

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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## No Place Like Home

As nursing homes profit from pain,  
communities fight to reform them.

ALSO

***The South in Congress***

***Pigs and Pollution***

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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# DATELINE: THE SOUTH

**WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, W. Va.** (June 1) — Newspaper reports revealed that Congress has been maintaining a top-secret bomb shelter in the hills alongside the luxurious Greenbriar resort hotel since 1958. The underground bunker — built at a cost of \$14 million to shelter lawmakers in case of a nuclear attack — includes a dormitory with hundreds of bunk beds and a dining room with false windows to relieve the sense of entombment.



**DILLON, S.C.** (June 1) — The federal government wants to say *adios* to Pedro, the billboard cartoon who has entertained and annoyed motorists on Interstate 95 for years with his ads for the tourist park "South of the Border." Highway officials ordered North and South Carolina to take down 229 of the signs as part of a federal push to remove 90,000 billboards nationwide. Pedro has never been especially fond of Uncle Sam. One billboard features an upside down "South of the Border" with the explanation: "This sign planned in Washington."

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** (June 2) — A local drugstore has decided to just say no to tobacco, refusing to sell cigarettes because of the health risks posed by smoking. Although cigarettes account for one dime of every dollar spent at the J.P. Brown pharmacy, co-owner Kelly Ross says he doesn't mind seeing the income go up in smoke. "There was some inconsistency here," he explained. "Tobacco certainly does not project a health-care image."

**COOKEVILLE, Tenn.** (June 5) — When nine-year-old Crystal Kellum forgot to bring a dollar to school for a class swimming trip, she did what any child of

the '80s would do: She called her bank. Barry Buckley, president of Peoples Bank & Trust, withdrew \$1 from the fourth grader's \$30 savings account and personally delivered it to her in class. "I've got kids in school," explained Buckley, "so I know the feeling of panic they get."

**AUSTIN, Texas** (June 6) — More than 50,000 readers mailed a coupon from a recent *Doonesbury* cartoon to State Comptroller John Sharp, applying for Texas residency so they can avoid paying state income taxes like President Bush. Sharp played along, sending applicants certificates declaring them "taxless Texans." He also suggested they make a donation to the Austin Center for Battered Women "to turn this into something positive for a few people." The center received more than \$20,000 in contributions.

**MIAMI, Fla.** (June 11) — City commissioners voted to evict the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture from a city-owned building today, claiming they need the space for a fire station. Critics say the eviction is part of a four-year-old campaign to punish the museum for displaying works by artists who support the Cuban government. A federal judge blocked a similar eviction last year, ruling that the city was trying to censor controversial political views. "This is just another pretext for continued harassment," said Santiago Morales, president of the museum.

**CLEVELAND, Va.** (June 17) — The U.S. Navy added insult to injury to the family of Petty Officer Clayton Hartwig, who died in an explosion aboard the battleship *Iowa* in 1989. Six months after the Navy apologized for wrongly accusing Hartwig of causing the blast, his parents received a recruiting brochure addressed to their deceased son. "Come on Back," the brochure read. "You and the Naval Reserve. Full Speed Ahead." Hartwig's father called the mailing "a cruel joke." Added his sister: "It's just one slap in the face after another from these people."

**RALEIGH, N.C.** (July 25) — State lawmakers set an example today for other public workers looking to kill time. Legislators finished their session at 3:30 in the morning — but they had already passed a resolution agreeing to adjourn at 10 a.m. Faced with a long wait, a staff member simply leaned over a rail in the gallery and moved the clock ahead six and a half hours. House Speaker Dan Blue declared it 10 a.m. and lawmakers headed home.

**WOODLAND, N.C.** (June 18) — Residents fighting a company that wants to burn toxic wastes in their community won a battle in court today when a federal judge ordered ThermalKEM to pay the town \$100,000 to review its application for a hazardous waste incinerator. ThermalKEM argued that the fee was designed to block construction, but Judge Franklin Dupree Jr. said the town had a right to make the firm pay for the cost of processing its permit.

**HOUSTON, Texas** (June 18) — Nearly 2,000 residents who sued Monsanto and six other chemical companies that dumped toxic wastes near their homes settled their suit for \$207.5 million — the largest agreement ever involving a federal Superfund cleanup site. "I think it will send shock waves through the chemical industry," said attorney Joe Jamail. "They're going to know they've got some responsibility to dispose of their waste properly." The money will pay for medical care and college educations for 250 children who lived near the Brio dump, ranked as the 13th most toxic site in the nation.

**MARION, La.** (June 21) — The first integrated class at Marion High School enjoyed a belated commencement ceremo-

ny today, marching through the gym to receive their diplomas 22 years after they graduated. White officials canceled commencement in 1970 rather than include black families in the ceremony. This year 16 graduates — including two whites — donned caps and gowns. "It's a proud moment," said graduate Charles Bilberry, now 40. "It's time we remove the cataracts of racism from the eyes of America."

**MIAMI, Fla.** (June 25) — A former employee of a security firm hired to spy on environmental activists has been awarded the 1992 Cavallo Prize for Moral Courage for exposing the secret investigation. Rafael Castillo lost his job when he blew the whistle on a "sting" operation against activists who were working to document environmental violations by Alyeska Pipeline Service, the company that controls the flow of Alaskan oil. "He had to resign his job," said a spokesperson for the Cavallo Foundation. "He is a wonderful example of someone who displays moral courage."



**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** (June 27) — Shotgun-toting deputies escorted a valuable shipment of oil through town today. Their assignment: guard a vat of cooking grease from Dyer's Cafe being transported to the restaurant's new location. The oil, which Dyer's claims is the secret to its popular hamburgers, has been strained but never changed since the restaurant opened in 1912. "We need a sheriff's escort because we don't want our grease to get hijacked," said co-owner Jim Marshall. "You can't be too careful these days."



**SMYRNA, Ga.** (June 18) — James Cunningham, whose arrest for a "Shit Happens" bumper sticker prompted the state Supreme Court to strike down a Georgia law against obscene decals in 1990, was arrested again today for displaying the same sticker. Cunningham told the patrolman who cited him for having a "profane decal" that the law had been struck down as unconstitutional, but the officer insisted it was still on the books. "It was like deja vu," said Cunningham, a 34-year-old carpenter. "This goes to show you that shit does happen — and it keeps happening to me."

**MONTGOMERY, Ala.** (July 3) — Lawyers for the state defended Alabama's weak regulation of the toxic chemical dioxin, arguing in court that citizens have no constitutional right to a healthy environment. The state allows 10 Alabama paper mills to poison rivers and streams with levels of dioxin 86 times higher than federal standards. Environmentalists have sued, but the state called their concerns frivolous. "There is no federal constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment," said lawyers for the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.

**TAVERES, Fla.** (July 10) — In an unprecedented ruling, a circuit judge has given the go-ahead to 11-year-old Gregory K. to sue his parents for divorce. Gregory wants to stay with his foster parents rather than return to a father who has abused him and a mother who has abandoned him to state custody for most of his life. "This is a crucial case for children's rights," said Jeanne Lenzer, chair of the National Child Rights Alliance.

**MIAMI, Fla.** (July 14) — The state attorney general is suing Southern Bell of Florida, accusing the phone company of encouraging sales staff to charge custom-

ers for services they never ordered. The lawsuit says Bell offered color televisions, gas grills, and Caribbean vacations to employees with high sales figures, who rang up over \$14 million in unrequested services. "Southern Bell knows that it is not dealing with an educated public, and it takes advantage of that in every way possible," said salesman Adam Perez. "The pressure to sell is tremendous."

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** (July 28) — The state Supreme Court has ordered the Campbell County school board to reinstate Anne McGhee, an English teacher fired in 1987 for flunking a high school basketball star who repeatedly skipped class. The failing grade drew threats from the principal, petitions from outraged fans, and a bullet through her car windshield. The intimidation "was so psychologically devastating that McGhee was unable to work," the court ruled, ordering her rehired with full back pay.

*Compiled by Mario Nebbitts. Illustrations by Steven Cragg.*

*Readers are encouraged to send items to Dateline: The South. Please send original clippings or photocopies and include name and date of publication.*

## S&L GIVEAWAYS PROFIT GOP INVESTORS

Visiting Houston without taking in the abandoned ruins of the savings and loan catastrophe — the vacant office towers, idle apartment complexes, and eerie acres of empty subdivisions — would be like touring Pompei without noticing the volcanic devastation wreaked by Mount Vesuvius.

How odd, then, that Republican conventioners who descended on Houston in August failed to pay tribute to President Bush's first and most far-reaching domestic program — the \$500-billion bailout of the S&L industry.

In fact, a new study by the Southern Finance Project (SFP) reveals that politically powerful financial institutions and investors with ties to the GOP are among the most frequent customers of the government sale of failed S&Ls and their assets.

Based on detailed records of more than 20,000 properties sold by the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC), the study found that the federal bailout agency has conducted a massive fire sale that rewards the rich and well-connected at the expense of average taxpayers.

Take Trammell Crow, the Dallas-based developer who shared an Astrodome box seat with First Lady Barbara Bush during the GOP convention. In his heyday, Crow presided over the largest real estate empire in North America. Today, his holdings are dwarfed by the massive inventory of failed S&L properties inherited by the RTC. But Crow doesn't seem to mind. Last year the agency sold him two Houston apartment complexes valued at \$32.7 million for a mere \$21.1 million.

It was not the first time that Crow, who has contributed \$306,000 to the GOP and its candidates since 1988, cashed in on the S&L bailout. In 1988, he teamed up with Texas lumber giant Temple-Inland to buy Guaranty Federal Savings of Houston for \$128 million — picking up \$3.2 billion in assets in the process.

Then there's Charles Hurwitz, the Houston financier and would-be airline

tycoon. As an S&L manager in the mid 1980s, Hurwitz ran the largest savings and loan in Houston — United Savings — into the ground, leaving taxpayers with a bill for \$758 million. Now his investment vehicle, MAXXAM Corporation, is busily buying apartment complexes on the cheap from the RTC. So far, MAXXAM has purchased eight Texas complexes from the agency, paying barely half the book value of the properties.

On the second day of the Republican convention, Hurwitz took a break from the festivities to be deposed by a team of lawyers representing employees of Pacific Lumber, a northern California timber company Hurwitz purchased. The workers are suing Hurwitz for raiding their pension plan to pay for the buyout — but the financier stunned lawyers by cutting his testimony short to host a luncheon for former Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole and her husband, Republican Senator Bob Dole of Kansas.

According to the SFP study, such

bargain-basement deals to big Republican investors are commonplace. In Houston, the top 20 buyers walked away with property by paying as little as 11 cents for every dollar of book value. Nationwide, RTC sales average only 55 cents on the dollar, plunging to 43 cents in Louisiana.

In the end, the study notes, taxpayers will be hurt by the RTC giveaways. The public will eventually pay \$6.9 billion for losses on the sale of 16 failed S&Ls in Houston alone.

Among the study's other findings:

▼ Nearly one-fifth of all S&L deposits transferred by the RTC went to a single bank — BankAmerica of California. The top 10 buyers of S&Ls received half of all deposits transferred by the bailout agency.

▼ Eighteen of the 20 most expensive sales occurred in the South. Last February, for example, the government sold the New Metropolitan Federal Savings Bank of Hialeah, Florida to a Canadian bank — a deal that will cost taxpayers \$27.3 million.

▼ One of the largest buyers in the RTC firesale is Virginia-based BRW, a partnership that includes the Blackstone Group investment fund. Among the list of Blackstone partners is David Stockman, the Reagan-era budget chief who helped fuel the S&L disaster by cutting funds to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board as it struggled to keep up with mounting S&L losses.

—Marty Leary

*The Southern Finance Project is sponsored by the Institute for Southern Studies, publisher of Southern Exposure. To order the SFP report, write 329 Rensselaer, Charlotte, NC 28203.*

## THEY TAKE, WE PAY

The book value of all real estate held by bankrupt savings and loans that investors have bought from the government — and the loss on the deals that will be picked up by taxpayers:

| State            | # of Deals | \$ They Got (In mil) | \$ We'll Pay (In mil) |
|------------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Alabama          | 9          | \$30                 | \$12                  |
| Arkansas         | 18         | 31                   | 11                    |
| Florida          | 160        | 504                  | 130                   |
| Georgia          | 38         | 73                   | 36                    |
| Louisiana        | 45         | 75                   | 43                    |
| Mississippi      | 9          | 9                    | 4                     |
| N. Carolina      | 19         | 40                   | 4                     |
| S. Carolina      | 11         | 49                   | 20                    |
| Tennessee        | 11         | 25                   | 4                     |
| Texas            | 583        | 1,685                | 870                   |
| Virginia         | 14         | 21                   | 8                     |
| <b>South</b>     | <b>917</b> | <b>2,542</b>         | <b>1,142</b>          |
| <b>Non-South</b> | <b>726</b> | <b>1,699</b>         | <b>774</b>            |

Source: Southern Finance Project, from RTC data.

Note: Omits deals under \$500,000, and those with unnamed buyers.

## SHENANDOAH PARK AIR RATED WORST

Air pollution in the Shenandoah National Park of Virginia now ranks worst among the 48 most vital parks in the nation, thanks to a surge in power plant construction near the wilderness area.

Researchers report that the air in the 196,000-acre park is dense with sulfates,

nitrites, and ozone that harm soil, streams, fish, plants, trees, and even people. In 1988, the ozone level in the Shenandoah topped the federal "unhealthy" level three times, forcing park officials to issue health warnings to hikers.

Those symptoms have led Park Superintendent Bill Wade to liken the "sickness" of his park to AIDS: Its pollution-weakened ecosystem is now more vulnerable to such natural threats as disease and insect infestation.

"I think it is a very sick park," says Wade. "And, for sure, we haven't seen all the symptoms yet."

The most blatant symptom is the smog. Only 20 percent of it is natural haze from fog or dust — the stuff that makes the Blue Ridge Mountains blue, the Smoky Mountains smoky. The rest is man-made — mostly smokestack exhaust from power plants west of the park.

Energy consumption has doubled nationwide since 1960, and power plants have pumped more and more exhaust into the air — millions of tons of it through unfiltered smokestacks. What's more, the number of miles driven annually in Virginia has doubled since 1970, doubling the car and truck exhaust pluming skyward.

As a result, summertime visibility in the Shenandoah has dropped 80 percent in the past 50 years. On one out of three days, visibility is less than 10 miles. When the 105-mile Skyline Drive through the park first opened in 1938, visitors driving south from Front Royal to Waynesboro could see the tip of the Washington Monument 70 miles away.

And the pollution could get worse. Since 1986, the state has approved 20 new power plants for construction and is currently reviewing another dozen permits — more than any other state in the nation. The undisputed result of those 30-plus plants will be thousands of tons of sulfur dioxides and nitrogen oxides dumped into the air.

The Park Service has reacted to the danger by adopting a new role as an aggressive advocate for ending pollution and restoring clean air. And to some, Park Superintendent Bill Wade is emerging as the movement's hero.

The fight began in 1980, when Wade became the first park superintendent ever to appeal a state permit for a new power plant. Pressures from his Republican-backed superiors in the Department of Interior have frustrated many of his efforts, as has the pro-growth push by Dan Quayle and the Council on Competitiveness. But things would be worse, Wade said, "if we hadn't been in there scrapping with it."



**ONLY 20 PERCENT OF THE HAZE IN SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK IS NATURAL — THE REST IS SMOG CREATED BY CARS AND POWER PLANTS.**

Julie Thomas, an air-quality specialist with the park, says Wade is becoming the most aggressive superintendent in Park Service history — the first to look beyond his park to fight negative external influences.

But Wade says he can't do it alone. "It's absolutely a regional issue," he says.

Officials took a small step toward a regional solution in June, as representatives from seven states met in Atlanta to discuss creating a Southeastern coalition of government agencies to decrease pollution. Few specifics emerged, but future meetings are planned and the Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to provide some funding.

In the meantime, air pollution continues to threaten the Shenandoah — as well as neighboring towns and farms.

"We're sort of a barometer," says Julie Thomas, the air-quality specialist. "If it's happening inside the park, it's happening outside the park."

—Neil Thompson

## FLORIDA GUNS DOWN BAN ON BEAR HUNTING

Animal-rights activists came close to ending the hunting of black bears in Florida earlier this year, only to see the idea of a ban shot down by the state Game and Freshwater Fish Commission.

The uproar began last November,

when Commissioner Ben Rowe of Gainesville, an old turkey-hunting buddy of Governor Lawton Chiles, shot a black bear. His kill was legal, but that didn't prevent public outrage. The Fund for Animals launched a letter-writing campaign, and the state congressional delegation petitioned the Game Commission to ban bear hunting. Even Sports Illustrated stepped into the fray with a rebuke to Rowe.

The criticism stung. "I got written up just for trying to do a good job," Rowe told a reporter. "I didn't do anything wrong. I bought a hunting license and went hunting."

Everyone agrees that there aren't many black bears left in Florida. Estimates range from 400 to 1,500 — few enough for the state to list them as threatened, but enough in three relatively undeveloped parts of Florida for the Game Commission to consider them fair game.

About 300 hunters buy bear stamps each year, which allows them to trek through some of the toughest terrain in the state to stalk their prey. Black bears favor the thickest of forests and swamps. An average of 35 are legally shot each year, although the number was as high as 60 in 1990.

Their greatest predator, however, is not bullets — it's subdivisions and shopping malls. Rapid development has made their habitat a shrinking island in a sea of new construction. State biologists expect the bear population in several fast-developing counties of central Florida to die out within

30 years. No new bears come into the territory, while as many as 30 are killed each year trying to cross highways in search of food.

"They're in dire straits," says John Wooding, a Game Commission biologist. "With such low numbers, a chance event can drive them to extinction. Every individual is critical."

But the hunts, Wooding says, are designed to maintain the bear population in areas where hunting is allowed. "The goal is sustained yield," he says. "As long as they're sustained, there's no biological justification to stop the hunting."

Despite the scientific rationale, the outcry against bear hunting brought results. In an unprecedented move, the staff of the Game Commission recommended a ban on hunting based on public opinion rather than the number of bears. "It is apparent that the people of Florida are in the substantial majority opposed to the continuation of bear hunting seasons," wrote the commission director.

Public opinion, however, ultimately carried less clout than the opinions of public officials. At their meeting last May, game commissioners voted 3 to 1 to continue bear hunting. What was really being threatened, they said, was a time-honored tradition.

"Bear hunting in Florida is kind of a family tradition," says Henry Cabbage, spokesman for the commission. "It's passed down from father to son."

Hunters agreed. "It's not just for killing the bears," says Gina Johnson of Skipperville, Alabama. "I feel it's good family entertainment and something the whole family can do together."

—Linda Gibson

## STUDY FINDS THE RICH GOT RICHER

The income gap separating the rich from the poor and middle class grew wider in 43 states during the 1980s, according to a new study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The report — the first comprehensive state-by-state examination of income distribution — found that both poor and middle-income families have lost ground to the wealthy since 1979. The top fifth of all households watched their incomes rise by an average of \$7,000 during the past decade, while the middle fifth gained only \$143 and the poorest fifth lost \$347.

Nowhere is the income gap more striking

than in the South. The average income of the most affluent families is at least 10 times that of the poorest families in Louisiana, Mississippi, West Virginia, Alabama, Texas, Virginia, and Georgia.

Louisiana started the decade with the greatest gap between rich and poor — and the gulf widened. In 1979 the average income of the wealthiest fifth of families in the Bayou State was 8.7 times that of the poorest fifth. By the late 1980s it was 14.5 times as great.

The poorest fifth of Louisiana residents make only \$6,255, while the richest fifth takes home an average of \$90,481.

The non-profit center attributes the widening income gaps to low wages for the poor, large capital gains for rich investors, government cuts in welfare and unemployment insurance, and tax policies that hit poor and middle-class families harder.

"Tax systems in the vast majority of states take a larger percentage of income from low- and middle-income families than from the wealthy," the report notes.

The solution? States should institute tax reforms that take a larger share of income from the wealthy than from those at other income levels.

"States can chart a different course," the report concludes. "If low-income and middle-income families are to stop receiving steadily smaller shares of the income

pie, state as well as federal policies will have to play an important role."

—Mary Lee Kerr

To order the report, write the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 777 N. Capitol St. NE, Suite 705, Washington, DC 20002.

## LISTENING PROJECT DISPELS PREJUDICE

In the wake of the Los Angeles riots, communities across the country have resounded with impassioned calls for racial harmony. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, activists with peace and civil rights groups decided to do more than talk about race relations — they decided to listen.

Trained in non-violence and communication skills by members of Rural Southern Voice for Peace (RSVP) from North Carolina, 26 volunteers went in pairs to four white neighborhoods that had supported ex-Klansman David Duke in his 1991 race for governor. They called it the Louisiana Racial Issues Listening Project.

"The purpose of the project was both to build bridges and to challenge the myths and misinformation that strengthen racial hatred and prejudice in our country," says Herb Walters, founder of RSVP and lead trainer for the project.

Armed with a 25-question survey that encouraged residents to express their feelings and fears about race relations, volunteers asked people to share their views on topics ranging from the Los Angeles riots to David Duke, from affirmative action to welfare.

Almost 90 percent of residents interviewed felt there is racial tension in Baton Rouge. Most cited lack of education as the reason for disproportionate unemployment and poverty among blacks in the city, but 25 percent blamed black residents for being lazy or unwilling to work. Few of those interviewed had a clear idea of what affirmative action meant.

But volunteers did more than ask questions — they also encouraged residents to examine their racial prejudices. "Our interview process was not meant to provide dry, quick, easy responses, but to bring out deeper thinking and feeling on race issues," says Walters. "We began by building trust. We asked questions that tapped into personal values, and that provided opportunities to explore positive solutions to racial problems."

When residents were told that white

## THE INCOME GAP

The richest fifth of all families have increased their share of income in every Southern state since 1979, while the poorest fifth have lost ground except in Arkansas, Florida, and South Carolina.

|                    | POOREST FIFTH |           | RICHEST FIFTH |           |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
|                    | % share       | % change  | % share       | % change  |
| Alabama            | 4.2           | 0         | 44.8          | +13       |
| Arkansas           | 4.4           | +2        | 43.8          | +4        |
| Florida            | 4.8           | +1        | 44.0          | +22       |
| Georgia            | 4.4           | -6        | 43.5          | +19       |
| Kentucky           | 4.6           | -20       | 42.1          | +5        |
| Louisiana          | 3.3           | -31       | 47.2          | +15       |
| Mississippi        | 4.0           | -13       | 44.7          | +3        |
| N. Carolina        | 4.8           | -8        | 42.2          | +13       |
| S. Carolina        | 4.7           | +24       | 43.3          | +21       |
| Tennessee          | 4.5           | -4        | 44.4          | +14       |
| Texas              | 4.2           | -12       | 44.2          | +2        |
| Virginia           | 4.1           | -15       | 43.0          | +24       |
| W. Virginia        | 4.1           | -35       | 44.1          | +4        |
| <b>U.S. Median</b> | <b>4.8</b>    | <b>-3</b> | <b>41.6</b>   | <b>+8</b> |

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities



males hold two-thirds of the highest-paying jobs nationwide, for example, most expressed more positive feelings about equal opportunity employment programs. At the end of the hour-long interview, 45 percent of the residents said they felt more positive about race relations.

The Listening Project also gave interviewers a chance to learn from those they interviewed. "I realized that racism is not a single issue, but grows from a complex web of experiences," said one interviewer. "The people we interviewed have enough positive values on which to begin a dialogue that can lead to change."

Interviewers noted that more than three-fourths of white residents who had personal contact with black neighbors and co-workers considered their interracial relationships a positive experience. This fact, volunteers reported, "pointed to the obvious need for increased human contact between people with different racial and cultural backgrounds."

By the end of the interview, half of the residents were willing to give face-to-face interaction a try — to meet with others in their communities and talk about race relations. One woman suggested starting an interracial Neighborhood Watch group. "It's a way we could all work together," she said.

—Mary Lee Kerr

*For more information on the Listening Project, contact RSVP, 1898 Hannah Branch Road, Burnsville, NC 28714.*

## POULTRY GROWERS BEAT RETALIATION

Poultry growers in Florida have won an important victory in their battle with large chicken processors, encouraging growers across the region to begin forming statewide associations.

In a settlement with the U.S. Justice Department last March, corporate food giant Cargill agreed to stop retaliating against growers who organize, take legal action, or contact government agencies with grievances. The company canceled its contract with Arthur Gaskins in 1989 after he and 30 other Florida growers sued the company for underweighing birds to cheat them of income.

The settlement came at a pivotal time for contract poultry growers across the South. With nearly half the poultry market in the hands of just five companies, small growers are dominated by large

"integrators" who supply them with birds, feed, and rigid specifications for building and equipping chicken houses. Many growers have mortgaged their farms to stay in business. When growers complain, the company simply cuts off their contracts, or rigs supplies and prices to drive them out of business.

But over the past year, growers have been fighting back. Last October, growers from the biggest poultry states met in Caddo Gap, Arkansas and formed the National Contract Poultry Growers Association. They elected Arthur Gaskins president.

The organizing efforts have made the integrators nervous. A representative of Tyson Food distributed a memo to growers before an organizing meeting in Texas, warning them that the growers association "is being funded and led by a network of shady characters and organizations." The groups listed included the National Farmers Union, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, the Government Accountability Project, and the Institute for Southern Studies, which publishes *Southern Exposure*.

"They used every word they could think of that would scare farmers — but it didn't have the effect that Tyson wanted," says Mary Clouse, a former grower who now directs the Poultry Project of the Rural Advancement Fund International. The same day the memo was circulated, 200 growers at the meeting in Texas decided to form a state growers association.

Although farmers still fear repercus-

sions, Clouse says, many continue to organize. At the center of the struggle is *Poultry Growers News*, a newsletter Clouse edits to teach growers about their rights. "It gives them hope that they can't just be cut off for joining an organization," she says.

In a recent issue, Arthur Gaskins sent out a personal call to his fellow growers. "If we do not work together as one association of members and supporters," he wrote, "we will always be at the mercy of the integrators."

Growers in Alabama and Arkansas held statewide meetings in June, and Mississippi growers met the following month. Next January the national association will hold its second annual meeting, bringing together national leaders and newly elected representatives from each state association.

"They're not out there to bash the industry," says Clouse. "They're out there to build a strong organization. They're not really watching to see if the integrators care or don't care. That's healthy."

—Mary Lee Kerr

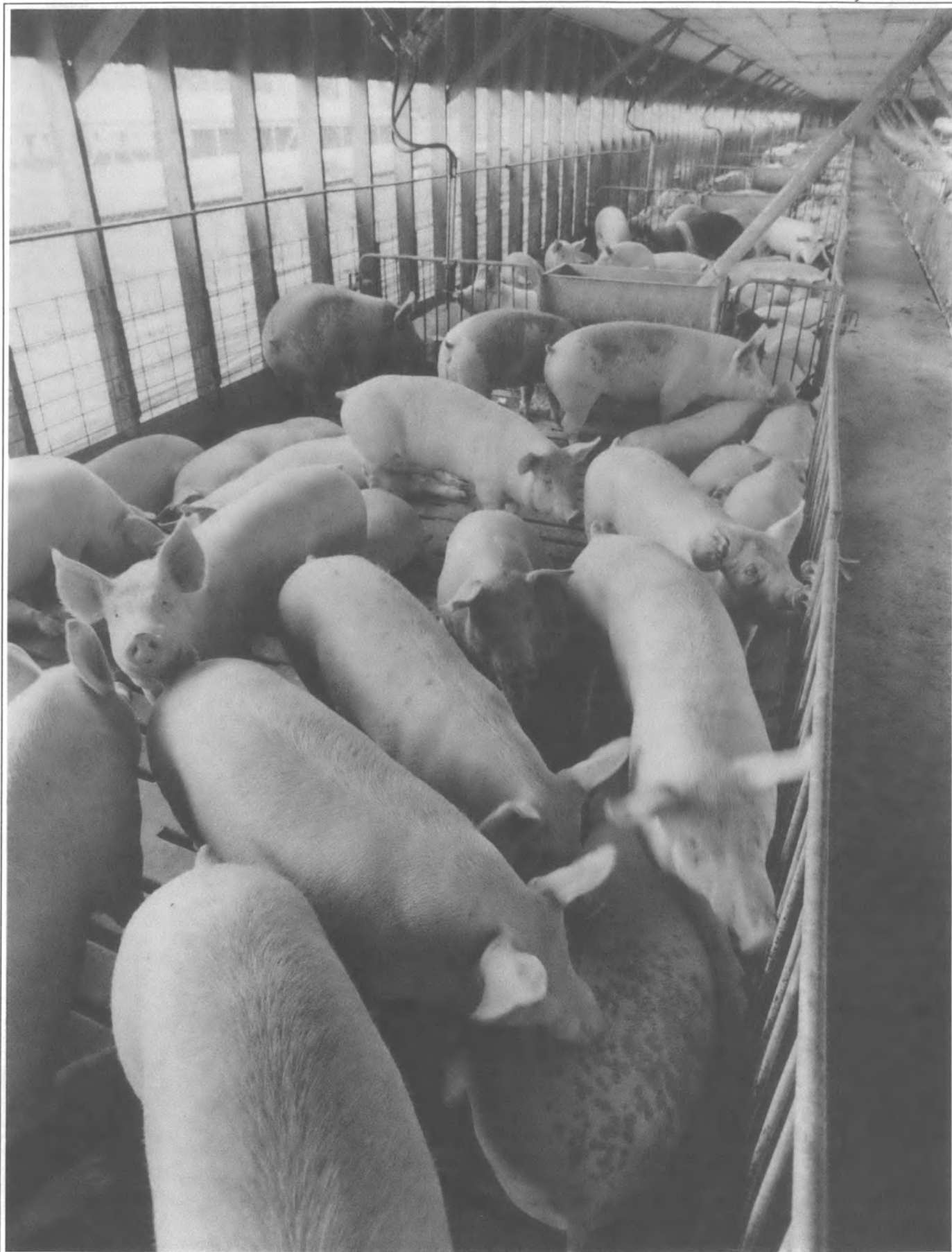
*For more information about organizing among growers, contact Mary Clouse at (800) 245-1995.*

*Readers are encouraged to submit news articles to Southern News Roundup. Please send original clippings or photocopies with name and date of publication, or articles of no more than 500 words.*

*Photo by Rob Amberg*



**FED UP WITH THE BIG COMPANIES THAT RULE THE POULTRY INDUSTRY, GROWERS ARE ORGANIZING TO DEMAND FAIR CONTRACTS.**



**CORPORATE FARMS CROWD THOUSANDS OF HOGS INTO CONCRETE CUBICLES, CREATING POWERFUL ODORS AND BROWN LAGOONS BRIMMING WITH UNTREATED WASTE.**

# H

By David Cecelski and Mary Lee Kerr

# Hog

# WILD

How  
corporate  
hog  
operations  
are  
slaughtering  
family farms  
and  
poisoning  
the rural  
South.

