

Kathryn R. Wall, author of the Bay Tanner mystery series, will teach “Writing While Southern” at **ARTworks** in Beaufort.



On October 5, I'll be participating in the wonderful Get Your Art Out program sponsored by the Arts Council of Beaufort County at ARTworks in Beaufort. My presentation is entitled “Writing While Southern,” and I'll be talking about my Bay Tanner mysteries set here in the Lowcountry, about the writing process, and about the precarious road to publishing in today's tough economic times.

So, in the interest of full disclosure, here comes the confession: I'm not a Southerner by birth, only by inclination. Have you seen the T-shirts that read **I WASN'T BORN IN THE SOUTH, BUT I GOT HERE AS QUICK AS I COULD?** That would be me.

Now I know Hilton Head, where my husband and I live, isn't the real South. In fact, I've heard it described as Cincinnati with a beach, which may be a tad harsh. But we on the island are fortunate to be sandwiched between Beaufort and Savannah, and it doesn't get much more Southern than those two beautiful places.

Even so, how do I have the nerve to conduct a workshop about writing the South, you ask? The simple answer is that I feel as if I belong here. I've been setting my books in the Lowcountry since “In For a Penny” was first published in 2001; and, after more than fifteen years as a permanent resident and ten years prior to that as a regular visitor, I'm a convert. And everyone knows we converts tend to be more zealous than those to the manner born. Some may call it

the “Gone With the Wind” syndrome, an unrealistic, romanticized version of history as symbolized by Rhett and Scarlett. I think I’ve come to see my new home a little more clearly than that, and I’ve grown to love it, warts and all.

There’s a mystique to the Lowcountry, a marked dichotomy between the revered past and the contemporary reality, each trying to keep from getting swallowed up, each vying for space and attention. Built-in conflict, the stuff mystery novels are made of. How could I resist writing about that? And there’s a different rhythm to life here than what we have in the North, where identity and profession are usually inseparable, and often little is known about family history. I remember being introduced to a pair of elderly sisters in the Upstate of South Carolina during a visit some years ago. (Picture the Baldwin ladies from “The Waltons.”) I was startled to be asked, not what did I *do*—the usual icebreaker where I come from—but rather, who were my *people*.

. It was almost like entering a different country from the one I grew up in, a calmer place where things move at a leisurely pace, and no one appears to mind. The people seem more in tune with the land, with the rhythm of the tides and their natural surroundings.

This is why I love writing about the South. It’s unique. Its history and customs and mannerisms and inflection are different from anywhere else on earth. Now, being a transplant, I’m at a decided disadvantage. Shortly after my third mystery, “Perdition House,” came out, I received an e-mail from a lady in Louisiana chastising me for what she viewed as my improper use of *y’all*.

Though I’d used it sparingly and had consulted with several native Southern speakers to make sure I had it right, apparently there are different rules for different states. I’ve been corrected as well on my use of the terms

*soda*

and

*soft drink*

(what we in northern Ohio call

*pop*

). Apparently Coke is the acceptable generic term no matter what you’re drinking. At least in Georgia, or so I’ve been told.

So I get things wrong, but I keep on trying, because I want to do justice to my adopted home. It’s a rich heritage, with all its flaws, and one that has intrigued and inspired writers since the country was born, whether they grew up on the dusty back roads of rural Beaufort County, in a

mansion on the Point, or in a little farming town in northern Ohio. The South is worth writing about, and **I hope those who share this view and treasure all this area has to offer us will join me October 5, from 1 PM to 3 PM at ARTworks to talk about it.**

I'm sure y'all will have quite a bit to teach this carpetbagger, too.

□ *Kathryn R. Wall is the author of nine Bay Tanner mysteries set in the Lowcountry and published by St. Martin's Press. Her most recent release, "Covenant Hall," will be followed in spring 2010 by "Canaan's Gate."*

*The Arts Council of Beaufort County continuously supports the writing community through grants to writers, by publishing short stories in its ArtNews magazine, and through its ongoing Get Your Art Out programs. In addition, ACBC has partnered with two local book festivals and in 2008 was recognized by the SC Humanities Council with their award for Literary Arts Advocacy.*

*ARTworks is located In Beaufort Town Center, at 2127 Boundary Street, Suite 18A, in Beaufort: 379-2787, [www.beaufortcountyarts.com](http://www.beaufortcountyarts.com).*