



Jacquie
Reeves

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photo by Chris Jensen

Historian, writer, investigator, wife, mother, ghostbuster, and tour guide Jacquie Reeves has many stories to tell. Her family roots reflect the legendary family struggles of the Civil War. Her maternal great-great grandfather fought for the Confederacy, while her paternal great-great grandfather fought for the Union. Growing up with three brothers, scaring their little sister witless with ghost stories was a favorite pastime. As the mother of an autistic child, author of nine books, and originator of Huntsville's wildly popular walking tours of haunted historical Huntsville we are barely able to scratch the surface of the stories she has to tell.

Have you ever seen a ghost yourself?

Just one, at the Historic Huntsville Depot. I was giving a tour and I turned to face the group. There was a piece of Plexiglas behind them and I saw the reflection of what looked like a conductor walk across the passenger platform. I whipped around and scrambled over to the platform to get a better look and there was nothing there.

You speak of it so casually. I guess you just get used to it?

Are you kidding? I'm chicken. It runs chills up my spine just thinking about it.

But you know they are out there, these ghosts, and you take an investigative parapsychology team with you? Yes. My daughter, Leah Gray, and Kevin Thompson are paranormal investigators. Kevin uses high-tech sophisticated cameras and recording equipment - a wand that registers temperature spikes and an EVP meter to measure energy. We also take along a medium to communicate through them. You would be amazed at the things we find out that don't match up later.

Does the equipment really register a presence? All the time. One of our photographers caught the image of two hands splayed on a windowpane on an upper floor of the Weeden House. That one was creepy! Brrr... just thinking about it!

Have you thought about trying to get on that Ghost Hunter's TV program? I've seen it, but the show is high in drama. Our investigations are much more realistic and straightforward.

Your family goes back to the American Revolution. And that family history is why I named my touring company Avalon Tours. My ancestor, Lewellen Jones, came here to grow cotton before it was named Huntsville. He fought in the American Revolution at Valley Forge with his aunt's husband, George Washington. His plantation, named Avalon, stood where UAHuntsville is today. His grave is behind Morton Hall.

How did you get started writing books and novels? My son, Jeff, was diagnosed with autism when he was three and it was a heartbreaking realization. The last chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution asked me to write an article. I found the research and writing helped me focus on something other than Jeff's illness.

And nine books later... Former District Attorney Fred Simpson and I wrote about 13 prominent capital murder cases in "Murder in the Heart of Dixie." I'm working on the third book of the series called "Murder and Mayhem in North Alabama."

You've interviewed convicted murderers... face to face? It was quite an experience. I went into the Limestone County Correctional facility to interview a guy who killed an 18-year-old boy and raped a 15-year-old girl, both hitchhikers in 1977. He let the girl go. He explained to me that everyone in prison agreed with him that he should not be in prison since a demon made him kill the boy, but the demon left after he raped the girl, and that was why he let her go. It was the most requested book of the year at the prison during Christmas 2004.

Your research requires that you follow murder trials closely? Robert and I spend many hours sitting through interesting trials at the Madison County Courthouse.

Robert Reeves from WHNT New 19... ooh, tell us a secret about him that people may not know. Robert and I have been married three years. Many people remember him from co-hosting "Mornin' Folks" with his late father, Grady, in the early 1980s. Although I didn't know him, I'm told they look very much alike. People still call Robert "Grady" quite often, when we are out. "Hi Grady, how

Written by Kimberly Ballard

This month's Spotlight needs no introduction.

He is beloved by all ages, and known around the world by several different monikers: St. Nick, Santy, Nikolaus, Father Christmas, Papa Noel, and Noel Baba - but we just call him Santa Claus!

Wow! I'm sitting here talking to Santa Claus! What an honor!

Ho, ho, ho! Well, it's good to see you again, too. Last time we had a one-on-one, your bottom lip trembled and tears streamed down your face the entire time.

I was four years old Santa...

I recall your Mom taking your picture. You still have it I believe.

Packed away in a box, yes... You are a man of many faces. Whenever I see you in person, in pictures, on TV - you always look different. I saw you a few years ago visiting children at a mall, and you seemed to have lost some weight.

