

Authors and Autumn

Can a Georgia autumn truly be put into words? Most certainly—especially when those words flow from our state’s fine authors. Here’s what they have to say about places close to their hearts.

Tallulah Gorge
Once it was called the Niagara of the South, those falls made by the Tallulah River as it tumbled through the land rip in northeast Georgia known as Tallulah Gorge. The falls are called L’eau d’or,

Tempesta, Hurricane, Oceana, Bridal Veil. Once, thousands of people made their way to the town of Tallulah Falls to stand in awe at the sight of tree-topped granite cliffs and the foam-tipped rush of water so far below.

For many, I would think, it was the first truly spectacular view of nature they ever saw. It was that for me.

I saw it first as a boy. An outing with the Boy Scouts, I think. Seeing the gorge was like encountering a visual from the



Old Testament where God splits the waters of seas and levels cities with a wave of his hand.

That was what I imagined that first sighting, God making a doodle in the earth with his finger. God cracking open

For these noted Georgia authors, leaves, lore, and lyricism are all part of the state’s autumn wonders.

In autumn, [Tallulah Gorge] blazes in the festive colors of red, orange, yellow, and all shades between—colors so vivid they startle the eyes and make the heart ache with joy.

Terry Kay

granite as easily as a farmer's plow breaks open the earth of a field.

If one fell from the edge of the cliff, it would take days to hit the water below, I thought then. So steep. So steep.

My imagination has tempered over the years, yet I still think of Tallulah Gorge as the most beautiful spot in

Georgia. It is a lush, tree-packed area of the state. In spring it buds in the lime leaves of hardwoods tucked against darker spottings of pine. In autumn it blazes in the festive colors of red, orange, yellow, and all shades between—colors so vivid they startle the eyes and make the heart ache with joy.

It has history, this place.

The Indians gave it the name Tallulah. Settlers to the area were stunned by what they discovered, and their talk of it made the rounds. Travelers found it, coming by horse and buggy, by wagon, by foot. In 1882, the Tallulah Falls Railroad began service, and thousands began arriving from as far away as the coast and Atlanta.

It was the place to be, if you were going to a place that lived up to its hype.

That all changed in the early 1900s, when Georgia Power constructed a dam for the making of electricity, and the water stopped its natural flow. Tourism faded. Fire took the town of Tallulah Falls. The automobile carried people to other places. Tallulah Gorge became a stop-by spot on the trip up U.S. 441—a place to break for a soft drink, for stretching legs, for taking a few minutes to peer over the drop-off.

In 1970, they made an effort to drum

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up some attention by getting aerialist Karl Wallenda to walk across the gorge on a steel cable. (It had been done once before, in 1886, by a Professor Leon.) I did not see Wallenda's walk, but I remember pictures of it—balanced on the wire, moving like a spider, the wind playing tricks on him.

But not even Wallenda could bring back the crowds. It took the passion of Gov. Zell Miller to do that. He did it by creating the Tallulah Gorge State Park in 1993, and now it's a place for camping, fishing, and hiking.

And all of that is fine, I suppose. It just isn't the same.

Once we stood on the rim and looked out and over—it was impossible to embrace in our souls what we were seeing with our eyes. Now I see people aiming cameras that look like howitzers at the place God gouged out with his fingertip, and I get the feeling they will wait for the film to be developed before they see what is there.

Pity. Beauty is a thing that must be seen firsthand. *Terry Kay*

Terry Kay has written eight novels, including *To Dance With the White Dog* (Peachtree Publishers), plus *The Runaway*, *Taking Lottie Home*, and *The Kidnapping of Aaron Greene*, (William Morrow & Co.). His most recently released work is *Special Kay—The Wisdom of Terry Kay* (Hill Street Press). He lives in Athens.

Southeast Georgia

I love fall flowers—wildflowers. My daddy calls them "lil' ole native weeds," and my husband sneezes every time I step through the door with a cropping of goldenrod.

My favorite place in fall is where my husband, Seward, and I live, on a 280-acre, sand-soaked farm, straddling two county lines—Echols and Lanier—in Southeast Georgia. A topography map would show what we now call our "tiny plantation" located some 30 miles northwest of the Okefenokee Swamp and 15 miles north of the Florida line.

Our three children are grown and have gone on to greener pastures. I doubt they will ever come home

