

"It winks because of
secrets it keeps,
things it sees,
things it knows."

Restaurant. Air Conditioned. Telephones.

*A local author sets her latest
mystery novel in
Tuscaloosa.*

by Margaret Clevenger

Those are the prophetic words of Dr. Priscilla Beaty holding forth on the landmark sign which has stood in front of the Moon Winx for as long as most people in Tuscaloosa can remember. Both Beaty and the 1950s' era lodge play pivotal roles in the murder mystery, *Tuscaloosa Moon*, by Carolyn Ezell (who wrote this book under the name Carolyn Breckinridge).

When Ezell chose Tuscaloosa as the setting for her latest novel, she did so for a couple of reasons.

"First of all, writers should always write about what they know," said Ezell, who has made Tuscaloosa her home since her university days at UA. "The second reason is that I was thinking at the time that there weren't a lot of books that featured Tuscaloosa and this whole area. And I thought how fun it would be for people to read and learn about our city and our state, about the Southeast in general. So my idea was to bring attention to this area and all the things that we have here that are beautiful, and fun, and wonderful."

The reader can actually travel the streets, make the turns in the book, and find most of the places mentioned in the mystery. *Metamorphosis* is a fictional residential treatment facility on the lake and the elementary school is strictly an invention of the author's imagination, but Ezell said she kept as much realism as she could in her setting. "I think it is important that you try to be as realistic as you can even though it's fiction. If I were trying to get one of my characters from point A to point B and I couldn't remember the exact way, I would get out there and drive it."

MOON WINK

LOOK
GOOD
FEEL



Restaurant

CONDITIONED



"That's been fun, meeting the public. Writing is solitary and quiet and difficult. Then going out and meeting folks takes a different kind of energy in a positive way." - Carolyn Ezell

Ezell is a retired therapist whose specialty was working with emotionally conflicted children and adolescents. That experience formed the foundation of her mystery. "I want people who see a child with difficulties to pay attention and be a good role model, which some of my characters really try hard to be in that book," she said. "I want people to know how that can impact a child's life and make a huge difference."

Many of the characters in her book have been so popular, readers have clamored for Ezell to continue their stories. She is finishing her second novel in the series now, tentatively titled Greenwood, and has once again included married couple Addie and Luke, she a police

officer and he a psychologist at Metamorphosis.

"I like my characters," Ezell said. "They grow on me. And I think the readers enjoy having a series of the same characters, getting to know them, getting to know the town."

But writing a series comes with challenges. "With the second book, you have to write enough to bring in the people who didn't read the first, but don't want to overstate and bore the people who did read the first book."

Ezell said she became too fond of some of her characters in Greenwood, and has had to rewrite and make drastic changes. "My victim turned out to be somebody I just couldn't see being done in. I

try to have a skeleton outline in my head of where everything is going, and then the characters come to life and fill in the rest of it."

Ezell spent three years writing Tuscaloosa Moon. She figures it took that long because she did not write every day as she does now on the second book in the series. Her writing schedule typically begins after the dinner hour when evening has settled and the house is quiet and interruptions are few. She stays at her computer until 9:30 or 10 at night. But the writing process is an ongoing one, not simply a nighttime pursuit.

"During the daytime, when I'm waiting somewhere, I'll be thinking about where a chapter

is going, how I'm going to make it work. So during the day, I'm formulating my thoughts and at night I put it down."

The last year has been a busy one for Ezell who has been touring with Tuscaloosa Moon. She has hit stops from the Southern Writers Festival at the Summit to the Mobile Christmas Jubilee. She has appeared at Shelton State, the Tuscaloosa Public Library, The Druid City Arts Festival, and at Little Professor's Book Center in Homewood. She has had signings at several Barnes & Noble Booksellers around the state, including three times at the Tuscaloosa location. Ezell's first book signing was last fall at The Guild of Professional Writers for Children.

"That's been fun, meeting the public. Writing is solitary and quiet and difficult. Then going out and meeting folks takes a different kind of energy in a positive way. Now that I've been out there long enough, I have people coming into the places where I'm signing, and they have already read the book and they're asking questions. It's nice to meet people who have questions and want to know more."