#### **NORTH RIVER, N.C.**

—By the broad salt-marshes of Carteret County, Elbert Murray has operated a tiny hog slaughterhouse for more than 30 years. When he started his business, most local farmers raised at least a few hogs. Rich or poor, white or black, they had a muddy pigpen and a slop trowel, and a smokehouse to preserve the meat through the winter. Every autumn Murray would butcher 25 or 30 hogs a day for his neighbors, seven days a week.

Hog farming was a way of life then. Cured hams, sausages, bacon, chitlins and hog jowls, sidemeat and fatback — they staved off hunger during hard winters and held together many a family farm. Pork flavored local cuisine more extensively than any

other food. And the passion for pork — in North River and throughout the South — elevated raising, killing, preserving, and cooking hogs to a high art and a community ritual.

But things are changing. Nowadays Murray's clapboard slaughterhouse seems as old-fashioned as a mule-driven plow. Dwarfed by corporate superfarms that breed and fatten as many as 40,000 pigs at a time, fewer small

and part-time farmers can afford to raise hogs, and the 73-year-old Murray now butchers and dresses more deer for sportsmen than pigs for farmers. Only a few of the better-off local farmers still raise hogs for market, and they ship them to a processing factory owned by agribusiness conglomerates in Kinston and Wilson, more than 70 miles away. North River doesn't get the jobs, the pork, or the profits.

A weary Murray feels like the world has passed him by. He and the few people who still bring him hogs belong to vanishing communities that can't compete with corporate agriculture. The young people in North River are moving away to find jobs. His slaughterhouse barely breaks even, and he spends most of his income on medical bills.

"I've worked myself to death," says Murray, a wiry black man considered one of the elders of the community. "They make it nearly impossible to live for yourself now."

Murray and his neighbors in North River are not the only ones threatened by the rapid growth of corporate hog farms. The transformation of hog farming from a small, local enterprise to a huge, multi-million-dollar industry endangers the future of family farming, the economic health of rural communities, and the safety of drinking water across the South.

Hog production has long been the domain of men like Murray and independent, family farmers. Over the past decade, however, the pork business has begun to follow the path of the poultry industry. Thirty years ago, a million family farms had chicken coops, raising birds to eat at home and sell at the market. Led by Frank Perdue and other chicken kings, the poultry industry is now dominated by a few multinational companies that control every stage of production from egg to dinner table. They raise the birds by the tens of thousands in high-tech confinement sheds, and the old coops stand empty and dilapidated in antiquated barn-

yards (see "Ruling the Roost," *SE* Vol. XVII, No. 2).

Now many of the largest poultry firms — including Tyson Foods, ConAgra, and Cargill — are turning their attention to the hog industry. Refining the lessons of the poultry boom, they hope to extend their system of "vertical integration" to the pork business, dominating the production process from grain mill to hog farm, from slaughterhouse to supermarket.

The rise of corporate hog farming means bigger farms — and fewer farmers. The size of the average hog farm in the South has almost quadrupled since 1974, from 29 pigs to 111 last year. Over that same period, three-fourths of all hog

## FACTORY FARMS

Corporate hog farming spread first and fastest in North Carolina. Since 1974, the number of farms in the state raising fewer than 50 hogs has plunged from 17,000 to fewer than 4,000. The number of operations raising more than 500 hogs has meanwhile soared from 20 to nearly 200, giving North Carolina the largest and most concentrated hog industry in the region.

Nowhere is the trend to corporate farming clearer than in the small town of Rose Hill, home of Murphy Farms — reputedly the largest hog producing operation in the world. Standing in the elegant corporate headquarters on the

for Murphy Farms. Although Murphy raises hogs on its own land, it relies on this extensive network of growers for most of its meat.

The contracts with hog farmers resemble those that now dominate the poultry industry. Growers must supply the land, build their own hog houses, and shoulder all of the labor and financial risks. The company supplies them with piglets and feed, and returns to take the animals away when they are grown.

The operations are huge — and expensive. Bred with new genetic technology to grow leaner and faster, thousands of hogs are crowded into concrete cubicles in \$100,000 confinement sheds. To take advantage of specialized equipment, the pigs are bred, raised, and fattened for slaughter at different sites. Automated sprinklers and fans cool the animals. Electronic feed systems deliver a scientific diet, including vitamins and synthetic hormones, that fatten them to 260 pounds in only six months. When the hogs go to the packing plant, ultrasound machines like the advanced diagnostic tools used in hospitals are increasingly used to measure their leanness.

"Swine management supposedly started in the Midwest," says Sam Ennis, a Murphy production manager. "But we feel like and hope that we've taken it to a different tier, a different level, and maybe have commercialized it a little bit more."

The factory-like farms are transforming the culture of hog farming. Some contract growers who work for Murphy grew up around pigs and are adapting to corporate farming as best they can. More and more, however, the new breed of corporate hog farmers are businessmen eager to move up the corporate ladder. They are more at home driving a BMW than a tractor, more comfortable carrying golf clubs than slop buckets. For these men, raising hogs is just another financial investment. They hire laborers to work with the hogs, and dutifully follow instructions issued by Murphy Farms.

"I've just been a business person all my life," said Steve Draughon, a grower with Murphy Farms who had never raised hogs before he invested more than \$900,000 in a contract operation. "The size of these facilities now, and the income they generate, and the management expertise that it takes to run them is more suited for somebody that's good at managing a business."

*Photo by News & Observer*



**CRAIG THORNTON TENDS THE PIGS AT HIS CORPORATE FARM IN CLINTON, NORTH CAROLINA. THE FACTORY-LIKE OPERATIONS CAN COST \$1 MILLION, MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR FAMILY FARMERS TO COMPETE.**

farmers in the region — more than 235,000 farmers — have been driven out of business.

What's more, say most observers, the devastation of family hog farms is accelerating. The only substantial growth in the industry is among operators with more than 1,000 hogs, who now produce at least three of every four hogs raised nationwide. At this rate, predicts Steve Marbery, editor of *Hog Farm Management*, the "family hog farm will become extinct early next century."

edge of town, it's hard to imagine its occupants have anything to do with raising hogs. Well-tailored executives and accountants move efficiently about a building adorned with green marble floors and plush pigskin chairs. Outside, a company helicopter awaits its next flight.

A sophisticated telecomputer system links these modern-day pig rearers to more than 600 contract farmers — some as far away as Iowa — who raise a total of more than 1.5 million hogs a year

## FAMILY EXODUS

Mathew Grant has never seen himself as a business person. A family farmer in Tillery, a rural black community on the Virginia border, Grant has raised hogs since 1957. Though he never owned more than 20 sows, the animals helped

him to be self-sufficient, educate his children, and — in a county with a tremendous rate of black land loss — hold on to his family farm.

Grant can recall a day when every black family in Tillery raised hogs. One by one, his neighbors closed their farms and lost their land. Grant held on. He was

the last hog farmer in town — perhaps the last black hog farmer in the county.

Then, last winter, Grant finally gave it up. He simply could not compete, he says, with the growing number of corporate farms raising 500 sows. Most of the big farms are owned or supplied by Smithfield Foods, a pork processing

## MURPHY'S LAW

His employees compare him to H. Ross Perot. Political allies and adversaries see him as an effective power broker. Citizens who live near his operations say he's ruining their lives.

Wendell Murphy pulled himself out of obscurity to develop a hog operation reputed to be the largest in the world. A slick businessman and a shrewd operator in the good ol' boy network of North Carolina politics, Murphy has created an empire of more than 600 hog farms in the South and Midwest that rings up \$200 million in sales each year.

Murphy is a small-town-boy-made-good. After earning a degree in agricultural education from North Carolina State University in 1960, he taught school before returning to his hometown of Rose Hill and opening a feed mill with his father in 1962.

Four years later the family started contracting with private hog farmers and selling the pigs to slaughterhouses. Business boomed, and by 1986 Murphy had 95 contract growers and 23 company-owned operations raising around half a million hogs. Today Murphy Farms produces over a million animals each year.

In 1982, Murphy capitalized on his fame as a businessman to run for the North Carolina legislature. He served three terms in the state House and two in the state Senate, where he wields power on a variety of committees — including a seat as vice-chair of the Agriculture Committee.

"Murphy picks his fights — he's a very good politician," says Bill Holman, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club. "He doesn't speak or throw his weight around unless he's sure he's going to win."

As a legislator, Murphy has not been afraid to use his power to benefit his business. Over the years, he has introduced or supported a variety of legislation to aid large-scale farm operations like his:

▼ Last year, Murphy sponsored an amendment to exempt feed lots for farm animals from tough state wastewater regulations, subjecting them only to

less stringent federal rules. Though the House added penalties for illegal discharges to public waters, the amendment "certainly benefited Murphy Farms," says Holman.

▼ Murphy introduced a bill last year to make sure that counties could not apply their own zoning regulations to control the size of livestock operations. The measure passed. "Senator Murphy was promoting the hog industry," says Don Webb, a Wilson County resident who lives near Murphy operations.

▼ Murphy has backed legislation to limit the liability of farmers from nuisance suits. The measure, explains Holman, would protect Murphy from being sued by citizens sickened by the stench of his hog operations.



WENDELL MURPHY

## PORK BARREL POLITICS

Murphy has also used his power in the legislature to funnel public money to North Carolina State — his alma mater — which supplies the hog industry with valuable research and technical assistance. Last year he introduced a bill criminalizing interference with animal research at the university, and pushed lawmakers to spend \$3.3 million improving roads for a university stadium.

The animal research program at NCSU has also been supportive of Murphy. Many graduates and staff members from the school have gone to work for Murphy, and agricultural extension employees from NCSU have traveled from county to county to speak in support of large-scale operations like Murphy's.

These state-employed specialists have taken advantage of the revolving door, moving from the Murphy-supported NCSU program into plush offices in Murphy's headquarters in Rose Hill. Terry

Coffey, for example, who used to be a swine specialist with the NC Agricultural Extension Service at NCSU, was recently named director of research and development at Murphy Farms. Public affairs director Lois Britt headed the agricultural extension office in Duplin

County before signing on with Murphy.

Public affairs have been much on Murphy's mind of late. Last February, the state senator announced his retirement from public office — just two and a half weeks before the Kinston *Free Press* reported that Murphy had been questioned by state agents as part of an investigation of "alleged irregularities"

in the campaign finances of former state senator Harold Hardison.

Citizens who live near Murphy Farms are also questioning how Murphy does business, saying his operations foul the air, contaminate the water, and drive small farmers out of business.

Murphy turned down repeated requests for an interview. "He's leery of reporters," explains Sam Ennis, his area production manager. "I'm sure he feels to a much lesser extent what Ross Perot probably felt. Perot probably felt he was being honest and open and now he's getting hammered. Murphy has a sense of what will work and he wants to do the right thing. That's why he can't understand these environmentalists."

To improve his image, Murphy is using hog waste to create fertile ground for nature preserves and artificial wetlands. But citizens who live near his operations remain unsatisfied, and many say they will be glad to see him retire this year. Says one Bladen County resident: "Do we really want any person in North Carolina to be in a position to exercise this much power and influence in support of his own financial self-interest?"

—M.L.K.

giant based in Virginia. And if Smithfield doesn't give you a contract to raise hogs, Grant says, it's almost impossible to survive.

"Smithfield gets all the hogs he wants," says Grant. "You're at his mercy."

Grant is one of the thousands of casualties of the bigger-is-better trend in hog farming — and by all indications, the pressure on small farmers is getting worse. Industry experts agree that in the near future, a family hog farm will have to be able to raise at least 300 sows to survive. That would eliminate *nine out of ten* of the remaining hog operations in North Carolina by the year 2000. By then, many sources predict, the standard size for contract farms will be 10,000

Bank of Kansas City, predicts "a substantial exodus" of small farmers who cannot compete with rising agribusinesses. Indeed, many independent farmers, who often have to wait a week in line at packing houses that give priority to larger customers, foresee the day when they just won't be welcome at all. Unless they have a contract with one of the big producers, they will receive fewer bids for their hogs, will have fewer places to deliver them, and, in many cases, will have to sell to a local monopoly that can set prices without competition.

"It would be tough to go independent," acknowledges Steve Draughon, the Murphy Farms contractor. Corporate

## "BRANCH PLANT" TOWNS

As corporate hog farming shuts down small farms, it also threatens the economic health of rural communities. Even many agribusiness economists and bankers predict that the shifting control of the hog industry will hurt the majority of the rural South. According to bank economist Alan Barkema, the growing exodus of family farmers could overwhelm counties and states with demands for welfare, job training, and other social services.

Many small towns are already finding their economies eroded, as hog production concentrates near a few larger towns that have giant slaughterhouses with networks of contract and corporate-owned farms radiating out into their hinterlands. "Small towns have been hurt *both* in regions that have gained production and those that lost it," concludes a recent study conducted by one bank.

The outlook in larger rural towns "may also be less than expected," cautions Barkema. The companies fighting to control the hog industry plan to obtain their credit and agricultural supplies from other multinational corporations, or from their own agricultural subdivisions based in Dallas, Omaha, or Chicago. According to Barkema, Southern communities will increasingly resemble "branch plant" towns, which have little control over their own economic destiny.

Reducing rural towns to profitable corporate outposts is precisely what the hog industry has in mind. Business leaders and trade publications make clear that the push to take over hog farming is part of a broader plan to extend corporate control of the industry to every stage of the production process. That means pursuing the model of "vertical integration" imposed on the poultry industry — enabling a single company to produce hog feed, raise pigs, slaughter and package the animals, and ship them to market.

Many corporate hog firms have already developed direct ties to slaughterhouses. Smithfield Foods, the Virginia packing firm, merged three years ago with Carroll's Foods, a large hog farming operation. Smithfield obtains half of its hogs through contracts via Murphy Farms and Carroll's Foods, and the company is building a large processing plant in North Carolina and contracting with more farmers to supply the new facility.

As the competition to control the hog

Photo by Rob Amberg



**LONG A WAY OF LIFE AS WELL AS A MEANS OF SUPPORT, RAISING AND SLAUGHTERING HOGS IS BECOMING A BIG BUSINESS. SINCE 1974, MORE THAN 235,000 FARMERS IN THE SOUTH HAVE GIVEN UP RAISING HOGS.**

hogs — and for corporate-owned farms as high as 60,000 hogs.

Few small producers have either the land or money required to operate on that kind of scale. Nor do companies like Murphy Farms have any incentive to provide management, transportation, or technological support to small farmers like Mathew Grant. The corporate farming operations want a uniform, economical product — and that means contracting with fewer farmers who raise more hogs.

Alan Barkema, an agribusiness economist at the First Federal Reserve

farms are "going to get a premium for their hogs because they can guarantee a constant supply."

Even the status of farmers like Draughon who contract with corporate firms is uncertain. William Heffernan, chair of rural sociology at the University of Missouri, cautions that producers may enjoy high prices and long-term contracts only during the current period of fast expansion. Once the competition narrows and a handful of firms dominates the industry, says Heffernan, farmers will find themselves forced to accept lower prices and less freedom.

industry heats up, slaughtering companies are undergoing a dizzying round of mergers, acquisitions, and bankruptcies. Only a few years ago, thousands of small, local outfits slaughtered and processed hogs. Since 1980, however, almost 200 major packing houses have closed down. Ten firms now slaughter nearly 75 percent of all hogs sold nationwide, and most industry insiders expect the field to narrow to three or four companies by the year 2000.

"The hog packing industry is going through more than just a shakeout," reports the agribusiness weekly *Feed-stuffs*. "It's closer to an earthquake."

The biggest tremors are shaking communities in the rural South. Although Iowa still produces 25 percent of all hogs nationwide, the industry is steadily marching below the Mason-Dixon line to escape tough, anti-corporate farming laws in the Midwest. IBP, an agribusiness conglomerate owned by Occidental Petroleum, recently expressed interest in moving its pork business to North Carolina. Such corporate "runaways" want to replace their unionized pork processing plants in the Midwest with larger, more automated, non-union factories in the South.

## BROWN LAGOONS

Rural communities face more than an economic threat from corporate hog farming. As many towns across the region are learning, big farms pose a lethal threat to the environment — fouling the air, polluting the land and water, and creating a waste nightmare for the rural South.

Small farmers have long used hog manure to fertilize their row crops, a system of recycling that was safe and economical. But corporate farms crowd thousands of hogs into confinement sheds on a single site, often generating more manure than they are able to absorb.

More hogs mean more environmental hazards. "The potential for catastrophic problems is greater for 1,000 sows than for 100 sows," notes Jim Barker, a swine specialist at North Carolina State.

Hog waste contains more concentrated organic matter than human waste, including nitrates, copper, antibiotics, and other nutrients and chemicals harmful to humans in large doses. To treat and dispose of the waste properly, however, is beyond the capacity of most small

communities. According to Dr. Leon Chesnin, professor emeritus of waste management at the University of Nebraska, a single operation with 10,000 hogs requires the same amount of waste treatment as a city of 17,000 people.

All told, the waste produced by the eight million hogs raised in the South each year requires as much treatment as the waste of 15 million people — more than the populations of Virginia, North Carolina, and Arkansas combined.

But instead of treating the hog waste, most large companies simply flush the manure into holding tanks, dump it into open lagoons, and spray it on the fields as fertilizer. Many waste lagoons are 30 feet deep — the same depth as neighboring wells.

"Huge corporate hog farms have allowed waste to overflow into nearby water supplies, allowed waste to pollute nearby wells," says Gary Grant, the son of hog farmer Mathew Grant in Halifax County.

At one operation contracted to Murphy Farms, pipes funnel hundreds of gallons of brown waste brimming with hog feces and urine into stagnant lagoons the size of small lakes. Sprayers that resemble tall lawn sprinklers spew the waste over nearby fields. The odors emanating from such massive quantities of hog manure can be overpowering, and studies indicate that the smell may be making residents and workers seriously ill (see sidebar, page 15).

Such dumping can also pollute drinking water. A year-long study of drinking water near swine operations in 18 states, for example, revealed that more than 13 percent had nitrate levels exceeding federal standards. Nitrates can leach into well water and cause infant deaths from a disorder known as "blue-baby syndrome."

Becky Bass lives a few hundred feet from a large hog farm near Wilson, North Carolina. A mother of two, Bass had to install a new water system be-

cause her five-year-old son vomited from drinking well water after Cargill built its hog operation behind their home.

"This water has been good for ages," says Bass, a young woman who is active in a local citizens group fighting to clean up corporate farms. "Now we're very concerned about our water."

Some of the problems stem from dumping too much waste on too little land. "What you're going to do is overload the soil and it's going to go down to the groundwater," warns Dr. Chesnin. "If you have sandy soils or if you have the groundwater close to the surface like southeastern Virginia, or south central Georgia, or places in North Carolina, it's a hazard."

Yet even when corporate farms have plenty of land, they still pollute the land and water. In May 1989, Virginia inspectors found hog waste piled so high at one swine shed owned by Smithfield-Carroll's that fans designed to ventilate the shed were spraying manure outdoors up to three inches deep. That same month, inspectors also discovered that 1,200 gallons of hog waste had shattered a lagoon wall at another hog operation and flowed into nearby woods.

Such pollution is commonplace. Virginia inspectors have cited Smithfield-Carroll's for

hundreds of violations since the late 1970s. In 1989, the company was fined \$15,000 for spraying waste on fields before a rain storm and for allowing a broken pipe to spill an unknown quantity of hog manure.

Other companies have similarly dismal records. In 1986, Virginia inspectors fined Gwaltney of Smithfield \$1.2 million for violating its anti-pollution permit at least 237 times. The fine was later reduced, and the company is appealing the citation.

Murphy Farms has also been cited for numerous violations. Last year North Carolina inspectors cited three

**Pipes funnel hundreds of gallons of brown waste brimming with hog feces and urine into stagnant lagoons the size of small lakes.**

company operations for lagoon overflows, plugged waste pipes, and a broken flushing system. The firm's McLaurin operation has been fined more than \$2,000 for 25 assessments in the last year.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CARPETBAGGERS

Among the remote pine barrens and Carolina bays of Bladen County, Evelyn Willis started a citizens revolt to counter the health risks posed by huge hog operations. Two years ago, the 62-year-old, retired insurance clerk learned that Smithfield Foods was planning to build a tremendous hog slaughterhouse near

and the environmental group sent her some information about water-quality regulations.

"The rest, as they say, is history," recalls Neil Armingeon, a scientist who worked with Willis at the Coastal Federation. "Overnight, she changed from a retiree to an activist. Evelyn, who had never questioned authority in her life, began to understand the dynamics of power and pollution."

Willis and her neighbors organized, petitioned elected officials, spoke out at public hearings, recruited supporters throughout the state, and filed a lawsuit against the company. It was slow, hard work, and Willis paid a high price for her commitment. "Lifelong friends and

aged to spark concern across the state. Four citizens groups and thousands of rural residents in at least 14 counties are meeting regularly, sharing information about corporate hog farms and how to challenge them.

One of the central groups leading the coalition is Halifax Environmental Loss Prevention (HELP), an organization of mostly black residents in Tillery, North Carolina. Members of the group see the surge in corporate hog farming as part of a larger trend in which business singles out poor, rural communities — often black or Native American — for industries that pose dangers to public health. In majority-black Northampton County, for example, local citizens have been fighting a pro-

posed toxic waste incinerator as well as several 10,000-hog farms belonging to Smithfield Foods.

"When these corporations want to do something that will cause a stink, they come to our communities," says Gary Grant, the co-chair of HELP. "We do not have the vocal power or, often times, the voting power."

To counter the divide-and-conquer strategy of corporate farms, HELP is crossing racial lines to unite black and white residents. Grant, the son of the last black hog farmer in Tillery, frequently meets with Charles Tillery, a white salesman and the great-great-grandson of the town founder, to discuss the dangers posed by hog pollution.

White residents like Tillery are alarmed by the threat to their land. "This is the biggest invasion since the Civil War," says Tillery. "What we have coming in here are carpetbaggers — environmental carpet-

baggars — bringing their operations here because other states have regulations to protect their citizens."

On May 23, Tillery and Grant joined dozens of other black and white residents in a protest rally at the First Baptist Church in Halifax County. "Trust Me — Hogs Stink," read one sign. "Ban Factory Farms," demanded another.

Residents were just as outspoken in voicing their demands. "Whether it's workers in a factory being exposed to

*Photo by Todd Sumlin*



**LOCAL CITIZENS ARE FIGHTING A TREMENDOUS SLAUGHTERHOUSE BEING BUILT BY SMITHFIELD FOODS ON THE BANKS OF THE CAPE FEAR RIVER.**

her Elizabethtown community on the banks of the Cape Fear River. She also learned that the plant would attract corporate hog farms that posed a serious threat to community health.

At first Willis underestimated the power of the corporate hog firms. "I used to believe that the state would never allow anything to endanger our environment," she told a friend. "Boy, was I wrong!" Then Willis contacted the North Carolina Coastal Federation,

neighbors shunned her," says Armingeon. "She was ridiculed and threatened in her own community."

Smithfield Foods intends to open its new plant this fall. But before Willis died of a heart attack last May, she and other Bladen County residents managed to pressure the state to develop new regulations designed to protect water supplies from hog farms and other livestock operations.

Willis and her neighbors also man-



hazardous chemicals or residents in a community being exposed to animal waste, it's all the same thing," said Joan Sharp, a member of Black Workers for Justice. "It creates health problems for the individual — and it creates health problems for us all."

## GRASSROOTS ALTERNATIVES

Citizens and farmers in North Carolina are also beginning to join forces with family farmers from the Midwest who are alarmed by the Southern migration of hog farming. Prairie Fire, a group based in Iowa, is organizing a conference of groups from 13 states this fall to discuss how to hold corporate hog farming accountable to community needs.

Although the movement has yet to develop a clear agenda, family farmers and residents in many states have pursued a variety of goals:

### ▼ Enforce existing anti-trust laws.

Several federal acts empower officials to prevent large corporations from dominating the hog industry. So far, though, the government has done little to make big companies obey the law.

▼ **Extend restrictions on corporate farming to Southern states.** Laws in the Midwest and High Plains limit corporate ownership of farm land and forbid pork processors from running their own hog farms or contracting with hog farmers.

▼ **Give counties the power to regulate big hog operations.** Many local officials would like to treat corporate hog farms like any other big business, but most states currently classify such livestock operations as family farms, exempting them from local zoning. Local residents thus have no power to limit the size of hog farms or keep them away from homes, schools, and churches.

▼ **Monitor water and soil pollution.** In southside Virginia, a grassroots coalition called PRIIDE has pushed the state to pass rules requiring permits for operations with more than 2,500 hogs. Such operations must now have enough capacity to safely store waste for two months and must carefully track how the waste contaminates nearby land and water.

The hog industry dismisses such proposals as the dying gasps of a vanishing generation of backward farmers. The

family farmer should simply "end his resistance to corporate farming," insists Bill Helming, an agricultural economist. "Opposition to corporate agriculture is short-sighted and unrealistic. Resisting — via legislation or other ways — would be foolish and self-defeating."

If farmers and citizens resist corporate farming, Helming and agribusiness leaders say, hog companies will simply move their operations to more cooperative communities — leaving local hog farmers without grain mills, slaughter houses, or access to credit.

Small farmers know the threat is not an idle one, yet many continue to work with citizens groups to develop an alternative vision of agriculture that includes them and their communities. They envision a system of agriculture that places community need over corporate greed, a system that cares for the land instead of exploiting it.

Gary Grant watched his father raise hogs for more than half a century before corporate farms drove the family out of the pig business last year. He knows that the economic and environmental health of rural Southern communities will be shaped in large part by the growing struggle in the hog industry between large corporations and independent, family farmers.

"I grew up in a community where every family had hogs," he says. "The family farm is a way of life as well as a means of making a living. I don't believe the wealth of this country should be concentrated in the hands of a few. I believe in a fair distribution of wealth, and I believe in family farms." □

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## CORPORATE FARMS STINK

Barnyards and hog pens have long been a fixture of the rural South, and country folk are accustomed to living with unpleasant odors. But the corporate hog farms spreading across the region are different.

"Every family had hogs when I was growing up," recalls Gary Grant, the son of a pig farmer in rural Halifax County, North Carolina. "But we weren't talking about 40,000 hogs on one site."

The stench from modern hog confinement sheds and waste ponds can often be smelled up to a mile away. Local citizens frequently complain of breathing difficulties, burning sensations in their noses and throats, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and sleeping problems.

"It makes you ill," says Becky Bass, who lives a few hundred feet from a large hog farm near Wilson, North Carolina. Bass says she notices the smell "about 90 percent of the time." Her husband, who works with hogs, "smells it and tastes it even hours after he's been in the house." Overpowered by the odor, her children are reluctant to play outside, and visitors sometimes hold their noses as they dash from their cars to the house.

A recent study at the Duke University School of Medicine confirmed the experiences of residents like Bass. Swine odors can have a serious psychological impact on surrounding residents, the study concluded, causing

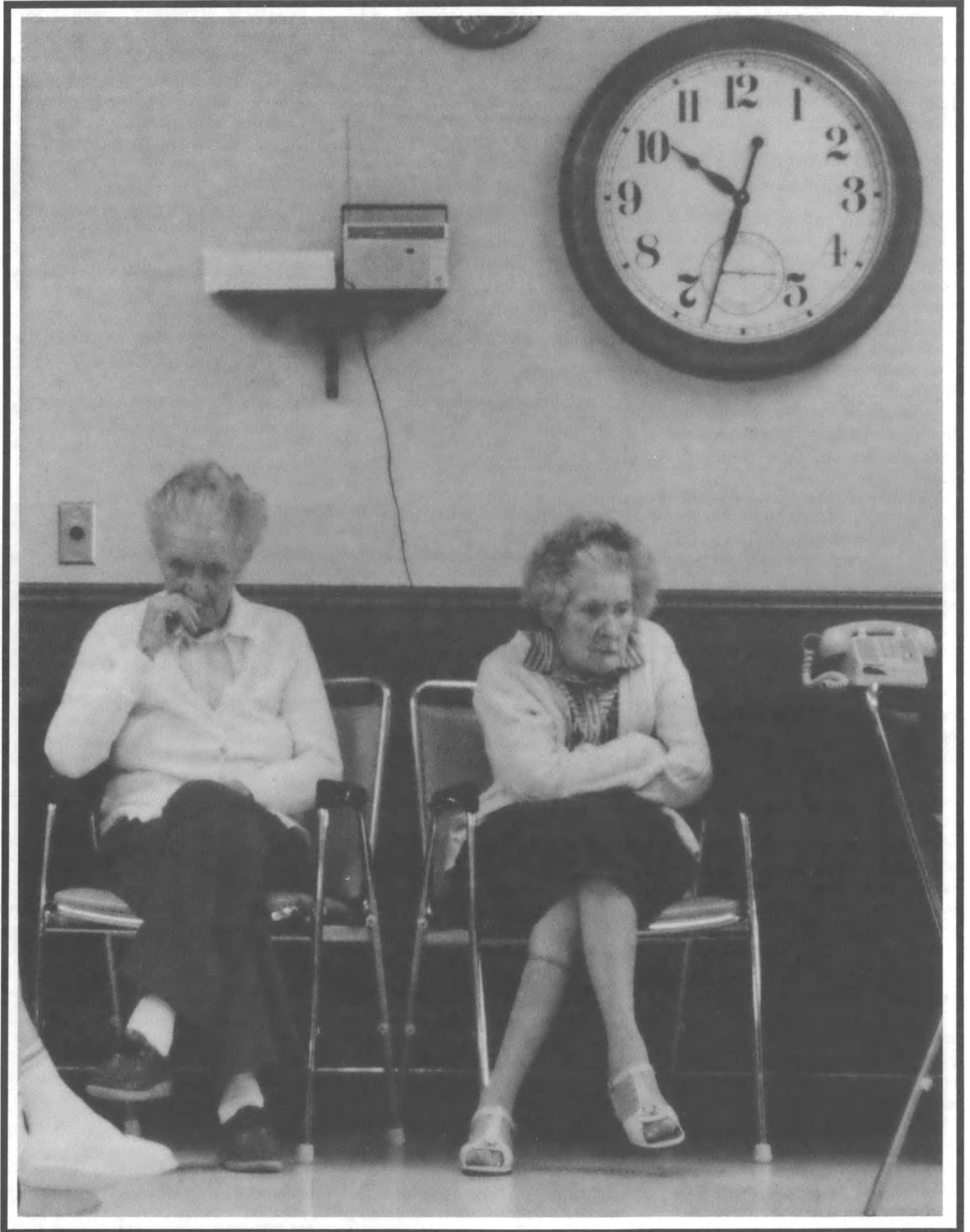
anger, irritability, loss of appetite — even breaking up friendships and marriages.

