

A READ ON THE LIT FESTIVAL

BY VICKY DICKSON

The just-released schedule of the North Carolina Literary Festival is a subject of some frustration for me. Since I can't be in more than one place at once, how to decide between Dorothy Allison, Elizabeth Edwards, Will Blythe and Allan Gurganus? Or Rick Bragg, Daniel Wallace, Nic Brown, R.L. Stine, Elizabeth Spencer ... The truth is, there isn't a session I wouldn't be interested in attending. And it's all a gift to the people of North Carolina, from the libraries of UNC, Duke and NC State, with additional support from N.C. Central University and many other sponsors.

The fifth in a biennial series that was started in 1998 and rotates among the three campuses, this year's festival will include 100 authors — local, emerging and nationally known. It includes a children's area for the first time, featuring *Goosebumps* creator R.L. Stine and Carrboro writer Clay Carmichael. Since the festival is funded entirely by gifts



DANIEL WALLACE

and grants, all events are free, though keynote events at Memorial Hall require tickets obtained in advance from the box office.

For a great overview of the North Carolina literary scene, check out one

of the Sunday sessions featuring author readings from *Long Story Short: Flash Fiction by Sixty-Five of North Carolina's Finest Writers*. A compendium of "short-short" (less than 2,000 words) stories, *Long Story Short* is a fascinating portrayal of the diversity of writing talent our state has produced. Running the gamut from Russell Bank's depiction of an aging couple on a final road trip, to Bekah Brunstetter's searing monologue about a sister's reaction to her brother's Iraq deployment, to Will Blythe's quirky multiple-obituary, the stories range from witty and ironic to painfully sad. The one constant is that they're all beautifully written, and riveting.

And don't miss Carrboro's own Erica Eisdorfer, in a Saturday session with friends Allan Gurganus and Wells Tower.

Erica's novel, *The Wet Nurse's Tale*, made its debut last month. It's a finely crafted peek into a part of Victorian English society that is seldom on view: the lives of the wet nurses who fed the babies of both the rich and the not-so-well-off. The novel's uneducated protagonist, Susan Rose, is lumpy and crude, and also smart, compassionate and very, very funny. As engaging a heroine as you're likely to come across, Susan tells the gripping story of her journey to recover the son who was taken from her as an infant. Despite her lies and schemes, readers will find themselves rooting for Susan all the way.

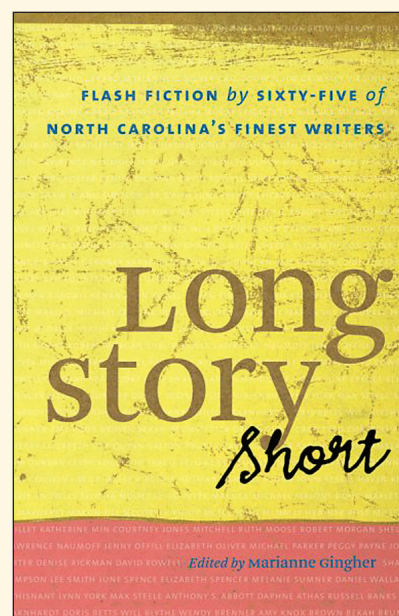
Festival attendees will want to line up early for Elizabeth Edwards' Saturday interview on her book, *Resilience: Reflections on the Burdens and Gifts of Facing Life's Adversities*. Though the

events in Edwards' life that have demanded resilience of her are well known, fewer people know about the background that has made her a gifted writer. Three years as an English graduate student at UNC (where one of her classmates was Clyde Edgerton) engendered in Edwards an appreciation for great literature — and helped counterbalance the legal career that taught her to "write a convoluted sentence as well as anybody."

Writing comes fairly easily to Edwards, and she describes it as solace, "like weeding" — though she also acknowledges it can be a wrenching challenge. Because she wanted *Resilience* to have a conversational tone, she read every page of it aloud. She hopes the book will help those who encounter hardship and challenges to face their new reality. And if it turns out she's not around long enough to teach her children resilience by her own example, she hopes her book will be a way to give her own kids wings.

For those who miss the *Long Story Short* sessions at the festival, or just want to hear more, the 50th anniversary celebration of the Chapel Hill Public Library will feature readings from Sarah Dessen, Daniel Wallace, Lee Smith, Haven Kimmel, Michael Malone, Jill McCorkle and Will Blythe, as well as live music from the Carolina Chocolate Drops and Midtown Dickens.

Sun., Sept. 13, 6 p.m. 2000 Fearington Village Center, Pittsboro. \$75. RSVP: 929-1666, chplfoundation.org



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