DAVIS GRUBB*:*
In Their Own Country transcript

1 **Tom Douglass**: Davis Grubb was the writer that Breece Pancake read when he was growing up. He was the writer that Richard Currey read, and Jayne Anne Phillips read. He was the West Virginia writer.

Kate Long: And now Tom Douglass is writing a biography about Davis Grubb. And what a subject! Flamboyant, irreverent and reverent at the same time. In the 1950s, Davis Grubb had the whole country on the edge of its collective seat with *Night of the Hunter*, his first novel about an evil, crazy con man pretending to be a preacher. *Night of the Hunter* was later made into a classic movie by Charles Laughton and James Agee. And Grubb wrote nine more memorable novels and two short story collections.

I'm Kate Long. And you're listening to *In Their Own Country*, a weekly series that brings you thoughts and work by some the most creative, original writers West Virginia ever produced.

Nobody is more original than Davis Grubb. He influenced a whole generation of writers in his home state. And his influence wasn't limited to West Virginians. Stephen King, for instance, dedicated a book to Grubb. Tom Douglass:

Tom: Davis Grubb was a true bohemian writer, an Appalachian eccentric, a literary wild man. Not overly intellectual, more pure instinct. Sensualist and moralist, a romantic.

2 **Kate**: Davis Grubb was raised in Moundsville in a house filled with books, and conversation about books. And he wrote of Moundsville again and again. In his fiction, he called the town Glory.

Tom: He once said, "Moundsville is every city I've known in a way. "The place means so much to me," he said. "I know it does, because I dream about it every night."

Kate: He hated school as a child, and he quit college after one year. No formal writing training. He just had a rare, natural gift with words. And he made a good living as a writer in New York for twenty years.

And during those years, his writing was everywhere. Two of his novels - *Night of the Hunter* and *Fools' Parade* - were made into movies. And from the 1940s through the 1970s, he wrote for radio and television. "Twilight Zone", "Playhouse 57", the "Alfred Hitchcock Hour". And when you picked up a magazine like *The Saturday Evening Post* or *Colliers* back then, you'd be likely to see the Davis Grubb byline.

3 **Tom**: Davis Grubb had some kind of energy that, when he started writing, he just couldn't stop. Course, there were dry periods in between when he wouldn't do anything at all. He'd just be kind of very laid back. But when he started writing, it was a fever that came on him.

Kate: And when he wasn't writing, this man liked to have fun!

Tom: Grubb was a large-frame man of 6'2" with a large voice that could take over a room. He was flamboyant and gregarious, ready to spin an anecdote or a joke. He often said, "I tormented myself for years, trying to decide whether life was predestined or freewill. I finally decided it must be predestined to be freewill."

Kate: He dressed in costumes: capes and scarves and beads, and sometimes an all-white three-piece suit. Sometimes a sailor outfit. Sometimes baggy pants and an old fedora.

He died in 1980. But you'll hear his voice in this program, thanks to the WV State Library Commission, which videotaped him in 1978 and 79.

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WVLC: The recordings will continue to allow the people of WV to share the ideas of Davis Grubb, our most noted author.
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Kate: And so they will. Here he is:

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4 **Davis Grubb**: A young writer once came to me years ago and said, "Why write anything? It's all been said." And I said, "Yes, but not by you." And I think unless you believe in the sacred individuality of everyone, then you don't believe in writing at all. Because no metaphor can have any real meaning unless, having originated in the mind of the poet, it finds soil to make its resurrection in the mind of somebody else.

As I've said in a couple of inscriptions I've written in copies of my books for people throughout the state: When I write a book, I'm sharing my mind with you. When you read my book, you're sharing your mind with me.
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Kate: Unless you believe in the sacred individuality of everyone, you don't believe in writing at all. Davis' Grubb's mind was something to share. Uncharted territory.

Tom: Every day you don't create something is a sin, Grubb told Ron Havern. That's what sin is. Doing nothing, or traveling along day after day in the same old rut, not feeling anything, not seeing anything. That's a sin.

Kate: He never quit joking. Ron Havern was a seminary student who visited Grubb in the hospital when Grubb was dying. Grubb told him to take a seat across the room. "I'm easier to venerate from over there," he said.

music

Kate: Most of his books are set in West Virginia. In fact, his agent told him that his stories that weren't set in West Virginia didn't have the same punch and flavor.

Davis Grubb: I never tried to write for everybody. I think all my stories, since they were about West Virginia, were first and foremost for people back here who could look and say, perhaps - when I was lucky - they could say, "Yes, it was like that in 1928 in Moundsville. That DID happen, or something very like it, in Clarksburg, in 1941...

Kate: His first book - *Night of the Hunter* - was partly inspired by a famous Clarksburg murder trial of a vacuum cleaner salesman who killed his mail order brides. That guy became the model for Preacher in *Night of the Hunter*.

5 **Kate**: So let's hear some of his writing. Here's the story: a young father named Ben, who works at a hardware store in the northern panhandle has robbed a bank and shot two guys. Killed 'em. Ben's in the penitentiary, waiting to be hung. He refuses to tell what he did with the money. His cellmate - who claims to be a preacher - is trying every trick he knows to get Ben to tell where he hid the money. Tom Douglass reading.