The same conditions that jeopardize community health also imperil hog workers. Hog farming has always been a dirty and dangerous occupation, but the move indoors to large confinement operations has increased the risks. Hydrogen sulfide released from decomposing waste has killed hog workers, and accumulated methane has caused explosions.

"Fifty percent of all people working with hogs have one or more respiratory problems," says Dr. Kelley Donham, a professor of agricultural medicine at the University of Iowa. Donham reviewed studies involving more than 2,700 hog workers, and discovered that they commonly experience acute and chronic respiratory ailments, including bronchitis and asthma-like debilitations. Although the long-term effects are still unknown, tests on stockmen show that permanent lung deterioration can occur within seven years.

The threat to community and worker health has angered many residents enough to band together to fight corporate hog farms. "It's not fair to make another human smell feces and urine," says Don Webb, a former hog farmer who has organized hundreds of his neighbors near Stantonsburg, North Carolina. "To continue to put large conglomerate hog operations under people's noses before the solution is found to the odor and water problem is wrong."

—M.L.K.



**EVEN NURSING HOMES THAT PROVIDE GOOD MEDICAL CARE TEND TO BE LONELY AND DEPRESSING PLACES THAT ISOLATE THE ELDERLY FROM THEIR HOMES AND COMMUNITIES.**

# No Place Like Home

BY ERIC BATES

We've all heard the horror stories about nursing homes. So why do so many still provide so little care?

Two years ago, Jim Lambert checked his father into a nursing home in Mobile, Alabama. It was Valentine's Day. His father, Prentiss, was 81 years old, and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. "He was confused and hard to understand," Lambert says. "My mother kept him at home as long as she could, but she was a little bitty lady, and she couldn't handle him anymore."

Prentiss weighed 182 pounds when he checked into Hillhaven Nursing and Convalescent Home. Within three months, he had lost 28 pounds. He slipped in his own urine several times, and aides began keeping him tied up and heavily medicated. He developed bedsores, bruises, a black eye, a urinary tract infection. He fell again and broke his hip, leaving him permanently bedridden.

Lambert, a successful building contractor, complained to the state repeatedly, but Hillhaven was never fined. He tried writing U.S. Senator Richard Shelby. "My father has been grossly abused," he told the senator. "Hillhaven has violated every statute in both the Federal Register as well as the State Guidelines. Yet, the abuse continues and the state appears to look the other way."

In May, Prentiss Lambert died. He weighed 94 pounds, his body contracted into a painful fetal position. His son is suing the nursing home for neglect and abuse.

"I don't need the money," says Lambert. "I just want to expose this nursing home company and make them clean up their act. My father had nothing to look forward to in that place but death. It was like being in a prisoner-of-war camp."

Two years before Lambert put his father in Hillhaven, Mary Ropp checked her sister Linda Stewart into a nursing home in Charleston, West Virginia. Linda was 32 years old, and disabled by multiple sclerosis. "She was living with me, but I was having a difficult pregnancy," Ropp says. "She decided to go into a nursing home."

Stewart weighed 120 pounds when she checked into Capital City Nursing Home. Within three months she had lost nine pounds. She became dehydrated, her lips cracked and peeling. She developed bedsores, and was hospitalized several times for infections and internal bleeding. Her body contracted painfully.

Ropp, a janitor, complained repeatedly to the state, but Capital City was never fined. She tried writing U.S. Senator Robert Byrd. "We have reason to believe Linda isn't being fed," she told him. "Due to recent weight loss. One former employee was eating Linda's food instead of feeding her."

In April 1991, Stewart died of an infection. She weighed 90 pounds.

"It kinda makes my blood boil," says Ropp. "I know that what happened to

my sister is happening to hundreds, maybe thousands of other people. These nursing homes are not doing their jobs. Everybody that's a breathin' deserves to have dignity wherever they are and be taken care of."

## ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Mary Ropp and Jim Lambert come from very different places. She grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia; he lives on the Gulf Coast of Alabama. She worked as a custodian before receiving her certificate as a nurse's assistant; he runs a large contracting firm that specializes in disaster repair. She sent her senator a simple handwritten note; he mailed his a two-page typed letter and met with him personally.

Yet the two shared a common experience: They both watched a family member die, slowly and painfully, in a place that was supposed to provide comfort and care. And they both ran into a dead end when they asked state and federal officials to help.

The substandard conditions in many Southern nursing homes have been extensively documented in recent years. Across the region, investigations have revealed widespread understaffing, poorly trained staffs, and even physical abuse and rape of nursing home residents:

▼ In Georgia, an investigation by the *Atlanta Constitution* found residents living

in degrading conditions. "Residents were picking cigarette butts off the floor and out of ashtrays and eating them," the paper reported. "Some residents had experienced weight losses of up to 40 pounds in recent months; some were found tied to beds or to chairs. In bathrooms, inspectors found dried feces smeared over the commodes, floors, and walls."

▼ In Texas, a four-month investigation by Nancy Stancill of the *Houston Chronicle* found widespread abuse and neglect. Eligia Aebersold, who is pictured on the cover of this issue, died eight days after doctors removed his right hip socket to halt a raging infection. His wife Thelma had found him lying in his nursing home bed, green flies buzzing around a urine-soaked bandage that covered a huge, bloody wound.

▼ In Arkansas, an undercover investigation of nursing homes by the state attorney general found "a host of problems including understaffing, improperly trained staff, infestations of mice and roaches, residents left unattended and covered in urine and feces, linen shortages, falsified charts, infectious bedsores, physical abuse and rape."

▼ In North Carolina, a legislative study committee documented similar conditions. In a single year, more than 1,000 complaints were filed against nursing home operators.

▼ A federal survey of 15,600 nursing homes found 25 percent failed to properly administer drugs and prevent the spread of infection, and 33 percent stored or served food improperly.

Yet despite the long list of such revelations, conditions in nursing homes and other institutions that provide long-term care for the elderly and disabled remain largely unchanged. In every Southern state, grassroots and legislative efforts to reform the industry and provide alternatives have encountered enormous obstacles.

Why? How can abusive and neglectful conditions be documented year after year, and yet be allowed to continue?

To answer that question, *Southern Exposure* conducted an investigation of the political and economic obstacles to reform. We examined scores of state and federal documents, including administra-



**PRENTISS LAMBERT DEVELOPED PAINFUL BEDSORES AND LOST 88 POUNDS BEFORE HE DIED.**

tive complaint reports, penalty review hearings, and state licensing records. We spoke with nursing home operators, employees, and residents, as well as family members, patient advocates, union leaders, and local and state officials.

We discovered that while officials and reporters have done much to document conditions in nursing homes, they have done little to expose the extraordinary power and influence of the industry. Nursing homes make their living from public funds — tax dollars contribute roughly half of all industry revenues. Yet nursing home owners and their paid representatives battle to weaken health and safety standards, evade inspections, and divert money from residents and staff into real estate and investments.

"These nursing home corporations are huge, and they are powerful," says Suzanne Harang, a registered nurse in Covington, Louisiana who now serves as a national advocate for patients. "The nursing homes say, 'We do a good job.' But my feeling is, 'How do you get such a bad rap if you do such a good job?' They keep the quality of care down so they can keep their profits up."

## CORPORATE EMPIRES

With people living longer and families living farther apart, more and more Americans find themselves forced to rely on nursing homes and other institutions for long-term care. This year, the nation will spend a projected \$66 billion on nursing homes — up from \$43 billion in 1988. Nursing homes now consume eight cents of every dollar spent on health care, making them the third largest segment of the health care industry.

Today nearly 1.7 million people live in over 19,000 nursing homes. Some medical experts project that by the year 2030, the number of nursing home residents will reach 5.3 million.

And those figures don't account for the one million elderly citizens currently living in 41,000 rest homes (also known as board and care homes, group homes, and personal care homes). Such facilities provide less medical care — and are subject to even

less government supervision — than nursing homes.

The modern nursing home industry owes its existence to the federal government, which began providing homes with millions of Medicaid and Medicare dollars during the mid-1960s to care for the elderly poor. To convince more homes to accept poor patients, the government placed no ceiling on costs and agreed to reimburse owners for their mortgage interest and property depreciation — a blank check that virtually guaranteed nursing home owners a healthy profit on their investment.

"Our current long-term care system is fundamentally a creature of government policy," says a report by Catherine Hawes and Charles Phillips of the Research Triangle Institute, a non-profit think tank in Durham, North Carolina. "Nursing home policy [is] a schizophrenic and nearly uncontrollable amalgam of increasing cost, substandard care, and discrimination against both those most in need of care and those least able to pay for such care."

As the industry boomed and spending on nursing homes soared, large firms

began to move in on what had long been a family-run business. For-profit corporations quickly took over 75 percent of the industry and developed subsidiaries to sell their own nursing homes essential and lucrative services such as food, laundry, drugs, management, construction, and real estate investment.

"The dominant trend in the nursing home industry during the 1970s and 1980s," report Hawes and Phillips, "has been increasing concentration and corporatization of ownership." Big nursing home chains dramatically expanded their control of the industry — and much of the growth was centered in the South. The Arkansas-based chain of Beverly Enterprises, for example, went from 47 homes in 1971 to 1,136 homes in 1985. The company is now the largest owner of nursing homes in the nation, with 91,000 beds in 34 states.

Beverly and the nine largest nursing chains own 15 percent of all beds nationwide. In Texas, Beverly and ARA Living Centers of Houston control 25 percent of all beds, dominating many rural areas of the state.

The result of such concentrated corporate control has been fewer options for consumers, less autonomy for local nursing home operators, and more economic and political clout for the chains. "Nursing homes used to be mom-and-pop operations," says Charles Phillips. "Now they're major real estate ventures and the source of corporate empires."

## OUR MONEY, THEIR PROFITS

For their part, nursing home chains and other owners often complain that they cannot afford to improve conditions, saying the government does not give them enough money to care for poor patients who cannot pay the bills. Indeed, care for the elderly — like other human services — has traditionally been a low priority in most Southern states.

The South is home to a disproportionate number of elderly citizens who are poor. According to federal data compiled by Health Care Investment Analysts (HCIA) of Baltimore, the percentage of nursing home residents who receive assistance from Medicaid is higher than the national average in all but two Southern states. Last year federal and state funds from Medicaid helped cover the cost of care for more than 75 percent of nursing home residents in Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and Kentucky.

Under the Medicaid program, each state decides how much it wants to reimburse nursing homes to care for the elderly poor, and the federal government then matches that commitment. But despite the enormous need in the region, Southern states rank among the stingiest when it comes to contributing their share to nursing home care. According to 1989 data from the federal Health Care Finance Administration, every state in the region provided Medicaid payments below the national median of \$70.06 a day. Arkansas ranked last in the nation with a daily reimbursement rate of only \$34.89 per patient, followed by Louisiana at \$42.62.

"The differences from region to region are incredible," says David George, who has operated nursing homes in Georgia, North Carolina, and Colorado. "You're dealing with the same elderly people who have the same needs — but in some states you get twice as much money and twice as much care."

The low reimbursement rates make it tough to provide decent care. "When I got down to Georgia, it was just a completely bare bones budget," says George. "It's pretty incredible that anybody can do anything with the amount of money they get here. You barely have enough to get a person up and cleaned and fed in the morning before the family comes in, so they don't find the patient lying in a puddle of urine."

The nursing home industry has sued several states to raise Medicaid rates. In Texas, rates have climbed 17 percent since 1990. But analysts predict most financially strapped states in the region will continue to shortchange the poor when it comes to nursing home care. "If the money is not there in state budgets, it's not there," says George Pillari, president of HCIA.

But while rates remain low, rules governing how public Medicaid funds are spent generally favor nursing home owners at the expense of patients and workers. "Owners go to legislative committee meetings and testify up and down about how regulations will adversely affect patients," says David George. "But what they're really talking about is how their profit margin will be eroded away."

Profit margins for the industry remain high, even with low reimbursement rates in the South. A review of data supplied by HCIA shows that four Southern states

— Texas, Arkansas, Virginia, and Louisiana — enjoyed the highest profit margin in the nation in 1990. Last year, Beverly Enterprises of Arkansas reported pretax profits of \$42.6 million, more than double the previous year.

"Rising stock prices and improving financial performance suggest the nursing home industry will flourish over the next few years," reports the industry journal *Modern Healthcare*.

One reason: Reimbursement rules allow nursing homes to skimp on patient care and staff wages while they funnel public money into subsidiary companies that deal in equipment, management, pharmaceuticals, building expenses, and real estate investments. In essence, nursing homes function as a sort of front operation — enabling private owners to take billions of dollars from taxpayers and invest them in their own businesses.

"Here states are absolutely scraped to the bone on public funds, and yet you have nursing home owners who are raking in hundreds of thousands of dollars playing real estate games with Medicaid dollars," says Barbara Frank, associate director of the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform. "A nursing home corporation pays a subsidiary corporation to manage a home, and then shows a loss. In reality, they just paid themselves a huge chunk of money to run their own home."

## WORKERS AND PATIENTS

Nursing home workers pay the price for high profits — especially in the South. The region is home to seven of the 10 states that offer the lowest salaries and benefits per patient. Homes in Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas spent less than \$15,000 on staff costs per patient in 1990.

"Nursing home aides work long, hard hours for low pay," says Barbara Frank. "The aides are the ones who have to deal with the unmanageable situations — and that makes it harder on patients" (see "Back-Breaking Care," page 26).

States also make it harder on patients by limiting the number of beds in nursing homes certified to receive Medicaid funds. The policy creates long waiting lists for beds — guaranteeing homes a steady supply of customers and allowing them to discriminate against those most in need of care.

Many homes refuse to accept elderly citizens who require extensive and expensive care, preferring to fill their beds with more profitable patients. They also dis-

criminate against black patients. According to a nationwide survey conducted by patient advocates in Tennessee, blacks comprise 29 percent of those eligible for Medicaid, yet they receive only nine percent of the Medicaid dollars spent for skilled nursing home care.

Elderly patients who need medical care have few other places to go. The nursing home industry lobbies states to devote public funds exclusively to nursing homes, undercutting competition from home health care and other alternatives. Fewer than 20 cents of every dollar spent on long-term care currently goes to care for the elderly in their own homes. Eight states, including six in the South, provide no funding for residents of rest homes (see "Where the Heart Is," page 36).

The lack of alternatives condemns many older citizens to spending their final years in an institution. Even nursing homes that provide good medical care tend to be sterile and depressing places that isolate residents from their homes and communities. Doctors in some of the cleanest and most comfortable homes in the region report that the loneliness and impersonal environment of institutional care have driven some patients to kill themselves, and have prompted many more to look forward to death.

"State reimbursement policies create powerful incentives that are almost entirely perverse," says Gordon Bonnyman, an attorney who has fought to reform nursing homes in Tennessee. "Development of long-term care has been shaped tremendously by Medicaid policy, which pays for institutional care but not for home care or other alternatives."

### BLOCKING REFORMS

Outraged by the increasing power of the industry and the decreasing standard of care, advocates for patients and their families have pushed for tougher federal regulation of nursing homes. In 1987 they won an important victory when Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. Known as OBRA, the new law requires nursing homes to draft a plan of care for each resident, provide 24-hour



THE LACK OF ALTERNATIVES CONDEMNS MANY ELDERLY TO INSTITUTIONS.

nursing services, employ trained nurse's aides, and pay stiffer fines for violations of health and safety standards.

"I'm just holding my breath and waiting to see how much of an effect OBRA has," says Becky Kurtz, coordinator of the Senior Citizens Advocacy Program in Atlanta. "I'm optimistic that it will — if our states take it seriously and enforce it."

So far, though, states have had no opportunity to test the reforms. After OBRA was passed, the nursing home industry lobbied hard to weaken and delay the federal regulations needed to carry out the law. The industry trade association hired Deborah Steelman, a former Bush administration advisor, to lobby the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). As a result, the administration did not announce the new rules until last August — five years after the reforms became law.

"They are an extremely strong lobby with a lot of money behind them," says Jody Hoffman, a health policy specialist with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). "These people have the money to purchase a former administration official with ties to OMB, which is where they needed to go to stop the regulations. For groups who don't have that kind of access — consumers, workers — it's a very frustrating process. Their side is not heard."

Indeed, the nursing home industry remains plagued by high costs, poor care, and lax regulatory enforcement. To understand the full extent of the trouble, it is essential to look beyond the cases of

abuse and neglect that have captured headlines and examine how the industry has used its political and economic position to systematically block reforms.

Southern states have traditionally taken a "hands off" approach to regulating business. Across the region, political leaders of both parties are accustomed to defending low wages, dangerous working conditions, and generous subsidies and tax breaks for business. As a result, they often construe nursing home

regulation, in the words of one Georgia state legislator, as "an infringement of private enterprise."

The nursing home industry does its part to make sure it stays that way, pressuring state lawmakers to increase public spending for nursing homes and to block regulatory reforms. Across the South, patient advocates and state inspectors struggling to improve nursing home care have met with strong opposition from the industry, its lobbyists, and elected officials who own nursing homes or accept campaign contributions from the industry (see "Resting Uneasy," page 22).

"It's like every other business," says David George, who quit his job as a nursing home administrator after uncovering Medicaid fraud in North Carolina. "Nursing home owners are in there lobbying and pitching to make sure their interests are taken care of."

The lobbying and campaign contributions pay off. Consider the case of Georgia, where patient advocates and fire officials teamed up last year to support a bill mandating sprinkler systems in all nursing homes. The year before, a fire in a Virginia nursing home without sprinklers had killed nine patients and hospitalized 100. Nevertheless, nursing home owners in Georgia fought the measure, saying they could not afford added fire protection.

"We have hit a brick wall of opposition from the lobbyists for nursing homes," said Lieutenant Governor Pierre Howard, who fought for the sprinkler bill. "I can imagine no greater horror than sitting in a wheelchair or lying in bed while smoke fills the room."

Nursing home owners had tried to get rid of Howard, contributing more than \$30,000 to his opponent in the 1990 Democratic runoff. The political action committee of the Georgia Health Care Association also reported \$29,425 in contributions to political candidates that year — making the industry the 15th biggest contributor among 300 lobbying groups in the state.

What's more, several state lawmakers had personal ties to the nursing home industry. Senate Majority Leader Thomas Allgood and his family owned an interest in four nursing homes. State Representative Troy Athon was a former lobbyist for the Georgia Health Care Association, and his wife served as president.

In addition, Representative Peg Blich owned a 95-bed nursing home, and Representative George Green practiced as a physician in several homes. Both served on the House Human Relations and Aging Committee — which stalled the sprinkler bill, and then amended it to force taxpayers to foot the bill for installation up front. Even with full public funding, the measure was eventually killed.

### CLOSER INSPECTION

Just as the industry uses its economic clout and political influence to block reforms at the legislative level, owners and operators also work to stall or weaken enforcement efforts by state regulatory agencies.

"The industry also has a great deal of influence at the administrative level where the laws are enforced," says Becky Kurtz of the Senior Center Advocacy Program in Atlanta. "They have the resources to keep up with everything that's going on. When the budget is being considered, for example, they get in there early with department staff, saying, 'Here's what we need and here's why.' They keep up constant communication."

The communication helps convince regulators to follow the "hands off" approach adopted by legislators. State officials in the South have been reluctant to penalize nursing homes, even in cases of widespread, repeated abuse. In 1982, Georgia empowered officials to assess daily fines on nursing homes for repeated violations — but regulators did not use the law for seven years, even though there were hundreds of repeat offenders.

"The regulatory agencies are hamstringed," explains Charles Phillips of the Research Triangle Institute. "Nursing

home beds are in short supply, so what do you do when there's a violation? Historically the only option has been to decertify the facility and cut off their Medicaid funds. But then what do you do with the residents? They've got to go somewhere."

As a result, even reforms that make it past legislators seldom get enforced. "I think the process we have in place now for inspections is good," says former nursing home administrator David George. "But there's always a lot of behind-the-scenes political things that go on to try to curtail the number of inspectors. It's a question of having the resources to do the job."

### OTHER VOICES

While the industry has the resources and connections to make its opinions known, the elderly and their advocates must struggle to be heard. Independent ombudsmen and patient advocates remain understaffed and underfunded, limiting their ability to press for reforms.

Each state is required to maintain an independent ombudsman who can educate nursing home patients and their families about their rights and help them resolve problems. Many ombudsman offices, however, receive little money to do their job.

Renee Johnston serves as ombudsman in Nashville, Tennessee. She is responsible for serving 9,259 elderly patients in 167 facilities. Her budget for the coming fiscal year is \$49,000 — barely enough to cover her salary and travel expenses.

"What we try to do to offset the large volume of residents who need help is recruit community volunteers," says Johnston. "We're trying to place one volunteer in every facility. Right now I have 15 volunteers — so you can see I need a lot more."

With little money spent on public education, many nursing home residents remain unaware of their rights. "I'm constantly amazed by how few people know about the ombudsmen and advocates that are there for patients and their families," says Atlanta advocate Becky Kurtz. "People live in fear in nursing homes. They're afraid if they speak up about problems, there will be repercussions — and they're often right. They need to know they can call us for help."

Kurtz and other advocates agree that meaningful reform will take a concerted

effort on the part of patients, families, workers, and state and federal officials. They cite a variety of measures needed to improve nursing home care:

- ▼ reform Medicaid reimbursement rules to direct more money to patient care and employee wages.

- ▼ monitor enforcement in each state to ensure that top officials don't lower or delete fines for problem homes.

- ▼ use state and federal provisions to take over homes that repeatedly violate health and safety standards.

- ▼ establish independent committees with wide community representation to watchdog nursing homes at the local level.

- ▼ organize families to visit homes and keep a closer eye on conditions.

- ▼ provide better funding for ombudsman and advocacy programs that protect the elderly, and for community-based alternatives to nursing homes.

In the end, the quality of care in nursing homes hinges on whether the public organizes to counter the influence of the industry. "The community has to get involved for the industry to change," says Renee Johnston, the Nashville ombudsman. "People have to advocate that conditions for staff members and patients be improved. We need more public awareness and public pressure. We need action on the part of family members."

Those who have watched a family member die from poor nursing home care agree. "We have to start raising hell," says Jim Lambert, whose father died two years ago. "If these nursing homes can't treat people right, we need to shut them down."

"I think it's a federal crime when a nursing home can do these things and get away with it," adds Mary Ropp. After she watched her sister mistreated in a West Virginia nursing home, she studied to be a nursing home aide. Now she and her husband dream of starting a non-profit home to care for the elderly.

"Those federal dollars that go into nursing homes are our dollars, our taxpaying dollars," she says. "When nursing homes don't do their job, they shouldn't get any more of our money. Federal laws and state laws should be so strict and so strong that the residents who live in these places get the care they deserve — and they deserve the very best." □

*Eric Bates is editor of Southern Exposure. Support for this investigation came from the Fund for Investigative Journalism and the Dick Goldensohn Fund.*

# Resting Uneasy

BY TINKER READY

Nursing homes and rest homes in North Carolina use their money and connections to block reforms.

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — When Helen Jarrell checked into a rest home two years ago, it seemed like a good place to spend her final years. The facility did not provide around-the-clock medical care like a nursing home, but it had a special unit for patients like Jarrell who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Her guardians thought she would receive extra attention there.

Three weeks later the 81-year-old Jarrell was found hanging from her bed, asphyxiated by a restraining device designed to keep her from getting up.

The state fined the home \$3,000. Over the next 14 months, two more rest home residents suffocated in their restraints. In the second case, the home was fined \$250. In the third, the state decided that the home was not at fault.

Spurred by the deaths, advocates for the elderly pushed hard for stricter regulation of the potentially deadly devices. They researched the issue, worked with rest home operators, and came up with a compromise rule that would require

homes to train staff in the proper use of restraints.

But last spring, when it came down to making the proposal a law, the industry fought it. Home operators and their lobbyists pled poverty, arguing the industry could not afford to pay the estimated \$600,000 it would cost for training. State regulators backed away from the measure, saying it would be too much of a burden on the homes to foot the bill.

State officials proved less thrifty, however, when it came to doling out tax money to rest homes. About a month after state regulators abandoned the training requirement, legislators awarded the industry an extra \$13 million to cover the cost of care for the indigent elderly. Next year, rest homes will collect nearly \$100 million in public funds from the state and its counties.

The double standard is typical of rest homes and nursing homes in North Carolina and other Southern states. Operators of the homes are willing to

accept public money — more than 70 cents of every dollar they spend comes from taxpayers — but they are reluctant to accept public efforts to safeguard the health and welfare of the elderly citizens who live in their homes.

Last year, the fiery deaths of 25 chicken plant workers in Hamlet, North Carolina led the state to toughen worker safety programs. By contrast, a review of state records and interviews with regulators, lawmakers, home operators, and patient advocates reveal that the more than 50,000 residents of nursing homes and rest homes in the state continue to receive scant protection.

For years, advocates for patients and their families have been trying to get the state to keep a closer eye on long-term care facilities. But the industry wields considerable political and financial clout in the state, and it uses its power to block reform efforts. Despite task forces, study commissions, lawsuits, and legislation, older citizens who live in nursing homes and rest homes continue to lose their



dignity, their limbs, and their lives. And all too often, advocates say, the homes go unpunished.

"I think people are dying from neglect and abuse," says Anne Hardaway, who served on a nursing home advisory committee in New Hanover County. "The state is doing little to prevent it — and even less to punish the homes after it happens."

## MONEY AND POLITICS

The long-term care industry has long made its living off of public funds. Last year, total government spending on nursing and rest home care in North Carolina totaled more than \$550 million. Medicaid, the joint state and federal health plan for the poor, covers the cost of care for about 75 percent of the state's nursing home residents. A state and county program called Special Assistance pays for about half of all rest home residents.

Despite their dependence on tax dollars, home operators want taxpayers and their elected representatives to stay out of the business. The industry often complains about what it sees as too much regulation, and it fights most new rules vigorously.

"The whole system is based on negative features," says Craig Souza, president of the North Carolina Health Care Facilities Association, the major nursing home trade group in the state. "The system is there to try to catch you."

Since state government drafts regulations and sets reimbursement rates, the industry has worked hard to line up allies in the political arena. It has a variety of weapons at its disposal:

▼ **Money.** Home owners and operators are regular contributors to elected officials and their political parties. A review of state election records reveals that industry representatives and their relatives have contributed at least \$71,862 to the Republican Party and the GOP campaigns of Governor Jim Martin and Lieutenant Governor Jim Gardner since 1984.

Home owners and operators are equally generous with state lawmakers. In 1990 alone, industry officials and the nursing home trade group handed out \$27,750 to 73 candidates running for the General Assembly. The largest contribution went to state Senator Jim Ezzell, who sponsored a 1989 measure that exempted rest homes and nursing homes

from penalties for some regulatory violations.

▼ **Contact.** Rest homes and nursing homes both have active trade groups with experienced lobbyists who know how to work the halls of the state legislature with the best of them. Since 1989, for example, the rest home industry has contracted with Roger Bone, recently ranked by one public policy group as the fourth most influential lobbyist in North Carolina.

▼ **Connections.** The state Department of Human Resources (DHR), which is responsible for levying fines against errant homes, is studded with political appointees with ties to the industry. "They seem more interested in protecting the rights of the homes than in protecting the lives of the elderly," says one county social worker who asked not to be identified.

The head of the department, David Flaherty, is former chair of the state Republican Party. Bill Franklin, former director of intergovernmental relations, is now chief lobbyist for the rest home industry. The head of the department's Division of Facility Services — the primary watchdog agency for nursing and rest homes — spent much of 1988 as director of the rest home industry trade group. This year, the former Republican mayor of Mars Hill was picked as the division's deputy director, but was quickly transferred to another state job after newspaper reports disclosed that he had pleaded guilty to Medicaid fraud in 1987.

## INSIDE TRACK

Close ties between the industry and public officials who are supposed to monitor it are nothing new. In 1981, State



**REST HOMES OFTEN USE WRIST CUFFS AND OTHER RESTRAINTS TO TIE RESIDENTS TO THEIR BEDS OR WHEELCHAIRS.**

Auditor Ed Renfrow issued a scathing report blasting regulators for being too lenient with homes that repeatedly violated the same rules. The report called for modest reforms in the regulatory process.

Renfrow says he was surprised by how state officials ignored the report — until he came to understand that the industry has what he calls "an inside track" to state policy makers.

"It's a political situation," he says. "The industry plays both sides of the street. They lobby well and do their homework. I don't have a problem with that, but there ought to be a balance. Everybody ought to be able to address their government."

But when it comes to reforming nursing and rest homes, even state lawmakers have a hard time addressing the government. Long after Renfrow's report was forgotten, state Representative Betty Wisner tried to push some nursing home reforms in the legislature, only to find her colleagues were reluctant to support her.



**THE INDUSTRY COMPLAINS OF EXCESSIVE REGULATION, BUT STATE FINES FOR NURSING HOME VIOLATIONS AVERAGED ONLY \$175 LAST YEAR.**

"I was very much aware of a strong interest on the part of the industry," says Wisner, who left public office in 1990 after serving three terms in the state House.

A year before she stepped down, Wisner proposed a bill to widen representation on the state Penalty Review Committee, an independent panel of home operators, state regulators, and consumer advocates that meets monthly to review proposed fines against nursing and rest homes. In 1987, the panel was given the authority to fine homes up to \$5,000 — a big improvement over the previous system, which limited fines to \$10 per violation.

But consumer advocates serving on the panel soon became convinced that the committee needed representation from health professionals who could better interpret shortfalls in care. Wisner proposed adding a geriatric physician, a nurse, a rehabilitation specialist, and a dietician to the panel.

Home operators fought the measure, lobbying aggressively in legislative committees. By the time the House ratified it, the bill added only a nurse and a pharmacist to the panel. What's more, the industry managed to tack on an amendment that allowed homes to escape panel review for relatively minor violations of health and safety standards.

Wisner blames the industry lobby for weakening the bill. She also faults her colleagues for letting it happen. "My impression is that they were just not interested in it," she says.

Marlene Chasson, director of the

statewide advocacy group Friends of Residents in Long-Term Care, puts it more bluntly. "Everything Betty tried to do got cut to ribbons," she says. "In trying to strengthen the legislation, it actually came out weaker."

### CLOSED DOORS

Blocked by industry lobbyists in the legislature, Chasson and other advocates have tried to reform the industry through the state administrative rules process. Their efforts were bolstered in 1990 when the press began to focus on the state's reluctance to take action against errant homes. After changes in personnel and procedures at DHR, homes were fined aggressively for several months.

But it didn't last. According to Chasson, regulatory changes designed to protect residents rapidly evolved to favor home operators.

"I think it has come full circle and now they're leaning toward the providers," she says. "The state is supposed to be looking out for the residents, not looking out for special interests."

One of the changes that backfired was a rule designed to give state inspectors more say in deliberations over fines. The state has teams of inspectors who monitor nursing homes, while county social service agencies monitor rest homes. An inspector who finds a problem makes a recommendation to the Division of Facility Services, which reviews it and sends it to the Penalty Review Committee.

