

UNC writer, prof seeks fresh prose

By **ETTA LEE**
Staff Writer

Doris Betts' first attempts at writing were as a pre-school child, dictating poems to her mother.

Although Betts now laughs about those early works, she believes a child's honesty and clarity are the ingredients of successful writing.

As she said in a novel, *Tall Houses in Winter*, "The author seeks to reawaken the child in each of us, by replacing us in a universe where nothing is either trivial or unwilled."

Betts, who has been with the English department since 1966, is director of UNC's freshman and sophomore English program and a creative writing teacher. Her goal, she said, is to make students care about the way they write. Basically, there are two ideas the writing program tries to convey.

First, students are taught the objective of prose is not to impress others with flowery language. "Most students come to Carolina thinking that teachers only care about grammar," Betts said. "They've heard they'll make an F if there are any misspelled words and so they fill their papers with long words all spelled correctly, but their style is pompous."

"You don't dress in a certain way to make others feel inferior."

"I tell students that good grammar is like zipping up your pants before a party or not spitting on the sidewalk. It's a matter of being civilized. Students need to learn about being truthful, honest, clear and brief."

Writers also need to rid themselves of general, abstract words and jargon, she said. "A favorite freshman word is 'things.' I tell them if they listed all the 'things' in the universe we would be here forever."

"Another problem is that students write like public school principals. They use undefined terms, passive voice and jargon and don't say anything."

Passive voice, which she called the favorite tool of Watergate politicians, is particularly a problem. "The passive voice assumes no responsibility. When you say, 'Acts were committed,' no people are involved."

"When writing is not in the interest of being exact, it become propaganda."

At the end of this semester, Betts will leave her post as director of freshman and sophomore English in order to devote more time to writing fiction and teaching.

She already has plans to publish a new novel. It will be set in the West rather than in Stoneville, the small N.C. town that is the setting of much of her fiction. "I'm getting away from the South," she said.

After leaving her post, she would also like to teach freshman composition classes. "Freshmen are nice to teach. They're fresh and they're not cynical. They're responsive."

She wants to convey to students the importance of written communication. "In the long run, writing not only affects our communication of facts, but also our understanding of one another."

People can communicate with one another through facial expression and touch, but language is needed to describe issues and feelings. "Without language, we regress to the level of chimpanzees."



Staff photo by L. C. Barbour

Doris Betts

Mrs. Betts began writing seriously as a student at UNC-Greensboro. "When I say I began writing 'seriously,' I mean I developed a willingness to revise. It isn't easy to step back from something you've written and see it needs changing."

By the time she turned to fiction-writing, she had written for many publications.

Her fictions works have included collections of short stories: *The Gentle Insurrection* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and novels: *Tall Houses in Winter* and *The Scarlet Thread*, both of which won the Sir Walter Raleigh award for best fiction by a Carolinian in the years they were published.

Tar Heel Trains carries remnants of railroad lore

By **DEBORAH MOOSE**
Staff Writer

"This train is bound for glory, this train," according to the Woody Guthrie song. However, most trains in America today are bound for extinction. Few people can recall the sound of a distant train whistle at midnight or the puff of steam and cinders that could darken an afternoon sky.

A small part of the lore of trains lives on in Carrboro at Tar Heel Trains, a store devoted to the hobby of model trains. The store, which is located in an old train car, carries all of the paraphernalia necessary to set up a model train in one's own home, including miniature buildings, bridges and trees. It also handles related items, such as books on the history of trains and even engineer's hats.

Janice Poe, manager of Tar Heel Trains, said that the smallest size train the store carries is the N-gauge, and the largest is the O-27 gauge. The N-gauge trains (or, as Poe calls them, "coffee table trains") are about one inch high. The more popular O-27 gauge trains are about three times the size of the N-gauge.

Poe said that at one time the store handled antique trains, which are the largest model trains, but there was not a great demand for them, so she no longer stocks them. "But if we don't have something someone wants, we can get it," the manager said. She also repairs trains and buys used ones.