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Ben lay back in the bunk and smiled. Preacher has quit talking now. Preacher just sits there across the cell from Ben with those black eyes boring into him. Preacher is trying to guess. Not that Ben hasn't told Preacher everything that he told others at the trial, Warden Sticher, Mr. Galumphy, Judge Stathers, and the jury. Everything that is, but the one thing that they wanted the most to know. Ben won't tell that to anybody. But it is a kind of game, teasing Preacher. Ben tells him the story over and over again. And Preacher sits hunched, heeding each word, waiting for the slip that never comes.

"Because I was just plumb tired of being poor. That's the large and small of it. Just sick to death of drawing that little pay envelope at the hardware store in Moundsville every Friday. And then when I'd go over to Mr. Smiley's bank on payday, he'd open that little drawer with all the green tens and fifties and hundreds in it. And every time I'd look at it there, I'd just fairly choke to think of the things it would buy Willa and them kids of mine.

"Greed and lust!"

"Yes, Preacher, it was that. But I reckon it was more too. It wasn't just for me that I wanted it."

"You killed two men, Ben."

"That's right, Preacher. One day, I oiled up that little Smith and Wesson that Mr. Blankensop keeps in his rolltop desk in the hardware store. And I went up to Mr. Smiley's bank, and I pointed that gun at Mr. Smiley and the teller, Corey South, and I said for Corey to hand me over that big stack of hundred-dollar bills. Lord, you never seen such a wad, Preacher.

"Ten thousand dollars worth, Ben Harper!"

"Then Mr. Smiley said I was crazy, and Corey South went for his gun in the drawer. And with that, I shot him and Mr. Smiley both. And while I was reaching through to get that green stack of bills out of Corey's dead fingers, Mr. Smiley got the gun and lifted up and shot me through the shoulder. Well, sir, I run and got scared and didn't know which way was up or down, before long, and so I got in the car and come home."

"With the money?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

Ben Harper smiles. "Why, they come down the river after me, about four that afternoon. Sheriff Wiley Tomlinson and four policemen."

"And where was you, Ben?"

"Why, I was there, Preacher. You see, I was done running. I was just standing out back by the smokehouse with those two youngsters of mine, John and that little sweetheart, Pearl."

"And the money, Ben? What about that? What about that $10,000?"

Ben smiles again and picks his front teeth with his thumbnail. "Go to hell."

"But listen to me, Ben Harper. It'll do you no good where you're going. What good is money in heaven or hell, either one?" Ben is silent. Preacher walks away and stands for a spell, staring out the cell window with that long, skinny hands folded behind him.

Ben looks at those hands and shivers. What kind of man would have his fingers tattooed that way? The fingers of the right hand, each one with a blue letter beneath his gray, evil skin. L-O-V-E. And the fingers of the left hand done the same way, only now the letters spell out H-A-T-E. What kind of man? What kind of a preacher? Ben muses and wonders softly and remembers the quick, leaping blade of the spring knife that Preacher keeps hidden in the soiled blanket of his bed. But Preacher would never use that knife on Ben. Preacher wants something from Ben. Preacher wants to know about that money. And you can't use a knife to get at something like that, especially with a husky fellow like Ben.

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6 **Kate**: Where did Davis get the idea for L-O-V-E and H-A-T-E on Preacher's knuckles? In a Clarksburg pool room.

Davis Grubb: Man came in, plumped his hands down on the bar beside me and said, "Give me a beer." I looked over and I saw L-O-V-E, H-A-T-E. I never looked at his face. It was like a blow. It startled me, particularly that left hand, HATE. I never looked at his face. I went in the back with my beer and shot a game of pool with a man named Nick. But I carried that little image of those two hands, LOVE and HATE, in my mind, never knowing where I was going to use it.

This is the way ideas are picked up.

Kate: And that music came from Grubb's record player. He sometimes brought it to speaking events so he could set up his own music track to talk against.

OK. back to Ben in that cell:

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7 *That same afternoon, Mr. Galumphy, his lawyer had been to see him too. There was no getting around it. They had all been mighty nice to him at his trial. Mr. Galumphy had done his very best to get him off with life imprisonment. And the jury was as nice a bunch of people as you'd want to see. And he thought to himself, many times since, I wish them no harm nor vengeance in this world or the other. Mr. Galumphy had told him at the outset that it would sure go easier with him if he was to tell what he'd done with that $10,000. And it was really then that Ben had made up his mind not to tell. Because any poor fool could see that it was justice they were after. It was the $10,000. So Ben simply said that he wouldn't tell them even if they was to break his arms and legs to make him tell. And Mr. Galumphy said they wouldn't do anything like that, but they'd like as not break worse than that, and he couldn't see any possible way to save him from swinging if he felt that way about it. And so Ben was more sure than ever that he was right. And he concluded with grim Calvinist logic that, if he needed to tell them about the money to be spared the hanging, then there was no real justice in the courts. And so he would take his satisfaction with him to the grave. It was sin and greed that had brought him to Moundsville, and it was sin and greed that was making them hang him. It was the face of Willa begging and weedling behind the chicken wire. It was the face of Mr. Galumphy arguing. It was the voice of Preacher in the dark. "Where? Where? Ben, where? Have a heart, boy. Where, Ben?"*

He awoke. The corner of the moon was gone from the window. The blue square was empty, except for the ragged thatch of Preacher's head, inches from his own. Ben gathered himself slowly under his blanket and let his muscles coil like a steel spring, then lashed out with all his strength until he felt his hard fist crunch into the bones of the whispering face. "Ben, you hadn't not to have hit me. I'm a man of God!"

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Kate: Right.

8 Grubb loved Charles Dickens and his tales of innocent or ordinary people who face down evil. He loved the English poet William Blake, who wrote about struggles between good and evil, in works like "Songs of Innocence and Experience."

