friends were amused, since I was all of 5-foot-6 and 122 pounds, so the nickname stuck for the balance of my high school days. When I attend reunions, some male classmates still address me as “Stud.” (Sigh.)

[Runner Up, Next in Line, Flash Fiction prize goes to:](#)

[Renovation](#)

by Tracy Whitaker

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