

# McLaurin's 'Cured by Fire' Raises Issue of Religion

### Main Character's Faith Preserves His Humanity Through Troubled Times

At the beginning of Tim McLaurin's fourth novel "Cured by Fire", one of the main characters, Elbridge Snipes, has a conversion experience. While Snipes is saved, in the course of his experience he gives up all the money he has, in exchange for "a little Bible the size of a pack of cigarettes".

The reader can view this exchange in two ways, depending on the amount of faith they possess. Is Snipes merely taken for a ride by a half-breed with flaming orange hair who has never found acceptance in any other situation? Is he an easy target for preachers (just as freshmen, away from home for the first time, and emotionally vulnerable, are the target of so many religious groups). Be this as it may, the faith that Snipes has from this experience.

The faith that Snipes gains from this experience carries him through troubled times, and allows Snipes to retain his humanity, to stay away from drink and to reach a kind of peace with his situation. Thus, one must conclude that McLaurin intends for us to take the religious experience as a genuine experience, at least in this case. However, one is still allowed a measure of cynicism, at least at this early stage of the novel. Later on, those who find it difficult to accept that any sort of faith really exists will find their enjoyment waning. However, this would be completely their loss: "Cured by Fire" is a fine and rich book, whatever one's religious leanings may be.

One of few books of fiction that deal directly with the idea of religious experience and the notion of faith, "Cured by Fire" is the story of two men, whose lives intertwine and parallel. Lewis Calhoun is the son of an alcoholic father, growing up harvesting tobacco in the fields of North Carolina, who wins a football scholarship to UNC.

For those of you who delight in novels set in familiar locale, "Cured by Fire" has parts set in and around Chapel Hill - and even one set in Kenan Stadium! Leaving college, seemingly on top of the world, with a beautiful wife, a child and a budding company, Calhoun starts to drink. Things sour. His downward fall ends with him in the homeless community (ironically, considering that he used to build houses) on the Northwest Coast. The chapters describing Calhoun's upbringing are juxtaposed with scenes of Snipes growing up.



As a half-breed, Snipes hardly has an easy life, but because of his religious faith, enjoys it more and reaps more of its benefits than Calhoun, who is unable even to appreciate what he has.

These scenes of childhood are perhaps where McLaurin's talent flowers to the best effect. The rich interplay of nature and Southern culture - a mix of guns, booze and racism (although this is only a small part of Southern culture) - is described in unerring detail. Scenes that could have been just plain cheesy, such as the parallel chapters in which both boys receive guns are handled with empathetic care and sensitivity. Calhoun's first hunt could easily have degenerated into the kind of "River Runs Through It" Disney soft-focus nature boy sentimentality, but McLaurin steers clear of such dangers. He is less successful in the central part of the book in the scenes of Calhoun's life around and immediately after college. These domestic scenes are stilted, to say the least, and one feels the unease of the author's style, when he is disconnected from matters that are close to his heart. Having said this, McLaurin is a UNC alumnus, and thus should have some sense of what these scenes should feel like. Indeed, he was taught by Doris Betts of the Creative Writing Program here.

Fire and the feeling of heat are associated with religious experience, with some sort of contact with the divine in many cultures. In Russia, it is also a metaphor for being drunk. In this novel, we have examples of both these types of heat. McLaurin has provided us with a beautiful example of a religious novel, fervent without being preachy, illumined without burning up in the reader's hands. "Cured by Fire" is a fine addition to the growing collection of UNC alumni literature.

# Alternative Individual Claims to Be Anarchist

### The Question Remains: Do Anthony's Everyday Secrets Really Qualify?

I have a secret to tell you. It's extremely personal, so you have to promise not to tell anyone.

That picture you see of the doofy guy in the coat isn't really me. I had somebody stand in for me. I know it's shocking, but I paid the guy pretty well. I even gave him a tip. And while we're at it, here's something else you don't know.

I am an anarchist. I scoff at society and the power hungry millionaires that hold it together. I believe that government is death, that death is life, and that life has nothing to do with either of the other two.

I spraypaint messages on the sides of buildings in my spare time. I talk with my mouth full.

