

A View From the Mountain

a newsletter from the Lillian E. Smith Center



Faulkner, Smith, and Information Tribes

AUTHOR, JOURNALIST OPINES ON PAST AND FUTURE IN LECTURE

What would a conversation between William Faulkner and Lillian E. Smith have been like?

The fiction writers, after all, had a lot in common. They shared a birth year (1897), a common heritage, and a favorite subject matter: race and life in the South. And unlike many Southern writers of the time who moved to New York City after achieving notoriety, both Faulkner and Smith chose to live out their days in their respective homes of Oxford, Mississippi and the mountains of northeast Georgia.

Though they trod the same literary ground and had the same interests, there is little evidence the duo ever shared the same room. (Continued on Page 2)

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Smith, who spent a year of study at Piedmont and lived much of her adult life at the home that now bears her name, was an outspoken feminist, progressive and liberal during a time when such views were far afield the mainstream – particularly in the South.

Roberts devoted about half of her 50-minute address to Smith. She also opined on politics, the re-segregation of American schools and what she called our path “back into our enclaves and tribes.”

“We are becoming information tribes as well as tribes in every other way,” she said.

But Diane Roberts, a renowned author, journalist and student of the works of both authors has few doubts about how that conversation would have gone.

“She would have ripped him apart,” she told a group at Piedmont College March 29. “Faulkner would have been terrified of Lillian Smith.”

In his works Faulkner addressed inequality and the destruction of racism. But he was a pragmatic progressive.

“He wanted desegregation to take about 200 years,” said Roberts, who was invited to speak at the Swanson Center for Performing Arts and Communications by Piedmont’s Lillian E. Smith (LES) Center. While Faulkner politely nibbled around the edges of race, Smith, who was born to a prominent Florida family, unabashedly plunged into the fray.

In 1944, she published *Strange Fruit*, a best-selling novel that tackled interracial romance. In many quarters, the book was banned and was placed on a list of publications that could not be mailed. The U.S. Postal Service lifted the ban at the bequest of President Franklin Roosevelt who interceded at the behest of his wife, Eleanor.

“Lillian Smith was a white lady who went wrong in all the right ways,” said Roberts. “She attacked the big house of Southern history. She was born and raised in the big house, but she refused to be a part of it.”



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—Diane Roberts

Lamenting the current political environment and the country’s “backward slide,” Roberts took some solace in the political activism of the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida who have advocated for gun control.

“I wish I could just air drop copies of Lillian Smith to them,” she said.

Roberts, who teaches creative writing at Florida State University, said she is also inspired by her students.

“Students today don’t see color in the same way their elders do. Their world view is encouraging.”

Roberts was invited to the college after penning “Stay and Resist,” an article about Smith in the Fall 2016 issue of *Oxford American*. The lecture was the culmination of a day-long series of events for Roberts. She enjoyed a tour of the LES Center in the morning and spent the afternoon with Piedmont students enrolled in creative writing and mass communication classes.

And she left the campus having made an impression on many students.

Among them was Emily Pierce, a student enrolled in the Lillian E. Smith Scholars Program who attended the evening lecture.

“Even though I knew a bit about Lillian Smith and social justice, it hadn’t clicked for me how she might take things these days, like March for Our Lives (a student-led, gun-control demonstration that took place March 24, 2018 in Washington, D.C.).”



Dana De Greff Wins 2018 Writer-in-Service Award

The Lillian E. Smith (LES) Center is pleased to announce Dana De Greff as the winner of the 2018 Lillian E. Smith Writer-in-Service Award. Currently a creative writing instructor at the University of Miami, Ms. De Greff is a widely-published and award-winning author of fiction, poetry, and book reviews. She has worked as a writing teacher in various capacities for eight years for both children and adults.

Ms. De Greff is the executive director for the administration of a \$45,000 grant from the Knight Foundation that has created and operates PageSlayers Summer Camp, a series of three consecutive two-week sessions for rising fourth and fifth graders. She also served as the community outreach and public relations coordinator for the Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation (VONA) Voices Writers’ Conference in Miami in 2016.

