

## AUTHOR

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Heel state resident.

He is busily renovating a 94-year-old house in Hillsborough - reconstructing it detail by detail, the way he works on his novels.

"Doing this is an act of philanthropy," Gurganus says as he takes a visitor through a series of rooms marked by traces of former grandeur.

"I found this house just as it was about to topple into decay. There was a five-foot cedar tree growing out of the gutter and the house hadn't been painted in 40 years. It was known as

the witch's house or Boo Radley's house," a reference to a character in the book, "To Kill a Mockingbird."

In New York, Gurganus was active in AIDS charities and as a volunteer "buddy" for people living with HIV and AIDS.

In the mid-1980s, he helped organize a group called Writers Against Jesse Helms that protested the conservative U.S. Senator's efforts to cut federal funding for the arts.

Now that he's settled in North Carolina, Gurganus is eager to become part of the effort to build community in the Triangle. He recently appeared at a fundraiser for the Fund for Southern Communities "Southern Outlook" program to fund

gay organizations. And he may return to teaching - something he has done in the past.

While public attitudes have progressed since Gurganus had his first short story published in *The New Yorker* magazine in the early 1970s - a story he says was the magazine's first about a gay character - more needs to be done.

When asked if it has been difficult to be an openly gay author, Gurganus pauses and gives a smile just this side of shy.

"It's fun to be able to be forthright," he says. "Those of us who were brought up not to be boat rockers have to get used to it. You have to learn to be noisy."

## TOWN

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tornado. "We really appreciate this," she says, watching the work team constructing her new home. "We'd like to get along with our life."

During their brief stay, Bethany church members worked on three Alabama homes. Drawing on a church offering of \$642 collected before their trip and the church's Needy Family Fund - for a total of \$840 - the church was able to purchase electrical supplies for two homeowners.

Melinda and Steve Barker were two of the beneficiaries. The tornado "exploded" their home but, amazingly, the couple and their two children, escaped relatively

unharmful.

Since then, family members have put all of their thoughts and energy into rebuilding their home. If not for the kindness of the Bethany church work team, Melinda Barker's 40th birthday would have come and gone without celebration. But church members presented her with a cake and a paid trip to the local Lowe's store, where Melinda picked out two porch lights for her new home.

Touched by the Barker family's unfortunate circumstance, the church is planning to "adopt" them for the holidays.

"It hit a nerve in all of us," says Robert Redmond, pastor of the Bethany United Methodist Church. "Even in the face of disaster, we have each other. It really brings meaning to the word 'neighbor.'"

## SHELTER

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on the amount of trauma that child will experience," says Chris Wynne, chairperson of Childwatch Inc.

In addition, parents may take children to Hallelujah House themselves.

Chuck Hodieme, executive director of Youth Focus Inc., says he hopes that "parents will recognize that they're on the verge of abusing their children and bring them to our facility instead of doing that."

Up to six children, from birth to 10 years old, may stay in the residential home for a maximum of two weeks until long-term arrangements are made. Live-in house parents, a full-time social worker and volunteers care for the children.

Each child referred to the home is screened by a social worker. Once admitted, crisis intervention is offered to families. Also, parent education, follow-up home family counseling and outpatient counseling are provided.

Childwatch Inc. is designed to

prevent and, therefore, end child abuse through education, intervention and sponsorship. Childwatch works with 31 agencies in High Point to make sure its projects fill a void in the community.

"We will not duplicate services," says Wynne. "Childwatch was developed strictly to fill gaps."

Through Childwatch, volunteers make presentations to increase community awareness of child abuse, assist new mothers with parenting skills and, through the use of puppets, teach fourth-graders about physical and sexual abuse.

The nonprofit also distributes a guide to services for children and families in High Point; sponsors a parent education program taught in schools, churches and community agencies; and lobbies for public policy and legislation aimed at child abuse prevention and services.

Childwatch discovered a need for a crisis nursery facility after conducting surveys and holding roundtable discussions with various service agencies in High Point. The nonprofit then conducted further research and worked with other

groups with expertise in the area of children's services, including the Association for Respite and Crisis Homes and the Department of Social Services.

"The only way that this would be successful was to bring together all these organizations that are already involved in children's services and meeting children's needs," says Wynne.

In addition, help from volunteers and in-kind donations from the community have helped get the house ready to serve children. All the furniture in the house has been donated and volunteers did the needed renovations and painting.

While the operating budget for Hallelujah House is \$148,000 for the first year, community support has enabled Childwatch to actually spend a minimal amount of money to get the project started.

"There has been an incredible outpouring of community support to help these children," says Ellen Whitlock, president of the Junior League of High Point. "Many organizations have donated money and supplies. Nobody tells us, 'No.'"



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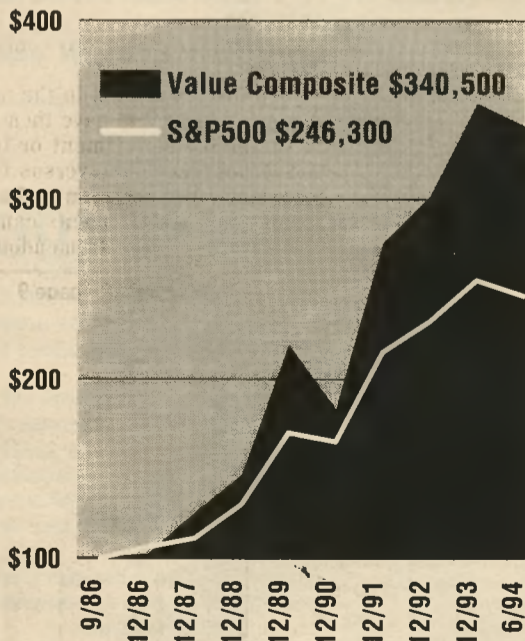
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