Tom: Like Dickens, the master of plot and poetic justice, Grubb liked to hang everything from the plot. All in service of Grubb's broad moral truths that love can defeat evil, that endangered innocence can be protected, that money corrupts absolutely. That sex and love is pure in all its forms. And that justice and redemption can be won in the battle.

Kate: Ben never did tell Preacher where he hid the money. But Preacher didn't give up. After he got out of the penitentiary, he found Ben's widow, married her, killed her, then terrorized the two children, who knew that Ben hid the money in the little girl's doll.

cello starts

9 Here, Preacher is chasing the kids through the night with that knife. Little John, the hero of the book, is pulling his little sister Pearl down to the riverbank, desperate to reach his dad's old rowboat. It's their only chance to get away. West Virginia writer, Ann Pancake, reads:

Anne Pancake: John is scrambling down the bank, pulling Pearl behind him knowing Preacher is close behind with his knife.

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His feet slipped and sucked in the mud, and the weeds tore at his legs as he led her stumbling on toward the boat, but Preacher had heard them and now his sweet tenor voice called after them.

John said, "Hurry, Pearl! Oh Godamighty, please hurry, Pearl!"

"You said a cuss word, John. That's a sin."

He thought desperately, staring into a great patch of mists: Maybe the skiff is gone. Maybe one of them shantyboat trash borrowed it tonight.

"John, where -"

"Hush! Hush! Hurry, Pearl!

Then he spied it, the bow jutting sharply in the blanketing white, and Pearl, yawning now in a perfect picture of a child bored with a stupid game, hugged the doll, Jenny and fought her way wearily through the ooze to the skiff.

"Children! <u>Children</u>!

They could hear him above them, thrashing down through the high brush filth, fighting his way toward them.

Get in the skiff, Pearl! Oh Godamighty, hurry!

Children!

John! she cried out, pausing. That's Daddy, calling us!

He uttered a sob of despair and thrust her brutally over the skiff side and down among the bait cans and fish heads in the bottom. Now they heard Preacher hacking at a vine that had entangled him. John knew well what it was he hacked with, and in an instant, he was free again, thrashing down through the brush, not ten feet away. But they were in the boat now and John's hand grappled for the oar the way poor old Uncle Birdie had shown him that day, and the way he had watched men do it since the first time he had seen the river. But they moved not an inch in the muck, so tightly was the skiff grounded.

Ah, my lambs! So there you are!

John thrust and strained against the oar until the flesh of his hands tore under the wood's ragged grain and the boat moved, and he bore down again, straining with every ounce of flesh and bone, and it moved again. But now Preacher had cleared the brush filth and was stepping swiftly through the mud toward them. John gave a final thrust that nigh burst his heart and the skiff swung suddenly into the gentle current.

Wait! Wait, you little bastards! Wait! Wait! WAIT! Damn you to hell!

Even in that faint show of moonlight, even with the mists wisping and curling against the land, they could see the livid, twisted, raging oval of his face: the mouth gaping and sick with hatred. Now he wallowed rapidly toward them through the shallows, the bright, open blade sinking in his fist, and then he staggered and slipped and fell, floundering in the water for a moment and then rising again, splashed after them.

John bore back on the oar in the lock, and the blade skimmed the water ineffectually, and he thought: Why can't I do it when I know how to do it! Please, let me do it! Please! And he bore back again, and the oar blade bit hard into the stream, and the boat swung erratically like a leaf.

Wait! Wait! WAIT! Damn you to hell!

And now some errant current in the vast, dark river caught them upon its warm wing and the boat began moving, blessedly moving, spinning at first like a mad October leaf and then heading into the channel while still they could hear Preacher: every sound drifting clean and sharp across the flat water: He was back on shore now where he could follow better, clawing his way down the brush filth through sumac and pokeberry, cursing and shouting amid that wiry jungle of the river shore, but now they were moving beyond him,. They were free.

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Kate: And the river carried them to safety. The Ohio River, one of Grubb's great symbols.

10 In 1961, a Time Magazine critic wrote of Davis Grubb, "So few have the same power to conjure up the forces of darkness." Well, Grubb had another perspective on that. "I believe in dark because it shows off light," he wrote. He saw the world as a dangerous place filled with, as Preacher said, "Hate and Love - warring one against the other from the womb to the grave."

Tom: Davis Grubb comes from a tradition that believes that in all of us, there is some good and evil, and there are moments of good that transcend the bad that we do. A belief in love, redemptive love. A belief in fighting injustice and actually winning.

Kate: West Virginia novelist, Denise Giardina.

Denise: I read *Night of the Hunter* and was just blown away by it. On one level, it's this classic noire thriller. But on another level, it's this incredibly beautiful story about these children and their search for love. And finally finding it.

11 **Kate**: In *Night of the Hunter*, a rugged country woman, Rachel Cooper, took the desperate children in. She protected them when Preacher came looking for them. And she was modeled on a Harrison County woman, Rachel Cutcher, who took in homeless children.

And here, after the danger has passed, it's Christmas Day and Davis - in classic Dickens style - is delivering his message through Rachel.

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Denise: Rachel reflected about children. One would think that the world might be ashamed to name such a day for one of them, and then go on the same old way. Children running the lanes, lost sheep crying in the wind while the shepherd drank and feasted in the tavern, with never an ear to heed their small lament. Lord save little children. Because with every child ever born of woman's womb, there is a time of running through a shadowed place, an alley with no doors and a hunter whose footsteps ring brightly along the bricks behind him.