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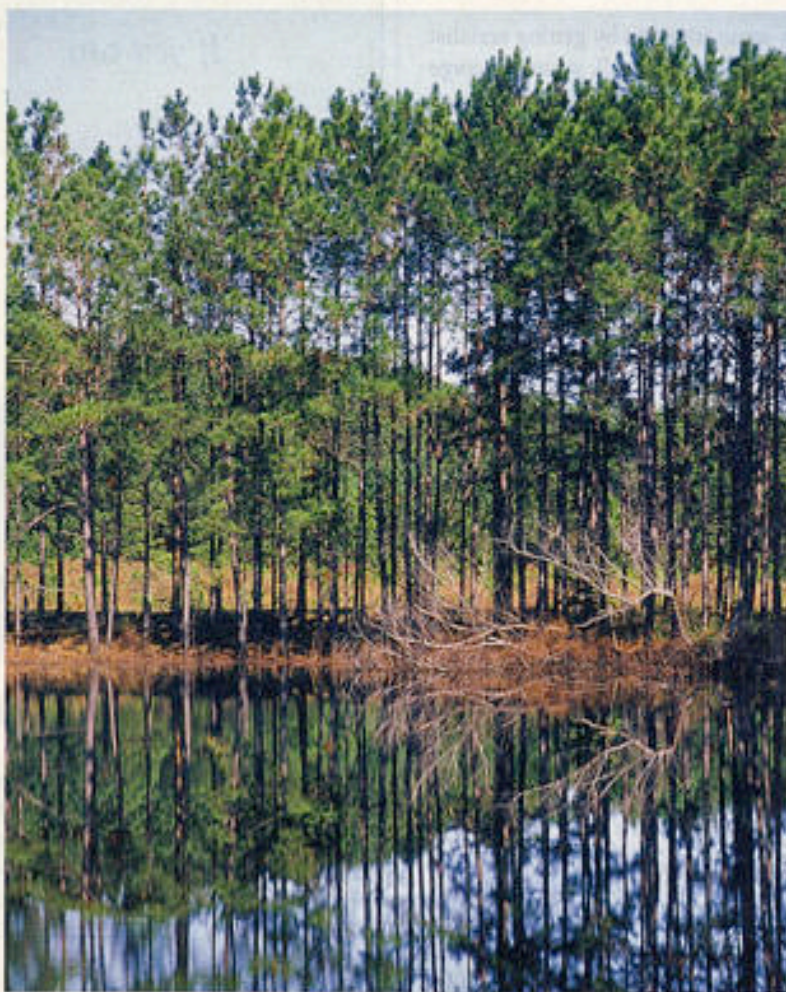
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again. But I stay where I belong—in and among these flatwoods, fields, and swamps. And when I die, I'll be buried in Wayfare Cemetery, just across Cow Creek, in Echols County. Those who know me best and love me most will bring wildflowers.

I love hearing a lone locust in the sere broomsedge, its tune keening down after the long hot summer.

I love the cornfield with its stalks and leaves freeze-dried in blowing poses. I love the glint of bleached stalks and mowed stubble in the pale shifting sunlight. And I love the toasted smells of the cured weeds and corn and the autumn light and haze and that patch of crotalaria. The flowers look like yellow sweet peas, an entire field that makes me feel rich.

If you listen, you can hear a bird in the west woods beyond the cornfield, and it sounds like somebody scaling a flute. You can hear the leaves whispering down from yonder poplar trees.

Oh, yes, and there is a bush with pods of violet berries, like plastic dime store beads. That's an American beautyberry bush, though my daddy will try to tell you, "It's just an ole wild mulberry that needs grubbing up."

**I love hearing a
lone locust in the
sere broomsedge.**

Janice Daugherty

The same rains that resurrect the ferns growing in our live oaks yield ghosts of buried treasures, mostly broken glass, corroded mule-plow gear, rusty nails, and metal forks. No silver buried on this poor-man's land.

A flatbed truck, rotted out to the hull, was here when we bought this place more than three decades ago. And

we've added our own curious relics: A tobacco harvester on its last crop was left down by the creek and has been recycled into a luxury deer stand. It has a pump-up, pivoting recliner mounted on a junked barber chair base.

We have an old-timey earthmover, left parked where it quit. Now it resembles a self-powered super-dumpster more than a tractor. There's lots more stuff I no longer hate but have to stretch a bit to say I love.

Droughts shrink our farm ponds and shrivel our wild ferns and flowers, the Alapaha River becomes more sand than water, but, because of the pines, it's still green here.

It's still home. *Janice Daugharty*

Janice Daugharty's latest novel is *Like a Sister* (HarperCollins). She is writer-in-residence at Valdosta State University and has published five other novels, including the acclaimed story collection, *Going Through the Change* (Ontario Review Press). She lives in Stockton.



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At night, seeing a full moon rise over distant Ossabaw Island is like watching a giant pearl float up out of the trees.

William C. Harris, Jr.

Savannah

Fall here is characterized more by a change in the weather than by the color of the leaves. After four or five months of 90-degree days and wilting humidity, folks in Savannah welcome the moderating temperatures that start around mid-October.

Oyster roasts become the entertainment of choice in the Coastal empire. All self-respecting Geechees are experts with an oyster knife and can pop those hot suckers open quicker than you can say "Budweiser"—which happens with regularity at oyster-shucking soirees. We know fall has arrived when it feels good to stand by the fire waiting for the next bushel of Daufuskie's finest to finish roasting.

For my buddies and me, fall also means heading out in boats toward our secret campsite on one of the barrier islands. The cool weather has zapped the bugs and sent the snakes into hibernation, so we're comfortable in the woods next to the creek on Raccoon Island. Just before we put the steaks on the fire, we enjoy watching the sun go down over the marsh. The spartina grass is brown then, and when the rays of the late afternoon sun wash across our special place, it turns the marsh into a carpet of gold that stretches for miles. I wonder if this is how the Golden Isles of Georgia were really named.

At night, seeing a full moon rise over distant Ossabaw Island is like watching a giant pearl float up out of the trees. And the stars... Wow! No city lights obstruct the glow on Raccoon Island, so we clearly see bright Orion through the palmettos as he shoots his arrow at Taurus.

In the early morning, when the air is still and cold and vapors are rising from the warm creek waters, there's something mystical about watching the sun come up over the marsh. Later, after the air warms, the turkey buzzards on our island take flight, making giant

circles as they gain altitude and head for the mainland.

When I was just a little fella, I didn't like fall because it meant I had to put away my bathing suit and take out my school clothes. But now I enjoy it and think of fall as spring being played backwards with only a few really nasty days of winter in between. The weather can be so delightful in Savannah dur-

ing this time of the year, God sends the sand gnats just to let us know true perfection exists only in heaven.

William C. Harris, Jr.

William C. Harris, Jr., is the author of *Delirium of the Brave* (St. Martin's Press). His next book *Jesus Island, Georgia* is scheduled for publication next spring. He is a native of Savannah.

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