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All my friends are going to be authors

BYLINE: Jeff Salamon AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF**DATE:** January 28, 2007**PUBLICATION:** Austin American-Statesman (TX)**EDITION:** Final**SECTION:** Life & Arts**PAGE:** J05

Larry McMurtry wasn't sure it was a great idea for anyone to write about his part-time job. For years, the author of "Lonesome Dove" and "The Last Picture Show" has written his own books in the morning and then sold other people's books in the afternoon. For decades, he owned and operated a store called Booked Up in Washington, D.C., and has run an establishment of the same name since the '90s in his North Texas hometown of Archer City, where four large buildings hold more than 200,000 volumes.

But when **Stayton Bonner** sat down with him to talk about his moonlighting, McMurtry was skeptical that the discussion would go anywhere.

"It was kind of daunting," says **Bonner**, an Austin journalist and songwriter who gigs semi-regularly at Flipnotics and the Hole in the Wall. "He said, 'I don't really have high hopes for this; journalists have never really gotten it right.' That was kind of hard for me; I was already intimidated about interviewing him because I grew up reading him. So I tried to learn as much about the book world as I could."

Apparently, the woodshedding paid off; not only has **Bonner** published a small, lovely book about McMurtry's sidelight, he got the great man himself to write the introduction to "The Bookman: A Story About Larry McMurtry's Other Day Job" (Three Dog Press).

It's not tough to figure out what drew **Bonner** to McMurtry; both men grew up as voracious readers in small-town Texas - in **Bonner's** case, in Henderson, near the Louisiana border. "Where I grew up there wasn't much to do," **Bonner** says, sitting in a comfy chair in one of his favorite hangouts, the North Lamar Boulevard Half Price Books. (Unbeknownst to either of us until we sat down, an endcap display of McMurtry books is standing just off to our left.) "There wasn't a whole lot going on to distract you, so my brothers and I would read 'Robin Hood' or whatever and then go out and play that. The fact that I could pick up a book and be transported anywhere just blew my mind as a young kid. That gave me a real love for reading - I'm always reading, always need to be reading. It's like an addiction."

Bonner came to Austin in 1998 to attend the University of Texas, wrote about music for The Daily Texan (he tells a funny story about how he landed the gig, but I'll let him save it for one of his shows, where the between-song patter is known to dominate the singing) and graduated with an English degree in 2002. There was a year traveling through the UK, a few months spent as an intern at Texas Monthly, and then the blurry, ever-promising present, in which **Bonner** works on his music (his third CD is due later this year), writes journalism and the occasional piece of ad copy and wrestles with his first novel, which is about a down-and-out musician living in a trailer in West Texas.

Somewhere in there, his friends Judy and Cody Ressel suggested he write an article about McMurtry's life as a bookseller. The Ressells, who live in Archer City, have grown close to McMurtry in recent years; they operate a store, Three Dog Books, next to his Booked Up compound. When McMurtry announced plans to close Booked Up in 2005, they thought a retrospective look at his bookselling career would make for a good newspaper or magazine article.

Bonner interviewed McMurtry at some length and wrote a 5,000-word story that he tried, without success, to sell to various periodicals. (I admit that I was one of the editors who expressed reservations about the length of the piece.) After McMurtry, who had decided not to close Booked Up after all, won an Academy Award for the "Brokeback Mountain" screenplay, the Ressells asked **Bonner** to update and trim his piece and let them publish it as a chapbook. (That's a pamphlet-sized book, usually put out by a small press.) "The

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Bookman" comes in two formats: the \$20 trade version, which is available at BookPeople and three-dog-press.com and the 200-copy limited edition, a \$150 deluxe boxed set, which is signed by **Bonner** and the man he invariably calls "Mr. McMurtry." Available on the Web site, it includes a passel of McMurtry ephemera, including his "want list" of rare books.

It's a list that **Bonner** says he himself can't make that much use of. "It's hard to be a collector when you don't have a lot of money," he admits.

Litcetera

Former Austinite Olen Steinhauer's "Liberation Movements," his fourth in a series of espionage novels set in eastern Europe, is a Best Novel finalist for the 2007 Edgar Allan Poe Awards. Steinhauer graduated from UT with a bachelor's degree in English in '92; the Edgar winners will be named April 26. . . .

Welsh writer John Williams has just put out "Back to the Badlands: Crime Writing in the USA," in which he travels across the country interviewing the likes of George Pelecanos, James Lee Burke and James Ellroy. The book also includes a chapter called "Austin, Texas: Don't move here," featuring interviews with Jesse Sublett and Kinky Friedman. It's a reasonable portrait of this city, though Williams does place the South First Street record store End of an Ear on a street called "South Main" and seems to be under the impression that Kinky was once the frontrunner in the gubernatorial race that was eventually won by "Rick Parry." . . .

Katherine Tanne, this section's "Please Don't Feed the Writers" columnist, has a story in "Modern Love: 50 True and Extraordinary Tales of Desire, Deceit and Devotion," out Tuesday from Three River Press. . . . Farfelu, a nonprofit magazine, is seeking submissions from local writers and artists for its sixth issue. The deadline is Feb. 1; details can be found at www.farfelu.com. . . .

The Writers' League of Texas will hold its 26th Birthday Bash today at Stubb's (801 Red River St.), 4 to 7 p.m. There will be free food, beer and music by Guy Forsyth; tickets are available in advance or at the door for a suggested donation of \$10. . . .

Half Price Books has launched the ninth annual Half Pint Library Book Drive, which will benefit more than 70 libraries in clinics, hospitals and community centers across the country, including the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas. The book drive lasts until March 31; "new and gently used" children books can be dropped off at the five area Half Price Books stores.

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Jeff Salamon AMERICAN-STATESMAN

You'll see Larry McMurtry novels at Half Price Books, but not at the author's own store, as **Stayton Bonner** writes.

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