With every child, rich or poor, however favored, however warm and safe the nursery, there is this time of echoing and vast aloneness, when there is no one to come nor to hear, and dry leaves scurrying past on a street become the rustle of dread. And the ticking of the old house is the cocking of the hunter's gun. For even when the older ones love and care and are troubled for the small ones, there is little they can do as they look into the grave and stricken eyes that are windows to this affrighted nursery province beyond all succor, all comforting.

To Rachel, the most dreadful and moving thing of all was the humbling grace with which these small ones accept their lot. Lord save little children! They would weep at a broken toy, but stand with the courage of a burning saint before the murder of a mother and the fact that perhaps there *had never been a father at all. The death of a kitten would send them screaming to the handiest female lap. And yet, when the time came that they were no longer welcome in a house, they would gather their things together in old paper cartons, tied with a length of clothesline and wander forth to seek another street, another house, another door.*

Lord save little children. They abide. The wind blows, and the rain is cold. Yet they abide.

And in the shadow of a branch beneath the moon, a child sees a tiger, and the old ones say, There is no tiger! Go to sleep. And when they sleep, it is a tiger's sleep and a tiger's night. And a tiger's breathing at the midnight pain. Lord, save little children. For each of them has his preacher to hound them down the dark river of fear and tonguelessness, and never a door. Each one is mute and alone, because there is no word for a child's fear and no ear to heed it if there were a word. And no one to understand it if it heard.

Lord, save little children. They abide. And they endure.
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Denise: And I always have trouble reading that without crying. First time I read that aloud was in a class of West Virginia literature I was teaching at West Virginia State, and I read this passage as an example of how beautiful Davis Grubb's writing is. And I just started bawling like a baby. And I still do. Every time I read it, it never fails to choke me up.

Kate: I think it came from somewhere deep inside him too. It had to have.

Denise: Oh, I think so. This is the child in Davis Grubb crying, and hurting, and asking for love. So maybe that's one reason it's very sad. But I think it also is something that touches all of us on this very deep level.

12 **Tom**: That is a pattern in Davis Grubb's fiction. His children, defenseless children, powerless children being pursued. It happens in *Night of the Hunter*. It happens in *Dream of Kings*. It happens in *The Golden Sickle*. And to a degree, it happens in *Fools Parade*.

Mainly, this sense of powerlessness comes from when his father died at 16, and when he had to leave the house at 318, when he was just 13 years old. That, I think, was a traumatic event for him.

Kate: Davis Grubb's own story would make good material for a Davis Grubb novel. When Davis was thirteen, the bank evicted his family from his beloved boyhood home a week before Christmas, during the Depression. His father died shortly thereafter. His mom had never held a job outside the home, but she had to support her two boys. So, in Grubb's Senior year in high school, she moved her two boys to Clarksburg, to take a job as a protective service worker.

There, Davis met Rachel Cutcher, who impressed him deeply. And he surely heard many stories about the abused, abandoned, and neglected children who became part of his mom's daily life.

After he finished high school, he wrote drama scripts for a Clarksburg radio station, WBJK. Then he moved to New York, got a janitor job to support himself, and by 1955, he was a well-known writer. And he became friends with writers and musicians like John Steinbeck and Miles Davis, who, by the way, once dedicated a tune to Grubb, called "Blues for Rachel," after Rachel Cutcher died.

13 **Tom**: And in the mid-fifties, late fifties, he hobnobbed with all the famous writers of New York. He went down to PJ Clark's, which is a bar on 53rd Street, I believe. And he took his little dog, Rowdy Charlie, with him. They'd sit on the barstool there, and there he met people like Robert Mitchum, John Steinbeck, and William Styron. Norman Mailer, who he didn't get along with very well. But writers of the times. James Jones. And he became friends with them. He became friends with people like Ruth Gordon and Mort Saul and Lenny Bruce.

Kate: He told them all about West Virginia.

Davis Grubb: I became almost tiresome in certain New York quarters with my harping on what I think are the unique splendors, horrors, and great humors of our state.

Tom: I think Davis Grubb would have been very happy to have lived his whole life in Moundsville, in Glory. But circumstances evicted him from that place. And he never got over that eviction. And in a way, he's always been trying to recover that place.

On the other hand, he was someone who had to kind of tone down his curiosity, his intellectual ways, so he could just survive. And New York City, for him, was a place where he didn't have to worry about measuring up to anything other than what he wanted to do as a writer.

14 **Kate**: Here's Davis himself in 1979, standing in front of his childhood home in Moundsville, in his beads and slouch hat. The highway is nearby, so you'll hear the traffic.

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Davis Grubb: Everything I remember, every book I've ever written, had its origins some way in this piece of land. *Night of the Hunter, Voices of Glory*.

Trucks are roaring along the interstate now, which has penetrated my part of Moundsville like a cruel arrow, burning down and destroying landmarks which, for me, were as familiar as this grass or that pavement.

318 Seventh Street. I don't think any number in my life could ever have any more meaning than that address.

Don't ever underestimate the real estate value of the human imagination. I can change this landscape in my mind into words on paper, and I make a pretty good living at it, and I get a great feeling from it too.

The real estate in my mind, the Moundsville in my mind, can never be penetrated by any interstate. The landmarks cannot be demolished, the real estate cannot be bartered or sold. Or prostituted in any way.

Kate: The eviction of his family from that house - and his dad's death - was the start of his great, lifelong anger at uncaring institutions.

