

AUTHOR SHARES STRUGGLES WITH WELFARE

BY SAMANTHA CAMILLETTI
scamilletti@dailypress.com

If you would have told Pamela Covington, author of “A Day at the Fare: One Woman’s Welfare Passage,” 40 years ago that she would be a survivor of poverty and a welfare and literacy advocate, she probably would have laughed.

“I once had all of the same stereotypes that most



Covington

people have about welfare recipients. I was living a really comfortable life-style — Victorian home in downtown Savannah, Ga., custom this and that, everything,” she said. “I never even knew anyone on wel-

fare.”

But all that changed, she said, when her partner’s behavior worsened as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder from Vietnam and made her feel unsafe.

“I had to make a decision that a lot of women would probably have difficulty doing. I gave it all up for my children so that we could be safe,” she said. “That was how I went from living

totally comfortable to just short of living on the streets in a week.”

A memoir, “A Day at the Fare” describes Covington’s three-year plunge into what she calls “deep poverty,” or the condition in which a person finds themselves deprived of basic human needs, and then her struggle to find a way out.

The author, who resides

See WELFARE/Page 2

Coming soon

The Daily Press has released a book in honor of NASA Langley’s centennial, “The Unknown and Impossible,” by veteran Daily Press reporters Tamara Dietrich, Mark St. John Erickson and Mike Holtzclaw. To celebrate, the Hampton History Museum will host a panel discussion and book signing 7-8 p.m. Aug. 7. The museum is located at 120 Old Hampton Lane in Hampton. The book can be purchased at the Daily Press office at 703 Mariners Row in Newport News. Print and e-reader versions also are available at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com and store.dailypress.com.

BOOK REVIEW

Familiar premise made compelling

Brown’s 3rd novel explores how missing woman’s secrets affect her husband, daughter

BY MEREDITH MARAN
Chicago Tribune

“Every story has been told,” Stanley Kubrick said. “Every scene has been shot. It’s our job to do it one better.” The story of “Watch Me Disappear,” the third novel by Janelle Brown, is a case in point. Unfaithful, secretive spouse presents herself as honest and devoted while living a duplicitous double life. The novel’s central question is not a new one, either, in life or in literature: How well do we really know the people we think we know best? It’s a testament to Brown’s skills that she does, indeed, do this story one better.

“Olive is crossing from the Sunshine Wing to the Redwood Wing, on her way to her third-period English class,” the book opens, “when her dead mother appears for the first time.”

“Olive,” (her mother) says, “You aren’t trying hard enough.”

Centering a novel on a Berkeley family that consists of a dead protagonist, her heavy-drinking husband and her netherworld-dwelling daughter is neither the safest nor the easiest way to pull the drawstrings of plot tight. But Brown does just that.

Wild, impetuous Billie, wife to Jonathan and mother to adolescent Olive, has gone missing one year before the book’s action begins. Since Billie makes only brief, flashback appearances, Jonathan and Olive do most of the talking, and most of what they talk about is Billie, so we get to know Brown’s anti-heroine in the second-best way possible, through the eyes, hearts and delusions of the loved ones she left behind.

“Sure, she’d been flirting with a mutual friend right in front of me,” Jonathan writes in his memoir-in-progress, excerpted in short bits throughout the book, “but I had been included, so what was the harm? ... Billie wasn’t trying to hide. It meant that there was nothing to hide.”

Oh, but there was. So much to hide, and so much being hidden, and for so long. Throughout the 15 years of their happy marriage (or so it seemed), Billie made a habit of taking off on solo backpacking trips (or so she said). “Watch Me Disappear” turns on her failure to return from one of them, a weekend trek through Northern California’s remote Desolation Wilderness. Only Billie’s smashed cellphone and lone hiking boot have been found.

Absent a body, Billie’s husband and daughter cope with Billie’s unresolved disappearance in their own, very different ways. Jonathan drinks and entertains the advances of Billie’s best friend. Olive sees her dead mother, in increasingly frequent, frustratingly unpredictable visitations. Are these hallucinations? Olive wonders. Psychic events? Actual sightings? Is Billie alive, exhorting her daughter to try harder to find her?