Well, I'm up and down, you know. Mrs. Claus went through a vegan phase, but the little elves slipped me chocolate chip Soft Batch cookies when Mrs. Claus wasn't looking. And of course the kids plumped me back up with goodies they left. You just can't beat M&Ms and Oreos!

What are your favorite treats?

Ho, ho, ho Let's see. I like Oreo Double Stuf and skim milk - the skim milk cancels the calories, right? I also like M&Ms, oh and my favorites are the sugar cookies shaped like me. Those are special because I can see the children made and decorated them just for me. It warms my heart when flying on those cold nights.

I'm curious, Santa - with all the new technology available, have you ever considered a faster, more efficient means of travel than the sleigh and the reindeer?

Nope - I still have the reindeer, although they finally talked me into a GPS a couple of years ago.

I bet that better helps you find all the homes.

No. We've never had a problem finding homes, but Blitzen gets a kick out of that automated voice that says, "You missed the turn! Go back, go back!" Ho, Ho, Ho - I have to admit that one gets me, too!

Just how do you get to all the houses in one night?

Everyone wants to know that answer. I start at the international date line and work my way around west so it's the end of the second day when I am actually done. Everyone says it's one night but that isn't possible unless..... hmmm... never mind, the reindeer wouldn't like Red Bull.

Santa, what is hot on Christmas lists this year?

Zhu Zhu Pets and Pillow Pets are excellent gifts, but will be hard to find. For older kids and adults, everything electronic! iPods and iPads, Bluetooths, the Kindle for avid readers, and Nintendo Wii are very hot. Personalized gift baskets and gift certificates are practical gifts as well.

Thank you, Santa, for sharing with us today. I know you have a lot of work to get back to, but one more thing...

Are the elves real mischievous?

Oh yes! Last year, Alabaster Snowball and Sugarplum Mary dressed up like M&Ms and did a TV commercial. They thought it was very funny - "Santa! You are real!" and then Red faints. Ho, ho, ho! You see, M&Ms are my favorite... add them into some soft batch cookie mix and mmm mmm mmm

Written by Kimberly Ballard
Photo by Monica Martin

A straight shooter with a quick, dry wit and no-nonsense manner, it is difficult to envision BancorpSouth president Penny Billings popping water wheelies on a jet ski. Then again, she is just brassy enough to survive breast cancer by taking chemo on Friday, recovering on Saturday, and going back to work on Monday. Once a hesitant North Alabama transplant who left her swanky Washington D.C. lifestyle for what she teasingly refers to as a fishing cabin in rural Alabama... all for love... and you now have a woman who sits on multiple boards of directors for several Huntsville nonprofit organizations and takes an active role in multiple philanthropic endeavors. In her own words, "I am a fast-talking Yankee at heart you know!"

I could have sworn I read that you had retired from banking... I did. I was eligible for retirement from Wachovia in September 2007. I felt it was time to get out of the big corporate banking culture, but then BancorpSouth contacted me. My last day at Wachovia was on September 7 and I started at BancorpSouth on September 12.

That must qualify as the shortest retirement ever. Well I do have that boring banker mentality... high type "A" personality... everyone should have a plan... stick to the plan.

It must be fascinating time to be in the banking industry. It is an interesting time to be in the banking industry especially for someone who has the "old banker's" mentality coming out of D.C. where I worked for Freddie Mac in the 1980s.

What did you do before you got into banking? I studied psychology in college because I wanted to be a juvenile probation officer, but I got a job working as a bank teller and the rest is history.

How did you land in Huntsville? I was living in Alexandria, Virginia with a nice home overlooking the Potomac when I met Jay. He worked in Washington, but had a fishing cabin on Lake Guntersville. I love him dearly but he isn't too quick on the uptake. We dated for three years before he finally talked me into moving into his family cabin in the woods.

You're teasing me! That fishing cabin is a gorgeous Guntersville lakefront home! Yes, I am teasing. The house is great now, but it really was just a rustic fishing cabin in 1986 when I got here. The first time my mother came to visit from Rochester, N.Y., she expected me to be washing clothes on a rock down by the river's edge. I warned her it was hot during the summer, but she could stay inside in the air conditioning. She asked, 'You have air conditioning?'

