

Francis Edward “Ab” Abernethy
(1925–2015)

By Fran Vick

Where in the world does one start to talk about Ab Abernethy? He was so many things to so many different people. He was an SFA Distinguished Emeritus Regents Professor of English—Shakespeare, folklore, world literature, and much more, teaching Janis Joplin folk music at Lamar in Beaumont along the way; a folklorist—Secretary/Editor of the Texas Folklore Society for 33 years, taking over from Dobie, Boatright, Hudson, becoming a giant among giants in Texas folklore; musician—playing standup bass in East Texas String Ensemble and of late, guitar-playing soloist of old favorites/jazz; spelunker, herpetologist, hunter, fisherman, Trailblazer—creating the Lanana and Banita Creek trails in Nacogdoches with his machete; veteran of World War II, serving with the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific; author of *Tales of the Big Thicket*, *Singin’ Texas*, three volumes of *The History of the Texas Folklore Society*, editor of more than two dozen books of the Society—many of them award winning—plus numerous articles in the *Texas Folklore Society Publications*. *Let the River Run Wild!* was his latest book, about the Neches River and Ab’s love affair with the river, East Texas and all of nature. He became a member of the Texas Institute of Letters in 1974.

Last week Ab was honored by the City of Nacogdoches for his work on the trails there. He and his singing group, with the audience joining in, sang “I’ll Fly Away” to end the festivities with one of his favorite songs. He was singing with gusto and great joy, as always:

*Some bright morning when this life is over, I’ll fly away
To that home on God’s celestial shore, I’ll fly away.
I’ll fly away, oh glory, I’ll fly away
When I die, hallelujah by and by, I’ll fly away*

—and then, early last Saturday morning, March 21, 2015, he did just that. He was my mentor, my great friend and supporter, my brother. I will miss him more than I can say, but I am so incredibly grateful he came into my life.

Diana Hobby (1931–2014)

By Celia Morris

Tall and stately like the goddess whose name she shared, Diana Poteat Hobby was one of the outstanding people of her generation in Texas. She was not, however, a native: born in 1931 in New York City, and always an exceptional student, she graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Radcliffe College in 1952. Expecting to marry an impoverished artist, she surprised herself by falling in love with a very rich man, Bill Hobby, whom she married in 1954 at her family home near Yanceyville, North Carolina.

Until 1957, they lived in Washington, D.C., where she earned a master's degree in English from Georgetown University and worked for the Experiment in International Living. After they moved to Houston, she became book editor of the **Houston Post**, the family enterprise—a position she retained for many years--and bore four children—Laura, Paul, Andrew, and Kate. In her spare time she got a PhD in English from Rice University and was associate editor of **Studies in English Literature** from 1979 to 1991.

She loved music, horses, Yeats, and dogs, though not necessarily in that order. She was stunningly generous—opening the doors of their stately home on South Boulevard to a motley range of guests and always finding an extra ticket for a visiting friend to concerts at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice or the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. She served on the boards of virtually every major institution in Texas that was devoted to the arts or to conservation, among them St. John's School, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, the Texas Institute of Letters, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Friends of Hermann Park, and so on.

Happiest while walking their big Labs under the hanging Spanish moss of the oak-lined avenues near their home in Houston, or riding horses at the North Carolina estate that she and her sister Sylvia owned outside Yanceyville, she suffered in her later years from Alzheimer's. It was a cruel irony for a brilliant woman, but when she died, on July 4, 2014, she could know that few people had taken hold of their life's reins more firmly or lived more abundantly.

Kathryn Marshall (1951–2014)

By Jan Reid

Kathryn Marshall McClendon committed suicide at 63 at her home in Fort Worth a few days before Christmas last year. Katy Marshall, as I knew her, received a Dobie-Paisano fellowship in 1976 on the strength of her compelling 1975 first novel, *My Sister Gone*, published when she was just twenty, and was inducted in the Texas Institute of Letters in 1977, the year her second novel, *Desert Places*, was published. She was an inactive member after that, but she cherished the friendships she made through the TIL. The 1982 anthology *Her Work* included her rollicking story "In Case You're Wondering How Come I'm Sitting Here in the Dallas-Ft. Worth International Airport." In 1987 she published *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975*. She wrote short nonfiction for publications that included *Ms Magazine*, *Savvy*, *American Way*, *Cooking Lite*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Washington Post*. She was an avid travel writer, taking risks and delivering gems of style and reporting from places as far removed from her native Texas as Paraguay.

