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Tim Huebner: So I'll start by saying, I'm Tim Huebner and I'm interviewing Huger Foote and it's November 13th, 2013, just a few days after your birthday.

Huger Foote: It's a few days after my birthday and a couple of days before my father's, November 17th. So I was kind of noticing that on the calendar and thinking that it was rightly placed.

Tim Huebner: So you have some specific things that you'd like to start out with and share with us?

Huger Foote: I guess initially I just wanted to express my gratitude to Rhodes and to you for making this day possible. As I had mentioned to you earlier, growing up as my father's son was kind of a process of finding out that my father was a prominent writer and later a celebrity on the grand scale. It was a period when my goal was not so

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much to be my father's son but to step out from behind that and be me. And the timing -- my father died in 2005 and there's been a whole sort of process of embracing my father's legacy that has been really a gift to me. And Rhodes has been a big part of that. I've felt that initially I knew there was work to do, and finding a home for my dad's collection. I felt compelled from growing up with my dad who was in a sense preparing me for that role all through the years I of course realize that now in hindsight.

There was a period there when it wouldn't have been possible for me to fully embrace, "Let's look back at my childhood, let's look at my memories of my father, my recollections."

[0:02:00]

But the initial step was to say, "You know what? I am my father's son. That's just a basic fact." So what's wrong with accepting that fact and stepping into that necessary role?" I found there are all kinds of gifts in that. So that was kind of like growing up a little bit I think.

And then came two things: one, to be guided by what my father would have wanted and what I saw that I wanted to share with future generations and scholars and people that would be inspired by it. The whole of what one finds when looking at my dad's life and work, which is mirrored in the collection that's here at Rhodes.

Long story short, being here today is a fulfillment of what started

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as a willingness to step into this process, and everything that's come has exceeded every expectation I could have imagined. So being here is a real privilege and a fulfillment of something that I think my father would have envisioned for his legacy as well.

I had a few notes here of just thoughts and reminiscences of things that came up. I think the first thing written here is that we were a three-person family, me and my mother and father. The atmosphere around the house was one of quiet, intellectual activity. My mother was a big reader, my father was back in his workroom until 4:00, 5:00 in the afternoon every day.

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The evening would sort of be the time where my dad would reemerge -- he'd go in after breakfast and reemerge when I'd be coming home from school, once I'd started school or whatever. And my mother would -- for a long period of time there's a little sitting room just outside my father's study, and the three of us would sit back there and it would always be my mom on this couch over here, stretched out, reading. My dad over here, and they would have drinks and I would draw and sort of hang out there. Many of the books that are in the collection now are on the shelves of that little room. And then we'd go back to the dining room, which was at the west end of the house and that's where we'd have dinner.

As the years went by we got lazier, or they got older, so we just -- before dinner they'd get together in the living room, which is a larger room, and then the dining room's just a step away from that.

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So I have this -- I'm looking back at seeing myself as a boy in this house with these two remarkable people and having a nightly meal with them.

I guess the thing that comes to mind next is things that I realized with great relish later were gifts of my dad to me, which started long before his encouragement to read certain books, which I'll get to in a minute. The house was filled with all kinds of interesting music, to start with. He played Bessie Smith and Robert Johnson on a regular basis in the house. And then -- and always during the period that my mom and dad would sit down before going to have dinner there'd be usually chamber music, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, piano stuff.

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And so as a kid I was kind of by osmosis absorbing all this stuff that was part of the atmosphere of the house. And when you get to

be about 20 years old and you realize it's kind of cool to know about Robert Johnson. So I was like, "Thanks, Dad, for putting that on the daily agenda," to have that music playing. And he would like to talk about -- tell me stories about Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith and things he knew about them.

Going on to this sort of -- in retrospect realizing that I think what he wanted to do was impart to me what he had received at the Percy House in Greenville, what Uncle Will, as he called him, gave him was an appreciation for great literature, classical music, painting. He wanted me to have the same thing, the same opportunities he'd been provided. And thank God I embraced that.

I think my first serious book --

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and I remember him always saying that his was *David Copperfield* -- mine was George Elliott's, *Silas Marner*. For whatever reason, he said, "You might start with this." So I sat down and I kind of often would read these things with some discipline -- I would set myself a goal of a certain number of pages or certain amount of time that I would spend with the book, and understanding probably only a tiny part of a sophisticated writer -- I might be 12 or 13 when I read *Silas Marner*. But I would be able to talk with my dad about these characters that I was discovering. And so that started this relationship for me with him of sharing books.

