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From the Editor

I don't know that each issue of *Arkansas Review* will feature such an introduction. I can't predict that I'll always have something worth sharing with our readers. I will say, however, that when I do, I won't be shy about it.

In large part, the reason that compels me to write is the success of the first annual Arkansas Literary Festival, of which *Arkansas Review* happened to be a part. Sponsored by the Arkansas Literacy Council--an organization already doing the work of the Lord--this two-day gathering of authors and readers was held during the weekend of April 24 and 25. What this meant for most Arkansans wise enough to attend was an opportunity to see and hear some of the finest writers from the state, the region, and the whole of the nation. In fact, a glance at the schedule reveals that more often than not, book lovers had to make hard choices, as, for instance, much-loved novelist Terry Kay was reading at the same time as equally revered poet Jo McDougall (whose latest book, *Satisfied with Havoc*, is reviewed in this issue). Still, there was a writer for every kind of reader in Little Rock: Dale Bumpers and General Wesley Clark, Dagoberto Gilb and Steve Almond, Kaye Gibbons and Molly Giles, and the most famous pair, Roy Blount and Garrison Keillor. Those with heftier wallets were able to attend cocktail parties and dinners with this prestigious lineup, but after their readings, most of the writers trudged over to Riverside Park to sign books, many of which were available at a tent staffed by Rod Lorenzen, Mary Gay Shipley, and other such assiduous booksellers.

About the only hitch in the Festival was some uncooperative weather. On Saturday, gloomy skies prevailed until about three, when the downpour commenced, shortening the day's program in the park by about two hours. These same ugly clouds were visible on a damp and sultry Sunday--which probably kept away some attendees--but no rain fell. Through it all, the volunteer staff kept apace with any and all developments, and a more chipper group I cannot recall. Always eager to fetch cool drinks and snacks for us participants, the men and women volunteers deserve notice as one of the prime reasons the festival unfolded so well.

I must admit, though, that in my hours of giddiest optimism, I believed no less than a hundred

people would subscribe to *Arkansas Review* during the festival. That figure would overwhelm our numbers of Volume 35, Number 1, but I had a contingency plan. (And by the way, subscribers may note that the volume number is listed on the magnificent cover as "34"; the correction now has been made.) Though we did not approach a hundred new subscribers, we did get enough to warrant the trip. For what I hoped to do more than anything was increase the *Review's* exposure. And from what I found in Little Rock, we still have work to do to become better known both in and out of state.

And that is, for me, the most important phase of *Arkansas Review's* development. Our readers know the quality of our contents--even our covers; but too often I heard, "I never heard of this magazine." Such is, however, the fate of academic journals. It is perceived that only "academics" will be interested in university-sponsored journals, yet I can think of several produced in the area that would wow most readers at the Arkansas Literary Festival: *Big Muddy*, *River City*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Boulevard*, *Natural Bridge*, *Southern Review*, *New Delta Review*. One can now find one of the best online journals available through the efforts of Marck Beggs--a contributor to this issue; *Arkansas Literary Forum* (www.hsu.edu/dept/alf) features the work of newcomers and such Arkansas mainstays as David Jauss, Philip Martin, and Dennis Vannatta. Donald Harington and Kevin Brockmeier--who both read during the Festival--also have had their work appear in *ALF*. And I assure readers of *Arkansas Review*, that the fiction, poetry, essays, articles and reviews in these journals are anything but "stuffy," "inaccessible," or other synonyms often attached to "academic journals."

In all, though, I'm thankful for the efforts of the Literacy Council and the volunteer staff: the first annual Arkansas Literary Festival showed that there is still a place in the world for the written word and people who will be around to make sure it endures. I left Little Rock hopeful: for the future of *Arkansas Review*, for literacy, and for the quality of life in the state. I was also hopeful that Garrison Keillor--who walked past my booth, forcing me to press upon him a free copy of our latest issue--and anyone else who subscribed or bought an issue will find in our pages the thrill that we here in Jonesboro have in assembling them.▲▼▲