

## Vehicular Outings With Petula Mae Klangston

Gail L. Roberson



Petula Mae Klangston and me have been friends for many years. What time I'm not getting her out of trouble, she's doing the same by me. When we're not holding pouting sprees and shouting matches, we're generally borrowing each other's things, plundering the countryside or crying on each other's shoulder. Petula Mae is a real good friend. She's the kind of friend that's not afraid to tell me that my excess adipose tissue is showing so don't wear that pair of pants to the speaking engagement, or that the back of my dress and slip is caught up in the top of my panty hose. Only thing is, sometimes she tends to get her kicks by letting me walk around like that for a while before she finally informs me that I'm making a spectacle of myself.

But, I still like Petula Mae, and I always get her back for her shenanigans. We go back a long ways. We've learned to take and expect a lot from each other. We're as thick and stuck together in times of need as my chicken pastry. And, above all else, we're not afraid of having a good old "free-for-all" once in a while. It clears the air, settles the dust, and makes things a whole lot more interesting for the rest of the year.

However, through all these years of friendship, I've come to realize that Petula Mae does not enjoy riding with me. Maybe it's because she gets tired of pacing back and forth while she waits for me to arrive. Or perhaps it's due to the fact that she's fed up with having to move all the notebooks and stuff on the front seat in order to settle into her place once I finally do get there. She denies it, but whatever the case may be, my sixth sense tells me that Petula Mae looks rather cautiously upon our vehicular outings without shy of much reserve and concern over the possibility of her permanent and untimely demise.

I can tell that Petula Mae is uneasy when she travels with me for several very apparent reasons. First of all, she has ALWAYS buckled up. However, I've noticed that she only buckles up while she's riding in MY car. No other car. Just mine.

And then, there's her feet. That's right. Her feet. Both of her size 10s are affixed firmly in place at ALL times. I can take you out there to my car and show you the dents under the metal floorboard if you don't believe me.

When I approach a stop sign from half a mile away, Petula Mae begins pushing at the floorboard with her feet while she braces herself with one hand on the dash and the fingers of the other firmly seizing the back of my seat.

"Stop DOING that, Petula Mae!" I always threaten. "I'm going to stop this car as best I can at the appropriate point of arrival at that stop sign. But, if you don't stop pushing so hard, you're going to push me right through it and straight off into the woods on the other side! So STOP PUSHING, PETULA! Okay. Alright. I've got it now. See? We're arrived. Safely. You can stop pushing now, Petula. I SAID, stop PUSHING, Petula!"

And, of course, there are always the mailboxes. I get the distinct impression that Petula Mae has something against those metal boxes on short posts that sit alongside the highway and bear many dents and missing letters. For some reason, every time we get a little close to one of those things, she immediately bounces over to the passenger side. I do not like that. It throws my concentration off and causes me to lose sight of the little white line along the edge of the highway. It also makes me have to yell at her again. "If you have some grudge with the postal authorities, Petula Mae, I suggest you take it up with the appropriate governmental branch and just leave me out of it!"

We've planned another one of our excursions tomorrow...Petula Mae Klangston and me, and that time we'll be hunting swamps for a wild flower I've been asked to photograph and write about. It'll be rough terrain, so I guess I'd better drive the old pickup truck. The brakes don't work so good, but with Petula Mae along, that won't be a problem.

**CLASSIFIEDS**

## North Carolina Literary Notes

by E. T. Malone, Jr.



**Dictionary Of North Carolina Biography.** Volume II, D-G Edited by William S. Powell. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986, 389 pp. \$45.00.

On February 28, the University Press at Chapel Hill published the second volume in William S. Powell's mammoth project designed to narrate the life stories of North Carolina's most interesting, notorious, and worthwhile citizens of the past.

The new volume of the long-delayed **Dictionary of North Carolina Biography** covers the letters "D" through "G". The first volume, published in 1979 and including letters "A" through "C", contained 708 entries and was 497 pages in length. This second installment in the projected multi-volume series is 389 pages long and contains 523 sketches.

Powell, now in semi-retirement from the History Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, began this project in 1971. It had been discussed for some years prior to that time, of course. One thing that became readily apparent was that personally researching and writing all the necessary sketches would be too much of a task for anyone, even the prolific Powell, who has published over seventy books and articles about North Carolina.

Therefore, Powell spent a good deal of time recruiting volunteer writers who would be qualified to produce biographical essays based on specific guidelines he provided them. Eventually almost seven hundred people--teachers, journalists, students, public officials, and ordinary citizens of many professions--became involved. Obviously the writing skills and ability to gather research information of such a heterogeneous group varied tremendously. Some sketches were excellent, whereas some others had to be almost completely rewritten.

As the years rolled along, Powell probably often wondered if the struggle were worth it. Many sketches were promised and never written. Some writers took much longer to complete their jobs than they had promised. Just the sheer bulk of paper and organization involved would have been enough to daunt most people, but Powell stuck to it.

UNC Press at first projected eight volumes when volume I was published. The introduction to volume II says that there will be seven volumes, but an early 1986 letter to contributing writers stated, "We now anticipate a total of five or six volumes for this series." Given the unforeseen complexity of the project, this shrinkage should come as no surprise.

It would be difficult to find anyone in North Carolina, professional or amateur, with a strong interest in history, who has not written something for "Bill Powell's Dictionary."

One of the cardinal rules of book reviewing is that one should not review a volume written by a friend or a title with which one was in any way associated. This rule has to be broken with the **Dictionary** or there would be virtually no one left in the state to review it.

No other state has anything like it. The closest series comparable is the **Dictionary of American Biography**, edited over the years by Dumas Malone and others, and it has obviously been one of Powell's models. The sketches cover literally thousands of men and women, all now deceased, from presidents and royal governors to Siamese twins, Blackbeard the pirate, and a man who weighed a thousand pounds. Researched to professional standards, the volumes in this series provide information that students, historians, journalists and genealogists will find in no other place.

A number of well-known Tar Heels have died since publication of the first volume. Paul Green, who died in 1981, is in this new volume, as is the beloved U.S. Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. Ironically, Ervin, who died in 1985, wrote several sketches in the volume that contains his own final notice.

On the back page of the dust jacket there is even a quotation from a review Ervin wrote, calling volume I, "a monumental effort to rescue from oblivion those North Carolinians of the past who deserve to be eternally remembered."

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