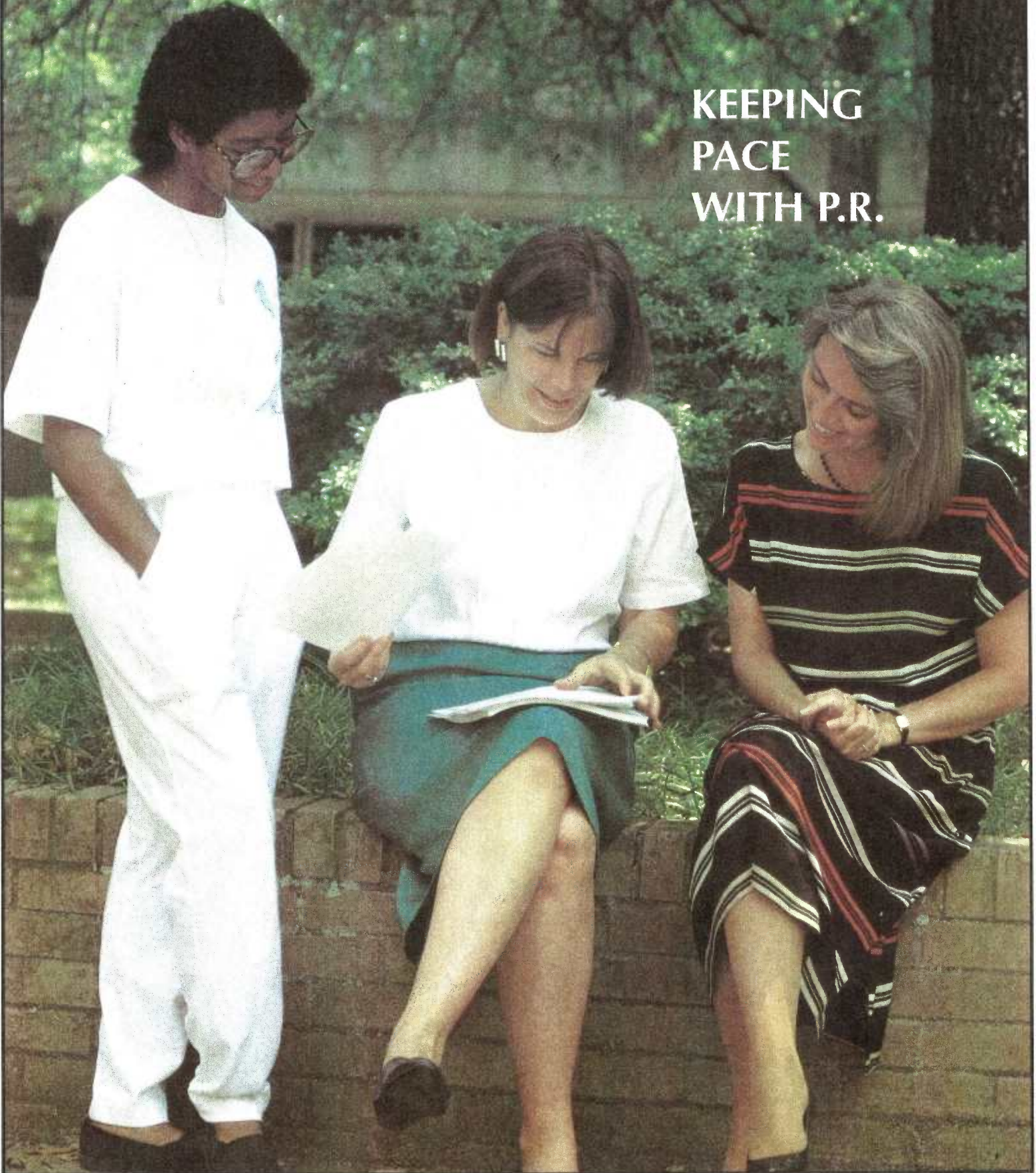


# JAFANA NEWS

*The publication of the Journalism Alumni and Friends Association*

School of Journalism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Vol. 11, No. 1, Summer 1990

KEEPING  
PACE  
WITH P.R.



Discussing P.R. - Juliet Dinkins (left), Dulcie Straughan and Melissa Johnson.

Photo by Elizabeth Ward

# David Wall begins new career as novelist

By John Bare

The rejection letters were no problem for David Cooper Wall. The North Carolina native and 1974 graduate of the School of Journalism at UNC-CH fought for a decade to impress casting directors in New York. Television bits came often. There was work as an extra in films. There were off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway shows and tiresome touring productions. There was also the wear and tear of New York City. The matchbox apartments. The traffic. The dog mess on the sidewalks. The thought of rearing kids in Manhattan. The Big Apple grew a little rotten.

