

Memory's Keep

Books by James Everett Kibler

Our Fathers' Fields: A Southern Story

Child to the Waters

Walking Toward Home

Memory's Keep

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James Everett Kibler



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*To the memory of my mother,
Juanita Connelly Kibler (21 November 1921-1 October 2004)*

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Preface

Memory's Keep can be read on its own. It has a beginning and end, but it's also the second volume of my Clay Bank County series begun with *Walking Toward Home*. When I finished that first work in 2003, I had more questions about the characters than that novel had answered. One of the leading ones was, "Why on earth is Trig Tinsley such an independent cuss? . . . What has led him to be such a 'one-of-a-kind' in a 'one-size-fits-all' world?" Everyone in the first novel realises Trig has achieved that much-honoured status of the Character. He's already become a legend that way when we first meet him there.

We in the South love our Characters. That fact says much about our tolerance and valuing of individuality. We take pride in them at the same time we may not be brave enough to resist conforming ourselves. The more we conform, the more we love our Characters.

"Oh, how sad!" we're always saying. "All the Characters are dying out." We regret the fact, but just as we've thought that the last one has passed from the scene, other folks in

our acquaintance quite unexpectedly start exhibiting traits and behaviour for which there just doesn't seem to be any good reason at all. Soon, some of these folks are well on their way to becoming Characters as unique as those who went before, and the genus *curmudgeon* is preserved.

Memory's Keep takes Trig back more than twenty-five years in time, to the mid-1970s, when he's a young man in his twenties making the choices and gaining the experiences that will make him who he is in *Walking Toward Home*. That first volume, set in 2003, had introduced us to three friends, given equal time: Chauncey, Kildee, and Trig, all quite different personalities—a kind of id, ego, superego sort of a thing—but with place and values in common too. This second volume, however, is Trig's.

So then *Memory's Keep* is a flashback, within which we go even deeper in time—in fact, over a century and a half deeper. Pull a Southern thread, and the whole unravels, to be rewoven again in a sturdier fabric. Everything connects and leads both backward and onward at one and the same time. In the rewoven creation, both design and pattern are there, but still not ever quite clearly revealed. Such is life—the unsolvable mystery that it is.

Like the keep of a castle, the memory is the most interior and sacred of places, the inviolate, unassailable centre that best protects our humanity and says who we are. Scientists don't like memory very much. It's the province of art, and, in an age when science has come to dominate, it must be defended above all. Momentary man, living for

the gratification of the now, doesn't care much for memories. He finds them instead a threat, an inconvenience, and a hindrance besides—something inefficient and impractical, and best to be rid of. The folks of the Clay Bank County series, whatever their shortcomings, are not momentary women and men. Provincials of place, they might certainly be, but never provincials of time. They do not inhabit a throwaway world.

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