

SNUG HOLLOW

The End of the World, or a Trip Down Liminal Lane

By Beth Curlin

Snug Hollow Bed & Breakfast
790 McSwain Branch
Irvine, KY 40336
(606) 723-4786
www.snughollow.com

“What a special week I’ve had—I can’t imagine a more wonderful place to work on a dissertation about the soul. I experience the road leading to your landscape as a place neither here nor there, but between places—a margin that involves leaving behind what I think I know in preparation for some new part of life that will unfold—a sort of ‘liminal lane.’”

The visitor who wrote this in the guest book of Snug Hollow Farm and Bed and Breakfast traveled from Louisville, winding through the Red Lick Valley from Richmond to Estill County. Left by some ancient river or ice age where native peo-



ples followed, it is where the Kentucky Bluegrass meets the Appalachian Mountains.

Snaking through a crevice of time sealed off by high limestone cliffs and shale knob, the road to McSwain’s Branch descends to a place that visitors have called “heaven” and “a place where those with broken wings may rest and learn to fly.” “You are truly at the end of the road—or the world,” Snug Hollow owner and creator Barbara Napier said. It’s true. You will hear the sound of silence here. If your senses have been dulled by modern life, stay a while and you’ll get them back.

A few years ago, author Gwen Rubio, who visits here often, brought the *Oprah* show to Snug Hollow to film part of a segment about Rubio when her novel, *Icy Sparks*, was chosen for the Oprah Winfrey Book Club. The main word Rubio used to describe the bed-and-breakfast was “quiet.” Writers need a calm, peaceful place to write and create so they can hear

the characters speaking. The landscape is beautiful; the house is warm. It is very conducive to creativity.

One's first view of the house is a surprise: a majestic, vaulting, two-story conglomeration of natural wood and glass windows nestled into the foot of the mountain. "I wanted it to blend in so that it wouldn't bother the world here. And I wanted to see vistas," Napier said of her goal, when she began designing her home 20 years ago. "I tried to bring the outside in, and not have boundaries. The walnut tree and the cemetery are part of the house. You feel like you are sitting up in the trees in the fall. At night, the stars are Texas bright, and stargazers have a clear view of meteor showers, eclipse, and even the aurora borealis.

When the sun sets, bats begin to fly, owls hoot from both sides of the hollow, and coyotes sing their eerie chorales. The creek adds



its own chuckling melody. Deer are spotted easily, and though he hasn't been seen, a bear sometimes leaves a calling card. In the 300-acre natural enclosure, wildflowers and colorful birds pose everywhere.

The building's decor is as organic and eclectic as its architectural design. Iron beds, old sofas, and antique lamps set the scene for quiet, intimate relaxation. "I call it early attic," Napier said, chuckling. "When I buy old things at auc-



tions or yard sales, I like to think about who these things came from and recreate the feeling I get from that. This place is kind of like a museum. It always inspires people in some way."

Old mandolins, deer antlers, turkey feathers, and knives hang on the Snug Hollow walls among family photos. Books, magazines, and music line a bookshelf. Paintings, (some by Napier herself,) quilting, and baskets are evidence of her interests in art, her life as a mother, and her penchant for collecting. "I am an artist, and this is my canvas. I am creating a picture, a little study, a relaxing place," Napier confesses. Guests say it feels like home. And her love for simplicity and old things has spurred another project, the renovation of the 175-year-old chestnut log cabin where she raised her two sons while the main house was being built. The rustic charm has brought people from all over the country and beyond to Estill County.

Napier is full of rustic charm herself, with jokes, recipes, and stories. And "Barbara is a terrific cook—the most hospitable person in the world. She waits on you hand and foot and pampers you, but you never know it or feel guilty, she does it so easily," Rubio said.

"The world comes to my doorstep," Napier said. "It is a true experience of Kentucky country living. People see the best of our culture. I love to share it, but they add as much to my life as I do to theirs." 🍷

Beth Curlin is a former long-time resident of Estill County and a former editor of the county's weekly paper. She now lives in Berea, where she is a development writer at

Berea College. She has received grants from the Kentucky Arts Council and the Kentucky Foundation for Women to write a book about breast cancer survivors in Kentucky. She can be contacted at betbcurlin@msn.com.

New Fiction by Gwen Rubio

Gwen Hyman Rubio's first novel, *Icy Sparks*, was hailed as "vivid and unforgettable" (*The New York Times Book Review*), "a combination of fire and ice that will take your breath away" (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*). Now, Rubio has done it again with *The Woodsman's Daughter*, a richly absorbing tale of the gothic South that, like *Icy Sparks*, has another unforgettable heroine at its heart.