In 1990, county social workers began

complaining that Red Wells, then head of the Division of Facility Services, was rejecting or reducing fines after holding private meetings with nursing and rest home operators.

To prevent the unilateral rejection of fines, the state set up an Internal Review Committee composed of several lower-level state regulators. Instead of meeting behind closed doors with the head of Facility Services, homes charged with violations meet with the committee to argue their case.

State and county inspectors are supposed to be notified of the meetings and invited to attend. But county inspectors say the committee has made little effort to inform them of meeting times or accommodate their schedules.

Jesse Goodman, the new head of Facility Services, says the agency is trying harder to include county inspectors. He adds, however, that the main purpose of the meetings is to give the homes their say.

The committee "is primarily geared toward the aggrieved party," says Goodman. "The facility, being the aggrieved party, should have the opportunity to offer additional information."

### REPEAT OFFENDERS

It's that "give-the-industry-a-break" attitude that patient advocates blame for the state's reluctance to make homes play by the rules. State inspection records are filled with cases where the state has taken little or no action against errant homes:

▼ Earlier this year, social workers in New Hanover County found a bed sore on a Wilmington nursing home resident's foot that was so infected, it had developed gangrene and become infested with maggots. The man's foot had to be amputated — but the state declined to fine the home after concluding that staff could not have prevented the infection.

▼ Last December, a patient with Alzheimer's disease disappeared from a Bynum rest home. The woman was never found — and the home was never fined.

▼ Last year a Hendersonville nursing home resident wandered out of the building, fell into a drainage ditch, and drowned. The state fined the home \$250.

▼ In June, three staff members at a Kernersville rest home punished an unruly resident by slapping her, pinching her breasts, swinging her by her arms

and legs, and forcing a bar of soap into her mouth. The home — owned by A. Steve Pierce, the largest rest home operator in the state — was fined \$500.

All told, the state levied \$67,070 in penalties against nursing homes last year — nearly double the fines assessed in 1988. But according to a review of state records by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, the average amount of each fine dropped from \$327 per violation in 1988 to \$175 last year.

The non-profit center also found that a handful of homes keep breaking the rules. Seven homes accounted for nearly a third of all fines last year — yet the state has revoked the licenses of only two repeat offenders.

The lack of state action puts patients at risk, permitting some homes to repeatedly ignore health and safety standards. Hillhaven-Orange, a Durham nursing home operated by the second-largest chain in the state, was slapped with \$6,250 in fines in 1989 — more than any other home in North Carolina. The following year, the home drew another \$2,150 in penalties.

Then, in December 1990, an aide at Hillhaven-Orange found maggots in a resident's vagina. The state fined the home \$250. Patient advocates were outraged, but home operators still dispute the fine. "It was never proved what, if any, organisms were found in the resident's vagina," says Rita Carter, an administrator with the Hillhaven chain.

### "BUDGETARY RESTRAINTS"

Although patient advocates have long focused on reforming nursing homes like Hillhaven, in recent years they have begun to direct more attention to life-threatening problems at rest homes.

Long-term care for the elderly in North Carolina is split between 300 nursing homes that provide medical services and 450 rest homes that provide baths, grooming, and other personal care. But the line between the two is blurred. The state, with the industry's blessing, has kept strict limits on the number of nursing homes. As a result, beds are in short supply, and elderly patients who need nursing home care are ending up in rest homes, which have fewer aides and no staff nurses.

That policy amounted to a death penalty for Helen Jarrell and the two other residents asphyxiated by restraints in rest homes. While federal law strictly

limits the use of physical restraints in nursing homes, there is no such rule governing rest homes, which receive no federal funding and are free to use vests and wrist cuffs to tie residents to their beds or wheelchairs.

The deaths prompted Marlene Chasson and other advocates to fight for a rule requiring rest homes to train aides in the use of restraints, but the industry stalled the measure in a rulemaking committee. Chasson then wrote to Governor Jim Martin, asking him to intervene.

Martin sided with the industry. In his response to Chasson earlier this year, the governor said the state was opting for a voluntary training program.

"In these times of budgetary restraints, administrative rules proposals which impose additional costs are not likely to receive favorable review by those directly responsible for fiscal oversight," he wrote. "It is to be expected that providers resist requirements that impose costs for which they will not be reimbursed."

But while the state was quietly withdrawing the restraint rule, the rest home industry was busy at the state legislature lobbying for a rate increase. Lawmakers boosted reimbursement to \$900 a month for each rest home resident — yet operators still insist they cannot afford staff training.

All this seemed like *deja vu* to Chasson. Several years ago, she and other advocates went before the state Social Service Commission to argue for a rule requiring rest homes to train their aides.

"We went down there and spent the entire day with them," she recalls. "I thought we had it."

And they did have it. The commission recommended training — but when the proposal came before DHR, regulators overturned it. The reason: Training would be too expensive.

### BUYING ACCESS

What frustrates Chasson most is that the industry and its lobbyists seem to have unlimited access to state lawmakers. "It's hard to say there is no influence when committee chairs refer to them, ask them questions, and vote the way they want them to vote," she says.

Pam Silberman, a lobbyist for state legal services who works on health care issues, says political contributions help

the industry gain access to legislators. "We don't have the money — and I think that really makes a difference," she says. "I don't mean to imply that all legislators are influenced by these kind of efforts, but some of them are."

Campaign contributions and personal contacts help industry lobbyists develop friendships with lawmakers, she adds. "It's much harder to do something your friend says will impact on his business than to do something for someone you don't know very well."

Bill Franklin, chief lobbyist for North Carolina rest homes, thinks advocates like Silberman overestimate the political power of the industry. He says the real obstacle to quality care is that the state doesn't reimburse rest homes enough to cover the cost of caring for poor residents. Rest homes, Franklin says, cannot afford big campaign contributions — so they focus instead on meeting with legislators who are favorable to the industry.

"The small amount we've been able to contribute has not been of great consequence," he says. "I think our grassroots efforts play a far greater part than any contributions we have made."

Craig Souza, the chief lobbyist for nursing homes, has no apologies for their big political contributions. "That's the system," he says. "We play it fairly and we play it openly. We're not looking for anybody to do anything but be fair."

Whether through contributions or contacts, the industry does exert a great deal of pull in the state legislature. "Rest home lobbyists are everywhere," says one legislative aide who asked not to be identified. According to the aide, lawmakers who tried to question some financial data supplied by an industry lobbyist during a recent request for a rate increase were simply ignored.

Despite such obstacles, advocates for patients and their families say they will keep pressing for reform. "It is stressful when you become aware of the political compromises in the long-term care arena and the enormous power the industry wields," says Chasson. "You do get burned out — but you just have to keep hammering away at it." □

*Tinker Ready covers nursing home issues for the News and Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina.*

# Back- Breaking Care

BY ANNE CLANCY

Spending a day with a nursing home aide shows how hard they must struggle to do a good job.

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.** — Marsha Angleton likes talking with residents at Riley's Oak Hill Manor, the upscale nursing home where she works as a nurse's aide. Many of the patients are quite wealthy, she says, and have traveled to far-away places.

"One man had been to Africa," she recalls. "He owned his own business, and I guess when you own your own business you can do whatever you want."

Angleton, on the other hand, has rarely been outside of Arkansas, going only as far as Texas and Missouri next door. In fact, the annual fee residents pay to stay at Oak Hill Manor is about twice the \$11,440 she makes each year, before taxes.

Yet Angleton shows little resentment about her station in life, even though it involves emptying urine bags and changing diapers. The only thing she regrets is not being able to become a beautician. Her father, who died when she was a teenager, farmed during the days and worked in a liquor store at nights to make

ends meet. Marsha couldn't afford beauty school when she graduated from high school in the rural town of Atkins, and she didn't want to work at Burger King. That left nursing homes.

Angleton was 19 when she got her first job as a nurse's aide at \$2.60 an hour. After seven years at Oak Hill Manor, she earns \$5.50.

Despite the low wages, Angleton considers herself one of the lucky ones. Unlike most of the 15,000 nursing home aides in Arkansas, she works at a well-staffed private clinic with fewer patients, safer working conditions, and slightly higher pay.

But like all aides, Angleton serves on the front lines of the nursing home industry each day. National studies show that aides provide 90 percent of the care offered in nursing homes. Almost all are women, struggling to raise families on their own. Most are black. And most receive little more than the minimum wage for performing dirty, back-breaking work.

Indeed, national surveys of occupational injuries show that nursing homes are among the most dangerous workplaces in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 15 percent of all nursing home workers experience injuries serious enough to be reported to the government — nearly twice the rate for private industry as a whole. What's more, nearly half involve back injuries, among the most crippling and costly of injuries.

The low pay and dangerous conditions are driving many aides to look for other work. According to state officials, annual turnover at Arkansas nursing homes runs as high as 50 percent, and the national rate is close to 100 percent.

To get a glimpse into how hard an aide must struggle to do a good job, one need only spend a day at work with Marsha Angleton. Like other aides, she spends her days caring for the oldest and sickest members of the community — a tough and tiring job, even under the best conditions.

"Not every place to work is as good as this one," Angleton acknowledges. "It all depends on if the nursing home owners care more about the patients than their pocketbooks."

## NURSE!

It is a few minutes before 7 a.m. when Angleton walks past the pine trees and landscaped yards dotted with crepe myrtle bushes that surround Riley's Oak Hill Manor to begin her eight-hour shift. Unlike many nursing homes, Riley's smells clean — the result, Angleton says, of good housekeeping. "Unlike some places, this place has enough good cleaning supplies and staff," she says. "When you walk in the door, there's no odor."

Inside, the home has been recently remodeled. Yellow cinder-block walls have been painted mauve, with matching wallpaper and off-white baseboards. Some of the floors are carpeted, and tile floors carry a heavy, hospital shine. Wooden railings line the wide hallways.

Angleton clocks in and looks at her patient roster. The first duty of the day is to wake everybody up and get them ready for breakfast.

A few minutes after seven, the overhead lights come on in bootcamp style. Angleton and her co-workers begin opening doors and giving orders for the residents to wake up. The aides hardly sound like drill sergeants, however, calling their charges honey, darlin' and baby. They ask residents how they are doing, eliciting responses from the grouchy to the incomprehensible.

Angleton changes diapers for some patients, helps others to the bathroom, and empties urine bags for those with catheters. A few residents can sit up by themselves or get into a chair for breakfast, but most need their beds raised to enable them to eat.

Getting so many people up and ready for breakfast can be the hardest time of the day, especially if there are not bed linens, diapers, or towels. Angleton says Riley's tries to provide its aides with the supplies they need, though there never seem to be enough towels and washcloths.

Large carts full of food trays are rolled into the halls, the first of many vehicles that vie for space each day in the unregulated and never-ending hallway traffic at the home. Before the day is over, Angleton will walk miles — back

and forth, up and down the halls — dodging laundry carts, 30-gallon diaper pails, mobile linen racks, and wheelchairs.

"Wake up Ellen, roll over, it's time for

"Sometimes I pop off and say I'm going to change my name to Nurse," Marsha admits privately in a rare moment of flippancy.

*Photos by Kelly Quinn*



**MARSHA ANGLETON CARES FOR EIGHT PATIENTS A DAY, BUT SOME LITTLE ROCK AIDES MUST TEND TO AS MANY AS 36 NURSING HOME RESIDENTS.**

breakfast," Angleton says to one elderly woman as she carries in a tray of scrambled eggs and fruit juice.

"Hand me my teeth," Ellen responds.

Once she finishes with Ellen, Angleton moves on to the next patient. "Be sure you tell Walter to eat," another aide reminds her. Many residents at Oak Hill suffer from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, and their memories come and go.

"When it gets to when they don't want to eat, you have to feed them," Angleton explains. "Sometimes they get so confused, they don't know to pick the spoon up. Their brain just doesn't work."

A little later, two patients get into a tug of war over a magazine. A woman in a wheelchair feebly kicks another woman before aides can get between them to break it up. A 93-year-old woman, also in a wheelchair, spends most of the day repeatedly asking for someone to come get her and take her home. She talks of visiting her sister on the second floor, although the building has only one floor. All her calls for attention begin with the cry, "Nurse, nurse!"

## ABUSE AND RACISM

Being flippant in front of residents is something Angleton knows not to do. Under strict federal and state regulations, even an off-handed comment can be considered verbal abuse — cause for firing. And once an aide is written up, the incident is recorded in a permanent record kept by the state Office of Long-Term Care. According to federal law, aides on the list can be barred from working anywhere in the industry for up to five years.

Nevertheless, verbal and physical abuse remains all too common. In a study conducted at Little Rock nursing homes last year by the University of Arkansas, more than 90 percent of the aides interviewed said they knew of residents being mistreated, abused, or neglected. In most cases, they said, an aide had yelled or spoken harshly to a resident.

Angleton gets angry when aides speak unkindly to residents. "My pet peeve is when a patient wants to go to the bathroom and someone will say, 'Go in

your diaper," she says.

The Little Rock study reported that abuse also takes the form of rough handling, which occurs frequently during bathing and dressing. Some aides said they knew of workers who hit and slapped patients, and in one case a female resident had been raped by a male aide.

Although aides have power over residents, the abuse can work both ways. "There is a lot of abuse inflicted on the aides by the patients," says Shirley Gamble, director of the state Office of Long-Term Care. That abuse includes verbal, physical, and sexual. Some aides in the Little Rock study told of having their breasts grabbed by patients. In one instance, a male patient knocked a female aide to the ground several times. The aide finally hit him back — and was immediately fired. She was later rehired after the resident moved to a different facility.

Most of the aides interviewed for the Little Rock study also reported experiencing racism from patients and their families. Black aides reported being called nigger, coon, and jigs. "Who's in charge of these niggers?" demanded a relative of one patient. "You can't trust those blacks," said another.

Black aides also experience institutional discrimination. None of the nursing homes surveyed for the Little Rock study, for example, had any black registered nurses on staff.

At Oak Hill Manor where Angleton works, there is no indication of racial struggles between the aides themselves. White and black aides work side by side and often call on each other for help.

"We have to do a lot of team work," explains Angleton. "If you don't, you can't function."

## HEAVY LOADS

As patient advocates have increased their scrutiny of the nursing home industry in recent years, lawmakers have developed new rules penalizing workers who provide substandard care. In 1987,

Arkansas also enacted a law requiring nursing homes to employ only certified nurse's aides who receive training. Later that year, federal lawmakers passed a similar regulation as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act to reform nursing homes.

But while such regulations are supposed to protect patients from mistreatment and poor care, they have failed to address the roots of the problem — the dangerous working conditions and heavy patient loads confronting most nursing home employees.

In Arkansas, most official complaints filed by aides involve understaffing. According to the Little Rock study, aides are sometimes responsible for as many as 36 residents on a shift — far more than

one person can hope to care for in a day. The more patients they must attend to, say aides, the less attention they can give them.

Oak Hill Manor, where Marsha Angleton works, prides itself on having more aides on duty than the law requires. Angleton says she usually cares for no more than eight patients on a shift.

But even with fewer patients, the work takes its toll. The job of a nurse's aide is physically demanding — lifting and turning patients, bathing them, making beds, pushing and pulling wheelchairs, helping patients walk and sit up. By 10:15 a.m. in her

shift, Angleton is already showing signs of wear and tear. She sighs heavily, looking somewhat flushed from rushing around.

"I did hurt my back once and was out of work for a half a day," Angleton says. Fortunately, she only pulled a muscle, and unlike some aides who wind up permanently disabled, she was able to keep her job.

Although it is the repetitive motions and heavy lifting that cause overexertion and injury, understaffing makes the situation worse. It is safer for aides to work in pairs when lifting patients, but the shortage of aides on duty can make it hard to find a co-worker when you need one.

"When one worker is responsible for

getting as many as 14 people up, washed, and ready for breakfast in as little as half an hour, finding and waiting for a co-worker to assist with a lift becomes problematic for both patients and workers," reports a study by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest representative of health care workers in the nation.

"Taking longer with one patient means leaving others hungry," the study continues. "It means having to skimp on care. The current levels of staffing simply do not allow workers to provide good care in a safe manner."

Union leaders say Arkansas nursing homes are among the most dangerous in the nation, and they point to Beverly Enterprises, the largest chain in the business, as one of the chief culprits. "Beverly is the J.P. Stevens of the nursing home industry — the worst, slimiest company of the lot," says Jamie Cohen, assistant director of health and safety for SEIU. "Health and safety is just not in their line item. They know that if they lose a worker, under the economy today, they can just find another." Beverly denies such charges.

To ease the burden of caring for so many patients at Oak Hill Manor, Angleton and other aides take turns feeding residents their lunches. During an average shift, aides receive two 10-minute breaks and a half-hour for lunch. Angleton spends her free time in the break room with a cigarette, a soft drink, and a bag of chips.

By noon, the aides have put bibs on their patients, and have begun cutting up their food and feeding them if necessary. Even the head nurse helps out. Marsha notices a woman who isn't eating her lunch, a plate of chicken, rolls, peas and carrots, and fruit. She cuts up her meat for her.

"There you go," Angleton says.

"No, you go ahead," the woman replies.

After helping several other residents with lunch, Angleton takes a moment to visit a woman she knows who isn't one of her patients for the day. The woman is eating in her room.

"You must have been busy," the woman says when Angleton appears. "You haven't been by to see me."

## CLOSE BONDS

Such close bonds are common among nurse's aides and their patients. Asked about the hardest part of her job, Angleton doesn't mention the day-to-day stress, the fatigue, or her aching back. "It's the dying," she says.

"When someone dies, it's a real hard

The job of a nurse's aide is physically demanding — lifting and turning patients, bathing them, making beds, pushing and pulling wheelchairs, helping patients walk and sit up.

experience. You've been with them day after day, and some of them can go down real fast. The patients become your family, and their families become your family.

This place can really suck you in."

Still, she says, getting to know the patients makes her job easier. "You have to learn when to tune them out and when not to," she explains as she clips the nails of a patient. The woman has no family, and a local bank donates the money for her care. The aides at Oak Hill Manor have decorated her room with stuffed animals, posters, and coloring-book pictures of Disney characters. A game show blares on the TV screen.

"She's a baby," Angleton says.

is concerned she doesn't have enough lotion, although two bottles sit beside her bed.

"You're pretty as a picture," the woman tells Marsha, who protests. "Well, you are."

### A CARING FAMILY

After lunch, there is more diaper changing, part of the every-two-hour, diaper-changing routine required by law. Some residents go back to their rooms to rest. Others stay in the day rooms, strapped into wheel chairs, or propped up in lounge chairs. One woman wanders the hallway; another pulls herself along in her wheelchair talking to an invisible Grandpa.

Marsha prepares to clock out.

The day has gone fairly smoothly. No one fell down, no one had a seizure or got too violent. The three-to-eleven shift arrives and Marsha meets her husband Gary outside to ride home to their trailer on a small plot of land just south of Little Rock. She tells Gary about her day, as she does every day after work. "If you can make it here," she says, "you can make it anywhere."

For relaxation, Angleton likes to go fishing with Gary and their eight-year-old daughter. Well, actually, she doesn't fish, she admits. She likes to sit on the bank and read romance novels.

The women in Angleton's family have a long history of care giving. Her now-retired mother was a nurse, and always told Marsha she should also be a nurse. Even as a five-year-old, Marsha says she felt a sensitivity to the older people her mother cared for at nursing homes. It was her mother who was her teacher when she first began working as an aide. She taught Marsha how to walk a patient, how to change a bed. Angleton's older sister is a psychiatric nurse, and her twin sister is also a nurse's aide.

Yet her advice for others thinking of becoming an aide is: don't. Go for the better pay, she says, unless you need to work as an aide first because you aren't sure if you could handle being a full-fledged nurse. "I'd say go to school and become an LPN or RN."

Coming from a nursing home aide as dedicated as Angleton, such advice speaks volumes. The job is simply too dangerous, too painful, and the pay is too low. If the nursing home industry is ever to improve the quality of care it offers, it will have to start by improving the jobs of women like Marsha Angleton. The more support nurse's aides receive, the better care will be.

The aides, meanwhile, keep trying. "The pay is lousy, the work is hard, and there is little respect — but I try not to let that matter because I enjoy my residents and take good care of them," one aide told University of Arkansas researchers. "I try not to gripe because one day I may be there — and I'm hoping I'll get assigned to the good aide who cares." □

*Anne Clancy is managing editor of Spectrum, a weekly news and arts alternative in Little Rock, Arkansas. The University of Arkansas study was conducted by Susan Mercer, Patricia Heacock, and Cornelia Beck.*



**"WHEN SOMEONE DIES, IT'S REAL HARD," SAYS ANGLETON. "YOU'VE BEEN WITH THEM DAY AFTER DAY, AND SOME OF THEM CAN GO DOWN REAL FAST."**

"There's so many personalities in this place and you have to learn them real fast."

Getting to know the families of patients also helps, says Angleton, especially when a new resident comes in. "The families are our bosses. You really have to feel the families out to find out what they want. When they first come in, it's an adjustment. It's the guilt, mostly. I try to tell them that I sympathize and try to do what they want right away, to build their trust."

She helps another resident comb her hair and put on hand lotion. The resident

By 1:25 p.m. Marsha begins filling out the day's patient flow sheet. By law, she must note what she did for each patient that day — bed bath in the morning, blood pressure check in the afternoon, the number of bowel movements, and so on.

At 1:50 p.m. Marsha takes some final blood pressure tests. Ten minutes later it is time for bed check — taking residents to their rooms and changing diapers again.

Bed check takes nearly a whole hour. By 3 p.m. some patients head to the dining room to hear a guest singer.

# “Because Someone Speaks Up”

INTERVIEW BY ELLEN FORMAN

Fran Sutcliffe has been raising hell and improving the quality of life for nursing home residents for 20 years.

*Fran Sutcliffe began the Nursing Home Hotline Patrol in Pinellas County, Florida in 1973, using a phone in her home as her base. Over the past two decades, she has earned a national reputation as an advocate of the rights of nursing home patients, and has been instrumental in passing laws to protect their rights on the state and federal levels.*

*At the age of 80, Sutcliffe still receives and counsels 10 to 20 callers on the Hotline each day, and travels extensively to speak and lobby. Known as a no-nonsense person, she has little patience for bureaucratic delays. She relies on facts to get her points across and to push effectively for change. In March she was named to the board of directors of the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform.*

*She spoke to Southern Exposure about the battle to improve the quality of life for nursing home patients, and the roots and impact of her activism.*

**W**hen I was growing up, my mother was always involved in doing something for other people. I learned from her. Someone would call her up who needed help, and she was always taking care of them.

I was always a fighter. I worked for the United Nations Association when the United Nations was a dirty word. Eleanor Roosevelt was a dear friend of mine. I traveled to 30 states setting up chapters. When we were in Monroe, Louisiana, we held a group in the Methodist church, and they had a burning cross on the lawn the next morning. They used to throw bricks in the window when we spoke. I was with Adlai Stevenson when they attacked him.

People would say, "Why are you fooling with that?" My feeling was, people will only learn about the United Nations through controversy.

I got started in nursing home advocacy when I became responsible for a dear old lady who fell and broke her hip. Her name was Alice. She was an old

family friend of my husband's, in her 70s, and she lived alone. She went to the hospital, and the social workers called. "We're sending Alice over to a nursing home," they said.

This was in 1973, and I didn't know a damn thing about nursing homes. I had never been in a nursing home. So I went and looked it over, and it looked like a pretty good thing. I said, "Fine, send her over."

I went to see her every day, and I very quickly realized that I had to find out what was going on. It seemed like a good home, but I don't take anything for granted. I began to look at laws to see what was right. That's where I really got involved. If it wasn't right, I spoke up.

People would see me at the home, and I guess they got to thinking that I knew something. A year later, I was appointed by the Florida governor to the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Council. There's a statewide council and a local council in each district of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS). That



was the beginning of the Florida ombudsman system.

We started from scratch, wrote the procedures for how to handle complaints, the forms, everything else. It was a long process. Now, everyone who checks into a nursing home must be given a brochure about the ombudsman system with a phone number to call if you have a problem.

I began the Nursing Home Hotline Patrol because the demand was there. I brought in a lady involved in the Quakers who was also very involved in nursing home care issues. We drove all over the county and visited every nursing home that summer.

A reporter from the *St. Petersburg Times* heard about us. She came over and said, "I want to do a story about this." She wrote about us, and she gave us the name, Nursing Home Hotline Patrol. I had so many telephone calls after that. We offered a brochure that was mentioned in the article, and we got over 100 calls for it the first day.

We started Nursing Home Patrol meetings, once a month, then six times a year. We just put a notice in the paper and 40 to 50 people came. We taught federal laws and state laws, Medicaid and Medicare contracts, and insurance. After the patrol began, the hotline was automatic. We don't have the patrols anymore, but the hotline is still going.

**O**n the hotline, I get at least 10 calls every day, and it's not uncommon for me to get 20 calls a day. Callers have very often gotten the runaround trying to do business with HRS, and they get a lot of wrong answers or no answers at all. Then my name comes up and someone says, "Call Fran, she knows the answer." I do know the law.

Many of our calls are referred from hospital social workers or even HRS people. They're asking about nursing homes, about where to go.

If I know a home is bad, I tell them, "Hell, I wouldn't go there." It's my opinion. If they want to know why, I'll tell them about the last inspection the home had. I know what the state inspectors are finding, and I'll tell them about it.

I got a call from someone who wanted to put a relative into a home that's considered one of the outstanding homes for Alzheimer's patients. Well, the state

report found 15 pages of deficiencies. I asked a nurse if things were really that way, and she said, "You're exactly right." People have called me and told me they'd

never go there. It wasn't a nice place.

The hotline covers Pinellas County, but I get calls from Philadelphia, Houston, people from all over the U.S. For

*Photo by St. Petersburg Times*



**"THE BOTTOM LINE IS MONEY," SAYS FLORIDA ACTIVIST FRAN SUTCLIFFE. "NURSING HOMES WANT TO MAKE MORE MONEY THAN THEY ALREADY MAKE."**

out-of-town homes, I have books here that give me ratings and some information about what kind of service they provide. I don't recommend homes in other parts of the state like I do here, but I can give information and advice on things like Medicaid. Sometimes I can refer someone to the ombudsman office in a particular area. The other thing I tell people to do is to go to the library. In Florida, the state inspection reports are all there.

The last thing I tell these people is, "Let me know what happens to you. If you're satisfied, if you have a problem, be sure to call me and let me know about it."

I got a call from a lady I talked to seven years ago. She called me for advice about where to put her husband. "He was in a nursing home and it worked out fine," she told me. "He's gone now, and I'm going to move back home." She just wanted to call and say thanks. It's really rewarding to give people help.

What makes it possible for me to do this is that I absolutely never took any money from anybody. I refused grants. I pay my own way and say what I think and if they don't like it, it doesn't make any difference to me. Endless numbers of people are helped because someone speaks up.

**B**ack in the '70s, we had people in the Florida legislature who wrote excellent laws to protect residents' rights. We don't have them anymore. I expect that the next time the session rolls around, it'll get worse. But back in the '70s, the residents' rights laws were very complete and very fine. When the feds wrote their laws in 1987, they followed them very closely.

During the administration of Governor Martinez, they refused to reappoint any of the experienced ombudsmen. We had excellent chapters that had done very good jobs. We lost a lot of good people, and it's hard to rebuild that system. It's hard to find dedicated

people. There's no pay and no glory in it.

In the last legislative session, Florida enacted new laws for something called adult congregate living facilities. The state has gone to the federal government for a waiver allowing them to use Medicaid funds for ACLFs. It's part of a concept of "aging in place." It may work, but I'm uneasy about it. We're still writing the rules, and they're fairly permissive. It sounds like it's setting up mini nursing homes. That's been my cry — the ACLFs won't be subject to the regulations of a nursing home and could suffer from insufficient staffing.

To be in an ACLF, a resident cannot require 24-hour nursing care. That's the primary consideration. So, in the case of an ACLF that offers several levels of care, who's going to interpret how much care a resident needs? And who's going to enforce it? It's mostly been left up to the responsible party — the doctor and the family. After all, the administrator of the facility is making money, even if the person isn't receiving the care they need.

We've always had the rule that anyone who requires seven days in bed has to leave the ACLF and go to a hospital or a nursing home. There's been accommodations for certain conditions like a cold, and I never argued against that. But when

state inspectors go in and cite the facility for having someone inappropriately placed, they have 30 days to have the person see a doctor.

I get a kick out of that. If people are inappropriately placed, they shouldn't have to wait 30 days for a determination. Let's stop kidding ourselves.

There are very few ACLFs where that really happens. Some are very well run. The irony is, the poorest ones are the ones with state patients, placed there by HRS. The poor ACLFs keep on going because of these state patients. It all goes back to the money.

The real problem in most nursing homes is that the staffing requirements

are so minimal. The people in homes are a great deal sicker than they used to be because hospitals get rid of them quicker, and there just aren't enough aides on staff at the homes to care for them.

We need better laws on staffing. I've gotten calls from aides who are upset because their supervisors wouldn't let them finish work because they don't want to pay overtime. They get discouraged and they quit and sign up with a home health care agency. Nursing homes say, "We can't get good aides, good aides are hard to come by." Don't give me that crap. It's the way they're handled.

For the most part, aides do a good job. Florida has trained over 100,000 nursing home aides since we started training about five or six years ago. We started training here before it was required by the federal government, and we have good training schools here.

The training doesn't do much good, though, when nursing homes get a tremendous amount of help from temporary employment agencies. Temporary aides come in for a little orientation, there's your assignment, and that's it. Nursing homes pay the agency no less than \$12 an hour, and the help gets \$5.

**T**he problems on the federal level have to do with budget issues. Dan Quayle and his so-called committee on competition are the people who have hung up the regulations we've worked so hard on.

Nursing home owners in the American Health Care Association have been very successful in persuading the president to delay the approval of the rules for OBRA, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act passed in 1987. It was supposed to go into force on January 1, 1992. Everyone agreed with these rules except for the American Health Care Association. They've waged one constant battle after another against reasonable rules that agree with the law. They claim it's going to cost them more money. They say, "We can't afford to do that." That's always their bitch.

The bottom line is money. They want to make more money than they already make. You have to understand: Everything today is run by big chains. We have 100 nursing homes in this area, and all but four are owned by chains. The chains

The people in nursing homes are a great deal sicker than they used to be because hospitals get rid of them quicker, and there just aren't enough aides on staff at the homes to care for them.

tell the homes how much money they can spend, and that makes it pretty tough on the local administrators. There are very few companies that give them enough to do the job that needs to be done.

I feel sorry for some of these administrators. They really try very hard to run good homes, but they have so few funds to operate on.

The chains make a big difference in the operation. There's no local control anymore. The regional director comes to town and walks into the administrator's office on Monday morning and says, "How much money are you going to make me today?"