The daughter of a mathematics professor at the University of Texas at Arlington, Katy was a beautiful reckless soul who was, according to her family, reciting Shakespeare at the age of three. She won a Ford Foundation Fellowship to the New York City Ballet Company's prestigious School of American Ballet. She had to give up her dream of a career as a ballerina because of injuries. She told me about the great care and enjoyment an old masseur showed in his work on their aching young bodies. She attended SMU and the University of Texas, then she became a Hare Krishna assigned to a marriage and was particularly prized for her skill as a dancer in their haggling travelers for money in airports. A highway patrolman stopped a van of them outside Odessa, and having never seen such humans before, he was certain that a big bag of flour was heroin or cocaine. He finally let them go, but only after demanding a photograph in which he posed with them, Katy hanging on him in a rather salacious way. Then came a writing program at California-Irvine that led to her first novel and her fellowship at Paisano. We were friends from the moment we first spoke.

Audrey Slate, who developed and maintained a special affection for Katy, had called us with the good news. Katy then called me and asked if she could please, please go first — she said she was living in California with a Vietnam ex-marine and feared he was going to kill her. She was a little frightened of the rural solitude at Paisano and caused a ruckus by painting yellow a wall over the work space in the front bedroom that had acquired some handwritten doggerel from Bud Shrake and Gary Cartwright, an illustration by the hippie armadillo artist Jim Franklin, and a poem by A.C. Greene. The second Paisano fellow was very proud to have written the poem on that wall for posterity. Coming after Katy, I did my best to tamp down the furor and fend off talk of some "rules" that would inhibit that kind of free spirit behavior. A.C.'s ghost might still be grumbling about "goddam women from California."

I'm not sure how many times Katy was married. The second marriage that I knew about was to a rather stern sort who was an associate editor under Jim Hightower at the *Texas Observer*. Molly Ivins was an incurable gossip, and she told a story that the *Observers* were at some dinner and liberal gathering, doing their best to set the nation and world aright, while Katy was under a table having it on with a *New York Jet*. After Paisano she stayed in Austin for a year or two. She taught a course in writing at UT; one of her star students was Dick Reavis, our

TIL colleague whom she introduced to Texas Monthly and set on his road as a distinguished journalist. In the years that followed, she also taught creative writing at Harvard and Mount Holyoke. One of her marriages to a prominent literary and movie agent placed her in the Livingston, Montana scene of Jim Harrison and Tom McGuane.

She worked with TIL member and her friend and editor Rod Davis, first at American Way and then on the staff of Cooking Lite in Alabama, where she zoomed through the office on the new kind of roller skates. I doubt she ever cooked anything she couldn't get out of a can or pop in a microwave. One time I chanced to have breakfast with her in New York. She told me with a laugh that her job was to go all over the country looking like a million dollars. In Alabama she married a trial lawyer who died from an accidental overdose of heroin in 2005.

There were times when she gave up writing altogether, or said she had. Inspired by the nurses she interviewed who had served in Vietnam, she graduated from the Baylor Nursing School, directed a charity clinic in Dallas, and worked for the First United Methodist Mission in Fort Worth.

She was an alcoholic who managed her life around it, more or less. She was banned from the San José Hotel in Austin in recent years because one night she went looking for her cat, which guests were allowed to bring. A shocked lobby clerk told her, "Mrs. McClendon, you are wearing no pants." No underwear either. One time she called me telling rambling funny stories and by the end of the conversation she signed off thinking she was talking to Gary Cartwright. In mid-December of last year I received an upbeat email from her, and I kept thinking tonight or tomorrow I'll have the time and energy to properly respond and tell her what our friendship meant to me. Some months earlier, as I was leaving for Fort Worth to get an award for one of my books, I had gotten a call from a nurse practitioner who bluntly informed me I had skin cancer that had spread to lymph nodes. It proved to be a fairly mild wakeup call that I ought to start wearing hats, but I didn't know that during the melancholy drive north. The next day I was treated to a morning-long breakfast with Katy and an amiable man friend in the lovely home she had made for herself in Fort Worth. I didn't tell her what had been pressing on my mind, if I had been tempted to, because in the good cheer and laughter of that reunion the tension and panic just dissolved, and I thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the weekend. Now I'm left with sadness and wonder.