Davis Grubb: We lost this house, like many Americans did, like many people did all over the world did during the Depression. I remember a curious circumstance in which a once esteemed and prominent banker in this town evicted us from this house. Came up the steps with the eviction notice. And my dog Rags bit him. And we were terribly concerned, because we thought we were going to lose him, and he was a lovely dog. And we were very glad when he made a gradual recovery.

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15 **Kate**: He made terrible grades in school and was always getting in trouble of one kind of another. His grade school principal said, "I never knew anybody to come in with as many bloody noses as Davis Grubb." And yet, Grubb already knew he was going to be a writer.

Davis Grubb: I can't remember when it first was that I said to myself, when I looked in a mirror over the washbasin, which was about to here on me, "You are a writer." I can't imagine ever not having been a writer. I wasn't a prodigy in any sense. I was, to all intents and purposes, a very stupid, mischievous, rather sad child. I made horrible grades in school, the worst, to the disappointment of my father and mother both. I'd come home with my report card just bristling with Fs or Ds.

Kate: Sometimes it looked like a comb, he said, there were so many F's on it.

The Depression itself influenced his writing. His family went broke before they lost the house. His dad was an architect, and there wasn't much call for architects during the Depression.

Davis Grubb: I know that, in an attempt to save on fuel, we would seal off rooms in this house and not heat them and live in less and less space as the Depression darkened and deepened. Until at last, we were living in our kitchen, our bedroom, our bathroom, and one room down here, this room I'm looking at now.

16 **Kate**: And every day, he saw two of his other great influences: the penitentiary and the Adena Indian Mound that both dominate Moundsville.

Tom: From every approach to the school steps, you could see the silhouette of the prison in the early sunlight. And from the Strand Theater, which was Davis' favorite place to hang out, you could see the penitentiary in the distance.

And the penitentiary is a Gothic structure. It looks like a castle. And it's colored gray and black from age. It's really a foreboding thing. It sits right in the middle of a residential district. And you have these nice houses with flowers and everything's well-kept. And not more than twenty feet away from these yards rises the penitentiary, looming over the town.

Kate: *The Watchman*, published in 1961, follows a guard at a penitentiary and contains many details that Davis soaked up from Moundsville life. The lights in the town dim when a man was being executed in the electric chair, for instance.

Tom: He says it was one of the bigger influences on his imagination, that penitentiary, and the Indian mound, which is the tallest structure in the whole town. It rises above everything else. From the top of the mound, you can see the Ohio River. You can see the penitentiary. You could see his house and all the places where he played.

Kate: And little Davis soaked all this in. As he wrote:

Tom: "In the innocence and confusion of my child's brain, the great mound and the penitentiary were bound together in ambiguous and dreadful brotherhood. One was the burial place of the unknown dead, the other of the unknown living."

17 **Kate**: In 1962, Grubb published *The Voices of Glory*. Each short chapter is a voice of a different resident of Glory in the early 1900s. Several events have left the town in a boiling stew of prejudices of all kinds: religious, social, sexual, prejudice against immigrants. Here comes a sample. This character, Henry Winemiller, is giving his opinion of a beautiful, unfairly treated Serbian woman who got revenge on the people who treated her unfairly. Read by John Morris.

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John: Tally Vengeance.

Her real name wasn't Vengeance. It was Natalia Lazarevitch when she and her man came down here from Mingo Junction in the spring of 1919. But ever after that night last September when she left Glory on the west-bound evening train, she was Tally Vengeance. As I recollect, it was old Colonel Bruce who started them calling her that. Though even without the name, it was vengeance the people would remember her for. Still, it was more than just vengeance: I saw it as a brand of indestructible pride; something straight-backed and high-chinned without being stiff-necked. That too, and a stealthy, peasant patience, as well. And, of course, that breed of wild, stoked slag-pile burning femaleness you don't often run into in the preacher-scared and custom-shackled life we've fashioned for ourselves here in the Republic.

Maybe back in the old-world Serbia where Milosh Lazarevitch brought her from, Natty wouldn't have stood out as anything wonderful or dangerous. Or even peculiar. For all I know, the women in those Balkan states are all like Natty. If they are, God help the kings: it's no wonder they're always getting into wars. Because when that woman got done working out her notion of justice here in Glory, you'd have thought Halley's Comet had gone through the roof of the First M.E. Church and thrown off enough cinders to set fire to the business district, the Elks Club, and half the respectable homes in town.

Let me be the one to tell you about Natty Vengeance. Because you'll never hear it from her. The Lord only knows where she went when she caught the ten o-clock west-bound that cool September night or where she's at now. And even if she was still here, her own voice couldn't - even if it would - tell you what Natalia Lazarevitch was and how she got that way or did what she did and why justice seemed to her something more precious than religion, respectability and personal pleasure. Or, for that matter, even personal safety.

Natalia Lazarevitch couldn't tell you these things. She was a Serbian and couldn't talk more than a half-dozen words in English. And maybe, being the kind of woman she was, she never knew what made her do things anyway. Women like Natty do most of their thinking in their hips; they are moved about upon this earth by the silent - and sometimes dangerous - logic of the womb. I've only come across two or three like that in my day: females without enough brains in their heads to know how to pluck feathers off a chicken, but with all the mother-wit and knowledge of a genius down in the hunches and instincts of their glands. And there's never any sense asking that kind of woman why she did something. Because her reason for it has to travel all the way up from her hips and by the time it gets to her vocal cords, there's not a bit of truth nor a grain of sense left in a word of it, not even to her.

