

Coming Home Again

UK Alum Holly Goddard Jones returns for Kentucky Book Fair

By Holly Goddard Jones



Kentucky native and author (and UK Alum) Holly Goddard Jones will sign her debut collection, *Girl Trouble* at the Kentucky Book Fair in Frankfort on Saturday, November 7.

Below is her recent blog chronicling notes from her trip to Nashville to participate in the Southern Festival of Books and the Women's National Book Association's NRG panel, along with a trip home to Kentucky.

When I was in graduate school, writing the rough draft of the stories that would eventually become my new book, *Girl Trouble*, my mentor, Lee K. Abbott, told me, "Your characters get in trouble whenever they leave town and go to Nashville." I hadn't noticed this before, but he was right: in Nashville, my southern Kentuckians drink to excess and brawl; they get fancy educations that fail to serve them later on; they go to doctors who deliver scary diagnoses. Things might not be a whole lot better across the state line in Roma, KY, but in Roma, at least, they know their enemy. Nashville—the city—is a big mystery.

I couldn't help thinking about Lee's insight as I recently embarked on a two-day trip back home for a reading in my hometown public library and a few appearances at Nashville's Southern Festival of Books, one of the nation's premiere literary events. The plan —hatched during my

dreamy summer break from teaching, when it seemed both possible and delightful — was to fly into Nashville on Thursday the 8th, drive home that night, read at the Logan



Jones read at Joseph Beth in September. *Girl Trouble* was Ace's October Book Club Selection.

County Public Library at noon on Friday, drive back to Nashville in time for the festival's Authors in the Round dinner, attend a breakfast panel the next morning, a reading

panel in the afternoon, and then depart from downtown Nashville at 4:30pm in time for a 6pm flight back to my new home in Greensboro, NC.

No sweat, right? I was probably wearing my pajamas at 2 in the afternoon when my publicist and I exchanged emails about the schedule.

My Friday reading at the public library was celebratory and nostalgic, and there was a great turnout. My dad, who took a rare day off of work, joined us, and I picked a few passages from *Girl Trouble* that were staged in recognizable settings (like the local barbecue joint) or at recognizable events (the Tobacco Festival parade). The library staff did a terrific job, and my author photographer, old friend Morgan Miller, had her beautiful work on display.

By 3 that afternoon, I was back on the road to Nashville for the Authors in the Round dinner. And nervous. You see, I'm just not that socially adept, and I was all the more anxious knowing that I would be one of 40 authors "hosting" tables purchased at the dear price of \$200 a seat. Pity the big-hearted lover of books who comes hoping for Rick Bragg and gets yours truly. But the event was actually quite lovely: my tablemates were friendly, the food delicious, the drinks plentiful. I nursed a very sweet cocktail called The Pageturner: bourbon and amaretto, served on ice in a silver julep cup. Here I was, small town girl alone in the city, getting plied with brown liquor. No good could come of this.

But the next morning, my experience with The Pageturner notwithstanding, I was excited to participate in a breakfast panel sponsored by the Nashville chapter of the Women's National Book Association. The intimidating line-up of panelists included Marie Brenner, author of *Apples and Oranges: My Brother and Me*, *Lost and Found*; Perri Klass, author of *The Mercy Rule*; Inman Majors, author of *The Millionaires*; and Kathryn Stockett, author of *The Help*. Nina Cardona of Nashville Public Radio moderated and faced the unenviable task of trying to find a common discussion theme in five very different books. She focused on character — how we built them, when and how we draw inspiration from real life, whether or not any of us have faced backlash for our portrayals.



Holly and author George Bishop

I read at 3:00 with George Bishop, whose first novel, *Letter to My Daughter*, will be released in the spring. He was an incredibly sweet man who gave a beautiful reading, and his cheering section of friends and family supplied at least three quarters of our audience. I now have an advance reading copy of his book that I'm eager to devour.

Following our panel and a brief signing, I ran in uncomfortable heels to my rental car, worried about getting to the



Holly signing in Bowling Green

airport in time to make my 6pm flight. After some misadventures trying to get my car back to the right garage and a desperate, breathless ten minutes trying to cram three bags' worth of conference booty into one "personal item," I made it through security and to my gate with half an hour to spare.

Seated, heels off, I started sorting through my swag: new books, a mouse pad, an inscribed bookmark from the WNBA. Pens, notepads. A CD.

"I nursed a very sweet cocktail called The Pageturner: bourbon and amaretto, served on ice in a silver julep cup. Here I was, small town girl alone in the city, getting plied with brown liquor. No good could come of this."

And finally, forgotten, at the bottom of my festival hospitality bag: a mini-bottle of Jack Daniels whiskey and a smashed chocolate Moon Pie. I'd let them slip through security! How could I? I made the evidence disappear as quickly as I could.

Due to a delayed flight and a subsequent missed connection, I didn't make it to BNA until almost 11pm on Thursday, and I still had an hour and fifteen minute's drive to Russellville, KY, my hometown. I fell into my childhood bed after midnight, with a pounding headache, and set my cell phone alarm. My mother had turned down the covers and placed a bottle of water on the bedside table. A card was on my pillow. It read, "Holly, sleep good, Love Mom."

Early the next morning, Mom and I drove over to WRUS, the local AM radio station, so that I could be interviewed by Don Neagle on his program, *Feedback*. *Feedback* has been on the air since as long as I can remember, and it's one of those radio shows that has achieved a beautiful sort of harmony with the

small town it serves. Don, who looks much younger than the 70-something years he claims, could do the show blindfolded and with one hand tied behind his back. He is kind, smart, unflappable. He tells me right after we go on the air to let people know who my parents are and who my husband is and who my husband's parents are. I do.

"Well, now that we've got that all straightened out," he begins, shifting to questions. Don's questions are good, and

he's read up on me and the book enough to fill more than a half-hour's worth of air time.

But the funniest responses come from the callers, who want to tell me that they know my parents, or that they lived for sixteen years in the subdivision where I'd said I grew up. My fifth grade reading teacher called in. So did my uncle David. So did the woman who worked at the Laundromat where my mother washed clothes.

I am grateful to the stores that hosted me, the events managers and booksellers and (in one case) librarian and her volunteers who welcomed me, the friends, family, and even strangers who came out to support the book, and of course to my publisher for making this possible. ■

Holly Goddard Jones will sign Girl Trouble at the Kentucky Book Fair on Saturday, Frankfort Convention Center 405 Mero Street; 1pm: Reading in the Glass Room of the Capital Plaza hotel; 9am - 1pm and 2pm - 4pm, Signing in the Convention Center. Her blog is at www.HollyGoddardJones.blogspot.com.



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