From their separate corners, Jonathan and Olive plunge into obsession, hunting down the facts of Billie’s life and death. Did she even remotely resemble the woman they believed her to be, or was she a screen onto which they projected their own fantasies and needs? How did each of them ignore and enable Billie’s



MICHAEL SMİY PHOTO

Janelle Brown’s new novel centers on the question of how well we know one another.

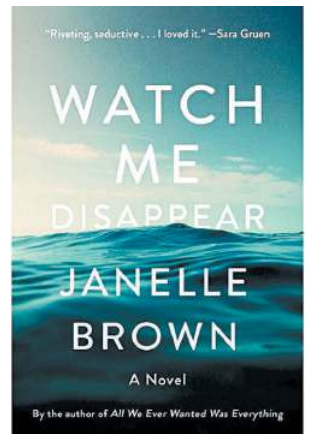
lies?

The rough tongue of truth licks at Jonathan’s denial as he scours his wife’s computer and his own memories. “He wonders now if marriage is about balancing on that

fragile intersection between the said and the unsaid, sharing just enough to satisfy the need for intimacy without crossing over into dangerous territory. Shoving everything else under the rug, hoping it

doesn’t accrue high enough to trip you up.”

Olive’s struggle to do what her age requires her to do — individuate from her dad while honoring her own needs and convictions — comes to a head in a



‘Watch Me Disappear’

By Janelle Brown, Spiegel & Grau, 368 pages, \$27

heartbreaking denouement. No longer willing to endorse Olive’s reports of visits from her mother, Jonathan tells her, “The only thing I truly believe is that it’s just you and me now.”

“This is the moment when she starts to cry,” Brown writes, “because she loves her dad, and she wants him to be happy; but she also knows that she can’t believe him because that would be disloyal to her mother.”

“‘OK, Dad, I’ll let it go,’ she whispers, because she knows that’s what he most wants to hear.”

Despite its familiar premise, “Watch Me Disappear” is a surprising and compelling read. Like the best novels, it takes the reader somewhere she wouldn’t otherwise allow herself to go. (Visits from a dead mother? Really?) And like the best novels, it’s strongest in the places that matter most: in the believability of its characters and the irresistibility of its plot.

Meredith Maran is a freelance writer and the author, most recently, of “The New Old Me.”

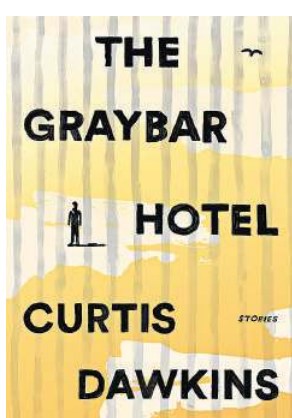
BOOK REVIEW

Convicted killer’s stories offer look inside prison

BY KATHLEEN ROONEY
Chicago Tribune

Most books’ publication dates fall on Tuesdays. That’s just the industry standard. So the fact that Curtis Dawkins’ debut story collection, “The Graybar Hotel,” had July 4 as its official release date is not that surprising; the Fourth of July happened to land on a Tuesday. Rather, the irony lies in that Independence Day should be the launch date for a book by a man who will theoretically never be free.

Dawkins, a Louisville, Ill., native who earned his master’s degree in fiction writing from Western Michigan University in 2000, is serving life without the possibility of parole at the Michigan Reformatory in Ionia, Mich., for a drug-related homicide he committed during a home invasion in 2004. In the acknowledg-



‘The Graybar Hotel’

By Curtis Dawkins, Scribner, 224 pages, \$26

ments, he admits and expresses remorse for his crime: “The night I killed a man was a horrible ordeal, especially for his family, my family — everyone traumatized by my actions. I still

struggle with guilt and sorrow. There’s often so much sadness and grief in my heart, it feels like I might explode.”

Almost every one of the 14 short stories in the collection seems to have originated from something Dawkins experienced or witnessed behind bars, and almost every one reflects with devastating compassion on the guilt and regrets of the criminals inside. In “Sunshine,” he writes, “When you’re separated from the people you know and love, every emotion is multiplied. ... We were all responsible for being there, of course — none of us were innocent. But that only makes you feel worse.”