But there's still another reason you'll never get the facts about Natty from her own voice. She'd never tell you. Not in Servian, English or Choctaw Indian. Natalia Lazarevitch would consider the reasons she did what she did to Glory as something that was simply not a damned bit of your business.

Well, that was something else I admired about her. Spiritually, I mean. Because I'm like that too. My life - past, present and future - my sins, my business, ambitions, failures, good luck and bad, my pleasures, wounds and disappointments: the good side of me and the ornery side - I look on them as all mine and strictly private. I feel beholden to no man to tell him why or how or when I ever did anything. So if you're inclined to know everything there is to know about Henry Winemiller, you can go ask some of these other big talkers here in town.
>>>

Kate: You can find out what Natty did and why she thought she needed revenge in *The Voices of Glory*. In that book, you'll also hear from some of the residents who have already died.

18 **Kate:** Here's Anton Jakob Heller, who died after an explosion in a coal mine. Read by Kirk Judd.

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Kirk: Look for my name among those graven on the stones on Glory Hill. You will not find it. My eternal home is in the earth. Deep, deep, deep within the earth. I am too deep even to feed the grass. I am so deep I listen in the nights to the eternal rustle and the creak of rippling rock seams old as earth itself. Sometimes I think I even feel the heat of the molten stone at the world's center and its core.

There is purity down here. Nothing decays. I lie beside the four who died with me, four hundred feet beneath the Benwood tipple. We share a little room carved out of coal. The other nineteen miners died in the blast. We five were cut off in a little room at the end of the corridor. No fire touched us. We didn't even hear the explosion.

We knew when it happened though. A silent blast of air raced swiftly past us, then came sucking back, and instantly, our safety lamps went out. The rats screamed in the blackness. Some men cried. A mine mule bucked and whinnied in the dark.

I was afraid for a while, like every other living thing within that breathless stigeon corridor. But after a while, I sat down against a wagon, opened my lunch pail and began to eat the food my wife had fixed the night before. Four hundred feet above me, sirens wailed and ambulances came clanging from every town, all the way from Glory up to Wheeling. I didn't hear them though. I didn't care. I didn't scream and fight and break my fingernails against the six million tons of coal and slate and earth that lay between me and the Benwood sun. I felt ashamed for some of the men who did. I thought, What's the sense of all that? Death must come for all someday, some way. And this way seems so clean. Here in this dry, black room that we had carved out of the bowelled, bituminous black darkness of the earth.

I ate my lunch, I finished every crumb. The company officials argued among themselves, four hundred feet above. Some among them said there was a chance that one or two men had survived down there. But the mine was burning. And mine is property. And the only way to quench a burning mine is to seal it airtight...

At last. the company men agreed: the chance of any of us living was slim. So at last, they sealed it at the mouth. The fire was over soon. And so were we.
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Kate: Davis Grubb had an amazing ability to put himself in somebody else's place. You never knew what Davis Grubb was going to write, just as you never knew what costume he would wear the next day. After his smash success with *Night of the Hunter*, people expected him to write another scary morality tale. Instead, he wrote a Civil War novel, *A Dream of Kings*, about a boy who grows up and fights with Stonewall Jackson in the Civil War.

Tom: It's an historical novel, but it's also a coming-of-age novel about Tom Christopher, who is an orphan, like Davis was. Who is searching for the lost father. And there's another character who is searching for her father. So there's a lot of father-searching in Davis Grubb's books, a biographical theme of Davis' own life.

19 **Kate**: Grubb's grandfather was a steamboat pilot on the Ohio. Grubb probably had fun picturing himself as Tom, playing on a wrecked steamboat with his friend, Cathy. She's at the wheel, pretending to be the pilot. Tom's wading ahead of the boat, pretending to be the leadsman in a rowboat, measuring the depth of the channel ahead of the steamboat so it won't run aground.

>>

Wading there, waist-deep in the shoals beyond the Nellie Queen's bow, now rank and green and green-glistening with sumac and creepers, and squinting my eyes till my lashes blurred the light of day and conjured it into a fog, the swirling mists of a desperate night, and I, the black leadsman, held the boat's safety in my fingers' cunning.

In my imagined skiff, I would make my way cautiously to a distance of 12 feet off her starboard bow and hearing in my dreaming heart, the ghostly crank of my fog-shrouded oars, while I dandled my lead line in the treacherous depths.

It was a glory, but it was a solomn doing. We were never closer to our gods then then. It was not playing. It was ritual and salvation and a praying time. "Half twain!" And I would hear her shrill voice chant out response and would wade on, heaving my lead line cautiously. "Quarter less taree!" I would sing ...
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Kate: See how different the language is from *Night of the Hunter*? Grubb not only varied his subject matter, he varied his writing style. Dramatically. Critics acknowledged the beauty of his writing and images in *Dream of Kings*, but criticized the book because it wasn't another *Night of the Hunter*. Grubb wrote, "They seem to get very upset when you don't write the same thing." But that didn't stop him. He went on to write a Gothic novel, a child's fantasy book, and *Shadow of My Brother*, a social consciousness novel about three generations of a white racist family.

Tom: He thought that no book should be like any other. He didn't buy into this "I have to write a formula book," or "I have to find a formula, then follow it because it was successful the first time."

20 **Kate**: His novel, *Fools Parade*, combines several genres into a spine-chilling chase through the Marshall County countryside. In 1969, *Time Magazine* called it "A marvelous soft of flapdoodle that does not fit into any category that book jacket haiku-ists can think of ... A fine book written for the hell of it, which is a splendid reason."

