



Richard Bausch

Wives & Lovers
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Tell us about the history of these three short novels — what inspired each of the stories and what, if anything, was used from your own personal experiences.

"Requisite Kindness" and "Rare & Endangered Species" were oddly produced out of each other. That is, the first versions of what became "Requisite Kindness" were written under the title "Rare & Endangered Species." In both instances I wanted to write about loss, or regret, I think. But then all of it got mixed up in my mind. I recall that what finally became "Rare & Endangered Species" was also an attempt to write five separate stories, each of which could stand alone, but all of which would add up to one story. "Requisite Kindness" saw about fifty different drafts and took more than five years to write. I haven't any idea where it comes from, except that I knew I had a story when it occurred to me that this womanizer was going to have to help his mother die — it took a long time to figure that out, and then, having figured it out, it took another long time to write. "Spirits" came from an early story called "A Domestic Education." I failed on a novel I was calling "Spirits," and decided that I would write a

story with the same title because I liked the title. It took only a matter of weeks to write it and very quickly I knew I was writing about that curious complicity between men where women are concerned.

All three novels take place in Virginia: What is it about this area, or its people, that captures your attention?

It's home. Not much more than that. I've also set novels in other places — Duluth, Minnesota in *Mr. Field's Daughter*; an unnamed 'great northern city' in *The Last Good Time*. Substantial sections of my novel *Hello To The Cannibals* take place in Mississippi, England, the Canary Islands, West Africa, and South Africa:

In *Spirits*, you don't reveal the name of our narrator. Why?

You know, it just never occurred to me to do so. It didn't seem necessary for some reason. Maybe, since he is a writer, some part of me wanted the reader to feel as though he were reading a memoir. Of course, the whole thing is fabricated. The fact is, for all the critics' talk about me as a realist, I'm making everything up — everything. It is all about imagining with me.

As a writer and a professor, what is the most important piece of advice you give to writers just starting out?

Read. No how-to books; no writer's magazines. Read the writers whose work is still around and has survived the winds of fashion and the attacks of the ignorant and the bigoted — read everything you can get your hands on. Everything that has ever been written that is worth keeping and remembering. Learn to know the world's literature, as much as possible, by heart — by your heart. And as you go, try the different voices on for size: imitate, imitate, imitate. Write a little bit every day, each day. Visit it, every day — in other words, show up for work. Every really good book was written a little at a time, over time, in tremendous confusion and doubt. So be patient, stubborn, willing-to-fail, open to change, wild to say things splendidly but utterly truthfully, for themselves and not for any aspect of your own ego, your own precious or special — as you perceive them — sensibilities. Go out away from all that. Be wayfaring. Imagine. Imagine. Imagine.