

Books

Southern titles to consider

From Styron, short stories, letters.

Rosanne Cash's music, Confederate journal also new.

By **Gina Webb**
For the AJC

In search of upcoming fall books by Southern writers, we didn't have to go too far to find plenty of great titles. The problem was figuring out how many we could politely stack on our bedside tables at once. We think these titles deserve a closer look.

"I've finally pretty much decided what to write next — a novel based on Nat Turner's rebellion," 26-year-old William Styron confided to his father in a letter on May 1, 1952. Collected in **"Letters to My Father"** (September) are more than 100 that Styron wrote between 1943 and 1953, sharing his thoughts about writing and his work. Also out this fall, five stories Styron wrote about his stint in the Marines, collected in **"The Suicide Run."** (Random House, October)

Jeannette Walls' heart-rending memoir, "The Glass Castle," made us wring our hands in despair. Happily, her upcoming **"Half Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel"** (Scribner, October) tells the story of her spirited grandmother, Lily Casey Smith, who raised two children while running a gas station, then running a ranch and even

running bootleg liquor to make ends meet. Sounds like our kind of mom.

Robert Hicks ("The Widow of the South") stays on track with another close-up look at a little-known aspect of the Confederacy. **"A Separate Country"** (Grand Central, September) is a story-within-a-story that traces the post-Civil War life of John Bell Hood, a notoriously callous Southern general whose secret journal reveals a closet romantic.

Contributor Russell Banks calls flash fiction "little stories that leave the reader anxious in a particularly satisfying way." **"Long Story Short: Flash Fiction by Sixty-Five of North Carolina's Finest Writers"** fills the bill, offering bite-size and provocative short shorts by Banks, Haven Kimmel, Jim Grimsley, Clyde Edgerton, Lee Smith, Daniel Wallace and more. (University of North Carolina Press, September)

If you're Catholic, there's probably a nun in your past you'd like to take a ruler to — or worse. In Gail Godwin's **"Unfinished Desires"** (Random House, December), a fateful encounter between Mother Ravenel and a student at an all-girls school in the North Carolina mountains reverberates for decades in this layered story about friendship, rivalries, redemption and memory.

Flaky Southern belle Leelee Satterfield's husband sweet-talks her into leaving her beloved Memphis to run an inn in chilly rural Vermont in Lisa Patton's novel **"Whistlin'**

Dixie in a Nor'easter" (Thomas Dunne Books, September). But when Leelee is left swindled and snowbound, she's forced to confront the true depth of her Southern grit.

Author Sue Monk Kidd ("Secret Life of Bees") had just turned 50 when she knocked around Greece and France with her 20-something daughter, Ann Kidd Taylor. In **"Traveling With Pomegranates: A Mother-Daughter Story"** (Viking, September), Ann struggles with her life post-college, while Sue tries to figure out what the heck to do with her vision of a swarm of bees.

In 1973, Johnny Cash gave his daughter Rosanne a list of 100 songs that he felt every young musician should know. Michael Stieff's **"Always Been There: Rosanne Cash, 'The List,' and the Spirit of Southern Music"** (Da Capo Press, October) tells the inside story of the album that finally resulted from that list and paints an unforgettable portrait of Rosanne and her lifelong search for her legacy.

Do we have an instinct for compassion? Or are we all just candidates for the next season of "Survivor"? In **"The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society"** (Random House, September), Emory University professor and acclaimed author of "Our Inner Ape" Frans de Waal explores how empathy comes naturally to elephants, dolphins, chimpanzees and, yes, even humans.



