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Douglas Cumming

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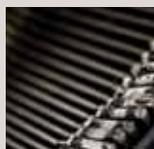
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The Outtakes of a Literary Life

Recalling the journalistic career of Marshall Frady — and how Furman almost became the keeper of his personal papers.

By Douglas Cumming



It seems fitting that the 58 acid-free boxes of the personal papers of Marshall Frady should be secured now in one of the South's finest collections of literary archives. The restless, romantic son of a Southern Baptist preacher, Frady always aspired to a kind of literary transcendence. And to many admirers, he had the gift to achieve it.

At Furman from 1959 until graduating in 1963, he graced student publications — especially the newspaper and the *Echo*, the literary magazine — with writing already marked by a well-disciplined, high prose style. Later, his ambition ramifying in the big-name magazines of New Journalism, Frady described his vision of writers blending in among ordinary citizens but “covertly . . . sending dispatches from those far brawlings of life to Dickens, Twain, Gogol, Balzac, Cervantes, and all those others you got to know a long time ago. . . .” He was driven by what Shakespeare meant in saying neither marble nor gilded monuments endure like written words that are read centuries later.

So Frady might be pleased that his papers are safely stored on the top floor of the Woodruff Library at Emory University, where the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library (cleverly called MARBL) is perched inside a high foursquare panorama of Atlanta, his home for 15 years. Here, too, are the papers of some of the South's best-known journalists, including Henry Grady and Ralph McGill. Here also are the papers of such immortals as Flannery O'Connor, Joel Chandler Harris, Margaret Mitchell and James Dickey. Like a temple to that ideal of literature that lasts, it has the busts of poets lining one wall, sternly watching scholars quietly leaf through their private scribblings: W.H. Auden, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes and others.

Frady's papers are in some ways more impressive than those of the better known names at MARBL. The Marshall Frady boxes contain 52.5 linear feet of well-crafted typewritten letters, self-edited drafts, clipping files, reporter's notes in a speed-slanted but clear hand, and staggeringly plump manuscripts, some of them screenplays never produced and fiction never published. These outtakes of Frady's life as a writer are certainly worthy of the company they keep.

Frady's mortal remains are in a cemetery in North Augusta, S.C., near where he was born in 1940. His death by cancer on March 9, 2004, at age 64, came so unexpectedly as to seem almost unreal to friends and fans who did not even know he had just moved from Sherman Oaks, Calif., to Greenville. A mere 18 days earlier, Furman had announced that he would be on campus that spring as a visiting lecturer and writer-in-residence. Instead, the university found itself ministering to the grief of a widow who had newly arrived as a stranger, Barbara Gandolfo-Frady, and a young kinsman whom the Fradys had taken in.

It also seemed that Furman had been handed another responsibility: the care of Frady's sprawling files. Therein begins the story of how the Frady papers might well have wound up in the James B. Duke Library, instead of at Emory.



The life of Marshall Bolton Frady

can be expressed the way journalism encyclopedias do now, in the gleaming accolades of his high-arc career. With a B.A. degree from Furman, he worked briefly in the Atlanta bureau of the Morris Newspaper chain, then in 1964 joined *Newsweek* as a correspondent covering the Deep South at the height of the civil rights movement. A year later he accepted a fellowship to study at the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, famed as a colony of poet laureates and serious novelists.

After another spell at *Newsweek*, he left again to write a biography of Alabama's erstwhile governor, George Wallace, who was then in his

first run for president. The 1968 publication of this novelistic portrait of Wallace, described later in typically Fradyesque words as "a stumpy, churningly combative segregationist and hotly glandular folk demagogue," made the author a literary — and controversial — sensation at age 28. (In a 1993 letter in the Frady papers, Emory historian Dan T. Carter, who was then working on a biography of Wallace, wrote to Frady: "[A]t the risk of shameless flattery, I have to say that there is no-one who has come closer to explaining Wallace than you did . . .")

Frady became a staff writer for *The Saturday Evening Post*, a writer on contract with *Life* magazine, and a contributing editor of *Harper's*, all the while freelancing for such magazines as *Mademoiselle*, *Esquire*, *The New York Review of Books*, *New Times* and *Atlanta*. Two more non-fiction books capped this phase of his career: *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Little, Brown, 1979) and *Southerners: A Journalist's Odyssey* (New American Library, 1980).

Next, Frady decamped for Manhattan to become the chief writer for the ABC News show "Closeup" and a correspondent for "Nightline." With several awards for his television documentaries, but a Southern writer's pang of displacement, he left for California in 1986 to try the larger artistic frame of screenplays. His archives contain hefty movie projects and records of lucrative contracts — among them an update of *All the King's Men*, a fictionalized take on Che Guevara, and a movie version of John M. Barry's *Rising Tide*.