You are involved in everything – The Chamber of Commerce, United Way... Does that come from growing up in and working in a big city? Actually, it is just the opposite. It is easy to get involved in Huntsville. You are just a blip on the radar in New York City or D.C., but Huntsville is a big little city.

What are your favorite philanthropic interests? I was on the advisory committee for the Huntsville Young Professionals (HYP) when they first got started. That was fun. I am most passionate about being on the board for the Red Cross. You may not think about Huntsville being a high hazard area for emergency services unless you realize a single-family fire is devastating to that family. The Red Cross does great work.

I have to ask you about being on the board of the American Cancer Society because ... Yes, I am a breast cancer survivor – it's been five years now, and Jay, my husband, is also a prostate cancer survivor. Their annual Relay for Life is a huge success in North Alabama.

You said you love the grandkids, your boat, and your jet ski. The grandchildren are turning into water rats right before my eyes. Jay and I both love the boat. But I go a visitin' on the jet ski – I throw on a t-shirt and shorts; cruise down the channel on my jet ski; and pull up alongside the neighbor's pier and park, then I go in and visit! ■

Penny

Billings

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photo by Chris Jensen

Interior designer, painter, new mother, and wine representative, the work of Huntsville artist Zara Edwards can be found at Huntsville's Artistic Images, Willis Gray Gallery, and at Matt Jones Gallery in Birmingham. Born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, Zara shares her love for wine, art, and motherhood.

Fine wine, fine art – it seems you have a passion for the finer things in life.

I have to be careful not to overanalyze or be overly philosophical about wine and art, but I love food and I love wine with dinner. I especially enjoy sipping a glass of wine when I paint. The two are very compatible. I am always learning about the wine and studying how it tastes, just as I am also learning about my art – always discovering and creating something new. My painting becomes finer over a glass of fine wine.

How did you get into the wine business?

I had an epiphany really, about nine years ago. I was at an art show in California where I met some winemakers who were promoting their wine. I didn't understand the makeup of an avid wine taster, but I was curious about what made a wine connoisseur so I decided to educate myself on it.

Tell us about Rush Wines.

I met Rush Garner and began as a wine representative for him three and a half years ago. We focus on small, boutique wines with a focus on higher-quality, handcrafted wines made by small-scale, family-owned wineries. We also have a private label series. We bring some of the world's finest wines to local markets throughout Alabama and introduce buyers to the people behind the wines.

You grew up and first began painting in Venezuela?

Yes, born and raised in Caracas. I was young when I started in art and my mother encouraged me, but it wasn't until much later that I started painting and developing as an artist.

Is South American culture evident in your art?

Once I became serious, I found inspiration in having a mixture of British and Spanish parents. I would say the rich, contrasting, and diverse merging of cultures and life experiences is bound to be evident in my work.

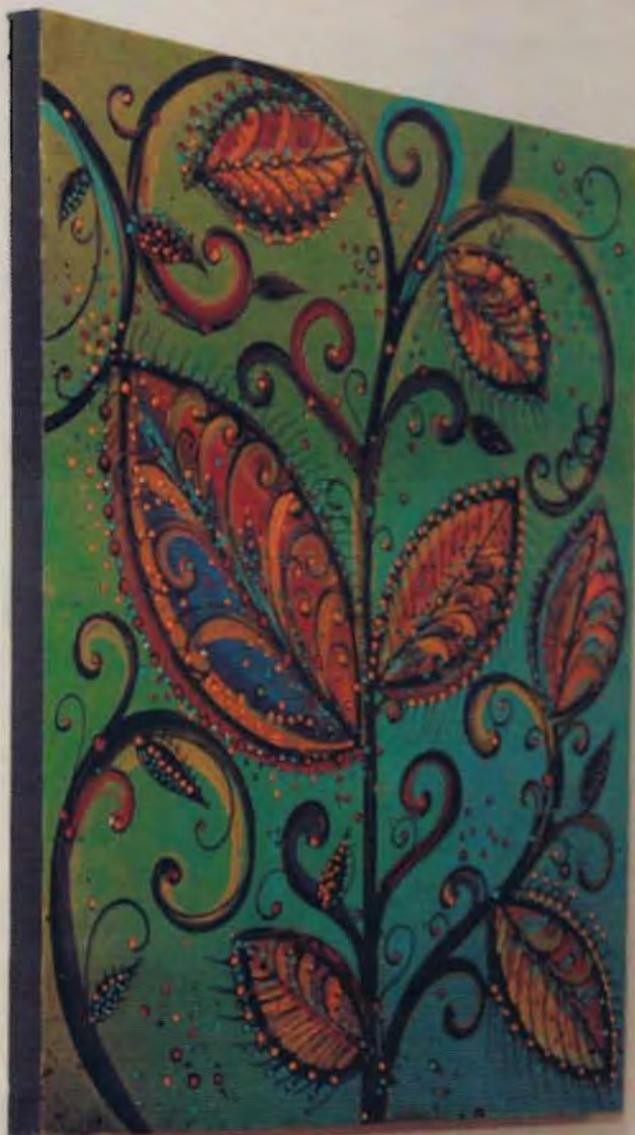
What I have seen of your work is very colorful and somewhat abstract.