Then came another one that jumps out is Joyce's *Ulysses*. I remember by that time he had -- we were setting up a room for me upstairs; my mother and father slept and lived -- everything was downstairs.

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And the upstairs had a guest room and at the other end of this short hallway was my bedroom. He set me up in there and I looked back with like real gratitude to my dad, he got me a stereo and started me off with a record collection, which was probably three or four records -- one of them I remember was some early Beethoven quartets. And then later a family friend gave me a Beatles' album. So that started another -- my father wasn't too excited about that new direction. So he was kind of nurturing this stuff from a young age.

But by the time I was 16 or so I remember I had a clock -- and he had also given me his old reading chair when he'd replaced the one in his study. It was a comfortable chair with an Ottoman, and I would set up a clock and I would say, per day, I was going to read

for one hour. And I got through *Ulysses*. And then came *The Brothers Karamazov* and these big books.

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And I realized that you only have to read them for one hour at a time, and anyone can read a book for an hour.

What happened to me -- and I probably would not have embarked on these things without his encouragement or his enthusiasm for them -- he was so excited about the books and he would talk about them. And I wanted to have the experience that seemed to be so exciting for him. He made it sound attractive, reading these characters in these books.

So I would go through this difficult process, especially with something like Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* where you're reading -- it's like carrying heavy weights upstairs for the first 70 or 80 pages. And then you start to -- something would give and I'd find myself engaged in reading one of these great works of literature and having this experience that he had had as a young man. So that's all thanks to my dad.

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So I mentioned music. A funny episode of my father's life is he -- to me it's funny -- he had a vast record collection of all of his favorite classical music. And as you know from studying his life he was sort of a self-educated man; he certainly attended high school and went to college for a year. But his in-depth study of classical music and literature was really done independently.

So at one point when reel-to-reel tape machines became available to the public he acquired one and set up shop in the living room with a **Thorn's** turntable and a Sony reel-to-reel. And one by one he wanted to transfer these LPs, record them onto reel-to-reel tapes. I think he approached this with the same meticulous study that he would have approached a novel or even the trilogy: he

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created these tapes so that the pieces of music would fit precisely, never be cut off at the end of a tape, and created a catalog of them and then labeled each tape. And inside each reel-to-reel tape box is a little not thing, describing its contents and where to find those things on the tapes, so if you wanted to hear the third movement of something you can fast forward to it on the reel-to-reel.

But the process of making those recordings involved many hours of playing the music while it's being recorded. And he did so at full volume. And he wore his pajamas and his bathrobe and smoked his pipe the entire time. So there was this -- especially

during the symphonies -- this thunder of music. And my friends would stop by my house after school or something and there'd be this music booming in the living room. And they'd come -- and the entrance to the living room is sort of an arched door with three steps down.

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And we'd come through, on the way to the kitchen, usually, the first place you go when a friend comes over -- we'd pass that doorway and they would stop and look in and there'd be this man standing there with his pipe smoking and this music booming and all of these materials spread out around him. And I'd say, "That's my dad." And of course the most you could do was wave and he would just sort of nod and go back to what he was doing. They would just look at me like, "What's your dad doing in there?"

It went on for several months, this process of transferring to reel-to-reel, hours and hours of very loud, classical music playing for days. And he took it on as a very serious project. Anyway, I just thought that was a funny episode that might be worth talking about.

Next thing I mention here is that -- and this kind of broaches a larger subject. I was going to mention here that we sent Sundays at [Cottondale](#), which was [Jay Tunkie Saunders](#), or Tunkie's

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house out in the country. You'd go east out Walnut Grove and then down some windy roads. It's a wonderful old farmhouse built in the 1850s. And my dad and I -- my mother wouldn't participate in this particular -- this was kind of our Sunday ritual, which had been preceded -- I'll go on with the Cottondale story and go back to the one about another thing -- but on Sundays we'd leave and be out there around one o'clock and there'd be people -- and there'd be kids, Tunkie's kids would be there and their friends and friends of mine.

I say this leads me to something that I think's interesting about my father. As you know, his closest friend of his heart was Walker Percy who was a fellow writer -- of course they didn't know that when they met, running around in the delta together. Which is sort of remarkable to me that these two people would be placed together by, again, this mentor, Will Percy,

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and that both of them, unbeknownst to each other, would go on to become great writers. Walker was the writer -- I mean my dad was the writer and Walker kind of fell back into [a writing moviegoer](#), after medical school. The fact that the two of them would become

two of America's greatest writers, and that they both were best friends in the delta, this young men is to me kind of remarkable, something greater than the players involved.