During the year that the store has been open, business has been steady in the spring and summer, but as the Christmas season nears, "I can't keep stock," Poe commented. "In the winter, fathers come in to buy trains for their sons — but they're really getting them for themselves," Poe said. She plans to open branches of Tar Heel Trains in Raleigh and New Bern later this fall.

There are four working trains set up in the store for customers to operate. They chug through tiny towns complete with cows, orange trees and gates with flashing lights. "There used to be a bridge that went up and down, but people liked to make the train wreck too much, so I had to take it down," Poe commented. Her favorite train set is the one she calls the "Soda Pop Special." Each car has the logo of a different soft drink.

Most of the people who buy model trains at Tar Heel Trains are collectors, according to Poe. Through her advertisements in hobby magazines she has attracted collectors from as far away as New Jersey. Some collectors deal in a particular historical period and only purchase trains that fit that period. Although a beginner can get a basic set for about \$40 to \$60, "if he's a collector, there's no limit to what he will put into the trains," Poe commented. She said that in addition to enjoying the trains as a hobby, collectors see them as an investment that will increase in value over the years. Collectors prefer the large O-27 gauge trains.

Poe recalled that her interest in trains began as a child in a small coal mining town in Kentucky. "I remember the clackety-clackety sound they made as they went by," she said. The manager said that she enjoys selling model trains because she likes to talk to the people that come into the store. "I want to find out what kind of jobs they have that would cause them to be interested in model trains," she said.

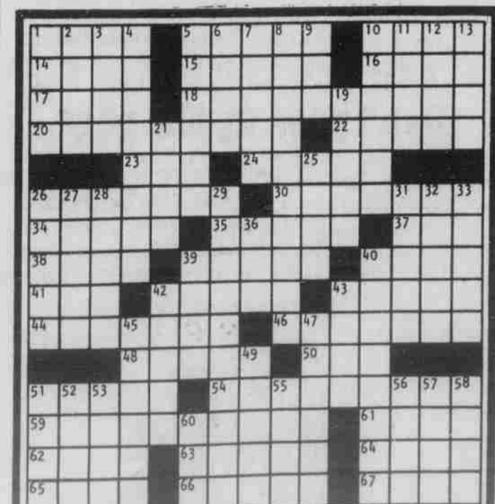


Staff photos by Fred Barbour

Located in Carrboro, Tar Heel Trains offers a wide selection of model trains for the enthusiast. Store Manager Janice Poe, above, takes a paint brush and dusts off one of the models.

THE Daily Crossword by Ann D. Rhoades

- | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ACROSS | 26 Devilish | 50 Remnant | 3 Tantrums |
| 1 Aficionado | 30 Signal blockers | 51 Italian girl friend | 4 Thirties "wheels" |
| 5 Silkworm's state | 34 Affirms confidently | 54 Blind pig | 5 Star in Aquarius |
| 10 Want | 35 Racing divisions | 59 Thirties symbols of liberation | 6 Slovenly one |
| 14 Certain solo | 37 — set | 61 Principal | 7 Flapper's hoped-for coat |
| 15 Alpaca's cousin | 38 Camera part | 62 Hoofbeat sound | 8 Game fish |
| 16 Other, in Granada | 39 Seats for judges | 63 — Dame | 9 Ms. West |
| 17 Creed men: suff. | 40 Divorce capital | 64 Silkworm | 10 "I meant —" |
| 18 Thirties coiffeur | 41 Unit | 65 Crag | 11 "L' —, c'est moi" |
| 20 Late-comers' spot | 42 Hockey's Sanderson | 66 Thirties coiffeur accessory | 12 Amarrind |
| 22 Joyce Carol — | 43 Right-hand page | 67 Parents | 13 Beetles |
| 23 State: abbr. | 44 Proper | DOWN | 19 Condemns |
| 24 Box-score item | 46 Biased | 1 — out of (abandon) | 21 Light colors |
| | 48 Greek valley | 2 Bear: Lat. | 25 Squealers |



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