It is open to interpretation, but I am not afraid to use vivid color in landscapes and nature. I try to paint day-to-day scenes that reflect emotion.

How do you like being a mom?

Zoe Isabella has completely changed my life.

She has inspired me to create art that is more meaningful.



Zara Edwards



Brad Howard

Written by Kimberly Ballard Photo by Chris Jensen

There are many stories about small-town men and women moving to the big city to seek fame and fortune only to share tales of struggles to survive, working multiple jobs, and outright rejection. However, this is where this story differs because Brad Howard's story is about seeking his dreams, grasping opportunities, defining his ambitions, and making smart decisions. Not that it wasn't difficult, because six years in Manhattan was no cakewalk, but on the other side of the challenge was the opportunity to return home and share his experience working for one of the world's finest wine connoisseurs and Master Sommeliers by opening downtown Huntsville's new *Amendment XXI*.

What took you off to the City that Never Sleeps?

I have a bachelor of fine arts in musical theatre from Ole Miss and I wanted to be an actor, a director, actually. Most of my family are athletes, but I am the one who has an artistic bend. I have been acting and singing all my life, so New York is the place to be.

What was it like trying to "get discovered" in New York?

It was hard work, exhausting. I would audition every day until 2:30 p.m., go to work at BLT Steak at 3:30 p.m., get home well after 1 a.m., and then get up and do it again.

In the mean time, you had to wait tables?

Not exactly. I got a job bartending and just happened to be working for Master Sommelier Fred Dexheimer while he was opening Laurent Tourendel's BLT Steak. He saw a lot of potential in me and took me on as an apprentice.

Dexheimer made quite a name for himself as the beverage manager at some of New York's finest restaurants like Gramercy Tavern, Cello, L'Impero, Jean Georges, and Spice Market?

He is an elite wine connoisseur, the highest rank and honor of Master Sommelier and he taught me everything I know and not just about wine, but about restaurant set-up, designing cocktail menus, atmosphere, management, everything.

You are technically a 'mixologist' and not a bartender?

I started out as a bartender but there is a difference. Mixology is a science — chemistry, in fact. All base alcohols like vodka, scotch, bourbon, and etcetera have chemical properties that play differently when mixed with other alcohols or liqueurs. For instance, gin is dry and floral so you would not want to mix it with a bold flavor like raspberry, but something light like cucumber will better complement it. Some alcohols mix well with sweet syrups and some work best with herbs. I enjoy playing with the options.

How do you reconcile the two?

Singing, acting, and working as a mixologist are all creative releases. They are both very detailed businesses and I am a very detailed person. The small details in creating a character are the difference in a good character and just a character, and balancing the mix between a floral and a fruit with liquor is the difference between vodka on the rocks and something unique and special.

How is Amendment XXI different?

Breck Robinson, my partner, and I wanted to bring the sophistication of New York to Huntsville. We have created an atmosphere. It is a space that is quiet, but not stuffy, caters to non-smokers, has a 1930s style prohibition feel, and yet modern with music from the 1980s. We use all freshly squeezed daily juices in our drinks. Nothing is canned or from concentrate. I took great pains about designing the drink menu and we are a family business. My grandmother, my mom, and my twin brother are all involved in some way.

