



RAY WESTBROOK

THE A-J REMEMBERS

Lubbock writer finishes first novel

Write of passage

Nilah Turner, who grew up in mid-20th century Littlefield, received the first shipment of her first novel on Thursday. She is a writer.

And as to exactly how that came to be, she isn't entirely sure: "I have no idea."

She does know that she started with a penchant for writing notes as a student in the Littlefield schools. There was an innate ability to write and that also gave her a job after high school with the Levelland newspaper. She moved to the Littlefield newspaper in 1968.

In the 1970s, she became a stringer for the Avalanche-Journal, and helped A-J staffer Tanner Laine with events in the region.

She is married to Bill Turner, who had owned three South Plains newspapers, including the one in Littlefield, before retiring 20 years ago. Their home now is in Lubbock.

Bill remembers, "Nilah was the most prolific feature writer we ever had."

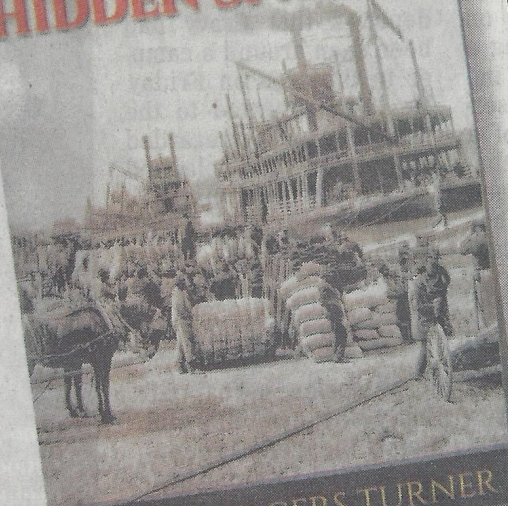
But she wasn't especially impressed with the pay reporters were receiving, and decided to try another facet of writing.

"She found out she could make a lot more money in freelancing than in working for a newspaper," Bill said.

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HOME TO HIDDEN SPRINGS



NILAH RODGERS TURNER

Bill and Nilah Turner, residents of Lubbock, have worked in journalism for most of their careers. Nilah has written the book, "Home to Hidden Springs," which is set in frontier Texas in the 1840 to 1865 period. (Photos provided by Bill Turner)

REMEMBERS

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Nilah recounts a transition that proved true to her plan:

"When I quit working for the newspaper, I started freelancing. And of course, I didn't have any better sense, so I started with the big one — I started with Reader's Digest. Because it then paid \$2,500 for every drama in real life, I thought, gee whiz, I can think of a lot of things I could write for this."

Actually, there was a preliminary foray into magazine work before she turned to the major publications. She had sold a short, humorous article to Progressive Farmer, and the magazine then requested permission to include it in a hardback copy of "Agricultural Classics" that included stories by Thomas Carlyle and George Washington.

It was like pouring gasoline on a flame. In the heyday of freelancing she had articles published in Reader's Digest, Good Housekeeping and Ladies Home Journal.

Her first sale to Reader's Digest came from reading a newspaper article about a helicopter crash in South Texas. She drove to the area and interviewed the man who had saved the pilot's life.

"I wrote my first one and sent it in, and they accepted it ... Then, I wrote another one and sent it in, and I did that all year that year. One day my editor called me and

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Nilah Turner
Writer

she said, 'Do you know that you are one of only two people who have ever written 10 stories in one year in Reader's Digest?'"

She agrees that the accomplishment was phenomenal: "It sure is. I probably couldn't do it again."

In later years, after magazines tended toward in-house writers, she got her real estate broker's license and opened a real estate office.

Nilah now has turned to writing novels. The first one, just completed, is titled "Home to Hidden Springs." It's in paperback for \$11.99 at Amazon, and \$4.95 for the Kindle version.

It was literally years in the writing because she always was looking for a better way to write it. There is apparently a touch of the perfectionist in her work, and there were many revisions of the book before it was published.

working on this other one — I wrote a first draft of the story in Pennsylvania, and thought, 'I can't do this. I've got to finish what I've got started.

"But it's still in the closet where I put it. A first draft is already ready."

Has the first novel been a fulfillment?

"Yes. When you finally decide you've got to finish it, I got it finished. I would like to rewrite it again ... but I don't dare."

Appropriately for this time of year, when the anniversary of Texas' independence is observed, her book, "Home to Hidden Springs," deals with the frontier days of the Republic of Texas from the 1840s through 1865, and shows Texas' involvement in the Civil War.

The setting for the story was developed from a time when she had moved from Littlefield to the piney woods area of East Texas. There she had often visited the historical town of Jefferson and Caddo Lake. It proved to be inspirational for a future novel.

For Nilah, writing has been one of the constants of her life. Whether she was passing notes in junior high school or finishing an article for Reader's Digest, writing has defined much of her personality. Whenever she has the time, she writes. And rewrites:

"I can always think of things I should have put in, and ways I should have worded it."