

The Portable Creek: Southern Nostalgia and Other Shenanigans

Keith Huffman

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Bootleggers and sports heroes populate the stories of The Portable Creek, a memoir set in the unique world of an affable Southern man.

Keith Huffman's gentle and nostalgic memoir *The Portable Creek* is set in the South; it concerns the past century in the region, as well as the people who make the area great.

With dozens of vignettes concerning Huffman's family and their love of sports, cars, and their neighbors, the book's three sections take a variety of approaches to their subjects. There are profiles and extended newspaper features; indeed, many of the chapters appeared in newspapers prior to being collected in *The Portable Creek*.

The first section focuses on Huffman's extended family; its entries are a fascinating kaleidoscope of warm Southern views. The first entry concerns the death of Huffman's grandfather Buck, who was baptized near the end of his life from a canister of water, carried and poured out by a preacher. Huffman's father is also introduced in the entry; he is celebrated for being there for Buck at the end. Both men are recurrent presences in the book, appearing in over a dozen entries; they, like others, are memorialized with humor and obvious affection.

Sections focused on Huffman's community and immediate family follow; they are interesting, but sometimes too broad. One entry follows a WWII pilot whose story is not connected to Huffman's in a meaningful manner. Indeed, the book is at its best when Huffman's personal stories and expressions of meaning are centered. He is a funny guide through Alabama culture who layers jokes and local dialect in. His memories of having a wart cured by a witch, and of his parents calling "the local meteorologist to verify hell's blizzard," are good-natured.

Telling details lead individual entries, as of a friend who "wanted to be a princess when she grew up," in contrast to Huffman's childhood ambition to become a turtle. Some such details aren't pushed beyond the superficial, though; elements of the book are best suited for Huffman's kin. Still, the book imparts Huffman's homesickness, preserving individuals' quirks, as with a man who kept a box full of statistics for a ball team that no longer existed. Huffman's concise descriptions help to define an American landscape of clear importance to him, while family snapshots contribute to its sense of homegrown authenticity.

The Portable Creek is a homey collection of articles set in the American South.

JEREMIAH ROOD (August 13, 2021)

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