In the 1990s Frady returned to magazine reporting as a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. Two more biographies of historical Southerners followed: *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson* (Random House, 1996) and, fulfilling a career-long goal in 216 small pages, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Penguin Life series, 2002).



There was always a lot more to Frady, of course, than the *Who's Who* version. The stories about him

from fellow writers, as well as his own vivid tales of endless nomadic journalistic quests, have left a burr of legend around his memory.

Just after Frady's death, Marc Cooper wrote in *The Nation* of how the two of them had been stranded in Mexico City for 57 days awaiting permission, in vain, for a reporting trip to Cuba. One morning Cooper was astonished to find that Frady had spent all night typing and crumpling pages, assisted by stimulants and Scotch, until he had achieved the perfect one-page book proposal. "I simply couldn't believe," wrote

"I simply couldn't believe that anyone could take so long to so meticulously craft two paragraphs and that, in turn, so few words could say so much."

Cooper, "that anyone could take so long to so meticulously craft two paragraphs and that, in turn, so few words could say so much."

This picture of Frady seems at odds with the figure others recall, soberly typing out a baroque prose that defied word-count editing and achieved almost first-draft eloquence. He talked that way too, recalled *Harper's* colleague David Halberstam in an introduction to a re-issue of *Billy Graham* in 2006: "I sometimes thought I could almost see the process take place — Marshall deciding what it was he wanted to say and routing it through that part of his brain where his father, Faulkner, and his other literary heroes lurked, and then in time it came out, exceptionally full, as if scripted in the nineteenth century rather than the twentieth, ready, I sometimes thought, to be set in type and printed as spoken."

Like many artists smitten with an inconsiderate muse, Frady was hounded by the debts that seemed to multiply in the wake of his writer's drive and romantic impulses. *Harper's* editor Willie Morris once wrote of how Frady had

indulged an obsession with the sultry actress Hedy Lamarr since seeing her on screen when he was a boy of 9. This bewitchment, Frady told Morris, had “propelled him over the years into a number of romantic misadventures in pursuit of her memory, including possibly even one marriage.”

Frady eventually had four marriages, three divorces, three children, and as many creditors as editors. The Emory archives include a personal financial profile from the early 1970s. It lists an income of \$34,500 based on a promise to produce eight articles a year for various magazines, and among his debts, a \$5,000 balance on an interest-free, no-schedule loan from Morris, \$2,160 a year in alimony, and bills from Sears and Rich's for \$400.

Frady wrote elegant pleas to creditors who had emptied one ex-wife's bank account or frozen his credit card — “a surprising and terribly hobbling blow,” he beseeched one faceless credit manager — and desperately sought gainful assignments. One of his files contains the most exquisite ad copy imaginable for suburban developments around Lake Lanier, Ga. After he died in 2004, his widow Barbara learned that he was \$200,000 in arrears from federal taxes and fines.

But before getting this shock from the Internal Revenue Service, she allowed Furman librarians to assume a kind of protective custody over her husband's papers. David Shi, president of Furman at the time, said the university volunteered to organize the papers in hopes that they might eventually be donated to Furman. DebbieLee Landi, the library's archivist, said she and a student spent the summer of 2004 working on the papers, which ranged from perfectly legible notes from high school and college classes to outlines and character sketches for *Moab*, one of several novels Frady was working on. Landi said she and her aide put loose papers in acid-free folders, labeled them, and eventually filled 123 acid-free boxes. Emory would later process them down to 58 boxes.





Over the next few years

the papers sat in the Furman archives, but researchers could not get at them because Barbara Gandolfo-Frady had not formally donated them. She was, in fact, unsettled on the matter. As a film production professional, she was struggling to find work while living in Greenville, where Furman had allowed her and her young charge to remain in a house near the campus. She was in discussions with Emory, knowing that placing the papers there would draw more researchers and give them a higher profile.

In the midst of this indecision, the IRS swooped in and seized the papers, the only worldly goods of Frady's estate that might be worth much. The boxes were hauled off to New York to be auctioned. "We had to wait a year or more before the IRS announced the New York sale," recalled Steve Enniss, who was then Emory's director of special collections. When Gandolfo-Frady finally alerted Enniss that the auction was set for October 8, 2008, he flew to New York with the intention of rescuing the papers for an appropriate home in a big research library.

The IRS, not known as a particularly nimble agency, had failed to generate any additional interest in the papers. So the deal was quickly consummated in a windowless, 12- by-18-foot IRS office in midtown Manhattan, as described in *The New York Times*.

