



George W. Gardner

Dr. John Neihardt died Nov. 3 in Columbia at the age of 92. His credits include being chosen the poet laureate of Nebraska, three honorary doctoral degrees, chancellorship of the American Academy of Poets. In 1936, the National Poetry Center named him the foremost poet of the nation. But many alumni remember him best as a master teacher.

By JOHN THOMAS RICHARDS

*"Let me live out my years in heat of blood!
Let me die drunken with the dreamer's wine!...
And grant me, when I face the grisly Thing,
One haughty cry to pierce the gray Perhaps!
O let me be a tune-sweet fiddlestring
That feels the Master Melody — and snaps!"*

Dr. John G. Neihardt, my old friend and mentor met death calmly. He spent his last two weeks with his daughter, Hilda Petri, in her home north of Columbia, refrained from alarming his friends when he knew that his biological clock was almost run down, and died quietly at 3:30 on the afternoon of November 3 before any ambulance could arrive. He told me a few years ago that he had given up the concept expressed above, of meeting death as a "grisly Thing" with a cry of defiance. "Death," he said, "is going to be the greatest adventure in my life. When I was young, I called it a grisly thing, but I don't feel that way any more. Death will come like a mother, bending over me and holding me kindly, with affection."

Since he came to the University of Missouri at Columbia in 1949 as Poet in Residence and lecturer in English, Neihardt's effect upon nearly two decades of students has been profound.

In the first place, Neihardt's prose sang like his rolling poetry, and he had the stage presence, from years on the lecture circuit, to wrap any audience in the words he flung so well. He may not have been a born actor—he has told me briefly of the early tension and stage fright which first accompanied his public speaking tours—but he took his friend Volney Streamer's advice and practiced his hypnotic public readings and speeches until he could keep an audience completely in sympathy.

His personality was charismatic and could grip and hold the undivided attention of his classes, some of which overflowed the old auditorium at the west end of the library. These were his Epic America classes, in which he taught from his *A Cycle of the West*. There were smaller classes in literary criticism, too—and graduate students responded with hard work and unflagging enthusiasm.

In the second place, Neihardt was one of the first men to teach American Indian Literature in any university. As an old Sioux longhair once said, "His skin is white, but his heart is as Sioux as ours." The folksinger, Buffy St. Marie, said, "Neihardt is the only white man who ever told the truth about the Indian." My Hopi friend, Dwight Lomayessa, once told me, "I don't know much about the Sioux, Tom, but I can tell that Neihardt knows what he is talking about. He knows how any Indian's mind works."

Other white men have lived with the tribes and have come to understand their cultures; among the early trappers in the days of the fur

Neihardt



The kind of kitchen cooks dream about is a working reality in Claiborne's East Hampton house. Steel fixtures, old wall tiles and copper pots and pans give it real character.

Claiborne 'Bread' Comes from Cookbooks

By BARBIE & PJ JOHNSON

"Most people thought when Craig Claiborne said goodbye to the *New York Times* a couple of years ago, he'd be up to his ankles in poverty. Although he does not particularly care for baking, he is, in modern parlance and by his own admission up to his bottom in bread. Money, that is. Thanks to cookbooks"—Craig Claiborne

It was a warm, sunny Sunday afternoon in East Hampton. We stood on Craig Claiborne's deck outside the living room looking down to a small beach and Gardiners Bay. We'd just enjoyed a casual, but delicious lunch, champagne, and much conversation about the University of Missouri back in the 1940s and Claiborne's subsequent, though not immediate, rise to fame as one of the world's best known food critics. We said we thought we had better be going, as the ride back into New York City on Sundays is always an ordeal. Claiborne asked us a number of times to stay. His other guests had left and he seemed rather lonely. Then he sat down at his typewriter, a permanent fixture in his kitchen, and typed the above. "Here's the lead to your story," he said. "How about it?"

His lead is not at all how we envisioned this article beginning. But as a journalist we respected his contribution, and after later re-reading it, we realized what a telling statement he had written.