We have one chain here that's always talking about their great units for Alzheimer's patients. It's "Alzheimer's this and Alzheimer's that." When I see the big boys who run that chain at a conference, I say, "Hell, stop talking about Alzheimer's and start putting enough money into the homes so the aides can do the job that needs to be done."

But the federal government has sided with the chains. The Bush administration has been of the opinion that we need fewer rules, not more. It's simply a way of accommodating the big boys, not only in nursing homes, but in every industry. Well, a new broom sweeps clean.

If you want to make them change, you have to hit them where it hurts — and the only thing they understand is money. The feds finally published the final rules for OBRA this week, and those rules provide for substantial federal fines. Right now, nursing homes that break the law just take a \$1,000 fine and forget about it. The new law says they can be fined \$10,000 a day for failure to meet regulations — and that begins to add up. I think that's one way to get their attention. If we can get the states to enforce the new law, it will make a big difference.

Another thing that gets their attention is lawsuits. The nursing home owners in the Florida Health Care Association want to limit the rights of families and residents to sue for civil damages. But sometimes the threat of a lawsuit is the only thing that keeps a nursing home in line. It gets more problems solved than anything else.

Attorneys are very careful about taking on nursing home suits — it's expensive, it's time consuming, and

they're just not interested in getting that involved. But the nursing home owners are very paranoid about it. Well, if they were doing their jobs the way they were supposed to, there wouldn't be any suits.

**P**eople always want to know what they can do. "I'm just one person with a problem," they say. I tell people who are complaining, "Did you report this to the director of nursing, or to the administrator?" Very often, the problem is corrected right then. If it isn't, I'll call the home, and they'll respond.

I often say to the administrator, "I know you want to run a good nursing home. You can't run it if you don't know what's going on, and you can't see everything all the time. I want to give you the opportunity to correct the problem before it goes further than me, and here it is." Ninety-nine percent of the time they take care of the problem. If not, I get ahold of state inspectors and I tell them about the problem.

People have to be their own advocates. There's no way this state can hire all the inspectors they would have to hire to correct all the problems. It has to come from concerned citizens.

When I speak to groups, particularly volunteers at nursing homes, they say, "I don't have the authority to say that." I say, "What do you mean? You're a concerned citizen, and you're calling attention to a problem they should be aware of. Nine times out of ten they'll do something about it. They get away with things because no one says anything about it. Anybody can do it. I have a mouth, I can talk — that's all it takes."

I welcome controversy, I welcome questions. I don't care what they are. I don't have problems with administrators. They don't love me, but they sure do respect me. That's the way it is. I'm paying the bills, and that's how I do it.

During my experience with Alice, it was so obvious to me that the families visiting patients were so hesitant to say anything. The residents were intimidated

— and still are, to some extent. That's why understanding residents' rights and using them is so important.

We've had wonderful residents' rights in Florida homes for years and got them on the federal level since 1987. But the rights only help if you demand them and use them.

For years, residents had to get up at 6 a.m. whether they liked it or not, and they went to bed at dark, and that was it. That doesn't happen anymore. They get up when they want to get up and if they want something else to eat they can ask for it. They're not as intimidated as they used to be, once they

understand their rights. They need to know that they can still have an independent lifestyle if they want to. They can question things.

The problem is nobody wants to speak up. That's really a terrible problem in this country. When anybody speaks up, they're criticized and labeled as strange.

My advice to anyone who wants to make a difference — about nursing homes or anything else — is to learn the subject and speak up. If you don't learn, you won't have the confidence.

I never think about getting discouraged. When I started 20 years ago, nursing homes sure as hell weren't as good as they are today. Now, for the first time, we have substantial residents' rights in federal law. It's going to be a long, hard fight to get the federal regulations rolling, to get them enforced. But it's going to get better. I never give up.

I'm going to keep speaking up, and I'm going to keep working on the hotline. If you call and I'm not here, try again. I'm probably out in some nursing home raising hell. □

*Ellen Forman is a reporter with the Sun-Sentinel in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. To contact the Nursing Home Hotline, call (813) 347-0953.*

I tell people who are complaining, "Did you report this to the director of nursing, or to the administrator?" Very often, the problem is corrected right then.



**THE TOWN OF BELHAVEN, NORTH CAROLINA CREATED PUNGO VILLAGE, A COMPLEX OF 38 APARTMENTS FOR THE ELDERLY BUILT AROUND A LAKE.**

# Where the Heart Is

More and more people are looking for alternatives to nursing homes. Here are six non-profit programs that really work.

“**I** hope I die before I have to go a nursing home,” a friend in her twenties told us the other day. It is the kind of comment we hear all too often of late. Most of us, it seems, are just plain afraid of nursing homes. They have come to represent everything we fear about growing old—sickness, pain, long and lonely days spent in a cold and impersonal institution, death.

Yet as the population as a whole grows older and those born during the baby-boom generation reach middle age, more and more of us are having to care for elderly parents at home, or go broke paying nursing home bills. In 1988, the country spent \$53 billion providing long-term care for the elderly. Fewer than 20 cents of every dollar went to care for the needy in their own homes. Most went to pay the expenses of the 1.7 million Americans in nursing homes—a number expected to reach 5.3 million by the year 2030.

It doesn't have to be that way. All across the South, people are coming up with healthier and more humane ways to care for their parents and grandparents. One program uses social workers to connect the elderly to medical care and

social services while they are still well enough to live at home. Another enables elderly volunteers to care for their next-door neighbors. Others provide health care in the home, or create non-profit housing centers or clinics that are owned and operated by the community.

Whatever the approach, the six alternatives profiled here all have one thing in common: They strive to help older citizens keep their homes, their independence, and their dignity. They prove that doctors, nurses, ministers, social workers, and neighborhood volunteers can work together to provide love, respect, and affordable care for the elders of the community.

—Eric Bates

## **SOUTHWESTERN AGING TEAM**

**PULASKI, VIRGINIA**

For a while, it looked like Rita Slenker might never make it back to the white frame house with the big Catalpa tree out front.

The house in southwest Virginia had

been her family home for almost all of her 75 years. But last spring Slenker wound up in a Maryland hospital with a case of double pneumonia. She coughed so hard she cracked a vertebra, and she was afraid she'd end up in a nursing home.

Instead Slenker came home and stayed there—with the help of Ellen Lamb, a “case manager” from New River Valley Agency on Aging.

Lamb arranged for Slenker to get daily “meals-on-wheels” lunches and weekly visits from a housekeeper. She had grab bars installed in Slenker's bathtub. And she has helped her keep up with doctors visits and lots of small chores that can be overwhelming for someone whose health has weakened.

“She's just been so good to me it makes me cry sometimes,” Slenker says.

It wasn't a lot of help—but it was enough to allow Slenker to take care of herself with some support from her neighbors. And that, says Lamb, is what being a case manager is all about.

The New River agency is one of four participating in a regional program called the Southwestern Aging Team (SWAT). Now in its second year, SWAT

has 18 case managers who cover every county and city west of Roanoke. They help elderly people stay in their homes, stay independent — and stay out of rest homes or nursing homes.

Health workers say that many older people don't seek help until they're too frail or ill to stay in their own homes. The problem is especially bad in southwest Virginia, where high rates of poverty and illiteracy and shortages of health care prevent many from receiving the preventive medicine they need. Case managers try to link people up with health and social services sooner so they can stay independent longer.

Even so, some people won't ask for help because they're afraid social workers will force them into a nursing home. "You constantly have to reassure them," says Dana Collins, who supervises case managers in Cedar Bluff. "We tell them: No, you're not going to lose your home. No, they're not going to take you away."

Debbie Palmer, executive director of the New River agency, says rest homes and nursing homes have an important place in long-term care, but they shouldn't be the only alternative for older people. The case manager's job is "empowering these people to deal with the system."

Virginia officials and university researchers are studying the project to see if the idea can be expanded across the state. But with an annual budget of \$400,000 in federal and state funds, SWAT has already helped nearly 1,000 older Virginians put off or avoid going to nursing homes. A few examples:

▼ Case managers arranged for sitters to care for an 83-year-old widow who fell down two flights of stairs a few months ago. They also found her an

amplified telephone to enable her to stay in touch with friends and family despite her hearing loss.

▼ A 76-year-old man with terminal lung cancer who was living in a rundown house received a stove, phone, smoke alarms, and a new front door. Case

*Photo by Mike Hudson*



**RITA SLENKER RETURNED TO HER FAMILY HOME, THANKS TO CASE MANAGERS FROM SWAT.**

managers also arranged for "meals-on-wheels" and visits from a local hospice.

▼ Social workers convinced a medical transportation service to provide free rides to the hospital for an 81-year-old woman whose relatives were charging her \$100 for the three-hour trip.

▼ "If they put me in a nursing home, I'll die," a 97-year-old woman who fell and broke her hip told social workers. Case manag-

ers arranged for personal-care aides and a sitter to stay with her, and a church agreed to pick up her utility bills.

Rita Slenker was also afraid she'd end up in a nursing home. Last summer she had gone to stay with a sister in Maryland who had cancer — and then she came down with pneumonia herself. By the time she returned to Pulaski, she had to use a metal walker to get around.

"I couldn't get out of bed hardly," she recalls. "It took so long. Painful." Then she broke two more vertebrae rolling over in bed.

But Slenker has gotten better and better. She gets lots of help from her neighbors, especially a young couple with twin girls. "You just wouldn't believe how much they've done for me. He's even called me from the store to see if I need anything."

In evenings when folks are home, she walks outside in her yard, sometimes carrying a cellular phone with her. "I'm doing real good with what help I'm getting now," she says. "If I can just continue getting better..."

She got home in time this year to see the blue flowers on her hydrangea bush. It was the first time it has bloomed in 15 years.

—Mike Hudson

## TIME DOLLARS

### MIAMI, FLORIDA

Like most elderly residents of Miami, Daisy Alexander comes from somewhere else. She has no family members nearby to take her to the doctor when her angina acts up, or to clean the house when her arthritic knee swells. Nor does she have the money to pay a professional to do the job.

But the 76-year-old Alexander doesn't worry. She knows that with a phone call, she can get help from any of a dozen neighborhood volunteers.

She and several neighbors in the low-income housing complex where she lives belong to the Time Dollars Network, a volunteer army of 1,900 who help the poorest elderly residents of Miami keep their independence. The volunteers — most of them retired women like Alexander — drive clients to appointments, clean house, explain Social Security forms, and sometimes just call to check on frail neighbors living alone.

For every hour a volunteer like Alexander works, she earns a "time dollar" — credit for an hour of service from the network that she or a family member can use as needed.

For many, however, credit is immaterial. Their satisfaction comes simply from helping others. "I'm by myself with my husband and I love people," says Gladys Vazquez, a 59-year-old volunteer. "It's a pleasure for me to help people."

Besides, the network serves anyone in need, free of charge. Volunteers know that help is always available, even if they have logged no credit.

Daisy Alexander is one of the busiest volunteers in the program, despite her sometimes crippling arthritis. "It's very difficult because I walk with a cane," she says. "But my mind is stronger than my body. When I get out, I forget about my pain."

Time Dollars was conceived by Edward Cahn, a University of Miami law professor, as he lay in a hospital bed recuperating from a heart attack in 1980. "We had a recession then and lots of

people were out of work," he says. "I was also aware that there were plenty of people who needed care. I asked myself, why can't we create a new kind of money to get people and needs together?"

His idea won the approval of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which awarded the Time Dollars Network a \$1.2 million grant in 1985 to organize in Miami and five other cities. Since then, the program has spread to more than 80 cities in 28 states.

In Miami, the network is scattered among eight retirement housing complexes where most of the volunteers and clients live. A paid executive director oversees the entire network, relying on volunteers to coordinate services from each center.

Cahn set up the program loosely, to avoid any resemblance to more bureaucratic, professional services. Through simplicity, he sought to bring clients and volunteers together as a "family." Unlike most home-care professionals, volunteers with Time Dollars face no formal screening or FBI checks.

That alarmed state officials, who wanted volunteers to be investigated. But Cahn balked. After five years, he claims, Time Dollars hasn't had a single incident of theft or abuse.

The agency is equally trusting of its clients. Although it seeks to serve those who cannot afford professional care, Time Dollars has no means test. "This is about what neighbors and friends can do," Cahn explains. "It's not about what you can pay."

A widow with an oceanfront condominium who wants volunteers to serve hors d'oeuvres at her next party will be turned away, Cahn says. But the widow with the oceanfront condo who needs a

friend to talk to a couple of hours a week will be welcomed.

The greatest reward for network leaders is seeing clients and volunteers develop close, lasting relationships.

*Photo by Al Diaz/Miami Herald*



**VOLUNTEER GEORGE FLETCHER, 70, EARNS SERVICE CREDITS AS HE WALKS WITH ELIJAH ADAMS, 88.**

"These volunteers we matched with people in need have become friends," says Ana Miyaris, executive director of the Miami network. "We don't have to call them. The recipient calls them. We just open channels between neighbors."

In the three years since she became a volunteer manager for the network, Gladys Vazquez has seen the number of volunteers in Miami more than double. Yet the program retains its camaraderie — and Vazquez still hears from friends

like Daisy Alexander.

"Daisy calls me and says, 'Gladys, this happened to me. Can you come over?' These people love us so much. We become like family."

— Cynthia Washam

## VIP CENTER

### ANNISTON, ALABAMA

Frances Hyde suffers from seizures. She needs round-the-clock supervision — but instead of being confined to a nursing facility, she lives at home and spends each day at the VIP Center, a non-profit program that provides day care for adults.

A full-time staff of four watches over Hyde and 38 other elderly and disabled adults as they sew, work on crafts, sing together, take daily walks, and enjoy outings to a nearby museum, bowling alley, and Wal-Mart.

"This is just about like a second home," Hyde says. "It's like my own family."

Since it opened in Calhoun County a

year ago, the center has become a second home to dozens of adults ranging in age from 26 to 84. They include elderly people who suffer from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, as well as younger people who have cerebral palsy or are mentally retarded. The only requirement is that individuals be able to feed themselves and go to the bathroom.

Pam Hall-Gann, the founder of the center, says the program provides an affordable alternative for many elderly residents who require constant attention but don't need the intensive care of a nursing home. The center charges a maximum of \$20 a day to care for clients — compared to an average daily rate of \$71 at most Alabama nursing homes.

The center is one of 37 adult day care facilities in Alabama certified to receive referrals from the state Department of Human Resources. The centers voluntarily agree to meet DHR standards in exchange for referrals: Unlike day care centers for children, operations that supervise adults are not regulated in Alabama.

Jude Ledbetter, coordinator of adult services with the DHR in Calhoun County, says the state should monitor adult day care centers to protect clients. "A lot of people are bringing adults into their home to live who shouldn't be," she says.

Yet Ledbetter has nothing but praise for the VIP Center, the only facility providing adult day care for the 120,000 citizens of rural Calhoun County. "We're proud that they opened up and they're there," she says. "It does save money and it does prevent nursing home care in many situations."

Not only does the VIP Center provide activities for elderly citizens, but it also serves breakfast, lunch, and a snack during its hours from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. For some clients, those meals are the only food they will eat during the day.

About half the elderly participants receive Medicaid, but the money doesn't cover all of the costs of the VIP Center. During the past year, director Pam Hall-Gann had to pump in about \$12,000 of her own money to keep the center open. By this fall, she hopes her expenses will not exceed her budget, which runs about \$50,000 a year.

Budget woes have prevented Hall-Gann from buying a van to transport clients to and from their homes each day. She wishes she had more volunteers to

help her mother, who drives clients whose relatives can't drop them off. Center staff also take clients to visit the doctor, pick up prescriptions, and collect food stamps.

While the center has had a relatively trouble-free year, an Alzheimer's patient wandered away from the facility a few months ago. Luckily, the police tracked her down, even though she had taken off the identification tag that all clients at the center must wear.

In addition to keeping older citizens out of nursing homes, social workers say, the VIP Center also serves an important emotional need. It is a social outlet for many elderly who might otherwise be ignored.

"For a lot of people, the center is their only contact with the outside world," says Jude Ledbetter, the county services coordinator. "It gives these people a reason to get up and gives them a sense of self-value."

—Jenny Labalme

## FAMILY SERVICE

### ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

Lera Watkins stayed home with her son almost until the end. She was nearly 78, and she was dying, pulled down by diabetes and congestive heart failure.

Her son, Rick, was determined to keep her home with him as long as possible. It was tough. She got weaker and weaker. Nobody got much sleep. Sometimes she would say: "This is too much on you."

But it was worth it. Every day they shared little things, like sipping morning coffee together as he fried an omelet for her. Knowing the end was near made the small pleasures that much more intense.

Rick Watkins couldn't have done it without help from his fiancée, his family, his friends — and home-care aides from Family Service of Roanoke Valley.

As many as five mornings a week, aides from Family Service came in and helped



THE VIP CENTER PROVIDES A SOCIAL OUTLET FOR MANY ELDERLY WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE BE IGNORED.

with whatever Lera Watkins needed. Along with visiting nurses, the in-home aides gave her son the support he needed to keep his mom at home. Without it, he says, his mother probably would have spent the last months of her life in a nursing home "laying in bed with a TV set overhead. I would have stopped by once a day and that would have been it."

Instead, she spent only a few days in the hospital before she died March 1.

Family Service has been giving in-home care to the elderly and handicapped for a quarter of a century. The non-profit agency, which also offers family counseling, gets funding from United Way, foundation grants, and other donations. With its \$240,000

Photo courtesy Family Service



FAMILY SERVICE AIDE WELDON ALLEN CARES FOR BEULAH JOHNSON AND OTHER CLIENTS IN THEIR HOMES.

budget, the agency is able to offer service on a sliding scale, charging clients only what they can afford to pay. Mary Johnson, a social worker at the agency, says fees at Family Service run about half the industry average of \$9 an hour.

Home-care aides help clients with grooming, bathing, meals, housekeeping, shopping, and medications. Counselors from the agency can also help with depression or family problems.

Although the program once employed 17 nurses and geriatric aides, budget cuts have lowered the staff to eight. Family Service still manages to serve as many as 50 people

each month, but the program has a waiting list of at least 20.

"We need more aides," Johnson says. "We need more funding somehow, someday. If I had five more aides, I could put them out there tomorrow. Sometimes, it's really difficult to tell someone there is a waiting list."

Lera Watkins was on a waiting list for a month or so. Then she was visited by home-care aides for nearly two months before she went into the hospital. "They were incredibly professional and helpful — and they genuinely cared for my mother as a person," says Rick Watkins.

Even after it was clear death was near, Lera Watkins kept fighting. Rick fed her jello with a spoon and gave her ginger ale through a straw. She hung on for 36 hours.

"I'm very proud of what we were able to do," he says. "I'd like people to know there are alternatives."

—Mike Hudson

## PUNGO VILLAGE

### BELHAVEN, NORTH CAROLINA

Times are tough in the waterfront town of Belhaven on the eastern shore of North Carolina. The seasonal fishing industry, once a mainstay of the local economy, has receded in recent years. Docks jut out into the ocean, weathered and silent. Many residents



commute to Virginia to work in the naval shipping yards, more than three hours away.

One might not expect a community burdened by such economic hardships to pay much attention to elderly and disabled citizens. But the 2,500 residents of Belhaven have managed to accomplish what few other towns, rural or urban, have achieved: They have created a biracial, non-profit community to care for older residents.

Last year Belhaven opened Pungo Village, a complex of 38 apartments for the elderly built around an artificial lake. Staff and community volunteers run a senior center, offer a nutrition program, transport residents to medical appointments, and help them with their personal needs.

Residents also pitch in and look out for one another. Unlike many nursing homes, which are tucked away in some distant field, Pungo Village is located in town — enabling older residents to remain in the community, within walking distance of family and friends.

"It's easy to visit my relatives, and they can visit me," says Sylvia Harrington, a resident of Pungo Village. "It's a nice place, quiet. I like the people. This is my home."

In its first year, Pungo Village has already become a close-knit community. Residents say they especially enjoy the beauty of the architecture and the comfort of the surroundings.

"There's a nice pond," says Harrington. "I don't like to fish unless I get a bite right away, but my friend likes to fish, so I just stand and watch her."

Community members credit the Reverend Judson Mayfield with providing the spark for Pungo Village. Since the early 1980s, Mayfield has directed Shepherd's Staff, a coalition of black and white churches that has provided services to thousands of older residents. The group offers emergency food and clothing, help paying utility bills, and rides to the hospital 30 miles away.

Slowly, Mayfield and other local pastors began to realize that they needed to do more to help isolated elderly citizens. The result was Community Developers of Beaufort-Hyde, a non-profit operation founded to build an alternative community for the aged.

"We were passing out kerosene and blankets, but what people really needed was housing," Mayfield says. "It quickly

became apparent that establishing a community would make a lot of sense."

Obtaining the money to make the project a reality proved difficult, but Mayfield proved equally tenacious. "He is totally dedicated to what he does," says Shirley O'Neal, coordinator of services for Pungo Village. "If he did not get the funding he wanted, he just applied for another grant or asked for a smaller amount. He would not give up."

Organizers also had to overcome decades of mistrust between black and white residents in the predominantly black town. "There was a division between both races," says Janice Ellegor, manager of Pungo Village. "It made it difficult to pull together local resources for the benefit of the whole community."

Local pastors who had belonged to the Shepherd's Staff coalition, however, already had more than a decade of experience in working together and building trust across racial lines. Under the leadership of Mayfield, local churches united their congregations around their shared concern for the elderly.

"I was impressed by how the whole community came together in support of this project," says George Esser, a rural poverty expert who helped to raise funds for the Belhaven project. "When a community is faced with very limited resources, it is a truly integrated effort which is the key to success."

The black and white residents who live at Pungo Village contribute 30 percent of their incomes for food, housing, and other services. The remaining budget is generated from grants and local institutions.

Community Developers of Beaufort-Hyde is meanwhile planning to build more housing for the elderly in neighboring Hyde County. Once again, the group will depend on churches to unite the community. "If you leave God out of it, you don't get a thing done," says O'Neal, the services coordinator. "If you don't have the moral fabric, you don't make a bit of progress."

Observers say communities across the region could duplicate the success of Pungo Village — if government and business would direct more public funds to local, non-profit efforts and less to for-profit nursing homes.

"Poor communities have the leadership they need to provide essential services like Pungo Village, but that leadership must be stimulated through founda-

tions and banks," says George Esser. "Every rural community in the country needs to have this type of community-owned facility for the elderly."

—Shana Morrow

## HAMPTON WOODS

### WOODLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

Imagine a nursing home where all the stock is owned by local residents — and where all the profits are returned to the home to improve the quality of care for the elderly.

Now picture the nursing home connected to a rest home, a senior center, apartments for the elderly, and a community clinic staffed by doctors, dentists, and a pharmacist.

Finally, imagine the entire operation flourishing in one of the poorest counties in North Carolina — an area long abandoned as unprofitable by private physicians and nursing homes.

Beyond imagination? Not in rural Northampton County, where local residents have created Hampton Woods Board and Care and Retirement Community Inc. The organization runs a non-profit, community-based nursing home and health clinic designed to provide older residents with the best care possible.

The project dates back to 1974, when a group of Northampton citizens concerned by the dwindling number of doctors in the county met with the Office of Rural Health in Raleigh. Officials helped the residents secure loans and grants to build a medical, dentistry, and pharmacy center, as well as to recruit physicians.

With the encouragement and assistance of Dr. Jane McCaleb and other new doctors, citizens began investigating ways to provide better long-term care for the elderly. The result was Hampton Woods, a unique facility that combines a primary care center, a 60-bed nursing home, an 18-bed rest home, and a community of 15 apartments in which residents live independently and prepare all their own meals. Hampton Woods also includes a senior center open to all older residents in the county for classes, parties, and meetings.

"This is state-of-the-art health care," says Dr. Mark Williams, director of the Program on Aging at the University of North Carolina. "Access to this kind of



**KEN REEB, ADMINISTRATOR OF HAMPTON WOODS, WITH RESIDENT ANNIE BRANCH.**

need for their nursing home, they didn't have any for-profit competitors," says Bernie Patterson of the Office of Rural Health. "It requires a lot of time and money to compete for a certificate, and a corporation won't risk that type of investment if residents are united and actively seeking a certificate for their community."

Hampton Woods has expanded beyond the services provided by for-profit nursing homes by cycling profits back into the home to improve health care. The facility recently received state approval for another 20 beds, and administrators are exploring the possibility of building an endowment fund to expand care for the poor.

"Many people in the county don't qualify for Medicaid, yet they don't have enough

money for insurance to cover their care," says administrator Bill Remmes. "These are the people who too often fall through the cracks."

Reinvesting profits in the facility also allows Hampton Woods to maintain a larger staff than most for-profit nursing homes. The community facility has fewer beds than the average corporate home, yet its nursing staff is 50 percent larger than the average for-profit operation.

More nurses and fewer patients means more care. The state requires homes to provide each resident with 2.1 nursing hours a day; Hampton Woods offers 3.9 hours.

As a community-based facility, Hampton Woods is also more willing than for-profit homes to accept patients who require more care. With long waiting lists for beds, corporate homes have an incentive to select patients who are easier — and therefore less expensive — to care for. Hampton Woods has a higher than average number of patients who need

intensive, sub-acute care — saving many residents from long, expensive stays in a hospital.

"We are indebted to Northampton County residents for their support, so we take patients who need more care," says Ken Reeb, administrator of the senior center. "We don't measure our success by profits — we measure it by a higher standard of health care."

— Shana Morrow

## **RESOURCES**

Here are several key groups working to reform nursing homes and promote community alternatives to institutional care:

### **National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform**

1224 M Street NW, Suite 301  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: (202) 393-2018

National reform group that maintains information on local patient advocacy groups and long-term care ombudsmen in each state.

### **Older Women's League**

666 11th Street NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001  
Phone: (202) 783-6686

Advocacy organization that deals in health and retirement issues; has conducted research on labor issues confronting nurse's aides.

### **Suzanne Harang**

71324 Highway 1077  
Covington, LA 70434  
Phone: (504) 893-9419

Former nursing home worker who now serves as an advocate for patients and their families nationwide.

### **Tennessee Coalition for Nursing Home Reform**

2012 21st Avenue South  
Nashville, TN 37212  
Phone: (615) 297-2391

Contact: Karen Franklin  
Statewide advocacy group with state-by-state figures on racial discrimination in nursing home admissions.

### **Friends of Residents in Long-Term Care**

3301 Woman's Club Drive, Suite 103  
Raleigh, NC 27612  
Phone: (919) 782-1530

Contact: Marlene Chasson  
Statewide advocacy group for nursing home residents and their families.

service in a rural community is really quite extraordinary. Poor people in Northampton County receive the same or an even better quality of health care to what millionaires receive around the world."

Its unique approach has made Hampton Woods an international model for alternative, long-term care. Williams says he routinely receives calls about the facility from doctors in Cairo, London, and Tokyo. The university sends a team of doctors, nurses, and social workers to the clinic each month to evaluate elderly residents and recommend treatment. "This is the first geriatric consulting team based in a rural community in the country," says Williams.

The key to the success of Hampton Woods lies in its broad-based, community support. More than 2,000 residents contributed a total of \$28,000 to get the center started, and scores wrote letters and attended public hearings to make sure the facility got approval from the state.

"When they applied for a certificate of

## Miss Elizabeth

*An Oral History*

By Kat Meads

*Ms. Elizabeth Sanderlin—“Miss Elizabeth,” as she is known around her home in Currituck County, North Carolina—is an unusual woman for her time and place. In a Southern Baptist community of farmers’ wives, she was a college-educated divorcee who worked outside the home, first as a teacher, then as part of the federal Work Projects Administration, created by Franklin Roosevelt to stimulate recovery from the Depression.*

*When “they turned the women off” from the WPA, as she puts it, she worked briefly as a restaurant manager and for many years thereafter as the county’s home demonstration agent. Now in her eighties, she remains a vital personality and intrepid traveler, unimpressed with herself and the many barriers she broke through with humor and grace.*

I came back to Currituck in '35, during the Depression, to live with my family. I was divorced then. I had a child died with appendicitis at three and a half years old. My husband and I were divorced about six months later.

Virginia Edwards, the home agent, came up to the house and said if I wanted some work to be up to the courthouse Monday morning, that everyone was going down there to register for work with the WPA. And of course I was bright and early down there and got a job working as a filing clerk. Then a new program was developed, Farmers Home Administration, and I went to work for that.

I was the home supervisor and Tully Williams was the farm

supervisor. We saw the farm families who applied for loans in Currituck, Camden, Perquimans, Chowan, seven counties in all. There was a committee in each county

*If you went in a home and saw flowers stuck down in a fruit jar or something, always remember there was something nice about that woman and give her plenty of attention. Because she was trying.*

set up of men. Didn't use women then, they were all men, and that committee approved or turned down the loans. Tully made the farm plan — how much it took to operate the farm with. Then I had to make the home plan — how much it took to live on, financially. Then I taught them, if they didn't know how to, to can food and live at home.

Two things we always got them was garden seed and a pressure cooker. Another thing was a milk cow. Over in Murfreesboro one man didn't want a milk cow. His wife was dead, and he had to milk it. So he always called me “Miss Cow Tail” when I went up there. He was upset over that. “Miss Cow Tail,” he called me.

With a milk cow you could make American cheese. We used an old oyster can and thick piece of wood with holes bored in it. Then you let that milk turn to cottage cheese and put butter coloring in there, cheese coloring, and mold it. During Depression you couldn't buy cheese. If you were going to have it, you had to make it. We canned sweet potatoes too. One woman in Perquimans County, every time she saw me years after said, “I'm still canning sweet potatoes.”

You just went into the home and did whatever was necessary. If the clotheslines and wood piles were in the front yard, we had to get them in the back yard. You'd want them to clean up the general appearance of their home. And fix broken-down door steps. So many legs were broken, crippled by broken-down door steps. I hadn't realized that before. So we were doing safety as well as appearance.

Then you tried to give them something to live for. I never will forget what our state woman said one time: If you went in a home and saw flowers stuck down in a fruit jar or something, always remember there was something nice about that woman and give her plenty of attention. Because she was trying.

A lot of people needed dental work, a lot needed glasses, some of them needed

tonsils removed. We saw to that too. One man's family needed five pairs of glasses. Five pairs in that one family. We drove up one day, Tully and myself, and all five of them came out to greet us, so proud of those glasses, you know.

It was interesting to see how things improved. I remember one family in Camden County, a black family. Their house burned. They had a large hen house and they were living in that hen house. The children were always upset and crying when we went there. But the woman was real smart, she just hadn't had the opportunity. So we got her a cow and hogs and chickens, and she got to feeding her family and preserving and canning and those children were soon back in school. And several times after then when she'd see me she'd tell me what that had meant to her. And you could tell it from the health of her family. Every family didn't do that well, but you don't expect it.