Enniss was the only bidder present; Furman had sent in bidding instructions that were conveyed by an IRS functionary. The bidding rose from \$6,000 to what Furman had set as its maximum: \$10,000. Enniss recalled that he then put in the winning bid — \$10,100 — at the increment suggested by the IRS agent conducting the sale.

The rushed, denatured character of the transaction, if not the thought of the remaining tax liability, left Gandolfo-Frady distraught. She was fighting back tears, according to the *Times*. But she took solace in knowing that Furman had not forgotten Frady. "It was nice to know they were still interested," she said in the *Times* article. And she was quoted as saying she was relieved that the papers would be in a place where researchers, students and journalists could take in the whole of Frady's work. Enniss paid up and took Gandolfo-Frady to lunch at the Algonquin Hotel, a storied gathering spot of writers.

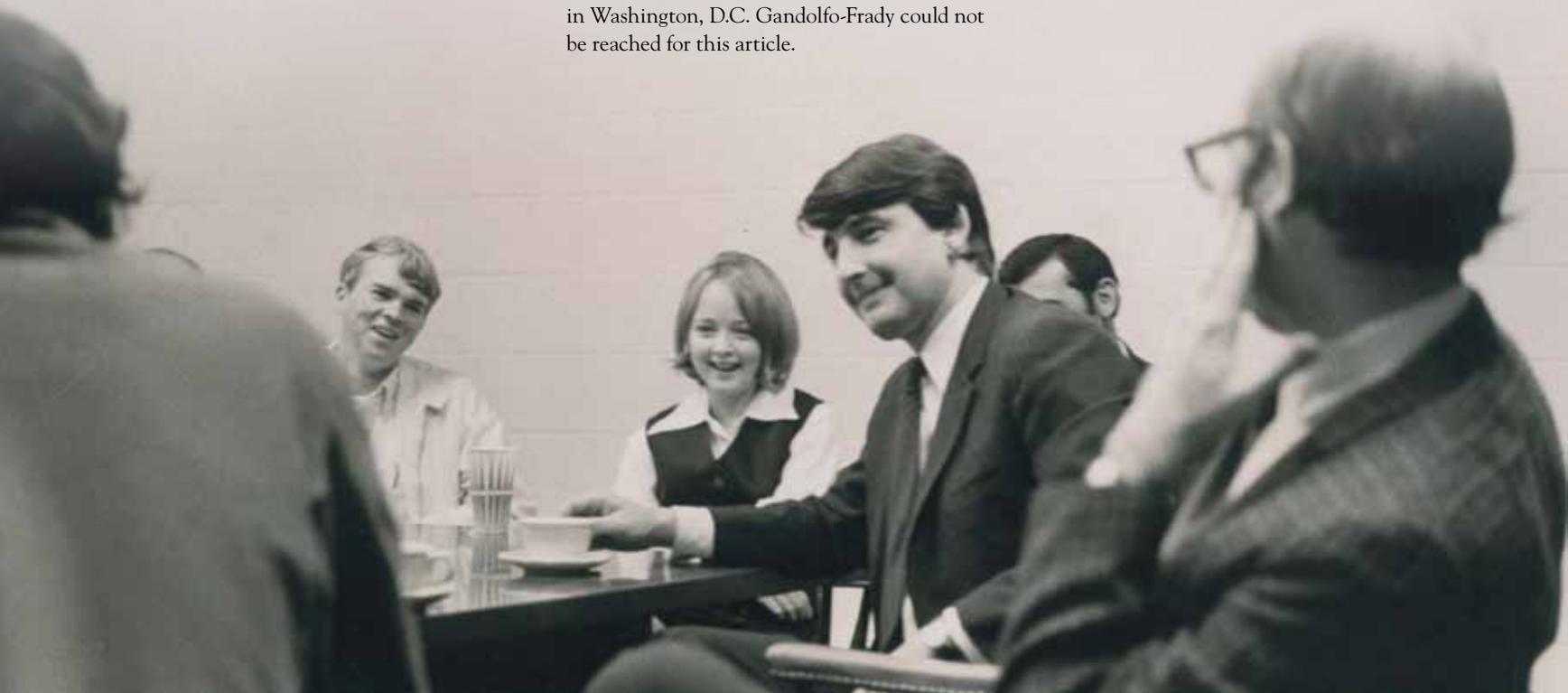
Securing the Frady papers was one of Enniss' last good works at MARBL. He soon became the head librarian at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. Gandolfo-Frady could not be reached for this article.