“A Human Number” takes as its subject a prisoner so consumed by loneliness that he places collect calls to strangers simply to connect with people outside: “You’re supposed to

record your name, so when the person picks up, the generic computer operator asks if you will accept a call from so-and-so from jail. Mine says, Hey, it’s me. Just something I came up with. Not many people know someone with my name, but everyone knows a me.”

In “573543” — whose title comes from Dawkins’ prisoner number — a man receives the number of another inmate who had died, this detail of impersonal bureaucracy speaking volumes about the bleak texture of life within such a vast, harsh system. “According to the Department of Corrections,” he writes, “the prisoner has been ‘released by death.’”

In perhaps the best story in the collection for its inextricable mix of humor and sadness, “Engulfed,” a prisoner makes a list of 152 of his fellow inmate’s lies, including “Julia Roberts

was a penpal” and “He died twice and met God both times.”

Besides the prison setting, the constant that binds these stories together is the atrocious tedium and isolation of an imprisoned existence — the monotony of being locked away from free society in the name of punishment.

It’s hard to read “The Graybar Hotel” and not think about the prison crisis in America, with 2.3 million people behind bars, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, an advocacy group seeking reforms to address mass incarceration. Also about the fact that white people make up 64 percent of the U.S. population but only 39 percent of the incarcerated population, whereas black people make up 13 percent of the U.S. population but 40 percent of the incarcerated one.

It’s hard, too, not to wonder about the privilege of the author, a white man, and consider how many other incarcerated authors — perhaps people of color, perhaps women, perhaps both — might be struggling to have their voices heard.

And that maybe is the biggest benefit of this book’s existence. It’s well-written and worth reading for Dawkins’ craft and insight, but it’s also an occasion to consider an industry that has little to do with rehabilitation and that makes it nearly impossible for its participants to recuperate their lives. As Dawkins himself says on the book’s final page: “I pray that we all find forgiveness, freedom, and peace. Inside and out.”

Kathleen Rooney is a freelance writer and the author, most recently, of the novel “Lillian Boxfish Takes a Walk.”

Dive into this first-person WWII saga

Military history enthusiasts, and U.S. Navy veterans, particularly Navy aviators, should not miss "Never Call Me A Hero," a new memoir written by two Norfolk historians.



WILFORD KALE
#HRBooks

These days, it is not unusual to read about numerous anniversaries of various Civil War conflicts, World War I events and those battles of World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Historians have a way to putting together different accounts of these actions in a riveting and highly readable fashion.

Eyewitness accounts illuminate historical events to an even greater extent.

This year finds the 73rd anniversary of D-Day, the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Midway, 155th anniversary of the Battle of Williamsburg, the 99th anniversary of the Battle of Argonne Forest and the 65th anniversary of the Battle of Pork Chop Hill. It is Midway that now draws our attention.

Two Hampton Roads writers — Timothy and Laura Orr — have composed a riveting narrative about the Battle of Midway through the words and memory

of N. Jack "Dusty" Kleiss, a legendary American dive bomber pilot who recalled the June 4-6, 1942, epic struggle in the middle of the ocean that many believed changed the course of World War II in the Pacific.

"Never Call Me A Hero" by Kleiss and the Orrs is a chronicle, but more important, it is a saga of life in the midst of a war. Kleiss flatly states, "...(N)ever call me a hero. During the Pacific War, I did my job and that's it. I know I performed a dangerous task — dropping out of the sky with a bomb — and that I lived in an exceptional time." That saga is retold in a straight-forward, sometimes sad manner, but in a way that one-man's plight depicts the feelings and difficulties of hundreds of other naval aviators. It is the friendships and camaraderie that make this story compelling.

Timothy Orr, associate professor of history at Old Dominion University, and his wife Laura, deputy education director of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, conducted 33 hours of interviews with Kleiss and after agreeing to compile his autobiography, he also provided a personal archive of his naval career. Especially important to the Midway story was his flight log and a self-published war

diary.