A family I worked with, Claude Wright's family, he had lost his wife but he kept those two children and I admired him for that. He did the best he could. But it was one of the worst houses — dirty, junky. He never hung anything up. I shouldn't tell you this, but I went there, he was in the hospital, and I took his two children and we cleaned that house up. I took off a truck load of old magazines and old clothes. Stuff that needed to be thrown out. I had no business doing that, but you get attached and I admired what he was trying to do. There was a hole in the floor and I covered that up to keep the cold air from coming through. And when I got home my second hus-

band, Sam, said, "You shouldn't have done that. That was his bathroom." And sure enough when I went back he had taken that board up. It was his bathroom.

We mostly saw six or eight families a day. If you didn't do anything but listen to their problems and their troubles, it released something. It did them good.

the world am I going to do to pay that money back? I was in Hertford and I called my husband and I said, "Sam, my job's going to be over with in 30 days, what am I going to do about my thousand dollars?" He said, "Well hush your crying and come on home." Said, "You've never heard of anyone starving in Currituck in your life."



**MRS. ELIZABETH SANDERLIN**

So I came home and I sold Fuller brushes and cosmetics and paid my thousand dollars back. Then I went to work at the Carotoke Restaurant in Shawboro. I had a cook and a dishwasher and a waitress, and I was manager. It was a nice place for the community people, a nice meeting place for them, I mean. We were open breakfast, lunch and dinner, and Saturday night folks came in to dance. But it wasn't enough business to operate. Johnny Etheridge said if I could get somebody to work like me, I wouldn't have to be paying all these others, but you can't find that. If a woman's going to cook, she don't want to wash dishes.

Years don't mean a thing to me. Seems like it was '45, but I'm not sure. No, it was '51. In '51 I went to work as the home demonstration agent for Currituck

County. Extension work. I did that for 18 years. Extension started in nineteen three or four, way before the WPA. But during Depression people needed something else. The extension service didn't lend money. The Farmers Home Administration did. They let people stay on the farm.

Twelve years I worked with the WPA. Then they turned the women off the Farmers Home Administration, after the Depression was over. One woman was all they kept on the payroll. I had borrowed \$1,000 to buy a car one Saturday, and next week I lost my job. I thought, what in

About the time I started as agent, Alma Roberts started writing for the newspaper. And she didn't know how to condense at all, so she put everything in there. We had so many write-ups about things being done in Currituck — that did club work more good than anything else.

They're called homemakers clubs now but they were called home demonstration clubs then because the county agent would go to the meeting and give a demonstration. I had 14 clubs throughout the county and a lot of them met at night. We'd demonstrate the different kinds of food you'd prepare or some sewing. We'd do household furnishings, refinishing furniture, upholstering furniture. When I started in '51, the state wouldn't let you do crafts. They thought it was a waste of time. But I did crafts anyway. I just didn't put them in the report at the end of the month. Now the state's paying people to go out and teach crafts. Times change. They do change.

We made mats out of pine needles, braided rugs, and Christmas decorations. Crafts have been a livelihood for a lot of women. Mattie Burgess sold her angels at the Christmas Shop in Manteo as long as she was able to make them. Her picture came out in one of the oil company's magazines. She was using their Fluffo margarine cans. We had fashion shows too.

It was a good time. A good time to visit. And if you didn't learn from the agent, you learned from someone else that night. And then so many people got up to speak. Not a year or two ago they called me to give a talk to the county commissioners. I said, "I can't do it now. Last time I tried to talk I just gave out of breath" — being nervous and my age and all. And the woman who called said, "Will you give me some notes so I can do it?" And that night the first thing she told them when she stood up, she said, "Now I'm going to talk tonight but club work has al-

lowed me to do it." Said, "It has put confidence in me." And that's what I've liked to see. Women who developed.

I know one time I was talking to Miss Alice Scaff about going to church or going to club meeting. I told her I'd put church first because I think you should put church first and she said, "Let me tell you something, no you don't. You put

*Every person is a special person. Each person—I don't care who they are or anything about them —each person has something to give, and if you pull it out of them or help them find it, then they develop. Seeing a timid woman getting up and being able to express herself is one of the nicest things I know of.*

club first and train them how to talk in church." That's not right, that's not the way I feel, but I think club work does train leaders for your community.

You still have a lot of women out there who are timid because they have

never worked outside the home. They're afraid to express themselves, they think they may be wrong. And every person is a special person. Each person — I don't care who they are or anything about them — each person has something to give, and if you pull it out of them or help them find it, then they develop. Seeing a timid woman getting up and being able to express herself is one of the nicest things I know of.

I've been retired since '69, but a lot of people still call me with their personal problems. If you just listen, it'll help them. Not longer than last week I started to leave a woman's house and she said, "Sit down." Said, "I've got to ask you something. My daughter-in-law wants to take me to live at her house and the other one wants me to stay here." Said, "What am I going to do?" Said, "Please tell me what to do." I said, "You're old enough to do what you want to do. You and I have gotten to that age now when we can do whatever we want to do."

People sometimes just want you to tell them what to do, but you don't. Help them see the choices, but leave it up to them. Then they can't come back and say, "See, you shouldn't have told me..." It takes a long time to learn that, but you learn it after a while.

I had a state man come by and interview me, wanted to know what problems I had in the county and who had ever talked ugly to me. I said I didn't have any problems and no one ever talked ugly to me.

Some of the other agents said, "You always laugh at everything. You never take anything personally." I've just always been that way. Could understand why people did things and all. I went in a house one time, and this young boy said, "Mama, everything brightens up when Miz Elizabeth comes in."

And I thought, well now, I've never thought about that. But I thought it was real nice, him saying so. □

*Kat Meads grew up in Shawboro, North Carolina and now lives in Los Gatos, California.*

# Snakes

By Nanci Kincaid

.....  
**CHERRY LAKE**

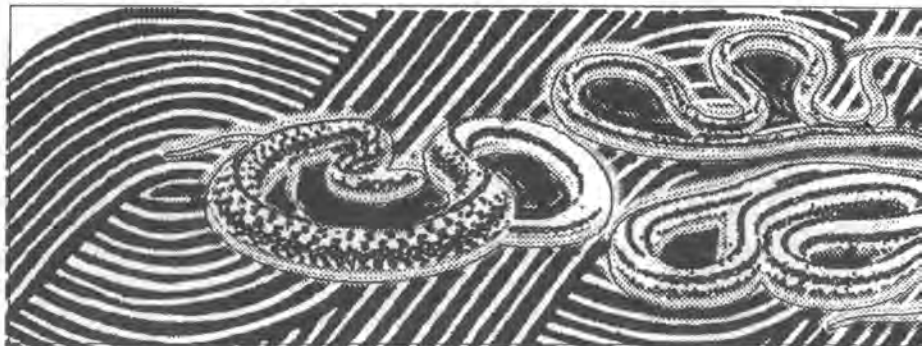
I am five years old. My brothers, Jimbo and Teddy, are three and one. We are driving with our parents to Cherry Lake to swim. It is summer, so Daddy doesn't have to be Pinetta School principal every single minute, some afternoons he is free to be our father.

We are all dressed in swimsuits. In the back seat my brothers hold inner tubes blown into the shapes of animals, but mine is a pink doughnut shape. The back seat full of inner tubes makes it seem like more than three children — like a birthday party with balloons. It is as hot as blazes and twice as hot in the car. It is hot the way only Florida knows how to be, the sun's rays like long, sharp needles pricking us with heat, the car fender gleaming hot, steam rising from the pavement. Our hair is wet and plastered to our heads making small, black curls around our ears. The car windows are down, but the breeze is hot breeze. We are happy. Our towels and flip-flops are scattered about the back seat. Jimbo, Teddy and I take turns hanging our heads out the window, or leaning over the front seat to look at our parents' faces. Are they happy too?

Cherry Lake is not far from Pinetta. The family that

lives next door to us goes to Cherry Lake every weekend to fish and swim. My brothers and I stand in the yard and wave goodbye to them on Saturday mornings as they drive off with their picnic basket, pulling their fishing boat on a trailer behind them. But today they stood in the yard and waved to us. They looked surprised as we drove away. It is a Wednesday.

Daddy turns off the highway onto a red dirt road. A sign



says Cherry Lake 5 Miles. We are nearly there. Palmetto leaves look like green fans on the sides of the road. Daddy is singing. He wants this to be a happy day for us. It cannot be a happy day for Daddy unless it's a happy day for Mother. It cannot be a happy day for Mother unless it's a happy day for

us. This is how our family works. So Daddy is trying hard, singing, "The sun so hot I froze to death, Suzanna don't you cry." He wants Mother to sing too, and we look at her, hopeful.

"Oh, my God!" she shrieks.

Daddy slams on the brakes slinging Jimbo, Teddy and me hard against the front seat. Teddy cries.

Across the road, stretched nearly from side to side, are two huge, fat snakes sunning themselves.

Mother reaches into the back seat for Teddy. "Shhhhh," she says to him, putting her finger to her lips, but looking straight ahead. "Do they have rattlers?" she whispers, her eyes squinted, her voice aimed at Daddy. "Listen. See if you hear rattlers."

Pinetta is famous for rattlesnakes. Every year they have a rattlesnake round-up, lots of men pouring kerosene down snake holes and smoking the snakes out, catching them in croaker sacks, weighing and measuring them, sending the best snakes to Ross Allen's Snake-Atorium at Silver Springs where they have the glass bottom boats. Pinetta takes pride in the size and number of rattlesnakes they have provided Ross Allen. The unremarkable snakes they sell to make hat bands and boots — and some of them they eat. The man who lives next door has been to the rattlesnake round-up. He says rattlesnake meat tastes like frog legs. But we haven't been. Mother doesn't believe in eating snakes. She hates them.

"Don't worry," Daddy says. "I'll run over them."

Mother gasps. Her bare feet spring from the floorboard to the seat. She wraps her arms around her knees. "Okay," she says. "I'm ready. Hurry, hurry."

Jimbo, Teddy and I lean over the front seat, watching.

One snake lifts his head, the other begins to slowly curve himself into a z.

"They're not dead," Mother says.

"I'll back up," Daddy says.

My brothers and I shriek. We begin jumping up and down in the back seat, slapping each other with our inner tubes. Daddy puts the car in reverse and backs over the snakes. Mother closes her eyes.

Daddy stops the car again to view the damage. The snakes rearrange themselves lazily, still claiming the center of the road.

"Those snakes must be seven feet long," Daddy says. "I've never seen such big snakes. They don't even feel these tires."

Mother looks at the snakes. They don't seem to understand that we are running over them with a two-ton car. So Daddy tries again. Shifts into drive, then into reverse, running over the snakes without stopping. Jimbo and Teddy and I squeal as we are slung back and forth between the front seat and back seat. Again and again. Now Mother's face is on her knees, her hands covering her head.

"Damn," Daddy says, stopping at last. His hair is drenched. "Can you believe this? Look at that. They won't die."

On the road in front of us are the two snakes, one now belly up and writhing, having been flipped upside down by our car wheels, the other easing its way toward a clump of palmetto leaves on the side of the road.

"Maybe you have to run over their heads," Daddy says.

"They're getting away," I say.

"I hate snakes," Mother says, lifting her head to peer at them.

"Run over them again," Jimbo says.

There is a rule in Pinetta. If you come across a poisonous snake you should kill it. Snakes are everywhere. Under the house, in our flower beds, in the weed patch where we play, circled around the leg of a lawn chair in the yard. Jimbo and I have already learned to look for snakes when we walk through the weeds or even when we sit in the shade of the Chinaberry

tree and draw in the dirt with sticks. We look for snakes every step we take, every game we play, and maybe Teddy does too. Mother has taught us this.

When people in Pinetta kill snakes in their yard they carry them out to the edge of the road and sling them

Daddy steps on the gas and the car moves. We all scream as we drive over the snakes. We imagine them thumping against the underside of the car. We think we feel a bump as we go.

Afterwards Daddy stops the car and we all stare out the rearview window. There lie the snakes, exactly as they were.



across their mailboxes — for the neighbors to see. It's a common sight. Not black snakes and garter snakes. Only rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, and coral snakes. The poisonous ones. Mother says she would not be a mailman in Pinetta for all the money in the world. Many a time a neighbor has hung a dead snake over the mailbox only to find out later that it had slithered away as soon as he turned his back. There is no way to count on a snake being dead. Even with their heads chopped off they can still bite you and kill you.

"I'm going to have to get out and kill them," Daddy says, opening his car door.

"No," I say.

"Don't," Jimbo shouts.

But Mother was the one. "Don't you dare," she screams, grabbing Daddy's arm, pulling him back in the car.

"I'll get a stick," he says.

"A stick?" Mother looks at him like he's crazy.

"I'll hold their heads down with a stick and grab their necks so they can't bite."

"You're out of your mind," Mother says, still holding Daddy by the arm.

"Then I'll kill them with this." Daddy pushes the car door open and stands on one foot, reaching into the pocket of his swim trunks for his pocketknife. It is the size of a fingernail clipper.

"Jimmy Thorton, get in this car," Mother says. "Please."

Daddy smiles. He begins to open the knife blade.

"Jimmy," Mother says. "Please don't." She grabs his shirt and tries to pull him back into the car. Daddy loves this. He is all smiles. Jimbo and I grab him too, yanking his arm as hard as we can. "Stay in this car where you belong," Mother says. "You're scaring the children." And she won't let go of Daddy's shirt, even when he tries to unpeel the fingers of her fist.

"I'll get the tire jack out of the trunk," he says. "I'll chop them to bits with the jack."

"NO!" we all shout, frenzied.

"You're bare legged," Mother says. "If they bit you ..."

Daddy laughs at Mother. But she will not let go of him. She has stretched his tee-shirt completely out of shape trying to pull him into the car. Jimbo and I are pulling too, begging him not to go. And we don't let go until he gets in the car and slams the door closed.

He pretends a few more times that he will get out and kill those two rattlesnakes once and for all, but each time Mother grabs him and refuses to let him go until he promises not to get out. This makes Daddy happy. He is smiling and laughing.

Meanwhile, the one snake rights itself and then both of them slide off the edge of the road through the sandspurs and into the palmetto thicket.

"Now," Mother says, "we can go."

Daddy grins at her and presses the accelerator. The car moves slowly. "I wish you'd let me kill them," Daddy says.

"Don't be silly," Mother answers. She puts her hand around Daddy's leg as he drives. It is like she is getting a good

grip on him in case he should suddenly try to jump from the car and kill something else on the road. He swerves all over the place as he drives.

**T**hat trip to Cherry Lake I knew my mother really did love my father. He knew it too, which was why he could barely keep the car on the road.

I don't remember another thing about that day. Not whether we ever got to Cherry Lake. Not whether we enjoyed the buoyancy of our inner tubes, the luxury of staying afloat effortlessly, without having to struggle and kick, without worrying about sinking and drowning. I don't even remember whether we enjoyed the hot dogs we roasted on unraveled coat hangers over an open fire Daddy built of sticks and dry wood.

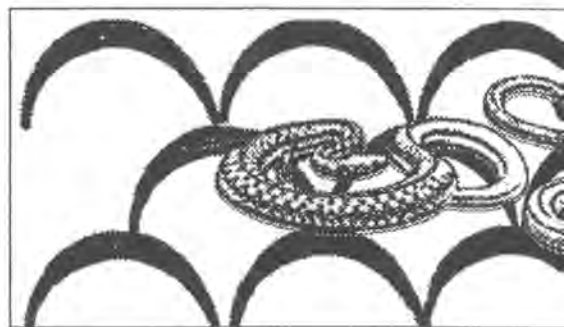
## THE WINDOW

I am ten. We live in Tallahassee now. Daddy has a job with the State Department of Education. He makes more money. We have just moved into our new house. Mother designed it herself and we barely got moved before the babies were born. Mother was expecting, but she didn't know it was twins until thirty minutes before Paula and Pamela were born. Daddy was in Miami. He travels a lot now. So our neighbors drove Mother. She leaked bloody pregnancy juice all over Mr. Covington's car seat. He said, "Don't worry about it," and picked her up and carried her into the emergency room when they got to the hospital. His wife, Ann, carried Mother's overnight bag. They were so nice they made Mother cry. I stayed home and kept Jimbo and Teddy.

We thought we would name the baby Pamela Ann if it was a girl or Wayne Henry if it was a boy. Mother didn't have a name ready when the second baby girl was born. This bothered Mother because she likes to be prepared for everything that happens. Paula Lynn didn't get named for three days.

The babies are six months old. Mother doesn't cry as much now. We have a maid, Paris, who comes every day. Before Daddy goes out of town he takes Jimbo, Teddy and me aside and says, "Now, while I'm gone, the best way to help your Mother is to stay out of her way."

Today Teddy is running a fever. He is sleeping in the pine-paneled study, but he wakes up and goes crazy slapping at the dark knots in the pine. He is shrieking and we all run to check on him. Mother feels his forehead. "You are hot as a fire-cracker," she says. She hollers for Paris to bring the baby aspirin and a cool rag.





**It is Mother's idea to flip the snake onto the rake somehow and carry it to a little hole Jimbo and his friends dug for the snake to be buried in.**

over and checks the babies' diapers. When she looks up she sees the snake.

"Good heavens!" she says.

Then Jimbo and I notice it too. A snake has crawled up the side of the house and out onto the roll-out window. It is draped half on, half off the glass, sunning itself. Daddy is not home to kill it.

"I'm not studying no snake," Paris says, when Mother tries to talk her into flipping it off the window with the broom handle and killing it with the hoe.

We stand in the living room watching the lazy snake, discussing what to do about him. There was nothing but the window screen between him and us. Mother walks over to the

"What's wrong with Teddy?" Jimbo says.

"He has a fever," Mother says.

Teddy continues slapping at the pine knots and crying. He thinks the knots are roaches crawling up the wall. He's trying to kill them. He's beating the wall with his fist. "Teddy, Teddy," Mother says. "It's okay." She picks him up and kisses him while he struggles in her arms. Then Paris comes with the aspirin and they make Jimbo and me leave the room.

When Teddy falls asleep Mother comes out of the study and walks in to check on the babies in the playpen in the living room. Jimbo and I are watching Popeye on TV. Mother bends

**T**he snake hangs in the window for four days. Every time Mother or Paris walks by they try to close the window even tighter. The snake has not moved at all in three days. "His circulation is cut off," Paris says. He was beginning to look dry. The end of his tail was stiff. Jimbo and his friends like to stand outside and throw pine cones at the snake to see if it moves, but it doesn't. We check on him first thing every morning. "Still there," we say.

On the fifth day, Mother is sure he is dead. We watch through the window while she goes outside and pokes at him with the rake. He flops back and forth, lifeless. "Okay," she yells to Paris, "you can open the window now." Paris begins the unwinding. "Go slow," Mother shouts.

Pamela and Paula sit in their playpen chewing on rubber clothespins. Jimbo and I watch Mother with admiration. When Paris unwinds the window completely, nothing happens. It is Mother's idea to flip the snake onto the rake somehow and carry it to a little hole Jimbo and his friends dug for the snake to be buried in. It isn't an easy thing. Mother fools with the snake until she gets afraid she will crack the glass in the window with the rake. The dead snake doesn't want to come loose. One last try, and she manages to hook it on the rake prongs and sling it to the ground. Inside the house we all cheer.

But as Mother walks nearer, jabbing lightly at the dead snake, it raises its head. "Lord, God," Paris shrieks. "It ain't dead yet."

"Run, Mother," Jimbo and I scream. She takes a few flimsy whacks at the groggy snake, missing it each time, then she backs up and stares. That snake contracts into a long S and begins to move through the grass. Mother throws the rake at it and runs for the house. We watch the snake slide through the yard, cross the paved road, and go into the woods across the street.

"Good riddance," Paris says.

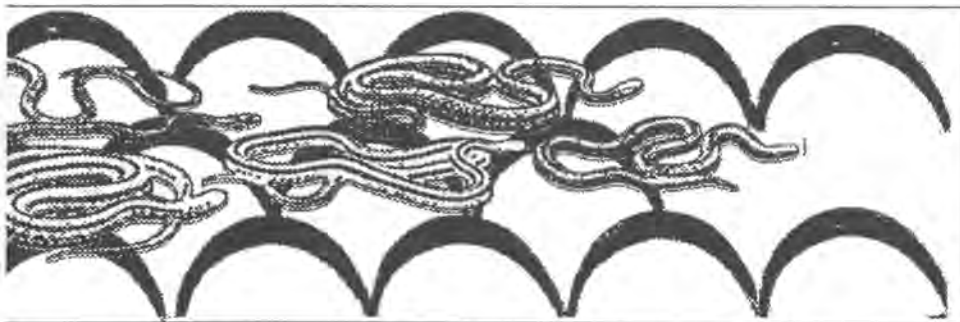
Mother is afraid to let us play outside until the following day when Daddy comes home from his trip to Atlanta. He brings everybody presents in his brief case. Mine is a piggy bank in the shape of a peach. Paula and Pamela get rattles that say Welcome to Georgia. Mother gets a Whitman's Sampler. And Teddy and Jimbo get rubber snakes. Daddy holds the fake snakes by the necks and slings them out at Jimbo and Teddy, trying to be funny, saying, "Look out."

I laugh, but Jimbo doesn't. He throws his in the kitchen trash can which hurts Daddy's feelings.

"Hey buddy," Daddy says to Jimbo. "What's wrong?"

"If you don't want yours can I have it?" Teddy asks. He digs through the trash can and gets it out. He holds the two rubber snakes up and puts their heads together like they are kissing at first, then he slaps them together making them fight. Daddy looks at Mother and winks.

But all Mother says is, "You are never here when we need you, Jimmy."



window yelling, "Stay back," to Jimbo and me who want to get a closer look at the snake. She hurriedly winds the squeaky handle, and the window rolls down. The snake doesn't have time to think what to do. It is clamped almost in half by the closed window. Paris walks over and turns the window handle as hard as she can too, to make sure. It is closed so tight that the snake is pinched in half and dangling. He is caught right in the center of the living room window.

"Now," Mother says. She looks at Jimbo and me. "Don't you touch this window until we're sure he's dead."

## THE FLOWER BED

I am fourteen. We live in Richmond, Virginia now. Daddy is manager of a textbook publishing company here and has a fancy office in a tall building on Main Street. He has two secretaries and six sales representatives who work for him. His hair is getting gray.

Mother left six months ago taking Teddy and Pamela and Paula with her. They went back to Tallahassee, where Mother got a job working in a doctor's office. She fills out insurance forms. I think she will miss the Virginia snow. Last year we had a white Christmas for the first time in our lives. Mother went outside and laid in the snow she liked so much. We taught her how to make angels. And Daddy gave everybody ice skates for Christmas. I don't know what good ice skates will do in Tallahassee.

Jimbo and I want to go to live with Mother too, but we never said so when she left and we don't say so now. The two weeks before she left Mother never got dressed. Every day when we came home from school she had on her nightgown. The day she left, yelling for Teddy and the twins to get what they needed and throw it in the car, she was wearing her nightgown and bathrobe and had not combed her hair all day.

"Where are you going?" Jimbo and I asked Mother when we got home from school and saw her loading the station wagon with a mattress and Pamela and Paula's pink Barbie doll suitcases. "Where are you going?" we screamed.

"You can come if you want to," she said. "Get whatever you want to take with you. But hurry."

**"I love you,"  
she shouted as  
she backed  
out of the  
driveway. We  
tried to believe  
her. "I wish you  
would come  
with me."**

"window," Teddy yelled. It was the only thing he said. He sat in the front yard and stared straight ahead waiting for Mother.

"Where are you going? Tell us," Jimbo begged.

"Come with me," Mother said, "both of you."

"We can't," I told her. Daddy will kill himself, I thought, when he comes home and sees this. He will jump off a bridge

Jimbo and I stood watching Mother. Her bedroom slippers flapped as she walked. "Hurry," she told Teddy and the girls, "hurry." It was like somebody had nailed me to the floor where I stood. Teddy and Pamela and Paula ran back and forth from their rooms slinging their things into the car, G.I. Joe and all his equipment, Barbie's Fashion Runway and a pillowcase full of her outfits, the report on Zeus that Teddy was working on for school, a box of markers with lost lids, two female gerbils in a cage, no socks, no pajamas, no under-pants. "I claim the front by the

into the James River. He will die without us — without Mother.

"I'll call you," Mother said, hugging us, crushing us, jabbing her fingernails into our skin. She got in the car and Teddy didn't look at her. He looked straight ahead.

"I love you," she shouted as she backed out of the driveway. We tried to believe her. "I wish you would come with me." Her face was ugly, stretched too tight across her bones, and her hair was wild, she slapped at it, then moved her hand to her mouth and bit it, hard. "I have to go," she said. "I have to."

Pamela and Paula sat in the back of the station wagon on the mattress. They made their Barbie dolls wave goodbye to Jimbo and me in the rear view mirror.

Jimbo and I ran behind the car all the way down the driveway. "It's okay," we said. "Don't cry." The car tag says Virginia is for Lovers. Our number is LH-4687. I memorized it.

**N**ow some nights Daddy puts a hundred-dollar bill down on the kitchen table. "This is yours," he says to Jimbo and me, "if you will just call your Mother and ask her to come back."

But we won't do it.

Daddy sits in his chair and smokes cigarettes all night long. He wants Jimbo and me to tell him what went wrong. He wants us to explain things to him. We try to keep the house neat. It is neater than it ever was when Mother lived here. Nothing is messed up. But Daddy still sits in his chair and says to Jimbo and me, "I've made a lot of mistakes in my life."

Daddy hires Mrs. Foster to stay with us whenever he goes out of town. We hate her.

Daddy spends three nights a week in Washington, D.C. He is publishing something for the government. Mrs. Foster says she bets he has got a woman there. She says, "Your Daddy is not the kind to suffer long."

But she never sees him sleeping in his chair. She doesn't see him sit up all night trying to write Mother a letter. He doesn't come into her room in the middle of the night and wake her up saying, "I just had a dream about your Mother. Wake up, Bethie. Listen. What do you think this means?"

I tell Daddy that if he doesn't fire Mrs. Foster I will run away. This scares him because he cannot afford to lose anybody else. He says he will think about it. He says maybe Jimbo and I are responsible enough to stay alone.

**I**t is Tuesday. Daddy goes to Washington on Tuesdays. After school Jimbo and I come home and fix bacon sandwiches and watch TV. We sit in the den downstairs with no lights on. We don't talk. We just eat. Mrs. Foster has gone someplace. We're alone. The doorbell rings.

It's the paper boy. He wants his money so I pay him. Then



he tells me, "There's a snake in your flower bed." I look where he points. In the pine straw is a long black snake. I yell for Jimbo to come look.

"It's harmless," the paper boy says.

"I know," I tell him.

Jimbo comes out and looks at the snake too. This attention makes the snake decide to climb up the side of the house to



get away from us. We watch it crawl up the bricks. "How can he do that?" Jimbo says.

"Don't let him climb up there and get in your attic," the paper boy says. "They like to nest in attics."

I run to get the broom. When I come back the snake is climbing up over the doorway. I swing the broom at him gently, trying to brush him down.

"Give me that," Jimbo says. He swipes at the snake and it falls back into the flower bed.

"He's harmless," the paper boy says, "but where there's one snake, there's two."

The snake begins to wriggle out of the shrubbery and into the clearing in the yard.

"Do you want me to kill it?" Jimbo asks.

"Yes," I say.

"Get the hoe," he tells me. I run to the garage to get it, but can't find it, so I get the shovel.

"That won't do," Jimbo says. "We need the hoe." He goes to the garage to look for it.

I stand watching the snake. It moves slowly. Without thinking what I'm doing I raise the shovel over my head and strike the snake as hard as I can. It bounces. I cannot believe myself. So I deliver another blow. And another one. What amazes me most is that I'm not afraid. It feels good to hit the snake.

"What are you doing?" Jimbo yells.

"It's going to get away," I say, "if you don't hurry."

Jimbo runs over with the hoe and chops at the snake with all his strength. The snake twists and jerks. The impact of the hoe makes marks on the snake's skin, but doesn't cut him open.

"Kill it," I say.

Jimbo beats the snake with the hoe until it is limp and flopping like a piece of soft rope. "Is he dead?" he asks.

We aren't sure. You can never tell about snakes.

"It seems so hateful to only half-way kill him and leave him to die slow," I say. "It's better to kill him completely, all at once."

"Okay," Jimbo says, whacking the snake with the hoe again. I lift the shovel and hit him too, to be sure. We beat him and beat him and beat him. It makes a terrible sound when

Jimbo's hoe strikes my shovel. The noise vibrates all the way up our arms and seems to shake our brains.

We keep at it until we are rubber-armed and can't lift our hoe or shovel anymore. "He's dead," I say. "He has to be."

Jimbo reaches down and picks up the dead snake with his bare hands. I can't believe it. He drapes the snake over

the hoe and carries it across the street and throws it into the wooded lot over there, shouting as he slings it, making a noise like a Tarzan yell, only worse. I stand in the yard and wait for him. When he turns to walk back home I look at his boy face. I love Jimbo.

**W**hen we get inside the house the phone is ringing. It's Mother. She knows Daddy goes to Washington on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

"Hello," I say. "We're fine," I say. "How are you?"

She says she and the little children miss us. She says she loves us.

"Jimbo just killed his first snake," I say. "He beat him to death with a hoe."

Mother gets quiet. "Let me talk to him," she says.

But Jimbo won't. He turns on the TV and listens while Douglas Edwards reads the world news. "He can't come right now," I say.

"I'm proud of him," Mother says. "Tell him that."

"I will," I say. And we hang up.

I walk outside and sit on the front steps. The shovel and hoe lay slung across the walk. We should put them away before Daddy comes home. I like to sit outside in the late afternoon and breathe cool air. I like to watch the cars drive by our house, sometimes with their headlights on, fathers heading home from work, sleeping as they drive, and short-haired mothers with backseats full of neighborhood children, delivering them home from baseball practice and piano lessons, stopping to let them out, their goodbyes echoing up and down the street, like the saddest music in the world. □

*Nanci Kincaid grew up in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Her first novel, Crossing Blood, was published by Putnam in June.*

# CHEAT

# Home

# Home

**ATLANTA, GA.** — Some days it seems like the phone at Annie Ruth Bennett's house won't ever stop ringing. The callers want to sell her storm windows, debt-consolidation loans, burial plots. But Bennett knows it's all a scheme: They want to steal a piece of her home by getting her to take out a loan against its value.

Ruth and her husband Frank learned about such scams the hard way. The couple is already struggling to come up with nearly \$500 a month to pay off a loan from Fleet Finance, a giant national mortgage company based in Atlanta. The Bennetts say they took out the loan after a home-repair contractor knocked on their door and offered to fix up their small frame house. He arranged a second mortgage at 18.5 percent interest. Then he took nearly \$10,000 to pay himself for work that an appraiser later valued at \$1,245.