I am an anarchist. I avoid symbolic bartering. When I cannot escape, I use

only two-dollar bills and wheat pennies. I believe capitalism is the curse of a higher being.

I do not actually believe in that higher being. If that higher being exists, I don't care unless it owes me money. I break in line.

I am an anarchist. I never do what people tell me to do. I study on my bed and sleep on my desk. I shovel the driveway BEFORE it snows. I pee in the sink and wash my hands in the toilet. I read the last page of a novel first. I bite jawbreakers.

I am an anarchist. I never follow a set format. I misspell words whenever I want. I don't never use correct grammar. I wrote this column in the wrong word order so my editor would have to fix it.

I am an anarchist. I drive on the wrong



ANTHONY KING RUNNING ON ICE

side of the road and occasionally in the median. I stop every two miles to refill my gas tank. I thought "Click It or Ticket" was a stupid catchphrase. I don't use my airbag.

I am an anarchist. I read "Playboy" for the articles. I watch "Murder She Wrote" because I find Angela Lansbury to be sexually stimulating. I never watch "Unsolved Mysteries" because the title is redundant. I like Barney.

I am an anarchist. It amuses me that at a quick glance, "anarchist" looks like "anti-christ." I find it funny that "antipasto" does not mean "opposed to pasta."

I break down laughing when I think about the fact that "Christmas" can be shortened to "X-Mas", which means that Christ marks the spot, you fight your Christ-wife in court, and on the "Family Feud," three Christs means the other team gets a chance to steal.

I am an anarchist. I sing off-key intentionally. I wear shoes that don't match, socks that do, and no pants. I have an earring in my spleen.

I am an anarchist. I believe in truth and

justice, but I lie and steal. I am a vegetarian, but I eat jerky. I believe that Oswald acted alone and that Kennedy really died from food poisoning. I sing the alphabet in chronological order.

I am an anarchist. I have closed captioning, but I am not hearing impaired. I once taught a dog to purr, a cat to squeal, and a guinea pig to refuse experimentation. I beat someone up and videotaped myself doing it. I cook sushi.

I am an alternative individual. I did not begin this paragraph like the others because it was what you expected me to do. I am not really an anarchist because that would mean I was labeling myself and would sacrifice my beliefs in anarchy.

I do not really believe in anarchy.

I am an idiot. You should stop reading.

FOOTNOTE: The opinions expressed in this column are not necessarily the opinions of the "Running on Ice" staff, sponsors or hockey team. If asked, the author will deny everything, including the golf alibi.

# Southern-Slanted Chili's Chillin' Even on a Friday

BY CANDACE BRYAN STAFF WRITER

Ok, so maybe Chili's isn't exactly "on the Hill," but it's close enough. Just a short ride down 15-501 takes you to one of a chain of many Southwestern style restaurants that provides an atmosphere a little different from Chapel Hill's own Applebee's or Ham's.

When you walk into the restaurant, you notice a lively southwestern decor, that if you can see past all of the people. It does get a little crowded, but if you're not extremely claustrophobic, you should be able to handle it. The full bar, complete with closed caption television, provides a temporary escape from the long wait list. Going at eightish on a Friday night could mean waiting for up to an hour, but Chili's does allow for calling to get on the wait list.

Upon being seated, a friendly waitress (at least in our case) rushed immediately to our table, got drink orders, and then quickly returned to take our main meal order. She continually checked on us and made sure

our glasses were full (which I love). It is rare to find such friendly service on such a crowded night, but we definitely hit the jackpot.

The menu has a southern slant to it, with lots of spicy Mexican-type foods such as fajitas, nachos, and such. But if you aren't into that Mexican thing, there are lots of other things to choose, ranging from your basic burger, to cheesesteaks and salads. I have to throw in a quick recommendation for the grilled chicken pasta in a spicy cream sauce - it was excellent.

The price range is a normal one, with main dishes averaging around \$5-\$9. I thought the price was reasonable for the amount of food they give you. And, if you're into saving money, they have really good deals on soup and salads - only 99 cents with any meal.

Despite the fact that Chili's is in Durham, you'll still see a lot of Chapel Hill faces, and probably feel right at home.

And if you don't try the one in Durham, try one somewhere else, there are Chili's all over the place.

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