But my father, unlike -- he had no use for artist communities, or artist colonies. In fact his best friends in Memphis were Jay Tunkie Saunders and Mr. McFadden -- Mickey, as he was known. And he didn't like to get together with other writers and talk about writing; he liked to have fun with his friends that he felt an affinity for.

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I guess the thing that's interesting to me about that is I think that my father had such a specific personal vision for what he was doing he knew exactly what he was doing in his writing. And it was personal and unique. He didn't want to -- he was so clear that I think he didn't want to muddy the waters with being mixed up with academic study or with other writers because he knew exactly what he wanted to do and how he wanted to do it. So he was busy doing that and he just -- and he would take time off when he wasn't working, rather than being influenced by other things. And that's an opinion kind of a thing.

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I think that something I'd just step back and say is -- again, I'll go back to what I started with is how grateful I am that this collection's at Rhodes, that you're teaching this course in my father's life and work.

There is something I knew, and people that study my father's life and work know, that he's done something that's outside of any particular camp, that basically his process -- and again, this is just an amateur talking about it, me, but basically this thing of going to original sources, multivolume naval histories, etc., newspapers and documents from that time, he would assimilate this vast quantity of knowledge and then -- to the point where

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he had, as he put it, a fact isn't a fact until you love it -- and I think that's maybe a misquote but I think that's how I recall it -- he would incorporate this stuff into his thinking in a way that was -- it was as if he lived it or experienced these things himself. And that would be before he'd sit down to write about the Battle of Gettysburg, or any particular subject, which is unusual, rather than picking one specific small area of study, say, he could have chosen to do a biography of Lee, or something on Lincoln, which he'd chosen one of his favorites. He did that for every single character that he encountered in his study of the Civil War.

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I think Jordan Redmond mentioned in an interview he did for the newspaper, he said, "I can't believe that he managed to absorb and

recall so many facts. So I knew that someone, a student at Rhodes, had had this moment where he had fully recognized the miracle of what my dad was doing back there.

So the fact that this collection is here and it's preserved in its entirety gives future generations a chance to have that same light come on and go, "Wow, look what this man was doing." He had no research assistant, no secretary, just consuming the information and then making it his own and sitting down and telling this story.

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And then there's this added layer on top of that, for me, of this majestic prose, and the fact that this thing is a literary masterpiece. I mean for all those elements to be in play and to come out in the way they did is something that you have to take a broad view of this intellectual life, which is what's going on here.

And that is something that I think my father would have taken great pleasure in knowing what's happening for future generations. He wanted to create art for not only the enjoyment of the reader but for their instruction of fellow historians.

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And all of this he was doing alone back in his room, essentially. He wasn't out trying to convince anybody of this, he just said, "I'm just going to do it my way and they'll get it." And that's what's happening. I'm so grateful that the role that was -- I guess I'll just mention this, that all through the years my father, as you know from seeing the collection, kept notes, diaries, catalogued everything he was preserving in the study there: manuscripts, the library,

the dates of when he read certain books, or the mini-dates that he read certain things, like **Percy**. He knew -- I was a child -- he already knew that these materials would be held in high regard and studied by future generations.

And the future generations, by the way, being the one that's studying in your class, they're the next generation. They're already here, which is fascinating.

But I only realized this in hindsight: he began to take -- he would occasionally ask me to come back to the study and he would open a chest and show me its contents and we'd get it out and go through it and say, "This is the final page, this is the war," and he would

take me over to a section of the library and say, "Here's where all the Faulkner is." And then he would show me the maps and explain with me what everything was. And then at one point I remember

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Realizing -- he began to talk to me about the decision about what to do with these materials which were going to be left to me. And then all through the years -- and I was, at that point, qualified to introduce someone to the contents of that study because he'd show me where everything was. But he did it repeatedly over a period of 10 or 15 years so that it was kind of like secondhand knowledge to me, that it was immediate; it wasn't explained to me once. And there was never a written guide, just if someone said, "Well where are the maps for Gettysburg?" I'd say, "Well they're probably in this closet over here. Let's take a look," and they've probably be there.

So I knew the contents of that study. He was preparing me for the day that would come when it would need to be catalogued and that a home would have to be found for it. So I kind of knew that was going to be my responsibility when my father passed in '05 that

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somewhere down the road -- and my initial decision, along with my mother, was so just lock that door and leave it there for a period of time. Of course we were approached by people who were interested and we'd say, "I'm sorry, no, it's not available."