A sheet of plastic in the living room now covers a gaping hole where the drop-ceiling installed by the contractor fell in. What's worse, the Bennetts owe more than \$28,000 to Fleet, plus \$7,000 remaining on their original house note. After 33 years of making payments on their home, most of the value in their property now belongs to someone else.

The Bennetts have already fallen behind on the payments. His Social Security check and her wages as a cafeteria worker for Delta Airlines aren't enough to keep up, and the couple has had to pay delinquency charges to Fleet,

a subsidiary of the largest bank in New England. "It's just tight, I'm telling you," says Ruth.

The Bennetts are not alone. Although "tin men" have been peddling shady home-repair loans for decades, the old scam has been given new life by mainstream banks hungry for profits. Interviews with state officials, private attorneys, and advocates for the poor across the nation show that respectable banks and savings and loans are using home-repair contractors and second-mortgage companies as front operations to prey on the poor.

Those familiar with second-mortgage abuses estimate that hundreds of thousands of low-income homeowners — most of them older black families like

the Bennetts — have been victimized in the past decade. Many have lost their homes outright. Others have had the equity stolen out of their property.

In Atlanta, attorneys for the Bennetts and other homeowners are suing Fleet Finance and Home Equity Centers, accusing the two lenders of "theft by deception." According to the lawsuit, Home Equity arranged questionable "home-repair" loans for the Bennetts and others, and Fleet in turn profited from the deals by buying the loans from the mortgage company. Since 1985, court records show, Fleet has purchased more than 90 percent of the loans made by Home Equity Centers in and around Atlanta.

William Brennan Jr., a legal aid attorney for the Bennetts, says scam artists see older black homeowners as easy marks because they are usually less educated and more likely to be financially strapped. They have also spent decades paying their house notes and often have large chunks of equity built up in their homes. That equity, says Brennan, makes a tantalizing target for loan brokers, tin men, second-mortgage companies, and banks.

"It's like finding a ten-dollar bill in the street and saying: This is mine, I'm gonna take it," he says. "Their attitude is: It's there for the taking."

## CREDIT STARVED

Thanks to lax regulation by state and federal governments and the free-wheeling brand of capitalism unleashed during

## By Mike Hudson

**Big banks are helping second-mortgage companies prey on the poor, using high-interest loans to steal low-income homes.**

the Reagan era, home-equity ripoffs have become big business over the past decade. Today the scams are well-organized, demographically targeted, and nationally franchised.

Across the nation, contractors and mortgage brokers prowl minority neighborhoods and offer poor, working-class, or elderly homeowners loans to pay off hospital bills, avoid foreclosure, or repair sagging front porches. Interest rates often run as high as 20 percent a year; sometimes they surpass 30 percent. Tacked-on service and insurance fees raise the price of borrowing even higher.

The banking industry makes this sort of lending possible by starving low-income and minority neighborhoods of mainstream credit. Borrowers in poor neighborhoods have nowhere to turn except to high-interest mortgage companies. Banks and S&Ls then profit from the questionable practices of the second-mortgage companies by quietly lending them money to make loans — and then purchasing individual loan contracts after they're sealed.

The need to confront second-mortgage fraud in minority neighborhoods — and the way the banking industry supports these crimes — has taken on an added urgency in the aftermath of the urban uprisings in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and other cities last spring. After years of neglect, media and government are slowly being forced to turn their attention to the economic exploitation of poor neighborhoods.

Activists and lawyers familiar with second-mortgage fraud say that the South may have been hit harder by home-equity scams than any other region in the country. Part of the reason, they say, is that many Southern states have weak consumer-protection laws — and do little to enforce those that they have.

Court records and interviews with officials and attorneys reveal a trail of ripoffs across the region:

▼ In Virginia, two mortgage companies called Landbank Equity Corp. and



**ANNIE RUTH AND FRANK BENNETT MAY LOSE THEIR HOME TO A BANK SUBSIDIARY ACCUSED OF PROFITING FROM SECOND-MORTGAGE SCAMS.**

Freedlander Inc. operated giant fraud schemes — stealing from borrowers and investors alike — until the firms collapsed and their top executives were put in prison. Landbank made 10,000 loans in five states. Freedlander, once the fourth largest mortgage company in the nation, expanded into 33 states and made 37,000 loans totaling \$675 million.

William Runnells, an ex-Bible salesman who got a 40-year prison sentence for masterminding the Landbank scheme, said making money off down-on-their-luck borrowers was easy. "When you're broke, you'll borrow money at any price," he explained. "It's like buying tomatoes. Everything's got a price."

▼ In rural Alabama, three juries slapped Union Mortgage of Dallas with more than \$57 million in fraud verdicts last year. In one case, five families won \$45 million after being taken by a home contractor that the company had recruited — despite a record of 14 lawsuits, liens, and court judgments against him. Attorneys for the victims say Union made 40,000 predatory loans across the United States.

A former Union branch manager in Alabama testified that the industry has a catch phrase to describe how borrowers can be hoodwinked with fast talk and confusing paperwork. "Cash out the deal," the saying goes, "before the cus-

tomers come out from under the ether."

▼ In Atlanta, second-mortgage scams are so bad that DeKalb County has funded a Home Defense Office to protect low-income homeowners. The program is headed by William Brennan, the lawyer representing Ruth and Frank Bennett.

Brennan started defending poor people as a legal aid lawyer in Atlanta in 1968. Back then, his biggest worry was making sure his clients weren't unfairly denied public housing or welfare. Sure, he says, there were corner grocers who price-gouged in poor neighborhoods, slippery door-to-

door salesmen and, of course, tin men. The poor have always paid more for goods and services.

But Brennan contends businesses that preyed on the poor simply weren't as organized and vicious as they are today. Trade schools, easy-credit used-car dealers, rent-to-own stores, check-cashing outlets, pawn shops, tin men, and second-mortgage companies all make lots of money by targeting people with low incomes.

"What we're seeing today is an active, organized, overt effort to oppress and abuse poor people in their neighborhoods," he says. "These people are now going into their neighborhoods in a big way to take advantage of them and take their money."

Brennan says Fleet Finance lures elderly homeowners into taking out high-interest loans — and is quick to foreclose when they cannot make the payments. Deed records show that Fleet took the homes of nearly 13 percent of the Atlanta-area residents it lent money to last year, a foreclosure rate at least 10 times higher than the national average.

In their defense, Fleet and other banks say that the home-repair and second-mortgage dealers they do business with are completely separate companies. There may have been abuses in a few cases, bankers say, but they had no way of knowing.



**"WHAT WE'RE SEEING IS AN ACTIVE, ORGANIZED EFFORT TO OPPRESS AND ABUSE POOR PEOPLE IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS," SAYS LEGAL AID LAWYER WILLIAM BRENNAN JR.**

## A NATIONWIDE RIPOFF

Although low-income homeowners in the South have been hardest hit by second-mortgage ripoffs, the scams are part of a booming business that systematically exploits poor neighborhoods across the nation:

▼ In Chicago, Community Bank of Greater Peoria agreed to pay \$4 million to settle a class-action lawsuit involving more than 6,275 homeowners. The borrowers said they were victimized by deceptive loans arranged by 40 contractors who had working relationships with the bank.

The bank denied being "in cahoots" with shady contractors but acknowledged some "technical violations."

▼ In New York, the state attorney general has charged a mortgage company named Dartmouth Plan with defrauding as many as 20,000 borrowers and then siphoning \$25 million out of the corporation via a phony employee stock plan. The state also has sued a dozen banks that bought mortgages from the company.

Dartmouth has already agreed to pay \$4 million to settle a criminal investigation of fraud involving 7,000 homeowners in Connecticut. State officials there say the company made loans in at least 38 states before going

out of business in 1990.

To increase its volume of mortgages, Dartmouth offered trips to Monte Carlo and other incentives to salespeople who brought in lots of loans or signed up customers for high interest rates.

▼ In Los Angeles, prosecutors have charged real estate entrepreneur Kevin Merritt with 32 felonies alleging the theft of equity and homes from low-income people. Merritt, who denies the charges, has been sued at least 175 times.

In one case, Merritt offered to help save the home of Roland Henry, an 84-year-old man who had dropped out of high school in east Texas and bought his own home by selling homemade tamales on street corners in Watts. Henry, nearly blind and confined to a wheelchair by crippling arthritis, was facing foreclosure on two previous home-equity loans.

Merritt offered to give him yet another loan to pay off the debts, Henry said, but instead fooled him into signing away his two-bedroom house. Merritt said Henry knew exactly what he was signing.

A jury believed Henry. His family won a civil verdict of nearly \$1.7 million from Merritt last spring. Henry didn't hear the judgment, however. He died last year.

—M.H.

"These people may be poor and illiterate, but no one puts a gun to their head and tells them to sign," Fleet Financial Group vice president Robert Lougee told the *Boston Globe*. "This idea that Fleet should regulate the world is preposterous."

## HAIRDRESSERS AND LOAN SHARKS

Whether or not big banks like Fleet are knowingly preying on the poor, it is clear that they are the biggest winners — and homeowners are the biggest losers — in what has become one of America's biggest growth industries.

According to the credit rating company of Duff and Phelps, home-equity lending has soared from \$1 billion in 1982 to \$100 billion in 1988. Much of that money has been borrowed by middle-class and wealthy property owners eager to convert their home equity into cash for cars, boats, and vacations. By last year, second-mortgage debt totaled \$357 billion. Thanks to such heavy borrowing, homeowners now control only 55 percent of the equity in their houses — down from 70 percent in 1983.

Much of that equity has been sold on the "secondary market," where banks like Fleet buy second mortgages from other lenders. Landbank, the Virginia-based mortgage company, was among the first to cash in on the secondary market, selling tens of millions in bad loans to banks and other financial institutions in the early 1980s.

Since then, second-mortgage speculation has continued to skyrocket. Surveys by the Consumer Bankers Association show that nearly 21 percent of big banks bought home-equity loans on the secondary market last year, up from only 12 percent a year earlier. Fleet Finance, for example, had 71,000 mortgages last year — nearly two-thirds of them purchased from other lenders.

Lawmakers set the stage for the second-mortgage scandals by deregulating the industry, much as they sparked the savings and loan scandal by loosening financial safeguards. Since the late 1970s, federal and state lawmakers have struck down almost all limits on second-mortgage interest rates and have created loopholes that make it easy for lenders to skirt usury laws.

Brennan, the Atlanta attorney, traces the genesis of large-scale equity ripoffs

in Georgia to 1983. That year, the state legislature wiped out all laws limiting second-mortgage interest rates — except for a 1908 loan-sharking statute that limits interest on loans to 5 percent a month.

Federal officials meanwhile do virtually nothing to regulate second-mortgage companies. That leaves the responsibility for policing the industry with the states, which generally adopt a hands-off approach. In Georgia, for example, citizens must apply for a license to work as a hairdresser — but anyone is free to set up shop as a mortgage broker, no questions asked.

Federal officials have also been half-hearted in enforcing fair-lending laws that require banks to do business in low-income and minority neighborhoods — despite study after study showing that banks are reluctant to make loans to black homeowners. In Atlanta, for example, a 1988 investigation by the *Journal and Constitution* and the non-profit Southern Finance Project found that whites receive five times as many home loans from mainstream lenders as blacks with similar incomes.

A recent study of 30 banks in 10 cities by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) documented similar discrimination. At a neighborhood meeting that the grassroots group convened in New Orleans last August, black residents talked about how hard it is to get credit — or even basic banking services — from mainstream lenders. Some said they had no choice but to go to pawn shops or high-interest finance companies for loans.

"Until banks start lending us money, all we got is each other," cab driver Dinel Smith told the gathering. "Low-income people have been paying their bills all their lives. If we didn't pay our bills, we'd be out on the street. Yet they call us high risk. What can be more high risk than the rich bureaucrats who caused the savings and loan fallout? That was people who didn't pay their bills. We're gonna pay their bills. We have to suffer."

## PHONE HOME

Since Ruth and Frank Bennett bought their home on a tree-lined street in southwest Atlanta in 1969, they have made several attempts to fix it up. Each time, they've fallen a little more in debt to second-mortgage companies. Now Fleet

owns 70 percent of their home — and the phone keeps on ringing with calls from tin men and mortgage companies looking for more equity to steal.

Ruth says a man called not long ago trying to sell her storm windows. She told him: "When I get ready, I'll get in touch with you." He called again, and she put him off again. Then he had a woman — his wife or secretary, Bennett guessed — call a third time.

"I just tell them I'm sleepy and I don't feel like talking," says Bennett. "I'm not signing no papers. I've learned my lesson."

Their attorney, William Brennan, had office visits from three older black

women one day not long ago. All three came in for wills and other legal work not related to home-equity loans.

As an experiment, Brennan asked each if they owned their homes. All three did.

Were the houses paid for, or almost paid for? They were.

Were they getting calls from people who wanted to loan them money on their houses? All three gave the same answer:

"I get calls every day of the week, Monday through Friday, two and three times a day." □

*Mike Hudson is a research fellow with the Alicia Patterson Foundation.*

## A GRASSROOTS RESPONSE

As Southern states continue to allow big banks and mortgage companies to profit from home-equity scams, one grassroots group in Boston has started to do something about it.

For three years, volunteers and staff researchers with the Union Neighborhood Assistance Corp. (UNAC) — an offshoot of the Hotel Workers Union Local 26 — investigated loan discrimination by banks and predatory lending by second-mortgage companies. They knocked on doors, dug through court records, reviewed computer tapes of a decade of mortgages, mailed out questionnaires, and ran a phone bank for homeowners in distress.

The group fueled public outrage by digging up devastating statistics. According to UNAC, more than 80 percent of homeowners who borrowed money from a second-mortgage lender called Resource Financial Group either lost their homes or faced foreclosure. Nearly all of those loans were in minority neighborhoods where mainstream banks seldom loan money.

Just as noteworthy was the fact that a subsidiary of Fleet Financial Group — the parent of Atlanta-based Fleet Finance — had helped fund Resource's predatory activities by extending it a \$7.5 million line of credit.

Armed with the facts, UNAC members staged sit-ins and got arrested at banks. The well-documented and aggressive criticism of the banking industry's role in the scandal helped make Boston the only place in the nation where the media have treated home-equity fraud as a long-running, front-page scandal.

Local bankers tried to paint UNAC director Bruce Marks and his co-workers

as wild-eyed radicals. But in the end, several Massachusetts banks — prodded by an investigation by the attorney general — agreed to put up \$23 million to repay victims and to make loans in credit-starved neighborhoods.

Now UNAC plans to try its formula of in-depth research and hell raising on a larger scale. It is creating a group called the Neighborhood Stabilization Corp. to fight second-mortgage fraud and other financial scams against low-income citizens nationwide.

By the end of the year, UNAC hopes to place organizers in a half-dozen locations across the nation, including Atlanta, north Florida, and rural Texas. The neighborhood-based workers will help lawyers who are suing over exploitive banking and insurance practices. And they will provide information that local advocates can use to organize citizens to fight for change.

Marks contends that many community organizations have become less aggressive as they have cut home-loan deals with banks or moved into housing construction themselves. "There's all kinds of compromises you have to make. You have to work within the parameters set by the banks. So it puts you at odds with the community that you're supposed to represent."

The solution? Get back to the grassroots. "Let's get out of Washington," says Marks. "Let's stop rubbing elbows with the bankers and the bureaucrats. And let's get back to the business of community organizing."

— M.H.

*For more information, contact UNAC at 321 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA 02116, or call (617) 267-1144.*

# The South in Congress

By Barry Yeoman, Bob Hall, and Laura Neish

Senator John Breaux can thank U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas for providing one of the easiest votes he has ever cast in his political career.

Last fall, the Louisiana Democrat listened for seven hours as Anita Hill described the sexual harassment Thomas dished out while head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Breaux heard Hill describe how Thomas talked to her about bestiality, large penises, and big breasts. And he heard Thomas protest the hearings, calling them a "high-tech lynching for an uppity black who in any way deigns to think for himself."

In the end, Breaux's vote on the Thomas confirmation turned not on the issue of sexual harassment or on Thomas' character — but rather on the demographics of his home state.

To win statewide office in Louisiana, a candidate needs the support of three groups: African-Americans, north Louisiana white Protestants, and south Louisiana Cajuns. Breaux, a Cajun who peppers his political speeches with references to crawfish and boudin, will have no problem getting the bayou vote during his reelection bid this fall.

But Clarence Thomas handed the senator a chance to please the other two sets of voters — groups generally at odds with each other on national issues. By voting to confirm Thomas, Breaux signaled his support for a staunch conservative who worked for the Reagan and Bush administrations for eight years — a move that pleased Reagan Democrats in rural north Louisiana. At the same time, Breaux solidified his

**Southern  
Exposure  
rates the  
region's  
representatives.**

support among African-American voters, many of whom stood behind the black nominee.

"It's important to know that in Louisiana, where we have about 27 percent black population, that the majority, and I think a substantial majority, were in favor of Judge Thomas," Breaux told CBS Morning News shortly after the vote. "That's a large chunk of voters as well as a majority of the white voters, so it was not that difficult a decision for me."

Six other Southern Democrats made the same calculation and decided to break away from their party's line. Along with Breaux, those Democrats — Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, Wyche Fowler Jr. of Georgia, Ernest Hollings of South Carolina, Sam Nunn of Georgia, and Charles Robb of Virginia — put Thomas over the top.

Without the Southern swing vote, Clarence Thomas would have managed only a 37-37 tie in the Senate. Although 11 Southern Democrats opposed the

Thomas confirmation, they were outnumbered by the seven Southern Democrats and eight Southern Republicans who supported President Bush's nominee.

Those Southern senators are precisely why Clarence Thomas is sitting on the Supreme Court today.

## THE SWING VOTE

The Thomas confirmation was not the only vote where Southern Democrats sided with Republicans. According to a new analysis by *Southern Exposure* and its publisher, the Institute for Southern Studies, Southern Democrats often hold the balance of power on key votes, especially in the House. The 169 House Republicans tend to offset the 180 Northern and Western Democrats, giving the 85 Southern Democrats the swing vote on controversial issues.

Southern Democrats shaped the outcome of all but two of the 20 key votes examined by the Institute, from banking reform to the B-2 bomber (see "Key Votes," pages 58-59). While they vote with Democrats outside the region on civil-rights reforms and partisan plans for economic relief, they tend to side with Republicans on the death penalty, defense cuts, and environmental laws — particularly those that challenge big oil.

Consider a Senate vote on a measure requiring the United States government to cancel off-shore oil and gas leases that threaten serious harm to the environment (Senate Vote 16). The anti-big-oil amendment to the national energy bill was sponsored by Democrat Bob Graham of Florida — but most of his fellow Southerners abandoned him when it came time to vote.



Northern Democrats (all those outside the South) stood up to the oil industry, supporting the amendment by a 30-7 vote. But Southern Democrats voted 10-8 to kill the pro-environment measure, joining Republicans within and outside the region to defeat the amendment by four votes.

Indeed, if Northern Democrats really controlled Congress, as is sometimes alleged, most of the key votes that failed would have passed. In the House, Democrats outside the South voted by 2-1 margins to stop discriminatory lending by banks, slice billions from the Pentagon, and make the oil industry create a petroleum reserve instead of sending American troops to

Iraq. But in each case, Southern Democrats went the other way, often voting with Republicans by 3-1 margins to kill progressive measures.

While Southern Democrats in Congress generally split their votes, Republicans from the region show remarkable harmony. The eight GOP Senators voted exactly alike on 15 of the 20 key votes analyzed, supporting a conservative social and economic agenda. In the House, the 42 Southern Republicans also voted with little or no dissent on half of the 20 ballots. The biggest defections came on votes involving protectionism, abortion, environmental protection, benefits for the jobless, and gun control — all issues posing problems for the GOP nationally.

Overall, the worst delegations are elected from Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, where racial politics and hostility toward the federal government keep white voters returning staunch conservatives of both parties to Congress. West Virginia — with its strong union heritage and current economic collapse — fields the best delegation by far, supporting politicians who appreciate the positive role an activist government can play.

### NOT-SO-SOLID SOUTH

Although the Southern delegation maintains its ability to shape the outcome of many issues, the examination of key votes reveals that the balance of power has shifted since the Institute conducted a similar analysis in 1984 (see "The South in Congress," *SE* Vol. XII, No. 1). Al-



**DEMOCRATS LIKE SENATOR HOWELL HEFLIN OF ALABAMA STILL DEFEND THE MILITARY — BUT MORE NOW VOTE WITH THEIR NORTHERN COUNTERPARTS ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC ISSUES.**

though the conservative coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats remains in force, the issue of how the South votes in Congress today is far more complex.

Through the mid-1980s, Republicans could count on Southern Democrats to deliver a bloc of conservative votes on most issues, from taxes to defense. The coalition stalled civil-rights legislation in the 1960s and helped President Reagan deliver his tax package for the wealthy in the early '80s. According to *Congressional Quarterly*, the conservatives peaked in 1971, when their coalition held together in 30 percent of all congressional votes.

Now their solidarity is down to 11 percent — and most of those votes are concentrated in the areas of defense, nuclear power, and environment. More and more, Southern Democrats vote with the party on issues involving the rights of minorities, women, and workers.

"Democratic members of Congress from the South are voting much more like their Northern counterparts than they used to," says Hastings Wyman, editor of the *Southern Political Report*. "The Boll Weevils seem to be smaller and less crucial."

Southern Democrats have moved to the center over the past decade for a variety of reasons. Older conservatives are retiring and losing their seats, often to be replaced by younger and more liberal candidates. The Voting Rights Act has increased minority voter turnout,

putting pressure on white lawmakers to represent *all* their constituents. Republicans have gained strength in the South, pulling arch-conservatives away from the Democrats. The national Democratic leadership has tightened party discipline, forcing dissident Democrats to vote the party line more often.

Even when Southern Democrats want to play to white voters back home, they face an increasingly heterogeneous constituency. A single congressional district in the region can encompass fourth-generation farmers, home-grown environmental activists, and

Northern transplants working for high-tech corporations.

When Southern Democrats do cast a conservative vote today, notes Hastings Wyman, "it's often one they know won't count for much. The issue is decided, and they can throw one to help their voting record with their conservative constituents."

### ON THE DEFENSIVE

The area where Southern Democrats continue to create the strongest rightward pull is defense. In the past two sessions, Northern Democrats have voted to slice billions from Star Wars, the Stealth bomber, and other Pentagon programs. But in each case, enough Southern Democrats joined Republicans to kill the progressive measures.

"It would come as no surprise to folks, but Southern legislators tend to be much more hawkish: voting for higher defense spending, willing to let the Pentagon and defense contractors get away with more profit making," says Burt Glass, legislative coordinator for Sane/Freeze, a national organization that supports deep military cuts. According to Glass, Southern Democrats tend to say: "That's okay if McDonnell Douglass gets away with a few more millions, because it's the military."

That doesn't mean all Southern legislators are blindly pro-military. Last fall, Democratic Senator Jim Sasser of Tennessee tried to cut funds for the B-2 Stealth bomber, Star Wars, and the rail-

mobile MX missile. His proposal was seconded by fellow Democrat Robert Byrd of West Virginia, usually considered a hawk. Byrd told his fellow senators that with the nation's domestic needs growing, "I can no longer support these big-ticket items, which seem to have a life of their own."

On the proposal to halt production of

the B-2 (Senate Vote 19), most Southern Democrats sided with Sasser in a rare show of Southern opposition to military spending. But they supported the Tennessee senator in weaker numbers than the Northern Democrats did. Democrats in Texas, Georgia, and Virginia — three states with big defense contracts — abandoned Sasser. Those Democrats

alone tipped the vote in support of the B-2. Without the South, the Stealth bomber would be fading away.

In another example of their pro-military stance, Southern Democrats in the House voted 53-32 to launch Operation Desert Storm (House Vote 17). Their support combined with the near-unanimous GOP vote to overcome the 33-147 opposition of Northern Democrats and send American troops to the Middle East.

Senator Howell Heflin of Alabama is a prime example of Democratic loyalty to the Pentagon. A self-described "country judge" with a touch of Tennessee Valley economic populism, Heflin is all over the map on domestic issues. He opposes abortion and supports stiffened penalties for flag-burners; at the same time he voted to extend benefits to unemployed workers and to forbid employers from replacing certain strikers.

But on military issues, Heflin shows a fierce loyalty to the commander-in-chief. On each of the key votes on defense-related issues, Heflin voted with the conservative coalition. He supported Desert Storm, opposed cuts in Star Wars research, supported continued production of the Stealth bomber, and opposed the transfer of \$3.1 billion in unspent Pentagon funds to domestic needs.

"If I'm sort of undecided, I'll vote with the Democrats," the Alabama senator told a reporter. But on defense issues, "I went with every Republican position."

Southerners have magnified their power over the Pentagon by assuming leadership roles on military issues. Democrat Sam Nunn of Georgia chairs the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, while Republican John Warner of Virginia serves as the ranking Republican member. "It's a Southern front there," says Burt Glass of Sane/Freeze. On the House side, Dante Fascell of Florida heads the Foreign Affairs Committee, while Tom Bevill of Alabama chairs the subcommittee that discusses funding for nuclear weapons.

But Glass cautions that thinking solely in terms of North and South oversimplifies the politics of military policy-making. "More than regionalism, old-fashioned pork-barrel politics has come into play," he says. One example: Georgia and California, with their B-2 contracts, teamed up to preserve bomber funding.

As more and more defense contrac-

## NUCLEAR REACTIONARIES

Over the past decade, Southern members of Congress have increasingly felt the pressure to vote for the environment. Throughout the region, hundreds of local citizen groups have sprung up, demanding protection for the air, water, and land.

But when it comes to defending nuclear energy, Southern legislators still stand in line for the honor. And the industry rewards its protectors well.

In the Senate, Bennett Johnston of Louisiana is one of the staunchest defenders of nuclear power — even though Louisiana is one of the biggest oil and gas producers in the nation. In the House, Marilyn Lloyd of Tennessee, whose district includes the Oak Ridge atomic energy lab, pushed through more than \$1 billion in federal funding for new nuclear-reactor designs.

But the two congressmen who have most recently backed the industry are Democrat Bob Clement of Tennessee and Republican Joe Linus Barton of Texas. Together, they have rewritten federal law to curtail citizen participation in the licensing of nuclear reactors.

In May, Clement and Barton co-sponsored a one-step licensing amendment to the Comprehensive National Energy Policy Act that represents a significant departure from current practice. Since the 1950s, nuclear plants have been licensed in two stages: The government holds public hearings before and after construction. The second round of hearings have often brought about safety improvements at new plants, including North Anna in Virginia and St. Lucie and Turkey Point in Florida.

But the nuclear industry claims the two-step process slows down licensing. So Clement and Barton introduced an amendment to eliminate the post-construction hearing. Citizens with safety concerns will have to petition the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to consider new information before plants go on-line.

It would be hard to find a more unlikely duo to introduce such a measure. Clement's Nashville district has a long tradition of electing Northern-style Demo-

crats and civil-rights crusaders to Congress; he ranks among Tennessee's most liberal members. Barton is an arch-conservative drug-testing champion who once organized a picket of former House Speaker Jim Wright's office.

Neither comes from a state where nuclear energy has been a grand success. The South Texas and Comanche Peak nuclear plants were plagued by design flaws and cost overruns, while the Clinch River Breeder Reactor in Tennessee was killed by Congress as a boondoggle. Nevertheless, when the nuclear industry called for a simplified licensing process, Barton and Clement came to its aid with their proposal for one-stop licensing.

"It essentially streamlines the process," says David Flanders, a spokesman for Clements. He dismisses opponents who say the measure will eliminate public participation, saying such criticism is "based primarily on their opposition to nuclear plants going forward." Under the one-step amendment, he insists, "there are more opportunities for public participation."

But former Nuclear Regulatory Commission member Victor Gillinsky compares one-step licensing to "handing an incoming freshman his college diploma on the basis of his course outline." Opponents of the bill say the public should have an automatic right to a hearing on new information before nuclear plants receive their operating licenses.

"Why are Representatives Clement and Barton so willing to deny citizen rights when most of their constituencies would reject this dangerously flawed bill?" asks Bill Magavern of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

The answer may come from Magavern's own organization. According to research by USPIRG, Barton has received \$120,450 from nuclear-industry political action committees since 1985. Clement, who has been in Congress since 1988, has received \$17,650.

— B. Y.

tors move South, Southern legislators fight even harder for military spending. Northrop recently built a new plant in Senator Nunn's hometown, joining other contractors drawn to the region's friendly political terrain and anti-union climate.

"You see great liberal pro-peace legislators decide they're suddenly for a particular weapons system," says Glass. "That's emphasized in the South, where contractors are migrating."

### DOMESTIC PROGRESS

In addition to its pro-military strength, the conservative coalition hangs together on some domestic issues — particularly ones involving law and order.

Last year, both the House and Senate crushed measures that would have allowed black defendants to use statistical evidence to show that the death penalty is racially discriminatory (Senate and House Vote 10). Although Northern Democrats gave overwhelming support to the bill, Southern Democrats cast a strong vote for capital punishment. Southerners voted to kill the amendment by a margin of 13-4 in the Senate and 45-37 in the House — giving Republicans enough votes to kill the proposal.

Southern Democrats again sided with the Republicans during a House debate on the highway and mass transit bill last October (House Vote 13). District of Columbia delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton introduced an amendment making female-owned businesses eligible for at least 5 percent of all road contracts and minority-owned firms eligible for at least 10 percent. Currently, women and minorities share 10 percent of the contracts.

Northern Democrats embraced the idea by a 103-77 vote. But Southern Democrats rejected it by a 57-27 margin, once again providing Republicans with the votes needed to defeat a progressive measure.

On the whole, however, Southern lawmakers tend to vote more progressively on domestic issues involving civil rights. "The old civil rights battles have pretty much gone by the board in terms

of polarizing the South," says Hastings Wyman of the *Southern Political Report*. Southern Democrats voted with their Northern counterparts for a measure to make voter registration easier, and for a new Civil Rights Act to override a series of anti-black decisions from the Nixon-era Supreme Court.

The trend toward a more progressive

In addition, North Carolina, Georgia, and Texas are all expected to elect progressive black women to the House this year.

Some of the votes of the newcomers may be offset by the increased concentration of white conservatives in non-minority districts. "This could put the pressure on Southern Democrats who

represent some of those white districts to move their voting records to the right," says Wyman.

Still, grassroots activists are excited about the changes that redistricting could spark. Some environmental organizations, for example, have been building coalitions with minorities on issues like the location of hazardous-waste facilities in low-income communities. In doing so, the groups have won the support of politicians like Georgia Representative John Lewis. "There's no stronger environmental champion in Georgia than John Lewis," says Betsy Loyless, assistant political director for the Sierra Club.

"One of the things the Sierra Club has been delighted to be able to focus on are the new minority-oriented seats,"

Loyless says. "For us, it really does represent a sense that the environment will be an issue. The Black Caucus has one of the strongest voting records on environmental issues."

