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Christmas list starters: These books make great gifts, including for yourself

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Columnist

Don Rose, a Cherokee-born Air Force major and technology maker, has written a novel about one of the most colorful characters in our history: Quill Rose, Don's great-great-uncle. Rose is the moonshiner whom Horace Kephart featured in his 1913 classic "Our Southern Highlanders."

In Don's novel, we first burst in on a Cades Cove cabin scene, 1841, with Rebecca Rose about to give birth to Quill, her sixth child. Her husband arrives late with Viola Ballard, best midwife around.

"I'm mighty sorry to be so long in getting here," Viola says, "but I was a far piece from our place when yore man showed up. I was helping Fred Bishop neuter some of his yearlings."

Quill's childhood unfolds, full of farm work, music, woods play and society. Then, at age 9, he hears his father say, "This here land is wore out."

The family moves to Cherokee County, near Uncle John, and the story enters the universe of Rose's legend. Whiskey-making, wilderness, feuds and family history enliven Don Rose's well-told tale, which includes Quill's involvement in the one instance of scalping during the Civil War.

Smoky threesome

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, basking also in Ken Burns' documentary, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea." Libby Kephart Hargrave, Horace Kephart's great-granddaughter, has released Kephart's recently discovered novel, "Smoky Mountain Magic," an adventure-romance that serves up a feast of local lore.

A bounty of local lore can also be found in Jim Casada's new book, "Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park." Its geographical arrangement, glossy paper, color photos and big, sharp typeface say "guidebook," yet it is much more. It brings together a veteran outdoorsman's lifelong learning about nature, legends and woodland sports.

George Ivey's debut novel, "Up River," emerges, bringing another interesting point of view, that of a preservationist brought into a mountain community to develop support for river protection. Ivey's fictional river, the Akwanee, draws on his north Georgia experience with the Conasauga.

Like his hero, Peter Bailey, Ivey had been a conservation representative in those parts. Subsequently, he headed the Friends of the Smokies' development efforts, and then went solo to consult and write.

"I had no idea that trying to do good could make me feel so bad," the novel begins, with Bailey sounding like the protagonist in a noir movie speaking into a tape recorder before launching into his flashback. Bailey narrates his encounters with locals, giving rise to frank talk about everything from hogsuckers and no-till drills to courtship options.

Two Duncans

At the recent Great Smoky Mountains Book Fair in Sylva, authors Pamela Duncan, Fred Chappell, Ron Rash and Vicki Lane (look up their books) participated in a discussion on "A Sense of Place."

Duncan's novels, including "Plant Life," depict mountain mill towns. The panel agreed that, for a long time, the disappearance of that culture has been going unnoticed.

Now we can add another author who's remedying that memory lapse: Julia Nunnally Duncan, a Marion poet and fiction writer. Her new novel, "When Day Is Done," lights a spark by connecting a prodigal, college-educated daughter of a mill worker with a new love interest, a cemetery caretaker, whose mother lives in a cabin in Spruce Pine.

"You ever caught a lightnin' bug in a jar, Esther?" the boyfriend's co-worker asks the heroine.

"That's the way you kill something, Esther," he continues, "Catch it, take it from its family, make it yours."

Duncan makes a good choice by focusing on the upheavals that go along with cultural transition.

Rob Neufeld writes the weekly book feature for the Sunday Citizen-Times. He is the author and editor of four books, and the creator of the Web site The Read on WNC at <http://thereadonwnc.ning.com>. He can be reached at RNeufeld@charter.net and 505-1973. Visit The Read on WNC to see other books of this region and what's being discussed by local book groups, as well as to interact with authors and readers.

Additional Facts

BOOKS REVIEWED

"Quill"

by Major Don Rose (Ivy House hardcover, 2009, 162 pages, \$22.95)

"Smoky Mountain Magic"

by Horace Kephart, with a foreword by Libby Kephart Hargrave and introduction by George Ellison (Gatlinburg, TN: Great Smoky Mountains Association, Oct. 2009, 205 pages; paperback \$12.95, hardcover, \$19.95).

"Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park:

An Insider's Guide to a Pursuit of Passion," by Jim Casada (High Country Pr. trade paperback, 2009, 448 pages).

"Up River:

A Novel of Attempted Restoration" by George Ivey (Dog Ear Publishing, Indianapolis, trade paperback, 2009, 300 pages, \$16.95).

"When Day Is Done"

by Julia Nunnally Duncan (March Street Pr trade paper, 2009).