So Wall, who now lives with his wife and children in Lenoir, N.C., was not bothered a bit by the rejection letters publishers sent him after reviewing the manuscript of his murder mystery. He simply marked the publishing house off his list and mailed his work to another publisher.

"People ask me how I deal with the rejection. I spent 10 years in New York walking around having people tell me I was too fat or too thin or too tall or too short or needed to have my face sanded," he said. "Getting a letter in the mail was no problem."

He could also tell from comments in the rejection notices that his novel was pretty good. Eventually, he said, a publisher liked the book enough to work through the kinks.

The result is *One Cried Murder*, a murder mystery written by a journalism student turned actor turned newspaper reporter turned public information officer turned novelist. Published by Red Dembner Enterprises Corp. of New York and distributed by W.W. Norton & Company Inc., the story involves an off-Broadway actor, a wealthy socialite and a private investigator. It arrived in book stores in mid-July and costs \$16.95 in hardcover.

In pre-publication notices, *Publisher's Weekly* said the book "shows considerable promise." *Details* magazine said the book is "very breezy, very easy-going. . . the plot is as tight as a drum, and there are no holes to be worried over later."

Despite his apparent success at developing the murder mystery, Wall didn't move

to western North Carolina in 1984 with the intention of writing a novel.

"We decided we didn't want to raise a child in New York," he said. "At some point you have to decide whether you're going to stick it out—how long does it take to reach stardom?"

"I had thought I would give it 10 years or so, and it was probably a good time to leave."

He and his wife, Elisabeth, also a 1974 graduate of the School of Journalism, have two sons, 7 and 3, and a 5-year-old daughter.

They chose the Caldwell County town of Lenoir because it was Elisabeth's hometown. But the move meant Elisabeth would have to give up a successful career in the New York magazine business. After a stint at *Mademoiselle*, she was working as executive director of *Gentlemen's Quarterly* when the couple opted to leave New York. They have recently formed The Dewrite Co., a direct-mail marketing and publishing business they run out of their home.

It's one of many career changes for Wall. From 1984 to 1987 he worked for the *Lenoir News-Topic*, a job that taught him how to produce copy day after day.

"I think if we had wanted to move to a

larger town, I would have stayed on in newspaper. It teaches you to write everyday, whether you want to or not. That is valuable to learn."

After leaving the newspaper, he took a job as public information officer with a Caldwell County hazardous waste incinerator that became the center of a bitter environmental fight. Local residents wanted the facility closed, and media continually reported on the suspected health hazards the facility was causing.

"It was a unique job," he said, laughing a little. "It was really difficult because they—the people—didn't want information. They just wanted it closed. It was a lot of wasted effort."

The plant eventually did close, leaving Wall without a job. But it was during his time in public relations that Wall began writing the novel.

"That's when I first started to work on the book. I liked to write, and all I was doing there was writing press releases and talking to TV news persons.

"It just seemed to come naturally. I just started thinking about it and started doing it," he said.

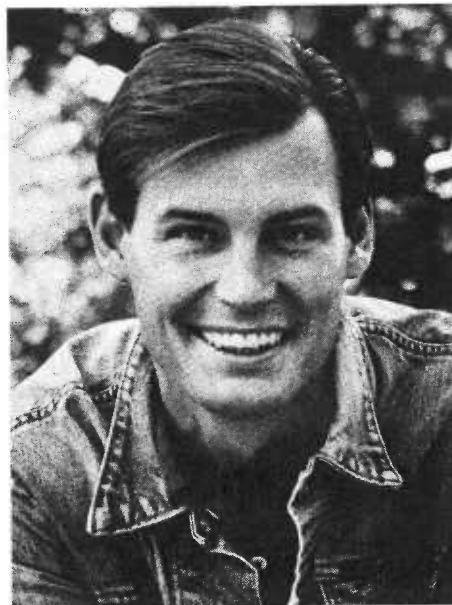
He decided to write a murder mystery because that's what he likes to read and because he thought it might be easier to publish than other types of novels. He drew on his familiarity with New York City and the people he has known over the years.

"Manhattan—it's a great place. It lends itself to a vast number of situations. Plus, you can always just make it up. It (the book) is correct, and it's precise. But if something really didn't work, I just changed it. So the D Train doesn't go to Prospect Park—big deal.

"You always draw from your experiences and people that you know, without being specific," he said.

Of his experiences at Carolina, he said he enjoyed the Journalism School, and he remembers that he did pretty well in a media law class he took. He still visits Chapel Hill a couple of times a year, usually enjoying a football game or ice cream on Franklin Street.