And when it came time everything has gone so smoothly and so well, and I think that's because I've just had to ask myself what would my father have wanted me to do here? So the motive is to honor my dad's legacy, out of love for him. So that's something that's --

And a funny thing that comes up: my dad was a devoted follower of "As the World Turns" as you may know. And every day he would stop writing, whatever was going on, and come out and go back to the kitchen and make himself a lunch -- before health concerns were on the table -- he would make

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Vienna sausages and iceberg lettuce and take the plate back. And my mother would join him and they would watch "As the World Turns" together. And then when he'd finished his lunch the room would fill up slowly with pipe smoke. And so by the end the show would end and he would take his plate back and go back to the workroom. That'd be it until late afternoon, which I think is fascinating.

He was later, in New York, invited to come to the set and had fun meeting some of the people who ____ "As the World Turns". But he watched it for so many years that we'd be watching it and he'd say -- and I didn't watch it with him but I would come back and sit on the edge of the bed occasionally and watch ten minutes or so -- I probably did that 100 times. And he would say, almost invariably: "Hugs, that person, that grandmother? I remember when she was a young woman and having an affair." He'd shake his head. Because the same actress stayed on the show for 20 years. So he grew up with them.

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But something about it helped him relax, I think, take his mind off the work he was doing back in his study, I don't know.

And speaking of the pipe, someone may want to know what the secret recipe for -- what his blend was. I know that he kept two cans above his drawers where he kept his socks and things was a shelf. And up there would be a big baggie of mixed up tobacco, and then separate cans that he was using to mix it. He would mix it in a bag and the pour it into a humidior, a sort of box that would keep it fresh.

And it was two types of tobacco: one brand called Half & Half -- and I think that's spelled Half "n" Half or maybe the "&" symbol. And then the second brand was Edward G. Robinson. So he combined those two. At one point he tried to encourage me to smoke a pipe, "You should try it," and I could never master the art of keeping one lit,

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or how to keep it going without inhaling it and coughing. So fortunately I didn't become a pipe smoker or else I might be sitting here now with my pipe going. But I made a valiant attempt. We all want to be like our fathers -- many guys do, anyway.

Another interesting thing about my father is, as you know, he wrote with a dipped pen. I don't have to describe any of that to you; you can see the manuscripts. But not only did he like to write with a dipped pen, he would not allow modern technology in the house, including -- you know, I proposed that we get a fax machine, and he said, "I will not have that in the house." He didn't want to know what it was. The closest he came was allowing us to have an answering machine, which he saw a purpose for, so he wouldn't have to answer the phone every time. But other than that he never wanted the internet installed, didn't want computers in the

house. He had someone -- I remember specifically someone offering

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to give us a computer and to teach him how to use it. I mean he never even felt slightly inclined to entertain that idea. He didn't want anything -- and I think he kind of knew that he would end up -- he saw a lot of headaches ahead, and they would interfere with the process that they worked for, the writing process. So that's kind of interesting.

I mean there's -- I feel like I'm taking up too much of your time with my own recollections. I just -- once I had begun to move and live in Europe -- initially I went to Paris for my senior year of college and then stayed on for three more years. My mother and father joined me there in Paris, it was three times, and that was some of my fondest and most exciting memories of being with my mom and dad because those

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were probably trips they would not have taken if I hadn't been there saying, "Come visit." And also my mother probably suggested it and then suggested again. She probably would have jumped on the plane in a minute. But my dad, who as you know, is not -- he was very content just to stay at the house with his library and work on things. But he was convinced to make this first trip to Paris and he had such a good time that they came twice more.

But some great things that we did together is one, we went to a bookstore, a *Galamarde* or something, and purchased all of his favorite French novelists, which are *Moissan* and of course Proust. And he bought me volumes, sometimes we'd buy the used old ones that you'd find in the little booksellers along the Seine by Notre Dame, or go to a bookstore and buy paperback modern versions. So he built me a nice little bookshelf of all his favorite French novelists in French.

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Another nice thing he did was we went and bought copies of his novels. *Tournament* was called *Tous Beant* and *Love in a Dry Season* was *Le Amore au Saison Seche*. So we went to the publishers and bought these things and later had them bound in these beautiful -- bound just as the manuscripts are in the collection here, same binder. But he gave those to me inscribed: "Bought, purchased with Huger in Paris" and put the date.

