



Dear Friends and Readers,

I've saved up a lot of news. First and foremost, I want to introduce you to Priya Bhakta, my assistant. Priya is one of my most talented writing students and some kind of genius kid at computer stuff. I am thrilled.

Also, for those of you in the Natchez, Mississippi area, I'll be at the Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration Feb. 19-22. I won't arrive until Feb. 20, but the conference looks terrific so check it out at www.colin.edu/nlcc. I am deeply honored that I am a 2009 recipient of the Richard Wright Award for Literary Excellence. Pulitzer prize-winning poet Natasha Trethaway is the other honoree. This year's conference honors the centennial of Eudora Welty. Miss Welty's work was a big influence on me, and I am so proud to be part of the 2009 celebration.

In March, I'm also participating in the Southern Literary Trail—an amazing celebration of writers and writing that spans Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia. I've included some information at the end of this newsletter for those who might want to check out some of the action happening all over these three states. (I adored Eugene Walter. He was very good to me when I first started writing.)

GREEDY BONES will be released the last week of June/1st of July (that pesky 4th of July holiday makes for confusion at some bookstores). I promise I have resolved the Oscar dilemma (but Jitty won't let me tell!) And I am now writing BONE APPETIT for 2010 release.

On another front, Bleak House Books hired me to edit a collection of short stories based around the Delta blues and a crime/noir element. I have a bang-up collection that is going to blow your socks off! I'm not kidding. I've wheedled stories out of some of the most talented writers working today, and this book is going to rock. Pub date is Oct. 2 this year. But mark your calendars for Oct. 3. We're launching the book with a big party at Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale, Mississippi, which is the epicenter of the blues. The contributors in the book will perform as a blues band at the club, and it is a come-one, come-all evening. Ben LeRoy, the publisher, is donating \$1 for each book sold to a charity to support literacy in the Mississippi Delta. Much more about this later, but put it on your calendar. If you ever needed an excuse to visit the Mississippi Delta, this is it.

We're finishing a week of "winter from hell" here in lower Alabama. While I love cold weather, it's so hard on my older horses (and therefore one me because I rush around making hot bran mashes and putting on and taking off blankets like a madwoman). I am so pleased to report that Miss Scrapiron is hanging tough with me. All of the horses are doing fine, though weary of the cold. Miss Scrapiron will be 32 this year, on my birthday.

The dogs and cats are doing fine. Most of them are younger, many of them Katrina strays. I'm trying to teach them gymkhana tricks (jumping little jumps, going through a short tunnel, etc.). What happens is that I jump the jump and I crawl through the tunnel and the dogs steal the treats out of my pocket and do nothing! A trainer I hired once told me my dogs were smarter than I am. He was right—and I never doubted him.

Hopefully with Priya guiding me, I'll be more up to date getting information out to you. I am now on Facebook and MySpace and Good Reads. My web site is in dire need of updating. The guy who does it can't update it if I don't get the information to him, so I will work on that.

I hope 2009 is a year that brings new hope to all of us. I'm sure feeling hopeful and excited about many things. Part of that is due to you guys, the readers of the world. Thank you for your support.

Here's some info on what's happening in Mobile, Alabama, for the Southern Literary Trail, but this is massive. There are plays and readings and lectures and tours of literary homes all around the South. Please check it out and participate if you can.

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Writing for GOURMET magazine in April 1962, Eugene Walter of Mobile decried New York's ignorance of Southern food, in general, and gumbo, in particular. He searched the Bleecker Street markets for okra "and got nowhere." Eugene declared, "It's interesting that in New York one can find authentic food of every country on earth, save the South. What is advertised as southern fried chicken is usually an ancient fowl encased in a cement mixture and tormented in hot grease for an eternity. Southern biscuits a la New York are pure cannon wadding."

To be presented by film maker Robert Clem during Mobile's chapter of the Trailfest celebration on March 21, "Eugene Walter: Last of the Bohemians" reveals the life and career of a writer, poet, actor (for Federico Fellini), artist and party host whose work celebrates the art of living and personifies the culture of the coastal South. He helped to start THE PARIS REVIEW and edited the literary magazine BOTTEGHE OSCURE. Walter won awards for his own poetry and fiction.

When Eugene returned to life in Mobile after his global adventures, he entertained the city with his radio broadcasts and commentaries on how to live. His remarkable bohemian life is shared in the film through interviews of the people who knew him best.

Many of the film's commentators will be speakers for events in Mobile during the weekend of March 20. The film is presented at Bernheim Hall of the Ben May Main Library on Saturday, March 21, at 2 p.m. More details about Mobile's weekend will follow in future eblasts. The schedule includes a dinner from Eugene's recipes at the Pillars Restaurant and the city's induction into the Trail at Oakleigh Historic House.

Robert Clem's film about William March, author of COMPANY K and THE BAD SEED, will also be screened in Mobile on Sunday, March 22, at the city's new independent cinema, The Crescent, free of charge, at 2 p.m. "William March/Company K" is also previewed with a video clip on the new website page:

<http://www.southernliterarytrail.org/mobile-writers-films.html>

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