But in 1974 he was ready to graduate and



David Cooper Wall

## Spearman Collection showcase for books by J-School alumni

A copy of David Cooper Wall's ('74) new mystery, *One Cried Murder* (Dembner Books, \$16.95), should fit in the Walter Spearman Collection of Books by School of Journalism Alumni right between *The World of Marathons* by Sandy Treadwell ('68) and *Videotex Journalism* by David H. Weaver (Ph.D. '74).

The collection, displayed in a seven-shelf bookcase on the first floor of Howell Hall, honors the late Walter Spearman, who taught at the University 45 years and won every teaching excellence award the University offers. He earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from UNC-CH (A.B., '29; M.A., '37), served as editor of *The Daily Tar Heel*, worked for daily newspapers, including *The Charlotte News* and *Greensboro Daily News*, acted in more than 80 area stage productions, authored several books, plays and study guides, and for 30 years wrote a weekly book review column, *The Literary Lantern*.

Though the Spearman collection contains approximately 310 books, School of Journalism alumni have written and edited many more. The School invites alumni authors and editors to donate copies of their work to the collection. Alumni may contact the Journalism School Library (919-962-1204) to check if a copy of their work is already on display.

"The collection continues to grow," said Dean Richard Cole. "It's a splendid

way to show how productive our alumni have been and continue to be. We're always encouraging alumni to give us a copy of their latest work."

The collection features many prominent authors, including *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker ('48). He has six books on display, including *On Press* (1978) and novels *The Judgment* (1961) and *Unto This Hour* (1984).

Noted sports journalist Furman Bisher ('38), long-time sports editor for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, has three books in the collection. The works of Hank Messick ('47), a specialist on organized crime and former investigative reporter for *The Louisville Courier-Journal* and *The Miami Herald*, occupy considerable shelf space. There are 16 of Messick's books in the collection, including Mafia-related works such as *The Mobs and the Mafia* (1972), *Gangs and Gangsters* (1974) and *Syndicate Wife* (1968).

With 26 titles, Durham, N.C., native Burke Davis ('37) has the most books in the Spearman Collection (see separate Davis article on page 8). Davis has been writing books for more than 30 years, with much of his work devoted to Civil War history. The collection includes *Sherman's March* (1980), *Gray Fox*, *Robert E. Lee and the Civil War* (1956), *The Southern Railway* (1985) and *Appomattox, Closing Struggle of the Civil War* (1963).

— John Bare

get far away from campus. Inspired by drama electives and his work in laboratory theater, he headed straight to New York City to begin acting.

"It was interesting. I don't know if you could do that at any other age or with any more knowledge than you have at that stage. If you knew what you were getting into, you would not do it," he said, noting that he didn't have time to think about the

hundreds of thousands of other actors chasing the same dream.

"It's a pretty confusing life. But what makes it work is you want it that badly. You want to be a working actor that badly. That makes you able to get through it." □

*John Bare is a second-year master's student in the news-editorial sequence from Garner, N.C.*

## Bass

(Continued from p.13)

"When Mabrey came back from the Marines, he looked like the all-American boy," said Herbert Taylor, who has been the attorney for the county commissioners, Town of Tarboro, and city and county school board throughout Bass' career.

"I have a great deal of respect and affection for him," Taylor said. "When he printed, he printed like he saw it. He never hesitated to express his opinion in a very timely manner."

His concern for the people of Tarboro and Edgecombe County were reflected in those editorials and writings, said George Dudley, who worked with Bass as an assistant before being named editor upon Bass' retirement.

"Mabrey was an excellent writer," Dudley said. "As far as what was going on in Tarboro and Edgecombe County, Mabrey was aware of it. That was a huge asset for anyone in the news business."

Bass is survived by his wife, Mrs. Patricia Bass, and two children, Mrs. Betsy Broom of Zebulon and B.M. Bass III of Tarboro. Also surviving are his brother, William M. Bass of Dallas, Texas, and two grandchildren. □

## Owens

(Continued from p.13)

County Chapter of the North Carolina Symphony.

She was communications coordinator at the ArtSchool, now the ArtsCenter in Carrboro, a former manager of Chloe's clothing store and a former news broadcaster at WCHL Radio. She also worked at the University of North Carolina News Bureau and wrote for *The Chapel Hill Newspaper*.

Owens was a graduate of Elkin High School and earned an associate degree from Pine Manor Junior College in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

She is survived by her husband, Mark Owens of Chapel Hill; her mother, Jerre Denning Boren of Elkin; three brothers, Richard Boren of Elkin, David B. Boren of Charlotte and Robert G. Boren of Raleigh; her grandparents, Howard Denning and R.B. Boren of Greensboro. □