Claiborne is a man who wielded great power when he was at the *New York Times*. His enthusiastic review of a restaurant literally could mean financial and social success to its owners. A negative review could be the kiss of death. His expense account at the *Times* allowed, actually required, him to be a world traveler. He's dined in practically every restaurant in the

world worth mentioning. But despite this, Claiborne at 53, is a quiet, modest man who has never really gotten over his childhood insecurities. There is a lot of pride in his 5-9 frame and he doesn't want anyone to think he's sitting in the grave, as he put it, waiting to die.

Craig Claiborne was born in Sunflower, Miss., in 1920. As a boy growing up in Indianola about halfway between Jackson and Memphis, he spent a lot of time in the kitchen. "My mother ran a boarding house and I loved to cook. It was largely a children's lib reaction. I wanted to cook better than my mother." The memories however aren't pleasant. He says he spent much of his life in abject poverty and that the reason for his cooking competition was his deep dislike of his mother. To this day Claiborne goes away at Christmas because of bad childhood memories.

He enrolled in pre-med at Mississippi State College but only stuck it out for two years. As he says: "I hated pre-med. I threw up anytime I smelled formaldehyde."

Claiborne transferred to the University of Missouri. "I was very unaware as a kid, but I knew Missouri was the oldest school of journalism and I loved to write poetry, so I decided to become a journalist."

The years in Columbia are remembered as somewhat haphazard, directionless times. "I had no real goals and only passing grades. I went through more or less unnoticed," Claiborne says, not to be modest, but to explain the phenomenon of many who later become famous. There is a sort of drifting of the spirit while they are in college. They are the ones professors call "late bloomers."

Claiborne remembers two instances where his creative writing ability was shot down. One was a musical he wrote for Savitar Frolics. "It was really racy for 1941. It had to do with a

football player who runs around with a bad dame." His work was not produced.

The other creative put down was as a J-School student selling advertising for the *Missourian*. One of his accounts was Wolfe Brothers. "I wrote what I thought was the greatest headline. 'You too could be a Wolf in Wolfe's clothing.' They rejected it."

Graduation in 1942 was followed by three years in the Navy in Europe and the Far East. After the war he went to Chicago—which he loved—until it started closing in on him. "I got to know too many people. Sunflower was a town of 250 and I hadn't come to Chicago to relive my Mississippi days."

When the Korean War broke out he went back into the Navy. The interruption proved a turning point. In 1953 Claiborne followed his earlier inclinations toward cooking and enrolled in Ecole Hoteliere, the professional school of Swiss hotel keepers in Lausanne.

The experience landed him a job with *Gourmet* magazine and then as part of the team of Seranne & Gaden, a pr firm specializing in foodservice. All the while Claiborne had his eye on the food critic's job at the *New York Times*. When the opening came he hesitated applying as no man had ever held the position. However, after learning that they'd rejected a number of applicants he made his move. "When I joined the *Times* it was the first time in my life I'd made as much as \$5,000 a year." That was about 15 years ago.

Today Claiborne collects an annual six figure income from just the royalties of his cookbooks. He publishes a monthly newsletter journal with his friend Pierre Franey, former chef of Le Pavillon. The journal sells for \$50 a year and has subscribers from all over the world. Claiborne is a food consultant for *Travel & Leisure* magazine and is constantly asked to take on special projects and speaking engagements. For the most part, he declines. However in less than a month's time he made a demonstration in Ft. Wayne, Ind. (he gave his fee to the Fine Arts Museum there) and helped host a 12-day Culinary Cruise on the S. S. France to the Caribbean. In the last three years he's been written about in such magazines as *House & Garden*, *Esquire*, *National Review*, *Ladies Home Journal* (three times) and *Harpers Bazaar*. When he's not working he's entertaining. His guests range from Helen Hayes, Iris Murdoch, Willie Morris, Lillian Gish to Henry Creel, a 1931 University of Missouri graduate and former Shell Oil executive, and Burton Rouche, another Missouri graduate and well-known writer.

Despite his notoriety Claiborne classmates would undoubtedly find him much the same today as he was in 1942. Sensitive. Scrupulously honest. Terribly enthusiastic about things that interest him. Somewhat self demeaning. A kind and loyal friend. □