The annual Writer-in-Service Award is open to U.S. residents working to advance writing through public service careers or volunteer work. Eligible activities include, but are not limited to, arts education, literacy instruction, prison arts and education, English as a second language instruction, and art-related therapies. Award winners receive a \$500 honorarium, a \$500 travel stipend, and a two-week residency at the Center. The Lillian E. Smith Writer-in-Service Award is made possible annually by a generous gift from Sue Ellen Lovejoy, who is a relative of Lillian Smith and a member of the LES Center Advisory Board.

New Documentary on Lillian Smith in Production

Hal and Henry Jacobs believe the human and civil rights issues Georgia author Lillian Smith confronted in the mid-20th century have never gone away. The father-and-son team are working on a film that will explore her life and highlight her impact as a great humanitarian.

The film will feature interviews with individuals who have in-depth knowledge of Smith's personal and professional journey, including Nancy Smith Fichter, the author's niece, and Civil Rights Movement leaders who worked closely with Smith.

In addition to archival images and footage, the film will also show the current landscape of the South, including the Lillian E. Smith Center in Clayton.

Hal Jacobs is an independent filmmaker who has produced short documentaries for Emory University and Georgia State University among others. His 2017 film, *Mary Crovatt Hambidge: Wanderer, Whistler, Weaver, Utopian*, was awarded "Best Documentary" at the Spring, 2017 Southern Shorts Film Festival. Henry Jacobs is a photographer, filmmaker and musician who lives in LaGrange, Georgia. The Lillian Smith film is expected to be released in 2019.



Lillian Smith Featured at Literary Festival

In celebration of authors whose works deserve greater contemporary attention, Georgia State University hosted its second annual festival titled "Revival: Lost Southern Voices." Lillian Smith was one of the writers featured at the event, which was held March 23-24 at the university's Perimeter College, Dunwoody campus in Atlanta.

"If your name were not Faulkner, O'Connor, or Williams, you could not write about the South and expect to be embraced by the publishing industry," said event co-chair Andy Rogers, assistant professor of English at Georgia State University. "The idea behind the festival is to highlight great American writers whose work deserves new audiences."

The festival's Friday evening session devoted to Lillian Smith began with a performance by Atlanta actress Brenda Bynum of her one-woman show, *"Jordan Is So Chilly: An Encounter with Lillian Smith"*. The play was followed by a panel discussion with Bynum along with Margaret Rose Gladney and Lisa Hodgens (co-editors of *A Lillian Smith Reader*) and LES Center director Craig Amason.

Other Southern writers featured at the festival included Delores Phillips, Harry Crews, Evelyn Scott, Fred Chappell, and Raymond Andrews.



Social Justice Organization Reorganized at Piedmont College



With help and encouragement from faculty and staff, a group of Piedmont College students interested in social justice issues has reorganized a chapter of the Washington Gladden Society on campus. The student-led organization is named for the prominent minister, politician, and reformer of the late 19th and early 20th century. Ordained as a Congregational minister, Gladden was a firm believer in the social gospel, a

religious reform movement that began in the 1870s and sought the betterment of society through application of the Biblical principles of charity and justice.

On the national level, the Washington Gladden Society is an affiliate of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Piedmont College has enjoyed a close relationship with Congregational churches since the early 20th century. The college upholds the intellectual, social, and theological heritage of Congregationalism through excellence in teaching and scholarship and by embracing our diverse society.

Piedmont's Washington Gladden Society has been involved in several activities during the 2017-18 academic year. The group partnered with the Metro Atlanta Reentry Coalition and the U.S. Department of Justice to sponsor a public screening on campus of the film titled *Released: When Does the Sentence End?* on November 8, 2017. This documentary challenges viewers to reflect on how we view citizens returning to society after serving prison sentences. The film was followed by a Q&A discussion with some of the men and women featured in the documentary.

