

Local Author Looks Back And Finds Riches

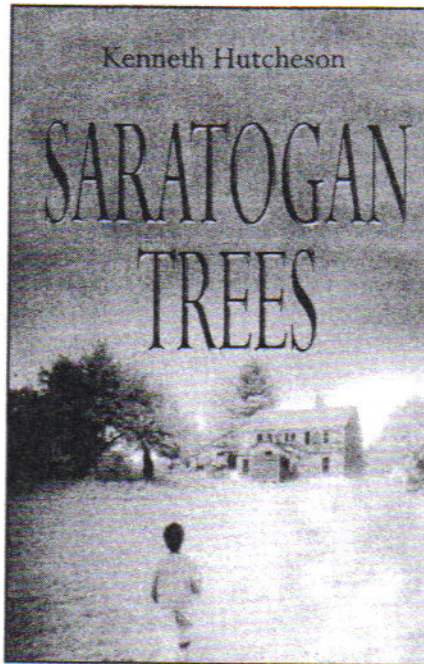
A new novel, *Saratogan Trees*, the place is Alusia, Alabama, on Big Sandy Mountain, on the Appalachian spine. In the early 1940's, twelve-year-old Ark Griffith lives with his mother and younger brother, Crackers, in the Saratogan cotton mill village. Ark is short for Arthur Kincaid and this main character comes alive for the reader because author Kenneth Hutcheson has a gift, the rare talent to make the reader care about young Ark.

Part of this local author's talent is in his beautiful descriptions of nature, people, and situations; all narrated by young Ark. While reading this fine book on vacation in the Caribbean last month, I was transported to a time and place vastly different. Both places were hot, but it felt mystical to vicariously live through the eyes and thoughts of a young boy in Appalachia in the 40's.

Ark is forced to grow up fast, due to circumstances beyond his control and because he possesses a strong sense of right and wrong. The times being what they were and the culture of hillbilly justice make for a ripe setting to showcase a moral-to-the-story that is timeless. This is a story that rings true, albeit it is a novel and falls into the category that says authors write best about what they know from firsthand experience.

Author Hutcheson uses his skills to make all the characters full, rich and real. The setting gives him a wide range of the good, the bad and the ugly to enrich the reading experience. This is a story that is thought provoking and stays with the reader long past the last page. Respect and admiration by a reader are well earned for this young boy and his heart wrenching decisions under the worst of circumstances.

Besides getting that warm fuzzy feeling from Ark's strong,



inherent good character, there are plenty of laughs with a tinge of dark humor for the situations and dilemma's young boys can find themselves in. I can count at least two times I received looks from fellow diner's or beach neighbor's as I laughed out loud at Ark's remarks or interactions with his brother. So the story may have a moral or a dark side to it, but there is no shortage of humorous entertainment value.

This is the first book of Hutcheson's reviewed by the Highlander, but he has written three novels and four plays. He was born in Alabama, but he lives in the foothills near Golden with his wife Nadene.

Saratogan Trees is a paperback, published by Publish America, and is available from Barnes & Noble or online, only by ordering a copy. Great summertime or anytime reading, guaranteed to not disappoint and you'll be

helping to support a local author.

(By A.M. Wilks)