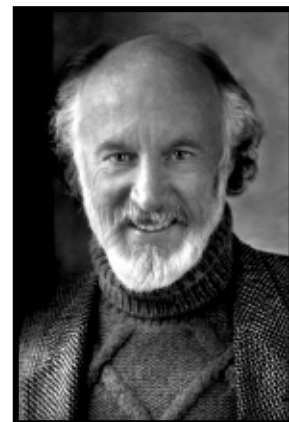




Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home Foundation
207 East Charlton Street
Savannah, GA 31401

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SAVANNAH, GA
PERMIT NO. 1534

TO:



**Please join us for the second annual
Ashley and Terry Ursrey Memorial
Lecture:**

Allan Gurganus

acclaimed author of *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, *The Practical Heart*, *Plays Well With Others*, *White People*, and innumerable stories and essays

7:00 p.m., Thursday, June 4
Trinity United Methodist Church
corner of Barnard and York Streets on Telfair Square
Free and open to the public

Book-signing and Reception will immediately follow the talk

“The most technically brilliant and morally responsive writer of his generation.”
– John Cheever on Allan Gurganus

Friends of Flannery

The Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home Foundation

207 East Charlton Street
Savannah, GA 31401
(912) 233-6014

www.flanneryoconnorhome.org

Issue 19

Summer 2009

Directors and Officers

*Any bunch of nuts can get up and
call themselves a foundation.*
Flannery O'Connor

Bill Dawers
President
Helen Borrello
Vice President
Betsey Bass
Secretary/Treasurer

Dannah Bonnell
Joni Saxon-Giusti
Allison Hersh
Christian Kruse
Rebecca Moore
Rena Patton
Dr. Jim Smith
Dr. Robert Strozier
Jane Thimme

Advisory Board

Craig Amason – Ex officio
Dr. Christopher Baker
Linda Bruckheimer – Ex officio
Archie & Sally Davis
Frances Florencourt – Hon.
Louise Florencourt – Hon.
Dr. Dorothy Kingery
Marsha Moore
Patricia Persse – Hon.
Dr. Paul Pressly
John & Ann Tatum

Newsletter

Jane Thimme
Bill Dawers

Allan Gurganus to give the Second Annual Ashley and Terry Ursrey Memorial Lecture on June 4

We are thrilled to announce that Allan Gurganus will give the Second Annual Ashley and Terry Ursrey Memorial Lecture on Thursday, June 4, at 7 p.m. at Trinity United Methodist Church at the corner of Barnard and York Streets on Telfair Square. A reception and book-signing will immediately follow this extraordinary free event.

Many of our members were able to attend Michael Cunnig-ham's stirring talk last June to kick off the lecture series, which was founded by Mrs. Alene Ursrey, Dr. John Hunt, and Ms. Betsy Cain in honor of deceased brothers Ashley and Terry Ursrey, native Georgians who, like Flannery O'Connor, were lifelong devotees of all things Southern, particularly the art of storytelling.

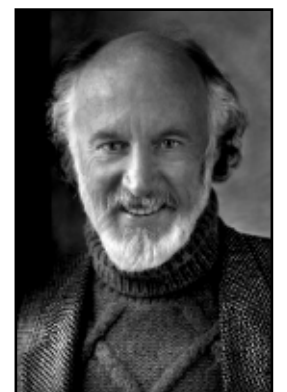
It's hard to imagine a better storyteller than Allan Gurganus.

A native of Rocky Mount, N.C., Gurganus is perhaps best known as the author of the best-selling novel, *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*. The mini-series adapted from the novel was nominated for nine Emmy awards, winning four. Gurganus has been honored with the prestigious O. Henry Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Best Work of American Fiction, the Lambda Literary Award and the National Magazine Prize.

Over the years, he has written a number of novels, essays and short stories and has also contributed commentaries to *The New York Times*, *The Newshour with Jim Lehrer* and National Public Radio. A 2006 John Simon Guggenheim Fellow, Gurganus is the author of *White People*, *Plays Well With Others* and *The Practical Heart*. His work has been translated into 16 languages.

Author John Cheever has called Allan Gurganus, “the most technically brilliant and morally responsive writer of his generation.” Robert Wilson, the editor of *American Scholar*, has described him as “the worthy heir to Faulkner and Welty.”

Please join us on June 4 for this exciting – and free – event.



President's Message

by Bill Dawers

I can't even begin to say how ecstatic I was that 300 people showed up at Trinity United Methodist Church for Brad Gooch's appearance in February for the national book launch for *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor*. Over 200 fans walked from Trinity to our reception in the rotunda at the Telfair Academy, and folks waited patiently as more than 100 books were sold and signed.

Many thanks to Trinity United Methodist Church and the Telfair Museum of Art, both of whom generously donated their spaces that night.

The local enthusiasm was matched by the international reaction to Brad's book. More than 30 major publications and organizations have reviewed the biography, with the vast majority being positive.

On the day after Brad's talk here, I drove him to Milledgeville, which is obviously sacred ground for O'Connor fans. That evening, about three dozen turned out to hear him at Georgia College and State University. The room was filled with O'Connor experts, which resulted in a longer and more detailed talk about the complexities of making the connections between a writer's life and her body of work.

Before making my way back to Savannah the next day, I stopped by Andalusia in the midst of driving rain. When I arrived, Andalusia's director Craig Amason was talking about O'Connor with a group of college students who seemed thrilled to be there on a dreary Saturday morning – another sign of O'Connor's growing relevance. I rambled through the old farmhouse and, umbrella in hand, walked a bit around the grounds.

Brad had a successful book-signing there later in the afternoon despite the tornado watches and warnings, but I was glad to stop by when it was quieter.