Loyless and other activists caution that it's unlikely the conservative coalition will disappear overnight. But thanks to redistricting, the phrase "Southern Democrat" could begin to evoke more images of progressives like John Lewis — and fewer images of Boll Weevils like Howell Heflin. □

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## THE BEST AND WORST

Southerners in Congress, with their score on 20 key votes.

### SENATE

| BEST                       |    | WORST                  |   |
|----------------------------|----|------------------------|---|
| John Rockefeller IV (D-WV) | 95 | Mitch McConnell (R-KY) | 0 |
| Terry Sanford (D-NC)       | 85 | Thad Cochran (R-MS)    | 0 |
| Jim Sasser (D-TN)          | 85 | Phil Gramm (R-TX)      | 0 |
| Albert Gore Jr. (D-TN)     | 75 | Trent Lott (R-MS)      | 5 |
| Bob Graham (D-FL)          | 75 | Jesse Helms (R-NC)     | 5 |

### HOUSE

| BEST                     |     | WORST                     |   |
|--------------------------|-----|---------------------------|---|
| Larry Smith (D-FL)       | 100 | Sonny Callahan (R-AL)     | 0 |
| Craig Washington (D-TX)  | 98  | John Hammerschmidt (R-AR) | 0 |
| John Lewis (D-GA)        | 95  | Bill McCollum (R-FL)      | 0 |
| Harold Ford (D-TN)       | 92  | Clay Shaw Jr. (R-FL)      | 0 |
| William Jefferson (D-LA) | 90  | Jim Bunning (R-KY)        | 0 |
| William Lehman (D-FL)    | 88  | Larry Hopkins (R-KY)      | 0 |
| Henry Gonzalez (D-TX)    | 80  | Bob Livingston (R-LA)     | 0 |
| Harry Johnston (D-FL)    | 78  | Richard Baker (R-LA)      | 0 |
| Jim Bacchus (D-FL)       | 75  | Don Sundquist (R-TN)      | 0 |
| Charles Bennett (D-FL)   | 75  | Sam Johnson (R-TX)        | 0 |
| Romano Mazzoli (D-KY)    | 75  | Jack Fields Jr. (R-TX)    | 0 |
| James Moran Jr. (D-VA)   | 75  | Larry Combest (R-TX)      | 0 |
| Nick Rahall (D-WV)       | 75  | Dick Armey (R-TX)         | 0 |
|                          |     | Thomas Bliley Jr. (R-VA)  | 0 |

Southern delegation is likely to continue this year, as redistricting in the House opens more seats to minority representation. The region is expected to elect at least 10 new minority members, tripling the ranks from the current five. "It's going to have a dramatic effect," says Hastings Wyman.

The new representatives will almost certainly include Melvin Watt of Charlotte, North Carolina, a civil-rights attorney and former campaign manager for U.S. Senate candidate Harvey Gantt. Known as an accomplished orator, Watt is running on the two-fold platform of shifting military spending to domestic needs and creating a universal health-care plan for all Americans — a dramatic departure from the usual campaign rhetoric of North Carolina congressional candidates.



# THE SOUTH IN CONGRESS

|                           | Grade | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | % Black in District |
|---------------------------|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------------------|
| <i>Jim Bunning</i>        | 0     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 3                   |
| <i>Hal Rogers</i>         | 5     | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 2                   |
| <i>Larry Hopkins</i>      | 0     | ? | W | ? | ? | R | W | W | W | W | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | 9                   |
| <i>Chris Perkins</i>      | 70    | R | R | R | R | R | W | W | R | R | R  | W  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | R  | R  | R  | R  | 1                   |
| <b>LOUISIANA</b>          |       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |
| <i>Bob Livingston</i>     | 0     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | 13                  |
| <i>William Jefferson</i>  | 90    | R | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | 66                  |
| <i>Billy Tauzin</i>       | 20    | R | W | W | R | W | W | W | R | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 21                  |
| <i>Jim McCrery</i>        | 5     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 33                  |
| <i>Jerry Huckaby</i>      | 25    | R | W | W | W | R | W | W | R | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 32                  |
| <i>Richard Baker</i>      | 0     | W | W | W | ? | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 27                  |
| <i>Jimmy Hayes</i>        | 29    | W | R | ? | R | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | 21                  |
| <i>Clyde Holloway</i>     | 8     | ? | R | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | W  | 38                  |
| <b>MISSISSIPPI</b>        |       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |
| <i>Jamie Whitten</i>      | 21    | R | W | R | W | R | ? | ? | ? | R | W  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | ?  | W  | 24                  |
| <i>Mike Espy</i>          | 86    | R | R | W | R | R | R | W | R | R | ?  | R  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | R  | R  | R  | W  | 59                  |
| <i>Sonny Montgomery</i>   | 10    | W | W | W | R | R | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 33                  |
| <i>Mike Parker</i>        | 13    | W | R | W | W | R | R | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | 45                  |
| <i>Gene Taylor</i>        | 20    | W | W | R | W | R | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | 20                  |
| <b>N. CAROLINA</b>        |       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |
| <i>Walter Jones</i>       | 45    | ? | R | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | W  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 33                  |
| <i>Tim Valentine</i>      | 30    | W | W | R | W | R | R | R | R | W | R  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 40                  |
| <i>Martin Lancaster</i>   | 45    | R | W | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | W  | R  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 26                  |
| <i>David Price</i>        | 65    | R | W | W | R | R | R | R | R | R | W  | R  | W  | R  | W  | R  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | 19                  |
| <i>Stephen Neal</i>       | 57    | R | W | R | ? | R | R | R | R | W | R  | W  | ?  | R  | R  | W  | R  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | 16                  |
| <i>Howard Coble</i>       | 10    | W | W | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | W  | 21                  |
| <i>Charlie Rose</i>       | 70    | R | R | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | R  | W  | W  | R  | W  | R  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | 27                  |
| <i>Bill Helner</i>        | 56    | R | R | R | ? | R | R | R | R | R | R  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | 19                  |
| <i>Alex McMillan III</i>  | 10    | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 23                  |
| <i>Cass Ballenger</i>     | 8     | W | W | R | W | W | W | ? | W | W | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 11                  |
| <i>Charles Taylor</i>     | 5     | W | W | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 5                   |
| <b>S. CAROLINA</b>        |       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |
| <i>Arthur Ravenal Jr.</i> | 30    | R | W | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | R  | R  | W  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 31                  |
| <i>Floyd Spence</i>       | 10    | W | W | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 36                  |
| <i>Butler Derrick</i>     | 60    | R | W | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | W  | 22                  |
| <i>Liz Patterson</i>      | 40    | R | W | R | W | R | R | W | W | R | R  | R  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | 20                  |
| <i>John Spratt Jr.</i>    | 60    | R | W | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 32                  |
| <i>Robin Tallon</i>       | 50    | R | W | R | R | R | W | ? | R | R | W  | R  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 39                  |
| <b>TENNESSEE</b>          |       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |
| <i>Jimmy Quillen</i>      | 5     | W | W | R | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 2                   |
| <i>Jimmy Duncan Jr.</i>   | 19    | W | W | R | W | W | R | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | R  | R  | W  | 7                   |
| <i>Marilyn Lloyd</i>      | 39    | ? | R | W | R | R | R | ? | R | W | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 12                  |
| <i>Jim Cooper</i>         | 47    | W | W | W | C | R | R | R | R | R | R  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 4                   |
| <i>Bob Clement</i>        | 55    | R | W | W | W | R | R | R | R | R | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 22                  |
| <i>Bart Gordon</i>        | 70    | R | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | R  | 7                   |
| <i>Don Sundquist</i>      | 0     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | 12                  |
| <i>John Tanner</i>        | 28    | W | R | W | ? | R | R | W | W | R | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 23                  |
| <i>Harold Ford</i>        | 92    | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | ? | R | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | 65                  |
| <b>TEXAS</b>              |       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |
| <i>Jim Chapman Jr.</i>    | 39    | R | R | W | W | R | R | R | W | R | ?  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | 18                  |
| <i>Charles Wilson</i>     | 39    | R | R | W | W | R | ? | W | R | R | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | 15                  |
| <i>Sam Johnson</i>        | 0     | W | W | W | ? | W | ? | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | 7                   |
| <i>Ralph Hall</i>         | 5     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 13                  |
| <i>John Bryant</i>        | 73    | R | W | ? | ? | R | R | R | R | R | R  | W  | R  | W  | R  | W  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | 22                  |
| <i>Joe Barton</i>         | 5     | W | W | W | ? | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 9                   |
| <i>Bill Archer</i>        | 5     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 7                   |
| <i>Jack Fields</i>        | 0     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | ? | ? | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | 20                  |
| <i>Jack Brooks</i>        | 56    | R | R | R | ? | R | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | 22                  |
| <i>Jake Pickle</i>        | 50    | ? | W | R | R | R | R | R | R | W | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 10                  |
| <i>Chet Edwards</i>       | 40    | R | W | R | R | R | R | R | R | W | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 15                  |
| <i>Pete Geren</i>         | 19    | R | W | W | W | W | ? | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 16                  |
| <i>Bill Sarpaluis</i>     | 19    | W | W | W | R | W | ? | R | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | R  | W  | 5                   |
| <i>Greg Laughlin</i>      | 23    | W | R | W | W | R | W | ? | R | W | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | ?  | W  | 10                  |
| <i>Kika de la Garza</i>   | 56    | R | R | W | R | R | W | ? | R | R | W  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | R  | ?  | W  | 77*                 |
| <i>Ronald Coleman</i>     | 55    | R | R | W | R | R | W | ? | R | R | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 68*                 |
| <i>Charles Stenholm</i>   | 10    | W | W | W | W | R | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 3                   |
| <i>Craig Washington</i>   | 98    | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | ?  | R  | ?  | R  | 42*                 |
| <i>Larry Combest</i>      | 0     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 31*                 |
| <i>Henry Gonzalez</i>     | 80    | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | W  | 70*                 |
| <i>Lamar Smith</i>        | 20    | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | R  | R  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 3                   |
| <i>Tom DeLay</i>          | 3     | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | ?  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 17                  |
| <i>Albert Bustamante</i>  | 61    | R | R | W | ? | R | W | R | R | R | R  | R  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | R  | W  | W  | W  | 59*                 |
| <i>Martin Frost</i>       | 65    | R | R | R | R | W | R | R | R | R | R  | R  | R  | R  | R  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | W  | 29                  |
| <i>Mike Andrews</i>       | 55    | R | R | W | R | R | R |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |                     |

# Double Bubba

By Barry Yeoman

**NEW YORK, N.Y.** — The most famous Southerner making the rounds at the Democratic National Convention this summer was not Bill Clinton or Al Gore. Nor was it Jesse Jackson, or even Jimmy Carter.

It was Bubba.

"Excuse me," said a local news reporter, stopping a late-afternoon commuter in front of Madison Square Garden. "The Democrats are about to nominate a double-Bubba presidential ticket. I was wondering if that will make you less likely to vote for them."

No matter where you turned, it seemed someone was invoking the tobacco-spittin', pickup-drivin', coondog-raisin' white man of Southern iconology. To some people, Bill Clinton and Al Gore, two Ivy Leaguers who would look exceedingly silly in overalls, were themselves Bubba incarnate. *In These Times*, a national newsweekly based in Chicago, referred to the candidates as the "all-bubba ticket" and offered this analysis of the convention: "Democratic strategists apparently believe that African-Americans will have little choice but to go with bubba boomers (baby-booming bubbas?) in the November election."

But Bubba wasn't just creeping into the news reports of the 15,000 journalists who converged on New York for the convention in July. Even before the convention started, the mythical man seemed to find his way into Clinton's

**The South  
rose again  
at the  
Democratic  
National  
Convention.  
But whose  
South is it?**

central command post. There, he sat in the corner, quietly reminding the campaign strategists that white Southerners don't cotton to candidates who embrace blacks and labor unions. If the Democrats wanted to recapture Dixie, he advised, the party would have to distance itself from Jesse Jackson and get tough on welfare recipients. A strong stand for capital punishment, accompanied by the execution of an Arkansas man with the mental capacity of a child, couldn't hurt either.

Someone had evidently forgotten to tell Clinton that during the 1988 Demo-

cratic primaries, it was Jesse Jackson who carried the South.

## **SOUTHERN PLATFORM**

A small crowd pressed around Bob Fitrakis in the lobby of the Ramada Hotel, across from Madison Square Garden. Fitrakis, a Jerry Brown supporter from Ohio, had sat on the committee that drafted the Democratic Party platform. And he was angry at what he viewed as meat-fisted efforts to "Southernize" the convention.

In particular, Fitrakis was protesting the way the Clinton campaign had stifled a debate on the death penalty. During the platform committee meetings, Brown supporters had proposed more progressive language on 22 issues. Most lacked enough support for a full airing, and the Clinton forces summarily quashed them. But the anti-death-penalty plank had gathered enough signatures for a discussion on the convention floor. Undaunted by this groundswell of democratic sentiment, Clinton strategists simply used a loophole in the rules to squash the debate.

"This is the Southernization of the platform," Fitrakis griped. "There was a strategy developed by the Democratic Leadership Council and the mainstream caucus that if we give in to the Reagan-Bush agenda and back away from social justice issues, environmental issues, labor-support issues, we'll win."

To some degree, Fitrakis was overstating his case. While the Southern-domi-

nated Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) from which Clinton hails does embrace political "centrism," the platform hardly rubberstamps the Reagan-Bush agenda. It comes out for abortion rights, child care, and lesbian and gay rights. It supports collective bargaining, and talks about empowering workers to hold their bosses more accountable for workplace dangers. It calls for higher taxes on the rich, a departure from Michael Dukakis' timid strategy of four years ago. And it criticizes the GOP for taking a lenient approach to white-collar crime, vowing to "ferret out and punish those who betray the public trust, rig financial markets, misuse their depositors' money or swindle their customers."

Still, the Clinton forces resisted efforts to strengthen platform language in areas like environmental protection, worker rights, and campaign finances. And the document departs from traditional Democratic platforms in important ways. It embraces private enterprise and entrepreneurship with unusual fervor, and it criticizes the "big-government theory that says we can hamstring business and tax and spend our way to prosperity."

What's more, in the weeks leading up to the convention, Clinton distanced himself from organized labor, as well as from activist blacks like Jackson. Besides his surprise attack on rapper Sister Souljah at a gathering of the Rainbow Coalition — a clear signal to white voters that Clinton was willing to publicly insult black leaders — the candidate warned the United Auto Workers that he would support a free-trade agreement with Mexico, which the union opposes.

Bashing unions and African-Americans were all part of the plan to woo

white voters who have forsaken the party in recent presidential elections. "Clinton took the first step when he stood up to Jackson," Texas Land Commissioner Gary Mauro told *Business Week*.

Perhaps the most subtle signal from Clinton has been his talk of the "forgotten" middle class. For more conservative voters, that emphasis signals a welcome departure from the Democratic Party's tradition as an advocate for the poor (and, by extension, blacks). Al From, director of the DLC, says the political shift was spurred by

view of the podium with delegates from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

But the Clinton camp might well be misreading the South if it thinks the correct Southern strategy entails moving sharply to the right. Many white Democrats have fled the party in the past 12 years, casting their votes for Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Those Reagan Democrats — the Bubbas — are DLC's prime targets.

But the South can also exhibit a strong populist streak at the polls.

*Photo by Robert Fox/Impact Visuals*



**THE CLINTON CAMPAIGN USED THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION TO CAREFULLY SCRIPT A POLITICAL MESSAGE — AND TO SILENCE OPPOSING VOICES.**

the party's loss of six of the past seven presidential elections.

"Losing has a way of focusing the politicians," From told reporters during the convention. "Liberalism lost favor when we quit being a party of prosperity and growth."

It's clear that much of this strategy was aimed at Southern voters. Even the layout of the convention at Madison Square Garden suggested the importance of the South this fall. While Arkansas delegates received the best seats at the convention, they shared the most direct

Florida voters elected Governor Lawton Chiles on the strength of his anti-big-business message. Terry Sanford of North Carolina won his U.S. Senate seat only after focusing on his opponent's country-club style and political views. In Texas, voters supported Governor Ann Richards and Railroad Commissioner Lena Guerrero, both of whom ran as progressives. Throughout the region, Southerners pulled for Jesse Jackson in 1988 and repudiated white supremacist David Duke in 1992.

The South has a strong black elector-

ate, particularly in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina. The region also has a growing number of Northern transplants, as well as millions of adults who don't usually vote. If Clinton wants to carry the South, he cannot take any of those votes for granted.

Even Bubba himself might not be looking for a conservative message with race-baiting undertones. Jerry Brown carried Michigan and Connecticut on the strength of white working-class voters who appreciated his message of putting economic power back in the hands of average citizens. Indeed, many Reagan Democrats fled the party not because of its social liberalism, but because it consistently failed to formulate an economic message that seemed relevant to their lives. In the absence of that economic message, some white working-class voters have been drawn to the racism and moral conservatism that the GOP offers.

### **PARTY ON**

In pushing the party to the right, Clinton did more than carefully script the political message at the convention: He also worked hard to silence any opposing voices. Besides his efforts to muscle Brown out of the platform debate, there were more subtle tactics. The seating arrangement was designed to keep Brown delegates out of the spotlight, while more radical speakers like Brown and Jackson were kept out of prime time.

The get-tough-on-dissidents stance was designed in part to impress big business. "It's unbelievable," Democratic National Committee treasurer Robert Matsui told the *National Journal*. Corporate convention sponsors are "up on the fact that Clinton and Gore were telling Jerry Brown, 'Look, you endorse and then maybe you can speak.' We are not pandering to these little special-interest groups running around. Usually we spend hours and hours negotiating with these guys and then cave in. This time we are just not going to cave in."

Fitrakis, the Brown supporter, had a more bitter take on the refusal to negotiate. "What they want is a coronation," he said.

In the North Carolina delegation, Clinton delegates received their orders at a daily breakfast. There was no debate over the proposed platform amendments or rule

changes. Clinton delegates were simply told how to vote.

One morning, Clinton's chief North Carolina "whip," Ed Smith of Raleigh, announced that Brown had proposed two amendments to the convention rules. Smith never told his fellow Tar Heels what the amendments would have done — namely, create a commission to study issues such as campaign finances and low voter enthusiasm. "These need to be voted down," Smith simply informed delegates. "Hence, our votes must fall in line accordingly. We must vote these down as efficiently as we can."

When the full convention debated

Brown's proposed rules changes later that day, North Carolina delegates ignored the discussion and bounced a large beach ball in the air. The sizable Brown contingent from Ohio, which sat immediately behind North Carolina, was infuriated. "This is not a

beach party," grumbled Bob Sholis, a Brown delegate from Columbus. "It's a political party."

Perhaps no North Carolinian felt the burden of the forced unity more intensely than Melba Melton of Rowan County. As the state's only Brown delegate, Melton could barely hold up a placard without someone trying to block it from the TV cameras with a Clinton sign. A couple of times, other delegates shouted at her, telling her to take down her sign.

Melton couldn't understand why caucus meetings consisted of pep talks rather than political discussions. "There's serious work to be done," she said. "Most of us are here for a big party. We should be reviewing the platform. We should be having representatives from both candidates to speak. We should be debating the issues, how we can bring even dissident voices into the fold, because we will need every Democrat we can get to defeat George Bush in the fall."

### **BEING THERE**

While Clinton kept dissenters at bay, he managed to avoid giving the convention a conservative, exclusionary tone. To the contrary, the gathering had a warm, inclusive feel — enough to make the 52 percent of the delegates who told

pollsters that they considered themselves liberal feel welcome.

For four days, speakers like New York Governor Mario Cuomo — along with scores of lesser-known Democrats — extolled the Democratic Party's traditional values of social welfare and civil rights. Georgia Governor Zell Miller hearkened back to the party's New Deal heyday when he described growing up with his single mother during the Depression: "Franklin Roosevelt ... replaced generations of neglect with a whirlwind of activity, bringing to our little valley a very welcome supply of God's most precious commodity: hope."

And Jackson brought that vision into the '90s, describing his \$1 trillion plan to rebuild America. In a speech with themes ranging from Haitian immigration to Middle East peace, Jackson touched Southern hearts by invoking last year's fatal fire at the Imperial Food Products chicken plant in Hamlet, North Carolina.

"If we keep Hamlet in our hearts and before our eyes," he said, "we will act to empower working people. We will protect the right to organize and strike. We will empower workers to enforce health and safety laws. We will provide a national health-care system, a minimum wage sufficient to bring workers out of poverty, paid parental leave. We must build a movement for economic justice across the land."

That's a far cry from the party platform, which calls for labor to join business "in cooperative efforts to increase productivity, flexibility, and quality."

Even Clinton's acceptance speech, with its promise to "end welfare as we know it," had enough liberal elements in it to please much of the party's left wing. As he delivered the hour-long address, whites and blacks alike — often people with opposing political views — cheered and cried together.

Not since Jimmy Carter won the nomination in 1976 have delegates at a Democratic convention stood together so firmly. As much as anything, that unity testifies to the marketing genius of the Clinton campaign — how adroitly the party has packaged its candidate this year.

To progressives, Clinton was heir to the visions of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. The slick, Hollywood film that introduced Clinton to the convention even contained eerie, black-and-white footage of the candidate as a fresh-faced youth from Hope, Arkansas eagerly shaking hands with President John Kennedy during a reception in the Rose Garden. Here, the film suggested, was a man who would struggle

**Even Bubba himself might not be looking for a conservative message with race-baiting undertones.**



for an America that welcomes people regardless of race, family status, or disability. In his acceptance speech, Clinton proposed taxing the rich and even broached the topic of discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

To conservatives, however, he was a man who would create a 100,000-strong national police corps and make welfare recipients take responsibility for their lives. "We will say to those on welfare: You will have ... the opportunity through training and education, through child care and medical coverage, to liberate yourselves," Clinton said in his speech. "But then, when you can, you must work, because welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life."

It seemed a little like *Being There*, the Jerzy Kosinski novel about the simple-minded gardener who became president — because he was a blank slate on which each person could write his or her own prescription for the future. Only Clinton is no simpleton; he's a shrewd politician who knows how to appeal to all people by intentionally *becoming* a blank slate. Each Clinton delegate sketched his or her own dreams and aspirations on the man who won the Democratic nomination.

"Sometimes I think he's a wolf in sheep's clothing," said Mike Nelson, a gay delegate from Carrboro, North Carolina. "I think he's a liberal."

Indeed, while Clinton was vowing to "put people first," he was also taking advice from lobbyists for Toyota, Occidental Petroleum, the National Association of Manufacturers, and other corporate causes. "They don't think this ticket is hostile," said Democratic treasurer Robert Matsui, adding that Clinton was gaining support from the energy and defense industries.

The only Democrats who didn't see Clinton as their party's savior were the ones who best understand how corporate interests have corroded the democratic system. "The Clinton strategy does not call for a genuine campaign against the entrenched economic interests that hold sway over both parties," wrote the *Texas Observer* after the convention. "Therefore, Clinton cannot be presumed to be seriously interested in the deterioration of American democracy."

Even so, delegates like Bonnie Moore, a Brown supporter from Austin, Texas,



**"AFRICAN AMERICANS CANNOT AFFORD TO BE EMOTIONAL," SAYS STELLA ADAMS. "WE HAVE TO BE PRACTICAL BECAUSE OUR COMMUNITY IS AT STAKE."**

conceded that Clinton would do more than President Bush to wrest political power from mammoth corporations that give millions in campaign contributions. "I'm certain that Clinton, if he's elected, will not veto the Campaign Reform Act," she told the *Observer*. "Any Republican will veto it."

### VOTING FOR OURSELVES

Such anybody-but-Bush sentiment may indicate how Clinton can win this November, despite his misguided appeal to the "Bubba" vote and his failure to address fundamental economic realities. After all, he is the first baby-boomer candidate of either party to run during a prolonged recession accompanied by a fierce anti-incumbent backlash. In the end, the central issue for many voters — as for many delegates at the convention — may have more to do with where Clinton stands in relation to President Bush than with whether he is a liberal or a centrist.

Stella Adams attended the convention as an uncommitted delegate. "I came here

to make sure that issues affecting African Americans and women were given priority by our delegation and by the convention itself," said Adams, a city employee from Durham, North Carolina.

At first, Adams felt ambivalent about the Clinton-Gore ticket, with its eschewing of Jackson and its emphasis on the middle class. "I think African Americans are comfortable with them as individuals, but we need reassurance that our needs are going to be addressed and really on the front burner," she said. "Right now, we don't have that confidence."

Yet over the course of the week, the convention magic worked on Adams. She came to believe that the two Southern white men would not only address the issues she cared about — health care, education, and economic opportunity for blacks — but could carry North Carolina and the nation.

"I've come a long way," Adams said the day Clinton accepted the nomination.

But what about Clinton's efforts to distance himself from Jesse Jackson and court the conservative white vote?

"When you have a president who doesn't have a clue to what's going on anywhere in the United States of America outside golf clubs and tennis courts, we don't have much choice," Adams said. "If we want a chance, we've got to vote for Clinton and Gore, because that is the only opportunity we have."

"African Americans cannot afford to be emotional," she continued. "We have to be practical because our community is at stake. Our children are at stake. We've got to have someone in office who will rebuild inner cities, and who's going to implement programs that will effect lifestyle changes in our communities, that will educate our kids, provide them with job training, provide them with health care. If we want that chance, then we have to be practical. That means we must get out, actively work for, and show up *en masse* at the polls — not for Clinton and Gore, but for ourselves." □

*Barry Yeoman is an associate editor with The Independent newsweekly in Durham, North Carolina. He has covered four Democratic National Conventions.*

# The Bible Belt

By Mary Lee Kerr

From small whitewashed churches to massive televangelism halls, organized religion represents a stronger force in the South than anywhere else. Sometimes a defender of the status quo, at others an advocate for social change, the church continues to play a leading role in dividing the South along racial lines and in shaping Southern culture and politics.

A staggering 56 percent of all church members in the nation today are Southern Baptists, and 40 percent of all churches are in the South. Texas has more churches than any other state, with North Carolina a close second.

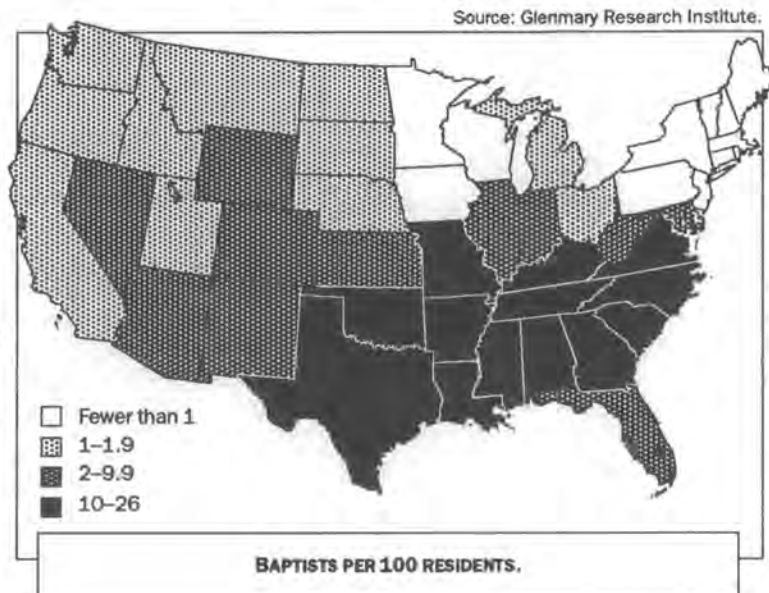
According to a Gallup poll, 63 percent of Southerners consider religion "very important" in their lives, compared to 54 percent in the Midwest, 48 percent in the West, and 45 percent in the East. Nearly half of all Southerners consider themselves "born-again" or evangelical Christians, compared to less than a third in other regions.

Religious beliefs have always spanned a wide spectrum in the South, from the earth-centered spirituality of Native Americans to the Anglican Church in Jamestown, Protestant sects like the Shakers and Moravians, and African traditions brought over by blacks sold into slavery. "The church in the South is about 99 different things," says Jim Sessions, executive coordinator of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia.

Perhaps the strongest force shaping religious life in the region was slavery. Under the plantation system, black and white Southerners developed strong Christian churches to address the needs of their congregations — but their spiritual beliefs and political agendas differed sharply.

"The slave master was praying for his wealth to increase, and his wealth was embodied in the slave," says C. Eric Lincoln, professor of religion and culture at Duke University. "The slave, worshipping the same god, was praying for his freedom and release."

The distinctions became sharper in the early 20th century, as opposition to the teaching of evolution fueled the spread of white fundamentalism. Preachers like J. Frank Norris in Texas and Bob Jones in South Carolina popularized fundamentalism during the Depression, and Oral Roberts and Billy Graham raised evangelism to a new level of mass appeal — and money-making potential — with televised revivals during the 1950s.



Today fundamentalism is promoted by schools like Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. "You could say that Liberty is one of the notches on the old Bible Belt," says Dr. Elmer Towns, dean of the School of Religion. "We still hold to certain pro-family values that we think came right out of scripture." University graduates, says Towns, play influential public roles. "We have people working in the White House for the President."

While the black church has developed its own brand of fundamentalism, many black congregations have fostered spiritual beliefs

emphasizing social change. "The church as a whole has been all too negligent on the question of civil rights," wrote Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. "It has too often blessed a status quo that needed to be blasted, and reassured a social order that needed to be reformed."

The black church was often at the center of the fight for voting rights and desegregation that emerged in the 1950s. Black ministers and divinity students rallied at the state house as well as at the church, making civil rights a political and a moral issue.

"The church was the one place that we could go where we really felt we were affirmed," recalls Isaiah Madison, a Methodist minister and executive director of the Institute for Southern Studies. "It was the way that people organized and educated themselves — both to better themselves and to correct injustices in society."

Many poor whites have also founded churches independent of the religious establishment. Coal miners in small mountain towns, for example, often rejected the "company church" and started their own. Even today, small churches sign newspaper ads in support of striking miners.

To encourage interracial cooperation, some black and white churches are building bridges between their congregations. Bi-racial "partnerships" have formed in Tennessee, Texas, and North Carolina, bringing blacks and whites together so they can get to know each other.

"We have done a lot of laughing, a little crying, and a lot of praying," says Dr. David Forbes, a minister involved in a bi-racial partnership in Raleigh. "And, we believe, some overcoming." □

Mary Lee Kerr is a research associate with the Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, North Carolina.

# AND THE WINNER IS...

Pete Daniel, a curator and historian at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. has won the five-year subscription to *Southern Exposure* raffled off in our reader survey. Pete has been an *SE* reader and Institute supporter for almost 10 years — largely, he says, because of our “willingness to take on controversial topics.”

Thanks to everyone who returned their surveys — a full 28 percent of you let us know what you like about *SE*, how you use it, and how we can improve. We'll tabulate your comments in the coming weeks and let you know the results.

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