



Gurney Norman

Kentucky Poet Laureate Gurney Norman is Director of Creative Writing at the University of Kentucky. His first novel, *Divine Right's Trip* (1971), was published by The Dial Press and Bantam Books, and Pantheon Books of England. In 1978, Norman's book of short stories, *Kinfolks*, was published by Gnomon Press and subsequently by Avon Books as part of its Southern Authors Series.

Norman is co-editor, with Katherine Ledford and Dwight Billings, of a collection of essays, *Back Talk: Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes*, published by The University Press of Kentucky in March 1999. He is also co-editor, with Sharon Hatfield and Danny Miller, of a collection of essays, *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature*, published in Spring 2005 by Ohio University Press. Norman's novella-length folktale *Ancient Creek*, originally published as a spoken word album by June Appal Records at Appalshop, will be released as a book by Old Cove Press in 2010, accompanied by an archival reading of the tale produced by Appalshop.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Norman wrote and narrated three one-hour television documentary programs concerning Kentucky history, landscape and culture. The films were directed by John Morgan for KET. "Time on the River" explores the Kentucky River Valley. "From This Valley" examines the literary and cultural heritage of the Big Sandy River Valley. "Wilderness Road" retraces Daniel Boone's route through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky in 1775.

In 1990, Appalshop produced a film based on "Fat Monroe," a short story from the *Kinfolks* collection. Directed by Andrew Garrison, "Fat Monroe" starred actors Ned Beatty and William Johnson. The film was featured at the 1990 New York Film Festival and other festivals in the United States and Europe. In 1993 Andrew Garrison completed work on a second film, "Night Ride," also based on a short story from *Kinfolks*. "Night Ride" was featured at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, in 1994. A third film, based on Norman's short story "Maxine" and also directed by Andrew Garrison, was completed in 2000. Norman served as scriptwriter and creative consultant on all three productions.

In 1999, Norman and his wife, editor/publisher Nyoka Hawkins, founded Old Cove Press, a regional literary press. Old Cove Press' first book was *Affrilachia*, a book of poems by Frank X Walker. In 2005/2006, Old Cove released a new collection of poems by Walker, *Black Box*.

The summer 2005 issue of "Appalachian Heritage" magazine features a 40-page section devoted to Norman's writing and cultural work in the Appalachian region. Included are commentaries by other writers, a critical essay, and a biographical

article, plus new fiction from Norman's forthcoming novel *Crazy Quilt*. *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, published by Northern Kentucky University, devoted a section of its Fall 1995 issue to scholarly articles concerning Norman's novel and book of short stories. The summer issue of *The Southern Quarterly*, published by the University of Southern Mississippi included a lengthy interview with Norman. In October 1996, Norman was the honored author at Emory and Henry College's annual two-day Literary Festival in Emory, Virginia. The festival included a series of scholarly presentations on Norman's fiction and television work.

Gurney Norman attended the University of Kentucky from 1955 to 1960 where he majored in Journalism and English. In 1960-1961 he studied fiction writing at Stanford University as a Wallace Stegner Creative Writing Fellow. After a two-year stint in the U.S. Army he returned to his hometown to work for two years as a reporter for the *Hazard Herald*. In 1967 he returned to California where he wrote and published *Divine Right's Trip*. After the publication of *Kinfolks*, he joined the English Department as a professor at the University of Kentucky in 1979.

In addition to his writing, editing and teaching at the University of Kentucky, Norman carries on an active service role in Kentucky and surrounding states as an advisor to community-based arts groups. He is a frequent presenter at colleges and universities and education conferences. Norman enjoys visiting small rural schools where Kentucky literature and culture are under discussion. In April 2009, Norman was appointed Kentucky Poet Laureate 2009-2011 by Governor Steve Beshear.