I have to believe that my writing as soon as I intended would have made no difference, but still ... I'm enclosing that last note from Katy, hands down the wildest child who's ever come my way. I know she had demons but I can't believe pulling that trigger was something she planned to do.

"Hope this is the right address. Roy notified me that you have finished Basque novel and this may be a very exciting time for you! Please respond. I am trying to get back to work on my hideously gothic tall tale but have been distracted lately. Awhile back I was picked up in the CVS pharmacy line by a 47-year-old black Yankee doc who is doing a forensic fellowship for next 6 months at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office. He is good-looking and smart and regales me with tales of hideous suicides and homicides and car wrecks and even sends me photos. This stuff is right up my alley. Obviously. And he takes me to nice restaurants. So that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Best love — KATY"

RIP dear friend.

Robert Sherrill (1924 –2014)

By W.K. Stratton

Before Woodward and Bernstein, before William Greider, there was Robert Sherrill, a tramp journalist with a barbwire soul. But more, much more.

Sherrill was born December 24, 1924, in Frogtown, Georgia, the son of an itinerant newspaperman. He grew up on the move as his father took jobs throughout mid-America. “The only thing my father taught me,” he once said, “was how to safely catch a moving freight train, and that came in handy a couple of times.” After serving in the Merchant Marine, he obtained an English degree from a West Coast college, then made his way to Austin, where he took a master’s degree in English from the University of Texas. In Austin, he plugged into a lively literary and journalism scene that soon would have a national impact.

He befriended Billy Lee Brammer and was godfather to Brammer’s children. Eventually he became associate editor of *The Texas Observer* while Willie Morris was editor. “Sherrill had been around,” Morris wrote. “He had worked as a newspaper carrier, a janitor, a house painter and a water analyst. He was a veteran reporter who had written, in the old tradition, for some 25 papers all over America. When he grew tired of one town, or began to hate an editor’s guts too much for his own sense of balance, he would simply depart for another, usually in the dead of night.”

He also taught English at Texas A&M. His articles, his instruction in the classroom, and his demeanor as an outlaw journalist influenced a couple of generations of Texas political writers. Molly Ivins, for one, considered Sherrill a mentor.

He went on to write for a number of national magazines (he is not the same person as the Robert Sherrill who served as an editor at *Esquire* during its glory days), most especially *The Nation*, for which he penned dozens of impactful articles while receiving a pittance in pay. He was a liberal but he refused to adhere to doctrine. Sometimes the loudest voices of criticism in reaction to his work came from the left.

And then there were the books, often written in collaboration with his first wife, Mary Bergeson, who was his researcher and unofficial editor. In them, he took on the gun lobby, big oil, the military justice system, Lyndon Johnson, and the Kennedys, among others. My favorite is *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*; the title is self-explanatory.

After Mary’s death, Sherrill married Jean Williams Dugger Marshall Sherrill, who survives him. She was a familiar figure in Austin literary and political circles and was the stepmother of TIL member Kathryn Marshall.

Sherrill, who became a TIL member in 1975, died on August 19, 2014. “Mr. Sherrill granted no quarter to anyone or anything,” wrote Adam Bernstein in the *Washington Post* at the time of his passing.

Just so.

Bryan Woolley
(1937-2015)

By Lonny Taylor

I was just getting ready to leave the house for church last Sunday morning when I got an e-mail from El Paso writer Marcia Daudistel telling me that our friend Bryan Woolley had died in Dallas on Friday. Woolley was a Fort Davis boy who wrote one of the best novels about small-town adolescence I know of, *Time and Place*, set in a West Texas town, a thinly disguised Fort Davis. It is, in my opinion, right up there with Larry McMurtry's *The Last Picture Show*, and that is saying a bunch. During his career, Woolley won myriad awards for literary achievement: a Golden Spur Award from the Western Writers of America, a PEN Western Literary Award for Journalism, a Berea College W.D. Weatherford Award for Non-Fiction, the University of Texas's Stanley Walker Journalism Award (twice); the Texas Headliner Award for outstanding journalism (four times); and four separate awards from the Texas Institute of Letters.