During spring semester, the students organized a field trip to the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta. They also sponsored a campus screening of another documentary titled *13th* directed by Ava DuVernay, which explores the intersection of race, justice, and mass incarceration in the United States. Plans are underway to involve Piedmont College students from the Washington Gladden Society in programs hosted by the Lillian E. Smith Center.

New Play About Lillian Smith Premieres This Year

John Barrow's *Lillian Paula Carson*—based on the life of writer and social activist Lillian Smith, her lifelong companion Paula Snelling, and Southern writer Carson McCullers—was the winner of the Southern Playwrights Competition. The award was presented by the Department of English at Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama.

Carson McCullers, famed author of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding*, made a sudden visit to Lillian Smith and Paula Snelling at their home near Clayton, Georgia, in 1953. With humor and insight, this play explores what might have happened on this visit, and how these brilliant women dealt with issues of justice, fame, commitment, love, and mortality.

Playwright John Barrow grew up in Cordele, Georgia and now lives in New York City. His plays have been performed in New York, Nashville, Key West, Atlanta, and other locations.





2018 Residency Award Winners

The winner of the 2018 McClure-Scanlin Visual Arts Residency Award is Ira Merritt. A multimedia artist from The Bronx, Merritt's creative roots are in photography and printmaking. He is a retired teacher of photography for 33 years, the last 24 of which were at the High School of Art & Design in Manhattan. He built up the school's internship program to be one of the most successful in New York City. He has been a recipient of four individual artist awards in photography from the Bronx Council on the Arts and has received grants for photography projects including documenting the residents of the Amalgamated Cooperative (the oldest housing co-op in the nation) during their 85th anniversary year.



Ira Merritt

"The struggle between individual needs and wants and what is good for society has been waged since the beginning of human existence," Merritt says. "Every individual first investigates and then debates internally before a decision is made; weighted down by a lifetime of experiences."

The McClure-Scanlin Award is made possible through a generous gift to Piedmont College from Tommye Scanlin and her husband, Thomas, who are giving the award in honor of their mothers. Scanlin is a member of the Lillian E. Smith (LES) Center Advisory Board and a long-time Lillian E. Smith (LES) Center Fellow. The award recipient is selected in consultation with faculty members of the Piedmont Department of Art and receives a complimentary two-week residency at the center.



Denise Trimm

The winner of the 2018 Gabriele Stauff Residency Award is a writer who has dedicated nearly thirty years to teaching creative writing. Denise Trimm nurtured the creative writing department at the Alabama School of Fine Arts for nine years while also completing an MFA in creative writing at the University of Alabama. In 2001 she was nominated by her students and won the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts

Distinguished Teacher of Arts Award.

For the past 11 years she has been teaching creative writing and English at Mountain Brook High School while also teaching evening adult enrichment classes at Samford University. Two years ago, she started "Alabama Writers Connect," a community for adult writers who meet weekly and critique each other's writing. The Alabama Writers Forum honored her as the "Most Winningest Teacher" for the Alabama High School Literary Arts Award. "I am currently editing a novel that has taken me nearly 20 years to write," Trimm explains. "I need the time and seclusion to put that book to bed."

The Gabriele Stauff Award is an ongoing annual opportunity that provides a two-week retreat at the Lillian E. Smith (LES) Center for an educator who has a minimum of six years of experience and who is working on a project that would benefit from a residency. The award also provides the winner with a copy of *A Lillian Smith Reader*, edited by Margaret Rose Gladney and Lisa Hodgins, published by UGA Press. Gabriele Stauff, Professor Emerita of English at Georgia Southwestern State University, has enjoyed several residencies at the LES Center through the years. She sponsors this annual award because she understands the value of time and solitude required for creative

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LES Center Improvements

PIEDMONT COLLEGE

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The cottages have new bed frames, mattresses, box springs, and linens.



Take a look at some of the recent improvements that we were able to accomplish thanks to your generous donations. No matter the size, your gifts allow us to maintain and improve the facilities and grounds at the LES Center. Thank you!

Wiggie Cottage has a new roof and a fresh coat of paint.



The Common Room Cottage has a new roof.



THANK YOU!

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