The narrative is a compelling saga of an aviator's love story — how he won, then lost and won again the love of his life, Jean Mochon, his wife of 67 years. She died in 2006. Kleiss, who was awarded the Navy Cross and Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Orrs wanted the book to be published to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Midway. Unfortunately, he died last fall at age 100, missing the anniversary and the book launch.

A humble man who never sought publicity, even though in his last years he was the lone surviving dive-bomber pilot of the battle. In the several years prior to Midway, Kleiss served on the aircraft USS Enterprise with a host of Navy aviator crew members.

As a Naval Academy graduate and dive-bomber, Kleiss was called upon to fly off the Enterprise, find Japanese ships and then, in 10,000 to 20,000 foot-dives, plunged through the sky in near vertical fashion to attempt a kill. At the Battle of Midway, bombs from his plane had direct hits on two aircraft carriers — the Kaga and Hiryu — which were part of the Japanese fleet that had attacked Pearl Harbor just six months earlier.

Often, episodes of the book are as much about those aviators who died in battle and in various related accidents, including those who ditched their aircraft after running out of fuel, as they are about the living. In fact, Kleiss decided to talk about Midway because "the real heroes of the battle were the crews who died, the torpedo bomber crewmen lost in their attack and the dive bomber crewmen and fighter pilots," not the living.

Kleiss never forgot those deaths. Through the years, Kleiss said he was haunted "by the memory" of his lost buddy and compatriot Tom Eversole. A torpedo bomber pilot, Eversole had a thankless job because he put his life at risk with torpedoes that never worked. In the end, almost all the torpedo bombers' efforts were in vain.

"I owe(d) it to Tom to tell the story right."

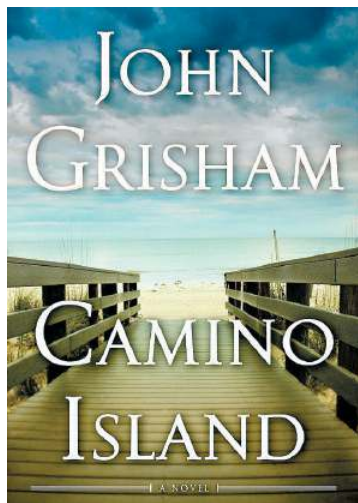
"Never Call Me A Hero," a surefire best-seller, is available at local bookstores and on line at Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com. Published by William Morrow, it costs \$26.99.

Williamsburg's Kale has written a number of nonfiction books of local interest, including "A Very Virginia Christmas."

NATIONAL BEST-SELLERS

HARDCOVER FICTION

1. "Camino Island: A Novel" by John Grisham (Doubleday, \$28.95) *Last week: 1*



2. "Murder Games: A Thriller" by James Patterson and Howard Roughan (Little, Brown, \$28) *Last week: 2*

3. "The Duchess: A Novel" by Danielle Steel (Delacorte, \$28.99) *Last week: 4*

4. "Use of Force: The Scot Harvath Series" by Brad Thor (Atria, \$27.99) *Last week: 3*

5. "Into the Water: A Novel" by Paula Hawkins (Riverhead, \$28) *Last week: 6*

6. "Wired: A Novel" by Julie Garwood (Berkley, \$27) *Last week: —*

7. "Tom Clancy Point of Contact: A Jack Ryan Jr. Novel" by Mike Maden (G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$29) *Last week: 8*

8. "The Silent Corner: A Novel of Suspense" by Dean Koontz (Bantam, \$28) *Last week: 7*

9. "The Force: A Novel" by Don Winslow (Morrow, \$27.99) *Last week: —*

10. "The Identicals: A Novel" by Elin Hilderbrand (Little, Brown, \$28) *Last week: —*

LITERARY EVENTS

Book Break in Chuckatuck

11 a.m. July 18

Read and discuss a different book each month while getting to know your neighbors. Each book is available for checkout at any Suffolk Public Library location. The group will discuss additional titles of interest for future meetings. Light refreshments provided. July 18: "Wish You Well;" Aug. 15: "The Boys in the Boat." Details: suffolkpubliclibrary.libcal.com/event/3276943.

Chuckatuck Library, 5881 Godwin Blvd., Suffolk.

