

Author Carl T. Smith returns to the Lowcountry and brings Sam Larkin with him.



By Mark Shaffer



Gardner knew what he would order before he walked through the door. With no celebrity chef and being in Covington, South Carolina, he had been surprised on his first visit to the establishment to find the best Steak au Poivre he had ever tasted. In all the times he had eaten at Emily's since, it was the only entree he had ever ordered, and he was looking forward to it.
- Excerpted from "Matthew's Island" by Carl T. Smith

Carl T. Smith sits at a window seat in the bar at Emily's in downtown Beaufort signing books as fast as he can. A queue of fans – some of them old friends – pull books from a table piled high and line up to have them signed.

It's the perfect venue for the bestselling author of the Sam Larkin novels, most of which are set in Covington, S.C., the fictional version of Beaufort. Characters in his books frequent this locals' favorite. Some may even be based on the real life characters that frequent the place, maybe even some of the fans clutching books for the author to sign.

Smith's just released the fourth Larkin adventure, *Matthew's Island*, as an e-book prior to publication. He describes his enigmatic alter ego as a guy "who tries to avoid other people's problems, but they just seem to fall on him." Read the first few pages of

Lowcountry Boil,

Larkin's 2003 debut and you'll probably be hooked. Like its culinary namesake, all the ingredients combine for an unforgettable, sometimes messy, and absolutely unique story of betrayal and intrigue heady with local flavor.

Smith spent decades in the northeast immersed at various times in the music business, theatre



and education. "But," he says, "I never really adapted to the speed of things up there." We're talking by phone a few days later from Smith's home in the upstate. He's already missing Beaufort. He says he regrets ever leaving Fripp Island and ponders a more permanent return to the Lowcountry.

It was a move south that slowed the pace enough to allow Smith to finish his breakthrough novel, "Nothin' Left to Lose" in 1999. The novel's publication completed a circle begun during his college days in Richmond where he first began writing and made a friend whose dogged insistence finally paid off some 30 years later . . .

Carl T. Smith: The Fan District, where the school's located, was primarily old houses and the atmosphere was much like Paris in the 1920's, I imagine, or the Village in the '30's. It was totally

creative. My best friend in college, Tom Robbins (*Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*), was the one that got me started writing.

Mark Shaffer: Future great American novelist. Not a bad guy to have in your corner.

CTS: I started a novel while I was in Richmond right after college. I put it aside for 25 years and Robbins kept telling me I had to get back to writing. Then my personal life took a big hit and I picked up the old novel and tried to prime the pump. But when it got to 1000 pages and nothing had happened (laughs) I decided to throw it away. I came south and wrote "Nothin' Left to Lose." And then I moved to Beaufort.

Terry Kay (author of *To Dance with the White Dog*) once told me, "Don't worry about writing the book in you, write the stories around you." I found that to be very true. You only have to keep your eyes and ears open. That's how "Lowcountry Boil" came about. That book was a gift.

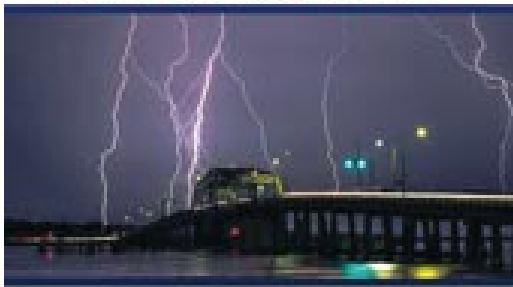
MS: And the beginning of a big Lowcountry connection. Where did Sam Larkin come from?

CTS: I don't know. People have asked, "How much of you is Sam Larkin?" I always say, "All but the brave parts." (Laughter)

I'm not the heroic type, but the little peccadilloes – the cooking and things like that come from me. When I first set out to do it I didn't want to do a character like every other protagonist of that type and I didn't really want it to be a thriller of any kind.

MATTHEW'S ISLAND

A NOVEL OF RETRIBUTION SAM LARKIN BOOK FOUR



CARL T. SMITH

www.carltsmith.com