And by the way, again, I'm so grateful to be doing this talk with you in our _____ today because these are things that I wouldn't have taken -- you know, they're your memories, but to sit down

and make a study of them or make a daily time, set aside, to let things surface was a process that I had gone through in the last couple of months that resulted in me reliving a lot of these experiences; it's been really fun.

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We went to a lot of great restaurants in Paris: **Le Mie Louis** was one of their favorites. He also had a certain repertoire of dishes that he liked to prepare at the house here in Memphis. One was "boiled beef" as he called it. And we found a restaurant in Paris called The King of **Pot Haufuer** and it's basically the French version of boiled beef, his favorite dish to prepare at the house. So we went to this place -- and of course it wasn't as good as his but -- and then we went to all kinds -- something about Paris is you can remember every detail of every meal you have there. You could go to other places and maybe you remember the name of the restaurant but not what you ate; in Paris you remember every detail. That was something my mom pointed out to me later -- 20 years later you can remember what you had. But that was amazing experience.

And then later I lived in London: same thing, they would come to visit in London. But I don't want to carry on too long here.

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I want to give you a chance to talk with me.

Tim Huebner:

No no, it's all great.

Huger Foote:

But I guess I want to just throw out here that my father had a -- what I wrote here in my note is that art has a spiritual past. Something my dad talked with me about -- another thing I haven't mentioned, at a certain point he started making cassettes for me. I had mentioned that whole reel-to-reel process, that all occurred again once the cassette tape was invented. And by that time he was an expert at fitting music onto limited tape space and creating a little complete kit of that set of music, labeled -- with his dip pen would write the names of everything contained in the tape. And he made a collection of those for me one or two cassettes at a time,

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which he would give me and I'd store up in my -- so he was communing with something greater than him when he was in his study back there, working, lost in his favorite books. And as someone noted, he was one of the great readers of his time. I don't know of anyone that's read the quantities and as extensively as my dad.

But I do think that a first startling thing for anyone looking at him as a historian is that if you asked him what are your source materials here -- perhaps that's not the right word -- what books do you reference, he would start with Homer, given -- Thucydides. And then he said it many times: his training for writing history was reading Proust and Dickens and the list goes on.

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Which is what I think he might have had in mind when he told me, "Whatever you turn out to be is fine with me, even if you're pumping gas you'll be better at it if you read Shakespeare." So his concern for me was "Be a reader". And he went so far as to tell me there are two kinds of people in the world: those that read and those that don't. So I kind of swallowed hard and said, "Well, I'd better be the former."

Fortunately I was never threatened with punishment if I didn't read, but it was clearly a whole world that was open to me. So I'll stop there and then we can come back to stuff if we need to, or whatever.

Tim Huebner: This has been great.

Huger Foote: Rambling?

Tim Huebner: No, I mean this is perfect. These are wonderful anecdotes and stories about your father. And you touched on several things that are kind of on my list of questions. So some of those things also go back to -- and there'll be some other things and I'll let your comments speak for themselves.

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But I want to sort of take you back -- you were born in 1961?

Huger Foote: That's right, November 13th.

Tim Huebner: Exactly. So at that point was your familiar living at the Yeats Road house? Or had they already moved to East Parkway?

Huger Foote: We most to East Parkway when I was five, if I'm correct, which would have been around '66. I believe when I was born I was taken home to Yeats Road. Again, I'd have to fact check that information because I can't recall it from personal memory; I was a little young that day.

We also lived -- we had an interesting chapter -- my clear memories, when they begin to form a chronological order -- that all starts for me at around age four or five, really. So I'm kind of at

the house on Parkway when I start having linear memory. So the rest is these snapshots.

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We also lived in Raleigh, at a house that was in the woods and had a path that ran down through the woods to a neighbor's house and I was friends with those kids.

Tim Huebner:

When was that?

Huger Foote:

I don't know the dates. It would have been between '61 and '66.

Tim Huebner:

Oh okay.

Huger Foote:

This is the kind of recollection -- I'm almost sure it's the truth: one morning I got up and they had had a dinner party out in the woods. They set up a table 50 yards into the woods. But it was elegantly set: white tablecloth, real china, wineglasses and everything. And they'd had a dinner party out in the wood and then come back to the house afterwards. And they left it out there to clean up. And I was the first out there in the morning, I remember wandering out there and seeing this place where there'd been a dinner party out in the middle of the woods. I'm sure some of my parents' friends who are still here in Memphis might recall that event -- or maybe I dreamed it.