Woolley was born on an Eastland County farm in 1937, but his family moved to Fort Davis when he was very young and lived in the big adobe house on the corner of Court Avenue and Buckeye Street now owned by Marty and Yana Davis. His mother, who had family ties here, served as Jeff Davis County Clerk for many years and his grandmother taught in our public school. Woolley went all the way through elementary and high school here. He was our hometown boy. When Dedie and I first started looking for a house here fifteen years ago, our real estate agent pointed out the Davis's house to us as "the house where Bryan Woolley grew up."

Woolley's childhood here shaped his writing and his career. When he was a sophomore in high school he won an honorable mention in an *El Paso Times* essay contest for a paper about soil conservation, "a subject about which I knew nothing," he later wrote. The next year the school principal recommended him for a job as the Fort Davis stringer for the *El Paso Times*. Stringers reported local news and were paid 15 cents a column inch for stories the paper used. Woolley got the job; his first story was about a chicken house fire put out by our volunteer fire department, which the *Times* did not use.

Woolley placed himself under the tutelage of Justice of the Peace Barry Scobee, a former journalist, who showed him how to write feature stories, and within a few months his features about rural life, old timers ("geezers and geezerettes," he called them), and Davis Mountains cowboys and ranchers, were appearing with some regularity in the *Times*. When he graduated from Fort Davis High School in 1955, he went to El Paso and got a job on the staff of the *Times*. He started as a photographer's assistant, developing film at \$1.00 an hour, but he soon worked his way to the sports desk, taking telephone reports about Friday night high-school football games from stringers and writing them up into stories. Woolley nearly got fired the first month for writing a lengthy and detailed story about a high-school game in New Mexico but leaving out the score, but he survived and stayed with the paper until he graduated from Texas Western College at 21 and got married to his high school sweetheart, a Marfa girl.

Woolley's path to full-time journalism and literary fame was not straightforward. His fiancée told him that being a newspaper reporter was not a respectable job and that she would not marry him if he stayed with the *Times*. Over the next nine years he taught high-school English, worked as a bank teller and on a seismograph crew, and spent time in two graduate schools, including Harvard Divinity School. The marriage ended, and Woolley took a job as a

correspondent for the Associated Press in Tulsa. He spent the next 50 years as a journalist, working in Anniston, Alabama; Louisville, Kentucky; and, since 1976 in Dallas, where he wrote features for the *Dallas Times-Herald* and the *Dallas Morning News*. He retired from the *Morning News* in 2006 but still contributed occasional articles to the paper.

Woolley was an extremely versatile writer. His forte was finely-honed short portraits of people or places, usually originating as feature assignments, but he also published 4 novels, two children's books, a non-fiction book about coal miners in Kentucky, a travel book, and numerous short stories. For my money *Time and Place* is his masterpiece. Woolley once told me he did not like the title but he had learned to live with it. He wanted to call the book *The Polio Year*, but his publishers, E.P. Dutton, decided that no one would buy a book with the name of a disease in the title. Woolley pointed out to them that Albert Camus's *The Plague* and Alexander Solzhenitzyn's *Cancer Ward* had done pretty well, but they were adamant, and when the book came out in 1977 it was called *Time and Place*.

The book was inspired by the ordeal and courage of one of Woolley's boyhood friends, Albert Fryer, whose parents, Bill and Vivian Fryer, owned the Fort Davis Drug Store. Fryer got polio at the age of 14 from swimming in a stock tank here. He survived, but he was badly crippled and died much too young. But *Time and Place* is about far more than illness and youthful courage. It is about how the past shapes the present, about conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans, about how adolescents learn to become adults. The setting, a town which is disguised under the name Fort Appleby, is so obviously Fort Davis that Woolley, in the preface to the 1985 T.C.U. Press edition, wrote that he wondered why he bothered to change the name.

Woolley was a big, shambling man, with long, unkempt hair, glasses, and a scraggly, short beard. He looked like a perpetually inquisitive bear and he had an air of eternal innocence. Unlike many writers, he was modest, sweet-natured, and completely inept at self-promotion, which is probably why his books are not better known. He loved Fort Davis and the Davis Mountains. He was here about two years ago with his two grown sons. Dedie and I had them to lunch, and he told us, "I'm here to show my boys where I want my ashes scattered." He'll be here soon.

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