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Murphy Station: A Memoir From The American South



Synopsis

“Murphy Station is a well-told coming-of-age story. It conveys a deep sense of place, and articulates the everyday ways in which the etiquette of Jim Crow was learned and enacted, and eventually questioned and even challenged.” —Jason Sokol, author of *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945–1975*

In the southern Georgia of 1950, Murphy Station is a community marked only by two country stores, two Baptist churches, and a graveyard. Farming is the way of life, and segregation is in full force. Welcome to Deep Dixie. David Donovan is a young white boy growing up in Murphy Station where even the best farmers are cash poor, and those who work for them, usually blacks, are poorer still. In adult conversation, the main topics are weather, crops, and politics. Within the last category, it’s agreed that the main threats facing America are two: communism and integration. So far as young Dave knows, this isn’t unusual, but already there are changes afoot. In this richly detailed memoir, laced with both humor and tragedy, we see how those changes affect Dave in subtle but ultimately profound ways. Coming of age in a world with the axiom “no boy a chicken, no man a coward,” Dave has the sorts of boyhood adventures common to the rural South: exploits with firearms, encounters with angry animals, challenges from friends, and a growing interest in girls. As he has these adventures, he also works in the field alongside black farmhands, some of whom teach him vital lessons about the realities of their lives—lessons that begin to challenge the prejudices and preconceptions of his time and place. By the late 1950s the civil rights movement has become a major force in the South; yet, as David enters high school in 1960 the customs of segregation still hold sway, persisting even when he leaves for college. In his first year away from home, he witnesses the national trauma of the Kennedy assassination, which blunts the promises of Camelot. In Vietnam a few years later, he sees those promises collapse entirely. Returning in 1970 to a Murphy Station much changed from what it was twenty years earlier, David Donovan finds himself transformed as well. David Donovan is the pseudonym of Terry Turner, professor emeritus of urology at the University of Virginia. He is the author of more than 120 basic science articles on male reproductive biology and of a previous book, *Once a Warrior King: Memoirs of an Officer in Vietnam*.

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Customer Reviews

“Murphy Station is a well-told coming-of-age story. It conveys a deep sense of place, and articulates the everyday ways in which the etiquette of Jim Crow was learned and enacted, and eventually questioned and even challenged.” —Jason Sokol, author of *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945–1975*

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I've long considered "*Once a Warrior King*," Donovan's first book, to be the best account of the war in Vietnam written by an officer who actually served there, so when I heard that he had written a book about growing up in the rural south, I couldn't wait to get a copy. As with his first book, "*Murphy Station*" is a well-written, intelligent account of a turbulent time in American history. Whether they grew up in rural America or in downtown New York city, anyone who enjoys a slice of American history served up as well as it is done here by Donovan, will relish this book. Mr Donovan, you've done it again---a great effort !

Great book about the South. Brought back many memories. David Dononan's first book, *Once a Warrior King*, is a very gripping book about his experiences in Vietnam. It is a must read. Should be a movie.

Anyone growing up in the south in the forties, fifties, and sixties will know that Mr. Donvan describes it exactly as it was. . . even down to the type of dirt under the house to the racial divide. I remember getting Johnny Cookies out of a jar at Murphy's Station. An excellent read!

Murphy Station by David Donovan What a great book! When I started writing what I liked about *Murphy Station* I ended up with over 6,000 words. So now I must pick and chose the most memorable parts of the book to share with you. This book is fresh off the printing press by someone who grew up in Murphy just 5 miles south of Moultrie . If you want to read stories that took place in the 1950's and 1960's set in any small Southern agricultural County, this is the book for you to read. As David states, "This is a story of *Murphy Station*, not the story. Names have been changed to prevent real people from being charged with actions they did not commit." He fesses up about many of the things little boys do and get away with. Maybe some of his family didn't know about these

things until they read his book. He also tells us about getting a spanking. "We got the lecture again about good boys needing to mind their parents and how it hurt her more to give us the punishment than it hurt us to receive it. Yeah, sure, we believed that! Then we got the spanking. It was for disobeying the general rule against playing with dangerous machinery on the farm." Does this sound familiar? Maybe we heard it from our parents or we might even have told it to our children. He shares a story about his first airplane ride. He was bussed from Sunset School in Moultrie to Moultrie's airport and climbed aboard a DC-3 and flew to Albany to visit the zoo. "That afternoon when I climbed aboard the DC-3 for the trip home I walked to my seat with the swagger of John Wayne heading for another mission over enemy territory. I was now an experienced flier. I knew what it meant to be lifted into the air, to see the world from the clouds, and to share the wind with eagles. And this time, I would know how to buckle my own seat belt." Speaking of clouds, I think all of us have laid down in a grassy field and looked at the clouds, but did we ever describe them as David can? "Clouds with their bottoms planed off by some invisible thermo cline would start puffing their bodies like pillows about to pop their seams. They were nature's galleons gliding through an ocean of sky, guns run out and booming." Another story begins.. "Then we heard it, faintly at first, then louder, taa, t-t-taa, t-t-ta ta ta --- the fanfare of Rossini's "William Tell Overture." Hooves thundered, pulses quickened. Heroes were coming! The announcer would begin, his voice tense with excitement: "A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust, and a hearty..." I am sure you remember the rest. David also shares something close to heart - his first kiss. "A gnat could have knocked me over." What imagery! Stories of fishing, taking a date to Gargano's in Albany, and working on a farm keep you entertained from cover to cover.

In his customarily lean style Donovan utilizes simple, declarative sentences in this book to address some complex moral issues. Woven into his humorous and warm stories of rural life in South Georgia of the fifties and sixties are opportunities for the reader to contemplate two primary things, hobgoblins created by politics and the age-old tensions in the relationships between people of disparate ethnic backgrounds. In addition there crops up in some stories an issue very particular to the tobacco growing areas of the South, and in these Donovan gives us direct access into the psyche of one who grew up on a tobacco producing farm in Georgia and then became a university research scientist understanding clearly the deadly effects of tobacco consumption. In all of this he gives us reason in our contemplations to have hope. He guides us in his stories to focus on change, change in attitudes and change in relationships. The changes echo unmistakably out of the pages of Murphy Station. It is obvious that Donovan is close to his subject. His affinity for the people,

places, and institutions of his hometown shine through clearly enough. His intelligent approach to difficult subject matter gives the stories weight. In this book Donovan has created a valuable addition to the rich tradition of Southern literature.

"Murphy Station," David Donovan's account of the Deep South in the 50s and 60s, was one of a life and time I was only one generation removed from, but has simultaneously felt so far and so close. This fascinating book highlights many of the struggles the South has fought -- and is fighting -- to overcome, but more importantly it gives an intimate look into the lives and lifestyles of an important time, place and people in American history. I grew up in Georgia, but have since moved north to Washington, DC. Through "Murphy Station," Mr. Donovan allowed me to view southern Georgia through my parent's eyes. Much I did not recognize, but much more reminded me how much I love home. Thank you Mr. Donovan for telling this story and bringing me to this place.

"Murphy Station" is just what I was expecting - a wonderful book about memories of family, the everyday experiences of growing up on a farm in south Georgia in the 50's and 60's, and a better understanding of how it was and felt at that time in our country's history. The author is my cousin, I'm very proud to say, and my family's visits to his home (the Turner homestead where my mother grew up) and the homes of the many aunts, uncles, and cousins who lived nearby were the highlights of my life. It's a thrill for me to read the adventures and escapades that Terry (a.k.a. David) shares with us in this book...not all the ones that I was part of but what I missed and those are even better. I could not put it down! I loved it! (The oldest Yankee cousin)

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