

Rising water, hurricane parties and a runaway pit bull

BY VICKY DICKSON

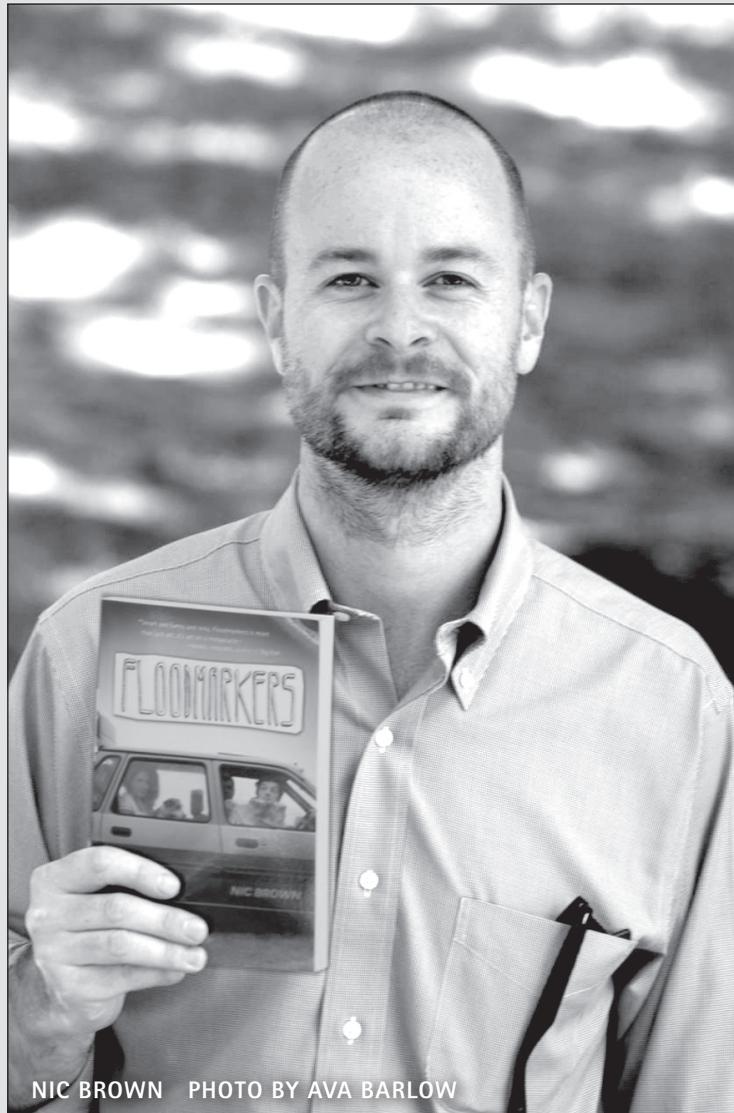
Chapel Hill's Nic Brown might be the only writer around who sees the sale of his first book, *Floodmarkers*, as "the second-best thing that happened to me that day." Given that Brown had also just completed the first draft of his second book (*Doubles*), he felt like one lucky guy on the day his first child, a daughter, arrived.

That kind of luck, though, comes only on the heels of hard work. Years of it. The stories in *Floodmarkers* had their genesis in Brown's time at the Iowa Writer's Workshop, which he entered after graduating from Columbia in 2003. A hybrid of a short-story collection and a novel, *Floodmarkers* tells what happens to the residents of Lystra, a fictional North Carolina town, over the course of a single day – a day when Hurricane Hugo has been predicted to hit town.

The collection originated with Brown's idea of a set of stories linked both by the imminent arrival of a major storm and by a wandering white dog. Its many characters include a funeral-haunting widow, an aspiring actor (who sculpts his 6-inch Mohawk with cherry Jell-O), a teenager whose initiation into the mysteries of sex comes from his female cousin, a child-molesting veterinarian and a gospel-singing school bus driver with a pregnant girlfriend.

Though these folks may sound like the eccentrics who commonly populate stories about small-town Southern life, readers should know that Brown doesn't deal in caricatures. His characters are complex, and they don't behave predictably. The action's always a bit surprising, and even the storm doesn't play out the way it's expected to.

The writing in *Floodmarkers* is tight and spare, in part because of Brown's conviction that his readers are intelligent and will get what he's trying to say without a lot of explanation. It's also carefully crafted, much as he crafted musical arrangements in his years as a professional drummer. Brown's evident compassion for all his characters makes us like them, too, and care what happens



NIC BROWN PHOTO BY AVA BARLOW

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to them which all combines to make *Floodmarkers* a most compelling read.

Floodmarkers will make its literary debut on July 7. You can get a preview, though, at The Cave in Chapel Hill on July 3 at 10 p.m., when Brown's reading will be accompanied by music from his friend Snuzz. And if 10

is past your bedtime, look for Brown at The Regulator Bookshop in Durham at 7 p.m., July 10.

GOOD OL' FESTIVAL

Latest news from the N.C. Literary Festival is that local favorites Lee Smith and Jill McCorkle will be doing readings and discussions about the work that inspired the musical *Good Ol' Girls*, at 8 p.m., Sept. 12. Matraca Berg, the Nashville musician who originated the idea for the musical and her friend, Marshall Chapman, will accompany them, so it should be a most entertaining evening.



ANNA DEVERE SMITH

GRACE AND KINDNESS

We're also excited about the Sept. 11 (7:30 p.m.) presentation of *Finding Grace and Kindness in a Winner-Take-All Society* by Anna Devere Smith, which is part of the Frank Porter Graham Lecture Series. Perhaps best known for her TV and film work (in *The West Wing* and *Rachel Getting Married*), Smith also is known for performance pieces dealing with complex issues and multiple points of view. It sounds most intriguing.

NEW MCCORKLE

Speaking of Jill McCorkle, fans will be happy to know that they won't have to wait much longer for a new read, since her short-story collection *Going Away Shoes* is due to hit the streets in September. You can get a signed copy at The Regulator Bookshop in Durham at 7 p.m. on Sept. 23.

REMEMBERING CHAPEL HILL

And fans of the *Citizen's* own Val Schwartz won't have to wait at all for a peek at her new book celebrating some of our area's most notable residents, *Remembering Chapel Hill: The Twentieth Century as We Lived It*. Val's making multiple local appearances, at Southern Season July 3 from 4-7 p.m. and Aug. 22 from noon-3 p.m., at William Travis Jewelry July 24th from 5-7 p.m., at McIntyre's August 16th at 2 p.m., and The Regulator Bookshop August 27 at 7 p.m. Come out and meet our illustrious columnist!