Even though she enjoys meeting fans of her book and talking with them about her characters and plot twists, Ezell has struggled with shyness for most of her life. When she was ten years old, while her family was living in Pennsylvania, her parents sent her to the Pittsburgh Playhouse School of Acting for classes in the hopes she would become more comfortable around people.

When she was thirteen, her father moved the family to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, as part of his job with the United States Agency



The author on location for a book signing at the Tuscaloosa Barnes & Noble.

for International Development (USAID). "I lived there for three years," Ezell said. "And then from there I went to an American boarding school in Beirut, Lebanon. The next year my father took a position with the U.N. in Karachi, Pakistan, and I graduated from the Karachi American School."

While her parents stayed overseas, Ezell returned to the states to attend the University of Alabama, where both her parents had graduated. With her grandparents just up the road in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa felt like home and Ezell settled in to stay.

While this is her first mystery

series, Ezell has been writing for years. When she was only in her 20s, she published her first book, *The Marble Tear*, a historical novel set in India. She has written several features for *Highlights for Children*, including an award-winning article, "The Anything Art of Jimmie Lee Sudduth," which has been reprinted in Canadian and American textbooks.

When Ezell is not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family. Husband Jim, an artist, author, and photographer, along with their son Jon, a visual artist and musician, designed the cover of *Tuscaloosa Moon*. Daughter-in-

law, Laura, is a nationally published author.

Her mother, Carralyn, is an avid reader who lives next door. “She is my biggest supporter,” Ezell said.

Being outdoors enjoying their dogs is another favorite way for Ezell to relax. “Lola, who is a rescue dog, likes to corral the koi in the pond,” she said. “They swim toward her and she runs like crazy.”

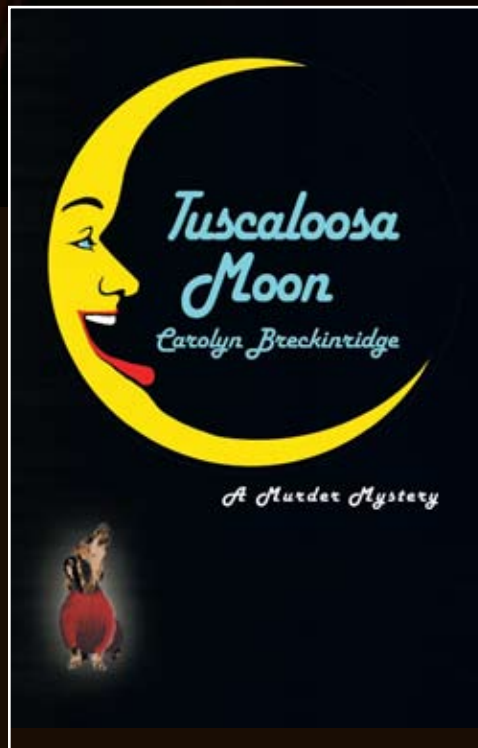
Ezell also volunteers in the Literacy Program teaching adults to read. “That’s inspiring. I always said when I retired that I would do that.”

One thing that Ezell said is particularly near and dear to her heart, is helping writers in the local community find a bigger platform.

“There is a place to watch dance, places to go if you want to hear music. There are art galleries. But there is just not a lot available for all the different authors who want and need to get their writing out there for the public to know what’s going on in town. I really feel like that is something that is important.”

Ezell supports and participates in as many local events featuring authors as she can in order to promote writers in the area.

“When I was in creative writing classes years ago at the University, the saying went that writing is a jealous mistress. All through the years I looked forward to having the time to devote to writing, and I’m so appreciative that now’s the time.” ★



Tuscaloosa Moon,
A Murder Mystery
by
Carolyn Breckinridge
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Paperback, 428 pages

Margaret Clevenger's work has appeared in many newspapers and magazines including Alabama Heritage, Mississippi Magazine, Pennsylvania Magazine, and Southern Lady. She has a story, "Whistling Past the Graveyard" in the anthology Tuscaloosa Tales: Stories of Tuscaloosa and its People. She is a regular contributor to Jubilation.

The Moon Winx sign that plays such a significant role in both the landscape of the novel and Tuscaloosa was originally designed by West Alabama artist and Gordo native Glenn House, Sr. (May 7, 1931 - September 14, 2014).