William Crute, signing 'The Green House Near Loveville'

2 p.m. July 21

A wealthy business man loses everything in a worldwide economic collapse. Now he must struggle just to survive and keep his family safe. William and Mary Bookstore and Cafe, 345 W. Duke of Gloucester St., Williamsburg.

ACES ON BRIDGE

BY BOBBY WOLFF

"Do not speak of your happiness to one less fortunate than yourself."

— Plutarch

My wife, Judy, was previously married to the late Norman Kay, one of the strongest players never to win a world title. He declared this deal, from the semi-finals of the 1968 Olympiad.

Norman was always a deliberate player, and when West led the spade jack, he took considerable time before committing himself. Eventually he won, tested the hearts and, when they broke 3-3, took the diamond finesse for an overtrick.

Was his line of play the best? It fails when hearts are 4-2 with the diamond finesse wrong. In contrast, playing on diamonds first might work if that suit divides evenly. But if the diamond ace is followed by a diamond to the queen, which is allowed to win, does declarer now risk a third diamond, or does he try the hearts?

Once you have identified the problem, maybe you can spot the best play for declarer. This would have been to try a low diamond toward the queen before releasing the ace. If the queen wins, you are still in control in the diamond suit and can even cope with a bad heart break by coming to hand in spades and leading a low heart to the 10. This loses only to the bare heart jack in East. And of course, if the diamond queen loses to the king, there is still time to test both red suits.

So was the U.S. team lucky here? Not exactly; in the other room, the Dutch declarer was in seven no-trump — which simply needed hearts to be 3-3 and the diamond finesse to work.

NORTH

♠ A Q 5
♥ 10 5
♦ Q J 6 5 3
♣ K 10 5

07-18-A

BID WITH THE ACES

07-18-B

South holds:

♠ A Q 5
♥ 10 5
♦ Q J 6 5 3
♣ K 10 5

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	Pass	Dbl.
Pass	Pass	Rdbl.	Pass
?			

ANSWER: This redouble is for takeout — your partner would sit back and let you enjoy yourself in one diamond doubled if he were happy to play there. You should expect him to have short diamonds and both majors, so you should bid one spade. In this context, the hand is quite suitable for play there.

WEST

♠ J 10 9 6
♥ 9 8 7
♦ 9 8 2
♣ J 6 2

EAST

♠ 8 7 2
♥ J 6 4
♦ K 10 7
♣ 8 7 4 3

SOUTH

♠ K 4 3
♥ A K Q 3 2
♦ A 4
♣ A Q 9

Vulnerable: North-South
Dealer: South

The bidding:

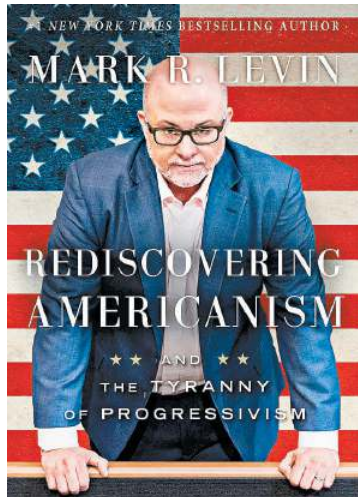
South	West	North	East
2♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	Pass	5NT	Pass
6NT	All pass		

Opening Lead: Spade jack

If you would like to contact Bobby Wolff, e-mail him at bobbywolff@mindspring.com. Copyright 2010, United Features Syndicate, Inc.

HARDCOVER NONFICTION

1. "Rediscovering Americanism: And the Tyranny of Progressivism" by Mark R. Levin (Threshold, \$27) *Last week: 1*



2. "Dangerous" by Milo Yiannopoulos (Dangerous, \$30) *Last week: —*

3. "Astrophysics for People in a Hurry" by Neil deGrasse Tyson (Norton, \$18.95) *Last week: 3*

4. "The Swamp: Washington's Murky Pool of Corruption and Cronyism and How Trump Can Drain It" by Eric Bolling (St. Martin's, \$26.99) *Last week: 2*

5. "Al Franken, Giant of the Senate" by Al Franken (Twelve, \$28) *Last week: 5*

6. "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F—: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life" by Mark Manson (HarperOne, \$24.99) *Last week: 6*

7. "Understanding Trump" by Newt Gingrich (Center Street, \$27) *Last week: 4*

8. "Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life ... And Maybe the World" by William H. McRaven (Grand Central, \$18) *Last week: 8*

9. "Bill O'Reilly's Legends and Lies: The Civil War" by David Fisher (Holt, \$35) *Last week: 10*

10. "Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy" by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant (Knopf, \$25.95) *Last week: 7*

For the week ended July 9, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide.