Tom Kazez, provost and executive vice president at Furman in 2008, said the university was far more saddened by Frady's death than by losing the papers. "We never assumed the papers would end up at Furman," Kazez e-mailed from the University of Evansville, where he is now president. "We hoped that they would, but understood that Barbara would likely seek the best arrangement she could."

So one of Furman's contributions to the world is its role in shaping the talent of Marshall Frady. That gift of Furman's — of Frady's — is now scattered on the slow broad sea of time, where the fleeting glories of the English tongue might lie dormant in university archives, but will out eventually.

"The truth is," wrote Frady in one of hundreds of unpublished treasures waiting to be discovered, "the English language, at its most alive, is inexhaustibly volatile and versatile, omnivorously assimilating, infinitely moving after meaning with a kind of controlled reckless grace like a wolf-pack after deer." |F|

The author, a longtime newspaper reporter and editor, is a professor of journalism and mass communications at Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Va.



Still learning from Marshall



Dawdling through my high school years in the leafy refuge of north Atlanta, I was almost oblivious to the upheavals ring-

ing around me, “the Sixties.” Luckily, my father, Joe Cumming, happened to be the Atlanta bureau chief of *Newsweek*, and in that post became a sort of dean of “the race beat” comprised of all those great reporters, editors and national television news crews tromping through the South to cover the region’s biggest story since the Civil War.

One of the correspondents was a particularly dashing younger man my father hired, Marshall Frady. Marshall looked like that lesser-known fourth member of the Mamas and the Papas, Denny something, but when he told stories over drinks on our screened porch, it was better than listening to the Mamas and the Papas, or even the Beatles. He picked his words with a kind of trippy glee, his eyes darting and dancing, and delivered them in the timbre of an older South he evoked from my childhood in Augusta. Marshall, who was born 11 years earlier than I in that same city but “on the other side of the tracks,” was becoming a lifelong inspiration to me.

It was not so much that he brought to our warm, noisy home his witness from the “windy margins of life,” as he might say. His influence on me was more shamanistic, the incantations that turned life into literature, and literature into life.

He had discovered some marvelous possibility within the work of journalism, something he called metaphysical writing, or “ultra-telling.” What excited me, maybe in part because it stroked family pride, was that Marshall had publicly credited my father, in the acknowledgments of several of his books, for helping him see the range of such non-fiction art. My father isn’t so easily flattered. His only contribution was recognizing that Marshall was uniquely gifted and not to be held back by the usual rules — such as concrete subject-nouns, active verbs, and keeping adverbs and adjectives to a minimum.

I majored in literature in college, and the Monday after graduation began a career for which I had no formal training — newspaper reporting. At the *News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C.,

I once saw Marshall in the morgue, the newspaper’s library of old clippings. He was poring over articles on Billy Graham. Years later, when I was at the newspaper in Providence, R.I., he sent me a tip he had gotten at ABC-TV’s “Closeup” in New York, about a landfill in my territory that could possibly be poisoning Rhode Island’s main water supply. A few years later, his authoritative letter of recommendation, I’m convinced, was the pennyweight that tipped the scale to win for me a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard.

He was always a presence, a push, in any assignment I had that I thought could rise above the ordinary. His writing style is hard to sneak by a city editor if one is not Marshall Frady, but it helped me find my own voice.

When he told stories over drinks on our screened porch, it was better than listening to the Mamas and the Papas, or even the Beatles.

The process, I admit, involved a touch of burglary. It was a family secret for my father and me that some of our favorite words and metaphors we stole from Marshall. When I wrote about Atlanta’s missing and murdered children one April, I described the dogwoods blooming in the woods “like puffs of musketry.” Shameless thievery. And then there’s that great image he had for the way a sense of sin follows a boy raised Southern Baptist, galumphing behind him throughout life like a great wheezing calliope.

Last February, on my first sabbatical as a journalism professor, I spent nearly three weeks as an explorer in the vast dense continent of Frady’s papers. Apparently, I was the first researcher to graze through this material since Emory University purchased it in 2008.

I am still learning from Marshall. I am learning that, while some critics and doubters have questioned the precise factuality of such radiant ultra-telling, Frady was a tireless researcher and kept beautifully hand-written notes. And I am astonished at how hard he worked. At 3 in the morning, in a letter to some book editor in New York who was finally getting an overdue manuscript, he wrote, “I feel thoroughly jackhammered and I’m catching glimpses out of the corner of my eye of strange beings in the room here, some of whom seem to have halos, others carrying whiffs of sulfur.”

Marshall wrestled with many angels and demons in life. Whatever rest he has now, I still feel that pressure and push to be better, to work harder in the craft, to please his shade.

— DOUGLAS CUMMING