Tim Huebner:

You lived primarily in the house on East Parkway --

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Huger Foote:

That's right.

Tim Huebner:

-- that's where your earliest memories are. And so in the 1960s, the late Sixties, growing up, that's also a tumultuous time in the history of Memphis and the history of our country: 1968 Dr. King's killed here in Memphis. Was your father talking about any of these things? Do you have any sort of recollection at that young age, you were seven, eight years old when all these things were actually going on. Do you have any recollection of them talking about the civil rights movement or King or what was going on in Memphis at that time?

Huger Foote:

I know my dad was just disgusted and disappointed in all the things that were happening, the racism that was evident in the South all through that period. As you know, there's that

mentioning in volume two where he talks about how disgusted he is with Wallace and the rest of them.

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But my mother -- of course at that age I'm seven or eight years old -- my mother and father were -- makes me very happy for both of them that they found an intellectual partnership too. And there were long discussions going on between them. I was buying making - - playing with my first bicycles. So as those events occurred which you mentioned I don't have a specific memory but I know my dad was disturbed and disappointed in what was happening, certainly down in Mississippi.

Tim Huebner:

And there's the story I've seen that your father told of seeing Martin Luther King in the airport in Memphis just prior to his being assassinated, spring of 1968, and your father saying that he wished that he had walked over to him and spoken to him to tell

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him how he thought that he was doing great things. And he kind of looked back after King's death and was sad that he hadn't actually walked up to him -- but of course no one knew at that point that he only had a few more days left. So just a poignant and powerful story _____ your father.

Huger Foote:

I mean just the fact that we lived in the town where Martin Luther King was assassinated was a defining moment in anyone's life who was here, I think. I knew something -- I was seven years old at the time, or so, and I knew something very serious had happened. And of course lived in the -- we all lived in the shadow of that thing -- geographical karma, as I call it. Yeah, it's interesting that my father's working on a history of the Civil War, as these events are unfolding here

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and the relationship between the two is interesting to study.

Tim Huebner:

So in the 1970s then, as you were starting to grow up, and your father is in the middle -- by the Seventies, up to the third volume in the trilogy, finished the second volume just a few years after you were born. So he's hard at work on that third volume in the Seventies, also writing *September, September* which comes out at about the same time as the volume _____ the 1970s. This was a very busy time, then, for your father. So I mean he must have been in there just writing day after day, just like you were talking about.

Huger Foote:

That's right. There was a little note by the phone, it was one of those old-fashioned rotary phones and it was on the wall, it had a long cord that would tangle up and you could pull it across the

kitchen while you're stirring -- you could stir a pot. And there was a little note that he had typed up very carefully on his typewriter, and Scotch-taped by the phone saying, "Mr. Foote is not --" this is what -- he said, "whenever anybody calls for me read this to them." It said,

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"Mr. Foote --" I wish I still had that little thing and had saved it but it kind of crumbled away over time, it said, "Mr. Foote is not to be disturbed and will not be available to receive phone calls until 5:00 p.m." And this was in a house where there was no secretary or anything. It was just his way of stating -- it was for the general public. It was also an understanding within the house that he was back there working and you didn't run back in there and disturb him.

So yeah, it was -- you know, there's this thing you'll encounter, anyone that looks at the collection encounters too, this remarkable thing of his method of taking blank, white sheets of paper and using this thing that looks like a medieval manuscript, calligraphic writing of the manuscript. And as you see in those manuscripts or the novels, there's almost no corrections. So he must have done drafts until he came to the final handwritten copy, which he would then type up. And as his editor, Robert Loomis, at

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Random House points out, he didn't allow anyone with a red pen to come near his finished -- what he sent them was to be published as-is. Which is -- and so someone had to proofread it for errors but there would almost be none. And there was certainly -- not allow any rewrite or -- everything was so carefully done.

So it's a wonder that he -- he had a growing, teenage boy in the house as a lot of this is occurring. And of course I'm discovering Jimi Hendrix or whatever. I think we all knew that he needed to be left alone back there because I knew something important was happening, as I say.

Tim Huebner:

Did you ever see or sense any of his frustration as a writer? I mean because after he finishes the trilogy and *September, September*, into the 1980s

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he's working on *Two Gates to the City* but is never able to finish that. So is that kind of a difficult period in your father's life as a writer, in the 1980s as he's kind of struggling to put all that on paper?