Here's the opening scene. Three convicts are getting out of Glory Penitentiary. They're waiting at the train station with Doc Council, the corrupt head guard, who is as fine a villain as you could wish for. Doc is taking full advantage of the chance to torture them one more time.

Read by Tom Douglass:
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It was a late afternoon of savage bottomlands, heat in the April of 1935. Johnny Jesus stood between his two companions, leaning back against the high baggage wagon on the warped bricks of the depot landing and facing the big moonfaced gunman.

The sun stood halfway down the west side of the Ohio River, which lay blazing like a ditch of diamonds beyond the old stooped willows of its shore To the east stood the town of Glory, West Virginia. And beyond it, the violet, orchard-fringed ridges rose humpbacked and shimmering.

No wind stirred. Yet, from time to time, like the hide of a field horse beneath the cloud of stinging flies, the Appalachian light seemed to twitch.

Five eyes watched the Uncle Doc' Council's fat forefinger dig a 98-cent watch out of his stomach and hold it up on a braided leather thong to check its time against the scrolled hands above the stationmaster's quartered window. Uncle Doc's amiable round face turned to look at the three of them again, and the light on the lenses of his spectacles flashed like army heliographs. When he spoke, his words were distinct. But the voice was soft as the sound of mud-daubers up against the jigsaw shadows of the lichen-stained depot walls.

Like an animal trainer, Uncle Doc had cultivated that voice through his years as Captain of Guards at the state prison. "Now then, each one of you has got him a brand new state free suit and a state free hat and a state free pair of shoes. I mean, those are gratis gifts from the state of West Virginia."

Uncle Doc was one of those humped, huge men who, beneath a cloak of paunch, are cat-swift as dainty dancers and hard as a sack of salt. He wore his loose, pokey suit of slate grey alpaca with the sleeves rolled up halfway up the freckled beef of his hairless forearms, arms which seemed not to have wrists at all, and his hands are the kind which still seem like fists even when the fingers are opened.

"Reach in the right-hand coat pocket, and you'll find a brand new five dollar bill. Reach in the left, and you'll find seven cents car fare. Besides them, gratis gifts from the state, each man of you has got a state-free B and O coach ticket in his hip pocket.

21 *He had the flat, benign countenance of a Sunday School teacher, which in fact he was. On his right lapel shone the bright brass button of Christian endeavor. "Your prison release papers is in your pockets. They're in order." Beneath the pink roll of his third chin, a bone stud shone at the gathering of his collarless shirt. Perched high on the bald pale head, he wore a broken-brimmed Panama straw hat, while on his tiny feet shone the startling white canvas of his Ball brand tennis shoes. Uncle Doc's feet commonly hurt him. He used up six or eight pair of Keds every summer, because he never kept them after they got grass-stained or dirty.*

"The westbound to Parkersburg is due in thirty nine minutes. It'll pull out of this depot in 42 minutes. When it leaves, you will be on it." He stopped short, shifting the chew to his tight right cheek, while the lenses slowly ranged the three of them, settling at last on the old man, Matty Appleyard, once miner, once murderer, in a time beyond recall of any save himself and state archive. One-eyed mountain man from Hampshire County, craggy-browed, towering and white-haired beneath the hand-me-down child's-sized hat. A tall man, toppled in somehow on his very height, yet holding erect and proud-mouthed. He smiled faintly, thoughtful, staring at his new paper shoes.

"Matty, they tell me up at the prison, you got a certified check in your coat pocket. They say it's for better than $25,000." Uncle Doc did not smile. "That's a good deal of money," he said and still did not smile, though some movement that could have been a chuckle stirred deep beneath

his buckled paunch. "What's a man have to do in Glory prison to get a lot of money like that, Matty?"

"Forty-seven years, Captain."

"That's right Matty."
>>

Kate: Violence just below the surface. The prison authorities and the local banker have put some fine print onto Matty's check that says his check can be cashed only at the Bank of Glory. But Matty isn't allowed to come back to Glory. Plus, they stole his money years ago.

22 **Kate:** Here's one more paragraph about Doc Council. Notice how Grubb describes him.

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"Whenever Uncle Doc Council moved, it was as though, deep within his vastness, the bones stirred first, catching up the meat of him on their way, and then, last of all, and then, last of all, his outside covering. Yet sometimes it seemed only the bones moved, secretly, slightly, leaving the surface of him unstirred, like a movement in the deeps of thick, dark drapes. Thus he moved now, yet the only hint on that tensing was the sunlight caught and dazzled once like the dog star in the dark of the pump gun's breach.

"Well, Glory's back yonder, boy," Uncle Doc said. And for the first time that day, he smiled. "Why don't you go home, boy?"
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Kate: Doc would love to shoot Johnny if he tried to do anything other than get on that train. Johnny knows it.

23 **Kate**: *Fool's Parade* was made into a movie, starring Jimmy Stewart. They had the premiere in Moundsville. Davis Grubb was invited. Now, the bus would not let him travel with his little dog, Rowdy Charlie, in his lap. And Grubb didn't go anywhere without that dog. So he paid $750 to rent a cab to bring him and Rowdy Charlie from New York to Moundsville and back. He didn't drive, and he wouldn't put Rowdy Charlie in a cage in the back of a bus or an airplane, so he rented a cab.

