



Jim Grimsley

## THE STUFF OF DREAMS

*Southern writer Jim Grimsley tells skillful, beautiful stories of tragic lives and hard times*

by Kristine Chatwood

**W**hat is it about the South? Why do so many writers hail from that region? It could be the water, but one suspects the rich, deep, sometimes tragic culture of the South may be a likelier cause. It is the tragic nature of Southern life that Jim Grimsley so painfully and so beautifully sets out in his new novel *Dream Boy*.

Like his first novel, *Winter Birds*, Grimsley's

### Books

new book is set in the rural South, where fundamentalist Christianity dominates daily life. It is a world of Sunday services and Wednesday prayer meetings, a world defined by church membership: the Baptist or the Holiness Church. Unfortunately for the characters in this story, the Church does not provide sanctuary.

Parental abuse is a common theme in Grimsley's books. In *Dream Boy* the abuse appears as the backdrop for the achingly tender and sweet story of the young love of two high school boys. Nathan is an only child. His father is an abusive drunk given to constant scripture quoting. His mother is passive to the point of invisibility. Roy is the son of upstanding farmers. He works on the farm, drives the school bus and plays baseball on the school team. They meet when Nathan's family rents a house on the farm owned by Roy's parents.

Nathan is drawn to the older boy, often watching out his bedroom window to catch glimpses of Roy, who sometimes appears to be posing in his own window. After a time, and with some reluctance, the boys begin their romance—a romance filled with the poignant passion and pain of adolescent love.

His love affair with Roy is the only safe haven for Nathan. He lives in constant fear of being attacked by his brutish father. His mother provides no protection, no safety. Only with Roy does Nathan experience love, kindness, peace. Of course, teen love between two boys, or two girls, is rarely a truly safe place. The need for secrecy, the threat of exposure, the guilt and the confusion all combine to blunt the joy of first love.

Ultimately, their love falls victim to the rage of Roy's friends. The end, for Nathan, is both tragic and liberating. Although some may think the ending a bit over the edge, Grimsley's storytelling is so credible that the ending seems to be the only natural conclusion.

An established and award-winning playwright, Grimsley has made the transition to novel writing with skill and grace. His writing is both thoughtful and thought-provoking. His books are wrenching stories, magnificently told.

*Dream Boy* by Jim Grimsley. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1995; \$18.95. Grimsley is currently on a promotional tour. He will be in Portland on Sept. 16, reading at 7 pm at Twenty-Third Avenue Books, 1015 NW 23rd Ave.

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From left to right: Dan Butler of *Frasier*, Amanda Bearse of *Married... With Children*, the Human Rights Campaign Fund's National Coming Out Project Director Wes Combs, NCOP Spokeswoman Candace Gingrich, and Human Rights Campaign Fund Executive Director Elizabeth Birch at a June 5 press conference in Los Angeles announcing Butler's new position as an NCOP spokesman and unveiling Melissa Etheridge's public service announcement "Labels Belong on Records, Not on People."

Candace Gingrich, sister of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, will talk about her role as national spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign Fund and its National Coming Out Program. Find out what's at stake for your rights, safety and health in the new Congress—and what you can do to make a difference.

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