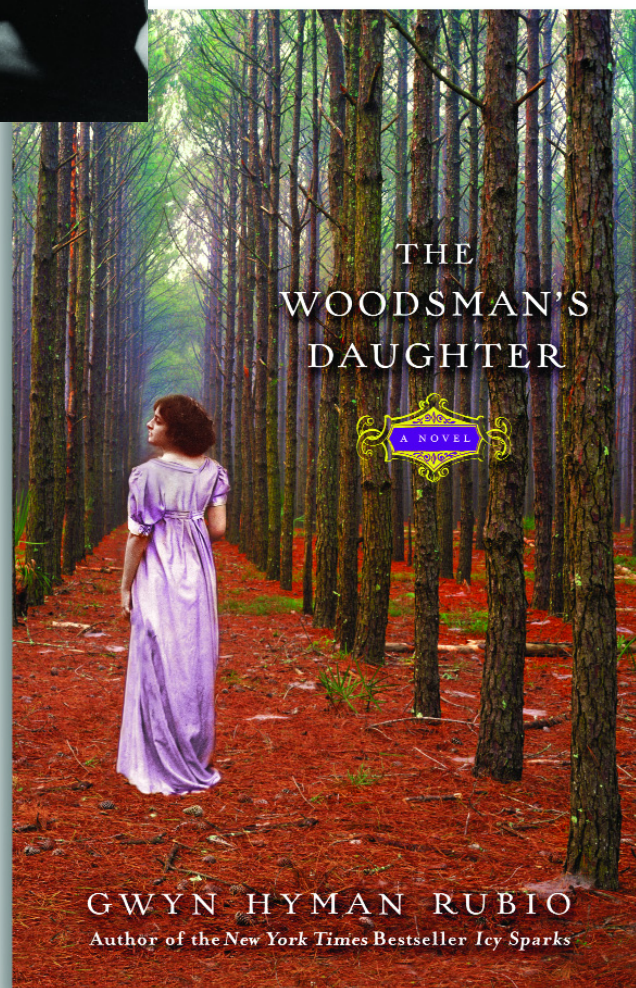
After the success of *Icy Sparks*, which sold more than a million copies and was *The New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, Rubio says that being chosen as an Oprah Book Club selection transformed her writing life and make it easier to get a second book published. "It was a wonderful, gratifying experience," Rubio said recently.

The Woodsman's Daughter tells the stories of three generations of a family at the turn of the 20th century and is set where Rubio grew up in South Georgia. Monroe Miller, a self-made man who created his fortune in the turpentine industry, loves the land and loves trees, but seems intent on destroying the land and himself. According to Rubio, the turpentine industry was a rough business and one of the oldest industries on the planet. "The production of turpentine goes back to Noah who pitched the ark within and without," she explained. The Greeks also wrote about the process. Gum is extracted from pine trees similar to the way sap is tapped from maple trees for syrup. Workers scrape, tap, and fill cups up with gum which is boiled down to make pitch, tar, and other products.

At one time Savannah was the largest exporter of turpentine products, Rubio said, but the South Georgia turpentine industry is pretty much dead due to the use of petroleum products. "I had a friend whose father owned thousands of acres that were turpentine farms and you could



Gwen Hyman Rubio has been nominated for Pushcart Press Editors' Book Award and anthologized in *AboveGround: Stories About Life and Death* by New Southern Writers. She is also winner of the Cecil Hackney Award as well as a recipient of grants from the Kentucky Arts Council and the Kentucky Foundation for Women. *Icy Sparks* appeared on *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Washington Post*, *Booksense*, *Amazon*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Barnes & Noble* and *Wordstock* bestseller lists.



smell the gum burning. Rubio's mother used it as a medicine. Even today turpentine is used in ointments for horses," she said. Rubio brings the swaying pines, humble shantytowns, and insular bustle of small-town living vibrantly to life.

Rubio is glad to be finished with this three and a half-year writing project, and, she says, "The next book will be short and sweet." She's already written a few chapters of a dark, but funny and short comedy. "When a novel takes as long as *The Woodsman's Daughter*, you have ups and downs. I've enjoyed it, gotten lost in the characters, like I always do. It has been fun writing from a man's point of view.... And it has taken my back to my childhood—back to South Georgia." 🍷

Old Towne Gallery
1/8th Page Ad