Huger Foote:

It's an interesting -- this is just right off the top of my head as you ask me the question -- I might add more to this later, but of course his being the voracious reader that he was he could fall back on reading as a spiritual practice to sustain him. And I think that a person whose *raison d'etre* is to be in the act of writing, as you say, for that to stop and to find yourself -- could be a sort of personal hell for somebody.

My father was busy reading back there.

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The making of those reel-to-reel tapes are a good example of an activity he would -- and I think that what I like to hope is that he understand that all the things that he -- this unfinished final novel, *Two Gates to the City* I hope that he knew that he had accomplished much of what he had set out to do, but he began that novel, of course, long before he started *The War* -- that he had accomplished so much of that in the writing of the war that he was at peace with the fact that he had produced something that was as supernaturally this miraculous prose masterpiece in addition to being this history of the Civil War, that that would be enough to say, "Okay, now I'm going to relax and enjoy some music and read some books."

But I would have to say that I never saw any

[0:43:00]

outward forms -- my dad -- it occurred to me at one point when he achieved the great -- of course you have to -- two things happened. One, he had angioplasty, he had a heart issue, which was, thanks to modern medicine, dealt with and he lived on very happily and in good health. But along with that came the request from his doctor to get some exercise. So he began, in a very disciplined, routine way, walk. And he mapped -- and I would walk with him sometimes -- mapped out a course, he left the driveway, went up Avery, up Robert Drive to Union, down Union, over the viaduct, Hollywood viaduct all the way down to Parkway, then back along Parkway to the house. And he recorded those cassettes that I mentioned he was making, these were the days before CD Walkman, these were cassette Walkman. He had one of those clipped on his belt and he would -- he didn't -- and he would put on

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some great music, and then go out and take this walk.

So one of the -- it was very fortunate -- everyone knows the benefits of exercise, both for your mental health and your general well-being. So he -- and also the strange thing about my dad, he loved really, really hot weather. So on days when I would be

reluctant to do anything, other than kind of run from an air-conditioned house to an air-conditioned movie theater, you know, those 100-degree days, he would really relish going for those long walks. And he's come in, wringing with sweat, and he wore what I think if someone say him would think was funny, he had tube socks that came up to his knees, shoes that were for comfort primarily, not for speed. And so there was that.

And then, of course, the Burn series, and the world recognized him as this literary genius. But I think I want to say this about the Burn series too:

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what people realized is you can't talk about this in an interview that I read, that my dad's knowledge of all the characters and the facts of the war were vast, it covered any area of the war, any topic related to the Civil War that you wanted to bring up, he would step up to it and embrace it a something he knew by heart. And that was the process that enabled him to sit down and write in the way that he could, with this living, breathing text.

So in a sense you've got, in those Burns interviews, I think, the same miracle occurring that you find in his writing, which is that he had assimilated and digested all the basic information to the point where it was his own, and he could speak just as if you'd ask me what my favorite color is, he knew the answers to any question you might bring up because he'd gone back the study into making the facts his own.

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And it came out in those interviews.

Tim Huebner:

How did the Burns series change his life? How did it change your life?

Huger Foote:

It was very exciting. I was living in New York on Hudson Street at the time, and I had a roommate, Parker Philips, who was a fellow Memphian. And Parker said -- my dad had told me I'm going to be on a PBS series. I'd been at the house on trips home and I'd seen Ken and his crew there, but we had had crews before from local television or Library Channel, things like that. And people would come to the house to interview my dad. But obviously they hadn't become this huge success in the way that series beat all the major networks, the ratings after that thing were -- I forget what the number is, 30 million people?

Tim Huebner:

Forty million people.

Huger Foote: Forty million people saw it. So no one knew that was going to happen when these young men were there,

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taping these interviews.

I was in New York at the time, the thing began -- Parker said -- I said, "Well I'll watch an episode of it, and I can always see the rest of it later," was kind of my approach to it. I was busy being a 20-whatever-year-old in New York. I sat down and within the first half hour I realized something was happening here, that my dad was -- something exciting was happening. And he kept appearing again and again. And so of course I stayed home and watched all the episodes as they ran for the first time because I was thrilled by it all. And very proud of my dad, filial pride abounding.

So there was a big change -- most of it was -- it was just a lot of fun. Mom and I were excited for my dad, the mail pouring in. I could mention various things.

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I was living in London at the time **Brian Lande** did that wonderful interview with him for C-SPAN which is such a fascinating interview. It's another source of treasure -- it's not that hidden, you can find it online, that's sort of thing, but I watched that with an old friend of my father's that he'd put me in touch with when I was moving to London -- Marguerite is her name, and we watched it together. So I had these experiences.