Rowdy Charlie was a little white, long-haired, smiling dog. His name came from Row di Chang, which means Holy Dog in Tibetan. When Grubb got Rowdy Charlie, he found one of the great companions of his life.

Tom: The little dog was Grubb's constant companion from 1960 to 73. And Grubb took Rowdy Charlie everywhere, even to his second home in New York. He would take the dog to PJ Clarks in NYC with him, sit him on the barstool with him, took him everywhere. He was a constant companion, to whom he was devoted and loved.

Kate: The late sixties were rough for Grubb in some ways. Critics kept wanting another *Night of the Hunter*. He was struggling with overuse of pills and alcohol. His brother Lewis lived in New York, and he helped, as he always had. And then there was Rowdy Charlie, his great comfort. But in 1973, Rowdy Charlie died, and Davis Grubb's life bottomed out.

Tom: His dog died in 1973, and he was heartbroken. His agent let him go, wasn't going to represent him anymore because because *Barefoot Man* - which was really a fine book - did not sell well, they let him go. He was lost for a time.

24 **Kate**: And then in 1976, he was invited back to West Virginia to help dedicate the new Clarksburg Library. Merle Moore was the Clarksburg librarian then. She really liked Grubb's books and knew he'd lived in Clarksburg. And so she tracked him down, just at the right time.

Merle: And I picked him up at the bus station at 4 o'clock in the morning. And that began the friendship.

Kate: He definitely helped make the dedication of the Clarksburg Library a memorable event.

Merle: He talked about not letting the mountains be destroyed and about not exploiting the poor people. The general tone that's in all his works.

My board president said afterward, "Merle, you could have prevented that." And I said, "Well, yes, I guess I could have. But if we asked Davis Grubb to speak, we asked him because of his record and his outspokenness. And that's the way he saw it. So I thought that's what we should do."

25 **Kate**: Grubb liked being back in West Virginia. He told Merle Moore he used to work as a janitor and he wondered if West Virginia needed one. Merle and Shirley Mills, the Moundsville librarian, got busy and got money from the Department of Culture and History to bring him back to West Virginia for two years to give talks at libraries, schools and so on.

Nobody knew it at the time, but those were his last two years. So, before he died of cancer in 1980, he traveled all over West Virginia and had a fine time.

Merle: And he always, when he had any money, he just spent it like mad, you know. He'd see a little kid in the lobby and go up and give her five dollars, then he'd call me and say he didn't have enough money for toothpaste till the end of the month (laughing). So we always had that battle.

Kate: Merle Moore invited him to spend Christmas with her family in Webster Springs.

Merle: One of the things he liked to do when he would come to Webster Springs, we used to have a general store downtown. And the same people had the TV cable. So they had a TV camera, so you could sit at home, turn to Channel 2 and watch who goes through the grocery store. Which is the way a lot of people amused themselves. And Davis would say, "Well, let's go down to Cutlip's and be on TV!" And then he'd pose.

(laughs) He was like a child. He just never let anything interfere with his enthusiasm.

Kate: In 1980, he was told he had cancer.

Merle: And he came in my office and said, "Merle, I have to tell you something." And he said, "But I want you to promise not to tell anybody." And I said, "OK". And he said, "The doctor said he thinks I have lung cancer."

He said, "Of course, I already told the girl at the hotel and the taxi driver." But I thought he should get a second opinion, and we took him up to Morgantown, and then later, he went in New York, he signed the contract for *Ancient Lights* the same time he was diagnosed.

26 **Kate**: *Ancient Lights* was his last book, once again something entirely different, a futuristic fantasy. Grubb refused chemotherapy treatments to finish it.

Merle: Davis always said writing a book, once you get the idea and start it, is like having a baby. You've got to finish it.

Kate: Merle Moore says she sometimes wonders about the way it worked out for Davis to spend his last two years in West Virginia. Davis might say it was predestined to be freewill. In his last days, a visitor wrote down something he said. It seems fitting for Merle Moore to read it.

Merle: "I'm a lucky man, a very lucky man. I've been allowed to finish my book. One thing I can say is that I have worked. I have created something. I haven't hid my light under a bushel. I've lived, and I've seen, and I've expressed what I've seen as best I could. I've known so many wonderful things and known so many people. But I don't regret that it's past. I don't regret that it's over, because it's not over really. It's past. You know, you can make a moment live forever in the imagination. That's part of what being a writer is all about. That's part of the reward."

Kate: In his room as he was dying, he had six things laid out where he could see them: his finished manuscript, a novel by Charles Dickens, a copy of William Blake's poems, his mother's gloves, and Rowdy Charlie's dog collar.

Merle: And he really felt, when he knew he was going to die, that when he got to heaven, he'd see Rowdy Charlie and his mother. So he wasn't one of those people who thought dogs didn't go to heaven, because he was sure Rowdy Charlie was in heaven.

Kate: There's so much more to say and to read, but we're out of time. I'm Kate Long. And you've been listening to "In Their Own Country," a program on the writing and life of Davis Grubb, celebrated son of Moundsville, West Virginia. Hope this sends some of you to the library to find his books.

In Their Own Country is produced and edited by Kate Long. Davis Grubb's stories were read by Tom Douglass, John Morris, Kirk Judd, and Anne Pancake. Music was performed by Tim Courts, Robin Kessinger, Bob Webb, Steve Hill, and Ron Sole. Bob Webb recorded the music and supplied production assistants. Francis Fished provided technical mentoring and production assistants. Invaluable advice from Tom Douglass, Merle Moore, Gordon Simmons, Mary Hogue, and Larry Gross.