O'Connor herself might have scoffed at the homage paid to her at Andalusia and at the Childhood Home. As longtime Childhood Home docent and supporter Carl Weeks noted at our recent screening of "The Displaced Person," O'Connor resisted the idea that readers and critics should care too much about a writer's life.

But as Brad's biography makes clear, the physical and emotional landscape of O'Connor's fiction closely mirrors her life. Our interest in Andalusia and the Childhood Home is not simply a matter of playing "gotcha" and guessing which character was patterned off which O'Connor family member, friend or acquaintance. No, we're



exploring something much more complex when we visit these sites: the deep bonds of family, the daily realities of prolonged illness, the power of imagination.

Come Visit Us Online

We're fortunate here at the Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home to be riding a wave of interest in O'Connor and her work. Our expanded hours have dramatically increased the number of visitors to 207 East Charlton Street, and the sale of mugs and T-shirts has created new revenue streams. We'll soon be set up to take credit cards for admission and for purchases, which should improve our revenue stream.

We're also obviously fortunate to have the moral and financial support of so many of you who are reading this newsletter right now.

But we're also sorting out the best ways to keep in touch with supporters, locally and nationwide. We'll obviously continue printing this newsletter, but we're also exploring a variety of other media. In addition to our more traditional website (flanneryoconnorhome.org), we also have a blog (flanneryoconnorhome.blogspot.com) and a page on Facebook, which can be found via a simple search.

On our blog, you can find all sorts of posts about O'Connor and the Childhood Home, including profiles of our docents. In a couple of short months, we've accumulated more than 450 fans on Facebook, and a number of folks from around the country have posted messages about the Childhood Home.

Jack Miller, now in Atlanta, writes: "I have many fond memories of this house – I've been there many times and partied there before it was a museum. If those walls could talk!"

Jane Martin, who lived on the second floor in 1990, remembers the flooding caused by a dripping kitchen faucet when a "mischievous curl of onion peel wedged itself in the drain." She and her husband were devastated to return from a show at Miss Billie's (a sadly defunct Savannah hotspot) to find water running to the floor below. Good news came out of bad: the repair work uncovered the hardwood floor on the parlor level, an original feature that had been covered over with tile.

In addition to being an obvious place for such reminiscences, Facebook has also turned out to be a great tool for reaching younger people, a few of whom turned up at our screening of "The Displaced Person" after reading about it online.

SIGNS

by Rena Patton

Katrina's waters had just drowned the Gulf Coast. We watched astounded as New Orleans filled with wind-driven water. Other cities like Pass Christian and Waveland had washed away. You know these things. You saw them, too.

In October I was putting a sign in the window of the O'Connor Home, the kind of sign you get at the hardware store over on Barnard Street here in Savannah, or anywhere else—black with neon-orange in caps: FOR RENT.

As the new president of the all-volunteer Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home Foundation, I was fundraiser, house cleaner and general overall cheerleader and rental agent. In truth, we all wear many hats. But I was thrilled to be a part of the mission of these slightly kooky, happily engaged, bright and clever folk who make preserving Mary Flannery's home their passion.

Ok, but what did I know about rentals and security checks and leases? I stood watching our tenant vacate one of the Foundation's chief sources of income, paying our monthly mortgage. As Jennifer's parents angled her mattress down the fire escape from the third floor-walk-up, I stared at the sign in the window.

"Pardon me," I turned to the voice behind me. Tall, thin—silver hair caught in a ponytail at the base of his neck. "Is this Flannery O'Connor's home?" I said it was, asked if he knew O'Connor's work.

"Of course," he smiled. "I'm a huge fan. Most writers are." Yes, I agreed. "Can I go in?" Sure. Was an apartment in O'Connor's house actually coming available?

"As we speak," dodging the mattress. Across Lafayette Square, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist filled the sky. Toby headed up the narrow stairs and returned.

"I'll take it," Toby said.

"Take what?"

"The apartment. It is for rent, isn't? There's a sign in the window."

That was three years ago. Last fall Toby, a Katrina refugee, became the first official employee in the 20-year history of the Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home Foundation, a dream of the "founding fathers." Thanks to Toby.

And that's the way it seems to be here—when a need arises, some blessing, like rain, falls on Lafayette Square and becomes a part of us, among us. As if the Home itself is drawing those it needs. Or could it be that prayers we know nothing of have brought us all here, impelled by Flannery's fierce and faithful fiction?

Funny about signs.



Author Brad Gooch with O'Connor docent, Mary Lawrence Kennickell at kickoff event for *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor*



Elizabeth Stewart, Betsy Cain and Dr. John Hunt among those enjoying the Gooch reception at the Telfair

Attracting Writers & Readers, Peacock Guild Debuts

We are excited to announce plans for the Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home to host the Peacock Guild, a Writers' Salon and Book Club, which we hope will attract fiction writers and readers throughout the Coastal Empire.

A new literary society for bibliophiles and writers, the Peacock Guild will offer a free monthly book club aimed at literature lovers and a free bimonthly salon to encourage Southern writers. We envision the book club meeting once a month to discuss great works of the American literary canon, including O'Connor's work and other examples of Southern writing, as well as other titles in contemporary literature. The writer's salon provides an ideal opportunity for local fiction writers to share work in a supportive environment.

Adrienn Mendonca, a former docent here at the Childhood Home, serves as the volunteer coordinator of this new effort. "I realized the childhood home was an excellent place for writers to meet," she said. "To know that you're in a place where a great Southern writer was formed is an incredible opportunity."

For more information about upcoming Peacock Guild events and meeting dates, call Adrienn Mendonca at 233-6014 or email peacockguild@gmail.com.