Ann Davis

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photo by Chuck Mitchell

As artist Andrew Wyeth once said, "One's art goes as far and as deep as one's love goes." Ann T. Davis' love for art in all its forms shines through in her career and her passions. The future was foreshadowed by a career in broadcast radio when, covering the Inauguration of President Nixon in 1969, she was seated next to NASA's Magnificent Seven astronauts. Several years later, Ann married Bill Davis, a missile defense scientist and consultant for Davidson Technologies, and moved to Huntsville.

Art came to the forefront in Ann's life in the form of office and corporate interior design. In her business, Corporate Design, her goal was for each finished project to be a "work of art."

Ann is past president of the Mountain Valley Arts Council, member of both the Guntersville Museum Guild and the Foundation Board of the Huntsville Museum of Art, and on the Board of Directors for the Guntersville Museum and Cultural Center.

What artist, living or dead, has had the most influence on your work? I have to say it is Andrew Wyeth. Until he died in January this year at ninety-one, he was known universally as the greatest living American artist.

You have recently started painting again. I retired from business and moved to Guntersville on the lake. The atmosphere renewed my interest in painting and photography. Five of us meet and paint together every month. One day, we named our little group "The Wyeth Circle," which consists of Susan Linn, Freeda Vest, Viki Morrow, Kathy Leberte, Linda Katz, and me.

What is it like being an artist in North Alabama? Last week, several of us from the Board took a trip to Montgomery where 30 works by women are on display from the Seller's Collection. Governor Riley spoke to us afterwards and he was very impressed. He said that he was in awe of the talent shown in this exhibition.

When you see a work of art, is there a common thread that always captures you? I love the Impressionists - early Picasso, Monet, Degas, Renoir, van Gogh - but later I developed a love for Realists like Wyeth.

How did you first get interested in art? I used to watch my aunt sketch clothes and fashion models. I drew my own paper dolls and colored my own paper doll clothes.

What was your first work of art? I did charcoals of football players at the University of Chattanooga!

What are your media of choice? In the past I have worked in everything, but having returned to painting after twenty-five years, I am back to oils again.

What is the *modus operandi* of "The Wyeth Circle?" The scenery around Guntersville Lake is simply gorgeous. We paint boathouses, outdoor scenes, waterfronts. Recently, we invited an instructor from Connecticut to conduct classes *en plein aire*. He was so impressed by the beauty of Guntersville, he is returning in October to teach another class.

Do you have a non-artist role model? I have to say it is Dorothy Davidson. Her guidance and support helped make our first fundraiser for the Guntersville Museum such a success, and we have been close friends ever since.

What world-famous art galleries have you "haunted"? My favorite gallery here in the U.S. is the Boston Museum of Art. I have visited the Smithsonian and prowled the galleries in London and Paris, but the Louvre was most impressive - seeing the original *Mona Lisa*.

Do you have any non-artistic pastimes? I love golf. ■

...sense of humor and amazing sense of self. The Huntsville has a passion for art and travel, and a knack for creative ideas in fundraising. The president and CEO of the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra is a tireless philanthropist. At Therapy Partners he created their very successful Dog Days of Summer annual fundraiser; served on the Board for the AIDS Action Coalition; and worked on the steering committee for the Lee Deal and Friends Theatre Endowment in recognition of the local actor and director who passed away in 2007. Having come to The Arts Council (TAC) two days after retiring from the St. Clair County Penal system as a prison counselor, he has been active in TAC's Seafare for years and began as a volunteer in the early days of Panoply. Today he is involved with a new project called the Give a Kick campaign. Over a box full of decadent cakes and pastries from Peggy Ann Bakery, EVENT discussed everything from his newest pet project, to his love for art and recent return from a cruise through the Greek Islands.

You just returned from a 10-day cruise to one of the most ancient and legendary parts of the world, and you were on HSO business... What a job!

We worked with a travel agent and Regent Cruise Lines to sell cabins on the cruise. A percentage of sales raised money for HSO. We started in Istanbul – what a magnificent place! We stopped in Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast of Croatia, and sailed through the Dardanelles at midnight. We stopped in Corfu, Mykonos, Santorini, and Olympia where the Olympic Games began. We also saw Ephesus and Kusadasi on the Ionian coast before hitting Venice for three days – one of my favorite places.

I see several interesting pieces of art here in your office.

