

SOUTHERN LITERARY REVIEW

A Magazine for Literature of the American South

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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS AMBER D. TRAN, AUTHOR OF "MOON RIVER"

 JUNE 14, 2017 BY [ALLEN MENDENHALL](#)  [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



Amber D. Tran

AM: So glad for the opportunity to talk to you about your debut novel, *Moon River*. Before we get into the book, I want to ask about your background. I noticed you're a graduate of West Virginia University. I studied English for my master's at WVU and graduated from law school at WVU. Did you study in the English department there?

AT: I did. I actually spent my first two years of college at a smaller school, West Liberty University, before transferring to West Virginia University. I did this because I was terrified about having required classes with more than 200 students. I spent my first two years at WLU, my last two years at WVU, and ultimately received a bachelor's degree in English literature with a concentration in creative writing from WVU in 2012.

When I visit West Virginia, I try my best to return to the

campus and speak with some of my professors. They were some of the most talented individuals I have ever met.

AM: Which professors, specifically?

AT: Kevin Oderman, Mark Brazaitis, Jim Harms, Mary Ann Samyn, and Amanda Leigh Cobb.

AM: I never had courses with them, but I heard good things. I take it that you learned your craft from them, in no small degree. Although you began writing at a very young age, no?

AT: That is correct. I've been writing since I was in the 5th grade. Throughout middle school and high school, I made sure my craft stayed active, even if I produced junk. It was during college, however, underneath the watchful eyes of my professors, that I learned to polish my work and transform it into worthy pieces of literature. I owe them so much. To this day I use their advice in my writing. For example, for poetry, Mary Ann taught me the importance of the line; I make sure to hear her voice every time I write a new poem.

AM: And here you are now with your first novel under your belt. What should our readers know about this novel?

AT: Readers should know that this is a work of fiction inspired by true events. Readers are safe to assume that I inspire a lot of characteristics and behaviors of the protagonist, Abigail. This novel takes place in northern West Virginia and follows the friendship between two children, Abigail and Ryan, as they grow into adolescence and learn how to fit in as kids, preteens, and teenagers. A lot of heart and home exists in this book, that's for sure!

AM: Have you always written about heart and home?

AT: For the most part, yes. I am in awe of where I was born and raised. There is something special about West Virginia. A lot of my work is inspired by

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the Appalachia. I have tried writing about other things, like science fiction and joy, but the inspiration is not as powerful. I'm a homely writer who likes to focus on the troubling and bleak. Perhaps it just makes for better literature.

AM: And now you live in Alabama, as do I. Do you think this move will affect what and how you write?

AT: Definitely not. My roots are in West Virginia. A part of the state is with me always. However, I will say that, for whatever reason, I've been meaning to write about a bed and breakfast in the Alabama area. This has been an idea of mine for a while. If I ever find the time to research the idea more, and if I muster the courage to steer away from West Virginia, I may give that idea a chance.

AM: Who are your favorite writers?

AT: Jo Ann Beard, Kerry Cohen, Kelly Braffet, Amanda Boyden, R. A. Nelson, and Jennifer Armintrout.

AM: What do you do when you aren't writing?

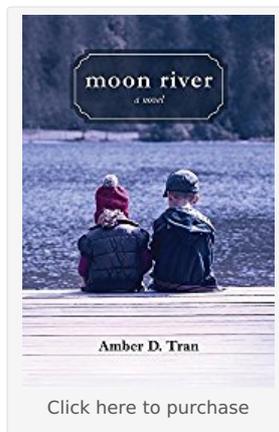
AT: When I'm not writing, I am trying to read. Sometimes other tasks get in the way, such as house cleaning and dog sitting. My husband and I love to play video games together, such as League of Legends, Tera, and Overwatch. We have spent many hours on our computers duking it out with friends.

AM: Even though you wrote it, did you read *Moon River* when you first received your published copy in the mail?

AT: I did! I pulled out the very first copy from the printer's box and began reading. I had tears in my eyes. Some dropped onto the first few pages. It amazed me that I could hold four years of work in my hands. The experience was an emotional one.

AM: I hope our readers will have the same experience. Thanks for doing this interview, Amber.

AT: Thank you for having me! I appreciate the time you have spent with me.



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About Allen Mendenhall

Allen Mendenhall is associate dean at Thomas Goode Jones School of Law and executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center. His books include *Literature and Liberty* (2014), *Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Pragmatism, and the Jurisprudence of Agon* (2017), *The Southern Philosopher: Collected Essays of John William Corrington* (2017) (editor), and *Lines from a Southern Lawyer* (2017). Visit his website at AllenMendenhall.com.

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