— Publishers Weekly

WELFARE

Continued from 1

in Hampton, will speak about her experiences during the RESULTS International Conference on Poverty, which runs Saturday through July 25 in Washington, D.C. Covington is slated to speak Sunday.

With the book, she's hoping to provide a realistic and poignant account of the welfare system she faced beginning in 1984.

"It was rough from having gone from all of that comfort to this," she said. "I was living in an air-conditioned, two-story tenement apartment that was shaped like a big L. It took up the whole block. So you had no windows on the side. No A/C in Jacksonville, Fla. It was hot. And the bedrooms were upstairs. For maybe over five months, I didn't have a stove to cook on."

She continued by recalling the money she received after applying for welfare.

"My welfare check was \$170, and my rent for that box of roaches was \$170," she said. "So for the first of the month, I was already at a deficit. Plus, I had a baby who was 1 and a half, shoes for growing children, utility bills..."

There's no trace of bitterness in her voice, no resentment for what she was put

through and her brown eyes glimmer still with the curiosity and passion she used to survive.

"Whose fault is it that I'm on welfare?" she asked. "Mine, because I had that comfort and I left. My mate's, because he served our country and didn't return the same. Was I to stay and roll the dice?"

Covington constructed her book by saving every document the welfare office sent her and arranging them in chronological order.

The book details her personal experiences, but she also hopes this will ignite a general conversation on what could be improved with the welfare system.

"I wanted to show the importance of why we need a safety net program," she said. "They need to work with the whole person, because believe me, when I was out there and I was down, something was wrong with me. It would have been helpful if someone, like the case worker, would have told me the day that I applied (for welfare) about the colleges nearby, the funding that would help me with school and Section 8 housing that has housing standards with central heating and air. Instead of me bumping along and finding out what if, if someone came in, it's all laid out there for them. Give someone something to shoot for."

Covington hopes to eventually write an

extensive report on changes she believes could streamline the welfare system to benefit both the government and the recipients.

The report was inspired by a few roadblocks in the system she met along her journey.

She mentioned one particular instance where her welfare check was reduced because she accepted scholarship money to continue her education.

"Because welfare requires you to report any change in household, which is defined as anything more than the \$152 a month, I had to report it. When I did, they reduced my food stamps to \$25," she said.

"What I'm trying to bring to light is that yes, (the welfare check) was helpful, because it was sure better than nothing and it kept me off the streets, but on the other hand, as I worked toward lifting myself up, I had to report that income and I got \$25 for food stamps. What can you buy for \$25? Kool-Aid with no sugar? I thought I was doing the right thing."

Despite the obstacles, Covington found her ladder out of darkness through education.

She began taking classes at the Florida Junior College and was awarded her first associate's degree in 1986.

"Today I have two master's degrees, two

associate's degrees and a bachelor's degree," she said. Her experiences with the welfare system encouraged her to speak out and join RESULTS, "a movement of passionate, committed everyday people" that aim to end poverty, according to the group's website.

With her story, Covington hopes to inspire not just those who are on welfare, but anyone who is facing rough times.

"All of us can be struck by adversity and we cannot adopt a sense of futility. We have something in us, if we'll tap into it, that will help us pull out of it. One of the quotes I commonly use is Ralph Waldo Emerson who said that what lies before us and what lies behind us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us," she said.

"So it's that 'within thing' that, without being religious, because I don't want to lose anyone, that gets them to hang in there, to keep scratching and scratching until something comes to the surface. And you have to do that by being resourceful and setting priorities and exposing yourself to unlimited possibilities."

Additional information on Covington and her work can be found on her website, pamelamcovington.com or by following @PMCOvington on Twitter. More information on the conference can be found at bit.ly/2t7LIAZ.