These are by Chris Clark, an African American artist from Birmingham. He is what some call a dumpster-diver. He found a smashed boom box and made this remarkable crow using the speakers for eyes and the other parts for the body. Chris also has quilts in the Smithsonian and in fact, did an exhibit there in 2008. He did this likeness of me. What do you think? I especially like the staple in my head. The specs are a nice touch too!

It looks just like you! You are involved with a new non-profit created by a student at Randolph. Tell us about it.

His name is Drew McDonald and he is sixteen. He befriended an Ethiopian exchange student and soccer, being very popular in Ethiopia, this kid was an excellent player. Drew started a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization that will donate soccer balls to Ethiopian students. He wrote the business plan and filed all the paperwork for a nonprofit organization, only to discover he has to be nineteen to run a company. He formed a Board of Directors and we have since created the Give a Kick Campaign.

Your major in college was psychology. Is that how you got into prison counseling?

For 25 years I worked in the St. Clair County Correctional system as a prison counselor and classification specialist. I met with inmates and studied their social, psychological and educational background; criminal history, etcetera, to determine how best to protect them both inside prison and for integrating them back into society when they were released.

Tell me a funny family story.

This may not sound very funny at first but it turned out well. When I was fifteen, my Mom went with me to get my driver's permit. As I was turning into my neighborhood off Drake Avenue, I accidentally hit the gas instead of the brake and hit a retaining wall. It threw my mother against the windshield and she was hurt, but she was okay. She recent passed on at a very elderly age; but I did not drive again until I was eighteen. ■

Catherine



Written by Kimberly Ballard Photo by Chris Jensen

Catherine Hereford is a hometown girl, born and raised in Huntsville. She is Development Director for the National Children's Advocacy Center; sits on the Board of Directors of First Circle, the Young Professionals initiative for the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra (an organization she started); a graduating member of Leadership Huntsville's Connect Class 4; and a member of the Board of Directors for the Huntsville Young Professionals. Six months ago, she took on a new job as mother to her first child, Alex. Twice a month, she drives the Soup Kitchen van for the Salvation Army. Special events coordinator, fundraiser, marketing and public relations management – Catherine Hereford loves to be busy and her agenda reflects it.

You started the First Circle. Do you play a classical musical instrument? *No, I just love the arts. I approached Dan Halcomb (HSO president and CEO) about planning and executing events to encourage young professionals to attend and support the symphony. We have been around about eighteen months and have worked behind the scenes on several symphony programs.*

You were a graduate of Leadership Huntsville's Connect Class 4. Yes, and they are currently on Class Eleven. It was a wonderful experience. It has an all-encompassing curriculum that includes areas of leadership where I would not ordinarily have received experience. At a young age in my career, I was interacting with top officials at NASA, and involved in local government. It was not only fun, but really cool work.

Huntsville Young Professionals has been busy this past year with their first Summerfest downtown. That and the New Year's Party at Downtown Forty Seven. It's all a part of bringing vitalization to the downtown area. HYP has over 4,000 members age 21 to mid-40s.

How has becoming a new Mom changed your life? *It has made me more effective in my job at the NCAC. With the abuse we see at the center, having my own child has made me look on this life I brought into the world. I wonder how on earth someone could hurt a child, and yet – it motivates me to work harder to eliminate child abuse completely from the world. It also helps narrow my activities down to only those I am most passionate about because they take me away from home.*

You are married to a native Huntsvillian.

Yes, I was off at school and had come home for the Christmas holidays when I met him. His mother and my mother played bridge together but we never went to school together and had never met.

What do you do in your spare time? *We spend a lot of time at our family home in Tims Ford, a little over an hour north of Huntsville. We do a lot of boating, playing golf, running... and I love to cook.*

Some people would say they couldn't take the heartbreak of working at the NCAC, seeing the bad stuff every day. Yes, it's true it can harden you... but on the other hand, from my office, I look down on the courtyard where some of the kids play ball and talk with their counselors. It keeps you focused on what is important and we know the work we are doing is important and making a difference. That positive carries you through the hard times.

All the work you do must be very fulfilling. I love my job! The idea of being a part of something so much bigger than you are...knowing what I do here at NCAC in our local community also positively impacts children in other communities – over 900 centers nationally and internationally. It's just a small part I play.