But there were fun things, like we'd be in New York and we'd go to a nice restaurant and the owner or the person in the restaurant would come out and introduce himself to my dad and make sure that we -- our money was no good in some of these restaurants. People would stop us on the street, and as long as they weren't asking for him to sign a book or something my father was very happy to talk to them.

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And I would just think, my dad, who never really was a --

self-promotion was something that he could care less about. His focus was on creating the books. And he never -- I don't think my dad probably ever called a publicist and told them what to do, or worried about whether the advertising campaign was going to be up to speed. All that stuff which most creative people are concerned about as they're putting their work in the world my father just didn't concern himself with that stuff.

It was like this perfect final chapter for this Ken Burns series with my father to enjoy the recognition in his lifetime. The content of what he created would have spoken for itself and then risen over time. But what a gift to our whole family for that to happen while my father lived so he could enjoy that in the last 20 years of his life. It's a smiling of fate, you know?

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Tim Huebner: You mentioned some of those fan letters, and obviously we have a lot of that here in the archives, and to be able to read what people were writing to your father is extraordinary. We have several hundred letters that he received, and I'm sure that's not all of them because he probably did not save all of them.

Huger Foote: Yeah.

Tim Huebner: But extraordinary.

Huger Foote: As you know, the Walker-Percy letters he only started saving them after a certain point when he found out Walker was saving his. There's a lot of interesting correspondence I'm sure that my dad probably didn't save over the whole course of his life. But yeah, those fan letters would come in double armloads: boxes and boxes, phone calls. I mean he was on "The Tonight Show" for God's sake, with Johnny Carson.

Tim Huebner: Right, and he never took his name out of the phone books.

Huger Foote: No.

Tim Huebner: So the phone calls kept on coming.

Huger Foote: Yeah.

Tim Huebner: Did he enjoy all of that?

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Or after a while was it just sort of bothersome?

Huger Foote: He finally just allowed the answering machine to do his job. He didn't always -- but at first he wanted to take the calls. He didn't want to be someone who didn't take his calls. He didn't like the idea of being unavailable. Which of course today is -- everyone's protecting their privacy; he was not wanting to be someone who didn't list his number in the book because -- something to do with him growing up in Mississippi Delta; an unlisted number would be

a pretentious thing or something. He didn't want to do that. Of course he never had a cell phone or anything. So there was a time when the phone would ring and he would say a word I won't repeat and turn the volume down on the TV if we were watching the news or whatever and go over and answer is an and say, "Hello?" and then he'd occasionally say, "Leave me alone," and hang up.

[0:52:00]

If it was after nine o'clock the person was in for a shock when they -- he was very clear about not calling at that hour. He's funny that way. And that started back when I was in grade school. In eighth grade there's a lot of phone conversation between eighth graders. We'd talk to our girlfriends for an hour a night kind of thing is what you did after you finished your homework. And if these people called that number after a certain hour my father would give them just a rain of fire down on them.

But back to the fans: yeah, he would take the calls. And sometimes they were very interesting people. That's one thing: all the people I've come in contact with, vast majority of the people who've ever approached me to talk about my dad or expressed their appreciation for his work or whatever have been great people.

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So he was open to them. That's a long answer to a short question. Sorry.

Tim Huebner:

Well this has been great. We've talked for an hour and heard a lot of interesting stories and insights and wonderful memories with us. And so we're very grateful for that. So we're going to conclude the interview and then I'll have a chance to go meet with the class.

Huger Foote:

I'm so excited to meet those students.

Tim Huebner:

Thank you very much Huger.

Huger Foote:

Thank you.

[End of Audio]

Huger Foote was born in 1961, in Memphis, Tennessee, and has held numerous solo exhibitions in London, New York, Paris, and other cities, including his hometown of Memphis. His work hangs in many public and private collections. This is his second monograph since "My Friend from Memphis", published by Booth Clibborn Editions in 2001. Huger Lee FOOTE was born on month day 1856, at birth place, Mississippi, to Hezekiah William FOOTE and Lucinda Frances FOOTE (born DADE). Hezekiah was born on December 17 1813, in Chester County, South Carolina. Lucinda was born in 1821, in Virginia. Huger had 8 siblings: Ann CLEMENTS (born FOOTE), Catherine Lewis PATTY (born FOOTE) and 6 other siblings. Huger married Kate FOOTE (born SHELBY). They had 2 sons: Huger Lee FOOTE and one other child.