

Clyde Edgerton: The Man with a Banjo

Award Winning Author Visits Meredith Campus

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For any of those at Meredith who may have been curious as to what goes on behind the doors of West Belk when they are shuttered closed, one answer may be a Friends of the Library gathering is taking place. Such an event seems to begin in cheerful exchanges of old friends and the quiet bustle of workers to get everything in order. Some in attendance of this event included President Jo Allen, many Meredith alumnae and faculty, and a few patrons of Meredith scholarships. One woman, Betty Davis (an alumna from the Class of '56), came all the way from San Francisco to attend.

After everyone was satiated from the dinner and the plates were cleared away, speakers came on to discuss the Friends and the library itself. New members of the Friends of the Library were introduced, and then Susan McClintock discussed improvements to the library, which now has a "fresher, friendly, up-to-date design" according to her. Such improvements include a more "inviting" ground floor and a quiet room on the second floor. McClintock also named the recipients of the 2011 Library Faculty Award: Dr. Ellen Goode and Dr. Martha Burpitt.

During these proceedings, there remained a quiet hum throughout the room anticipating the moment when the man of the hour would take the proverbial stage. He received a brief but heart-felt and amusing introduction and then



photo via John Kincheloe

Clyde Edgerton walked into full view.

He appeared the epitome of a charming, Southern gentleman. Dressed in a tan suit with a pink tie and wearing unassuming glasses, he made you feel as if you were in the presence of an old friend before even opening his mouth. When he did speak, his calm accent and distinct humor put everyone in attendance at ease. His first words were, "I'm over here so I can pick up my banjo."

This banjo picking Durham native has published ten books,

his most recent called *The Night Train* (after the James Brown song since Edgerton is largely influenced by music), yet he still managed to tell a story about burying his pet chicken, Redbird. His excellent skills of country "down-home" storytelling and his ability to mix humor with seriousness are probably the biggest attributes to his success. (Edgerton has won five 'notable books of the year' awards from the New York Times as well as several other notable honors.)

When asked about how humor aids his novels, Edgerton

responded, "I hope the humor encourages the reader to keep reading." Indeed, since Edgerton discusses uncomfortable topics like segregation in the Civil Rights era, his humor is almost necessary to avoid losing his readers to the intensity of his topics. On discussing segregation, Edgerton said he sees "the same problems abound" even today. Because of his ability to write about these issues that are still relevant but somewhat taboo, Edgerton has become a successful author and his books will gain a longevity that others of today

will not be able to accomplish.

Edgerton also has a history with Meredith College of which many students today are probably unaware. While teaching at Campbell University, Edgerton was in the process of writing his novel *Raney*. Campbell and Edgerton had an altercation regarding the new novel; however, the faculty at Meredith signed a unanimous proclamation in support of Edgerton. Regarding how he viewed Meredith, Edgerton remarked, "I know the reputation [of Meredith]...they came to my rescue." In showing his gratitude and appreciation for Meredith College, Edgerton has donated his works to the Carlyle Campbell Library. Media Specialist John Kincheloe said, "Edgerton has offered the college many materials." Additionally, he explains, "In 2002 Dr. Hilbert Campbell gave Meredith College an extensive collection of materials related to Clyde Edgerton. These include reviews, articles, and many editions of his novels." Kincheloe noted that all of these materials would be housed in the Meredith Archives. He added, "We are really excited about this amazing collection."

Clyde Edgerton certainly drew an audience at the Friends of the Library dinner and is someone who is counted as a prided highlight of North Carolina. Hopefully he will return to Meredith soon...maybe after his next book is released.

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