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Something About Books

by Jack Walsdorf (Library Relations, Alibris) <jackw@alibris.com>

When **Willie Morris** died last year (August 2, 1999) America lost one of its finest Southern writers, although **Willie** preferred to say that he considered himself to be "an American writer who lives in the South." With his death has come a number of books, many in the works before his early death of heart failure at the age of sixty-five. Later this fall, the **University Press of Mississippi** will publish *My Mississippi* by **Willie**, with photographs by **David Rae Morris**, his son.

Earlier this year the same press published two other books relating to **Willie**, the first was *Remembering Willie*, a book of memorials collected in the form of twenty-seven eulogies and tributes from President **William J. Clinton**, **William Styron**, **David Halberstam**, **Ellen Douglas**, **Mike Espy**, **Ed Yoder**, **Donna Tartt** and others. The second book, the subject of this review is *Conversations With Willis Morris*, edited by **Jack Bales**, the reference and humanities librarian at **Mary Washington College** in **Fredericksburg, Virginia**.

When **Jack Bales** undertook this project even he did not realize the magnitude of material available. **Willie Morris** was everywhere, on T.V., in books and magazines, in movies and videos. All of his work, and work about him are in the University of Mississippi's Department of Archives and Special Collections, which acquired **Willie's** papers in 1995, all seventeen thousand documents! As **Elizabeth Mullener** pointed out in her 1981 essay "Willie Morris's heart seems to be wherever his typewriter is." And **Willie** added: "I couldn't live without writing . . . I'd have no reason for living. I can't do anything else."

He could, of course. He could be the magazine editor he was, the youngest editor of *Harper's*, America's oldest magazine. He could be the teacher he was at the **University of Mississippi** where he would introduce his students to **William Styron**, **Shelby**

Foote, **James Dickey**, **Peter Matthiessen**, **John Knowles**, **George Plimpton**, **Beth Henley** or **Ellen Gilchrist**. The introduction to these writers came through their books, but better yet in person as visiting writers. And sometimes his class would have a young and unpublished writer attending, **John Grisham**, who used **Willie** as his first reader of *A Time To Kill*.

But in the end **Willie** was a writer of stories, be they novels, memoirs or short stories. "I happen to be perhaps the United States' oldest living sixth grader. I'm obsessed with childhood and I've written a lot about it . . ." This may have been true of **Willie** all his life, but at a very young age he had his most famous book, *North Toward Home*, published to much critical acclaim, and **John Kenneth Galbraith** summed it up by saying: "No one at thirty-two should write his memoirs; **Willie Morris** is the only exception."

Along with **Willie's** life long passion for writing came his belief in the written word. As he said, "the written word, when well done, is one of the few endeavors of the human race that lasts and matters. If you write something good, it's going to last; it's that simple."

Willie's words will last, and finding his published works is easier than ever. A quick check of the **Alibris** website found hundreds of **O.P. Willie Morris** books for sale, and the **Amazon** site offered over 40 titles, while **e-Bay** listed a few items up for auction. But it is the spoken works, the interviews, the out-of-the-way newspaper articles, which may be more easily lost in time. And it is with these sources that **Jack Bales** has done such a masterful job of finding and reprinting the often lost or forgotten works by and about **Willie**.

In *Conversations with Willie Morris*, (University Press of Mississippi, 2000) we find a total of twenty-five interviews starting in 1967, with one of the earliest pieces by **Leslie Cross** of the *Milwaukee Journal*. There are two television interviews with **Charlie Rose**, along with a delightful and entertaining interview done in 1966 by *Whad'Ya Know* host **Michael Feldman**. Feldman asked **Willie**: "What if **Faulkner** had been born in **Hibbing, Minnesota**? Would that have changed the course of Southern literature?" To which **Willie** replied: "No, his name would have been **Garrison Keillor**. He would have written *The Sound and the Snow*."

Studs Terkel, during a 1983 radio interview got **Willie** to talk about his multi-layered book, *The Courting of Marcus Dupree*: "I began to perceive that it really wasn't a book about football, although football is the thread that runs through it. It's a book about two Mississippians; a seventeen-year-old black and a middle-aged white. The seventeen-year-old black's odyssey into the great outside world almost coincided with the middle-aged white's return to his soil after a long exile."

This book ends with **Jack Bales** own 1997 "Conversation with Willie Morris." This is the longest single section of the book, twenty-eight pages, and in many ways the most informative, covering, as it does, the whole range of **Willie's** life as editor, teacher, and writer.

On a personal note, I knew **Willie** somewhat, helped get his limited edition book, *My Two Oxfords*, published; spent one memorable night with him and his wife, along with **Larry Brown** and his wife at the **Warehouse**, a pub in **Oxford, Mississippi**, talking about books, writing, publishing and bookselling. I will miss him dearly, but he will always live in his written words.

Click One, Get One Free

by **Sandra Beehler** (Old Dominion University)

Internet commerce in books is forcing changes in the book club business. When **Doubleday Direct**, one of the main U.S. book clubs, saw a big drop in enrollment in 1999, it moved quickly to grab a piece of the Web market. Though general-interest clubs find it hard to compete with online retailers, the Internet offers advantages to clubs which cater to special interests. Several specialty clubs offered by **Doubleday** online late last year have already exceeded expectations in online enrollment.

See — "New Life in the Old Club," *The Economist*, p.74, Feb. 26-Mar. 3, 2000.

SLIC FOR NIC

by **Sandra Beehler** (Old Dominion University)

A startup company called **Alacritech** is offering a new way to connect computers to the Internet that could increase server performance by 800%. Its **Session Layer Interface Card (SLIC)** would replace the **Network Interface Card (NIC)** that has been standard for the last 20 years. The **SLIC** includes an **Internet Protocol Processor (IPP)** and 8 mbs of memory, which takes over the burden of protocol processing from a server's CPU. Test results have been very positive, though there are still some technical problems to be worked out.

See — **James Karney**, "Cut the Chatter," *Internet World*, July 1, 2000.