



Kathy Hepinstall

The House of Gentle Men
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Life is That Big

I lived in Texas and Oklahoma until I was about six years old. Then my father moved us to New Jersey. My Texas accent never recovered from the two years I spent there. The rest of my childhood I lived in Spring Texas, a couple hours from the Louisiana border.

After I received my bachelor's degree from The University of Texas in Austin, Texas, I moved to Houston to try to join the creative writing master's program at The University of Houston. Being declared "marginal," I never got into the program. Instead, I took the literature route and received my master's degree two and a half years later.

I then moved to Los Angeles and entered the world of advertising — doing work for Coca-Cola, Nike, Ortho Weed Killer, and just about any other product you can name. Then three or four years ago, I moved to Austin, Texas and began writing seriously. Much of the time I drew heavily on my relatives from Louisiana.

Every year the relatives get together in Louisiana and clean out the family graveyard. Last year we had our first official graveyard softball game because we liked the sound of it. Currently I'm working on a book set in a graveyard because the subject fascinates me. Our family cemetery is very spiritual and contains the grave of Rosella Havens Peddy, family saint and beloved grandmother of my childhood.

The House of Gentle Men came out of this part of the world. The historical society of neighboring Merryville helped me out with some of the stories, and I did some research at Fort Polk on the great maneuvers of 1941.

There are really two Americas to me: The America of the big cities, where technology prevails, and rural America, a truer form of country where people live much the same as they always have. I've been tempted to live in New York but I could never be far from these people for long. Someone asked Toni Morrison once what she thought of the criticism that her characters were bigger than life. She said, "No, they are as big as life. Life is that big."

That's why I love writing about the south so much. Life is that big.