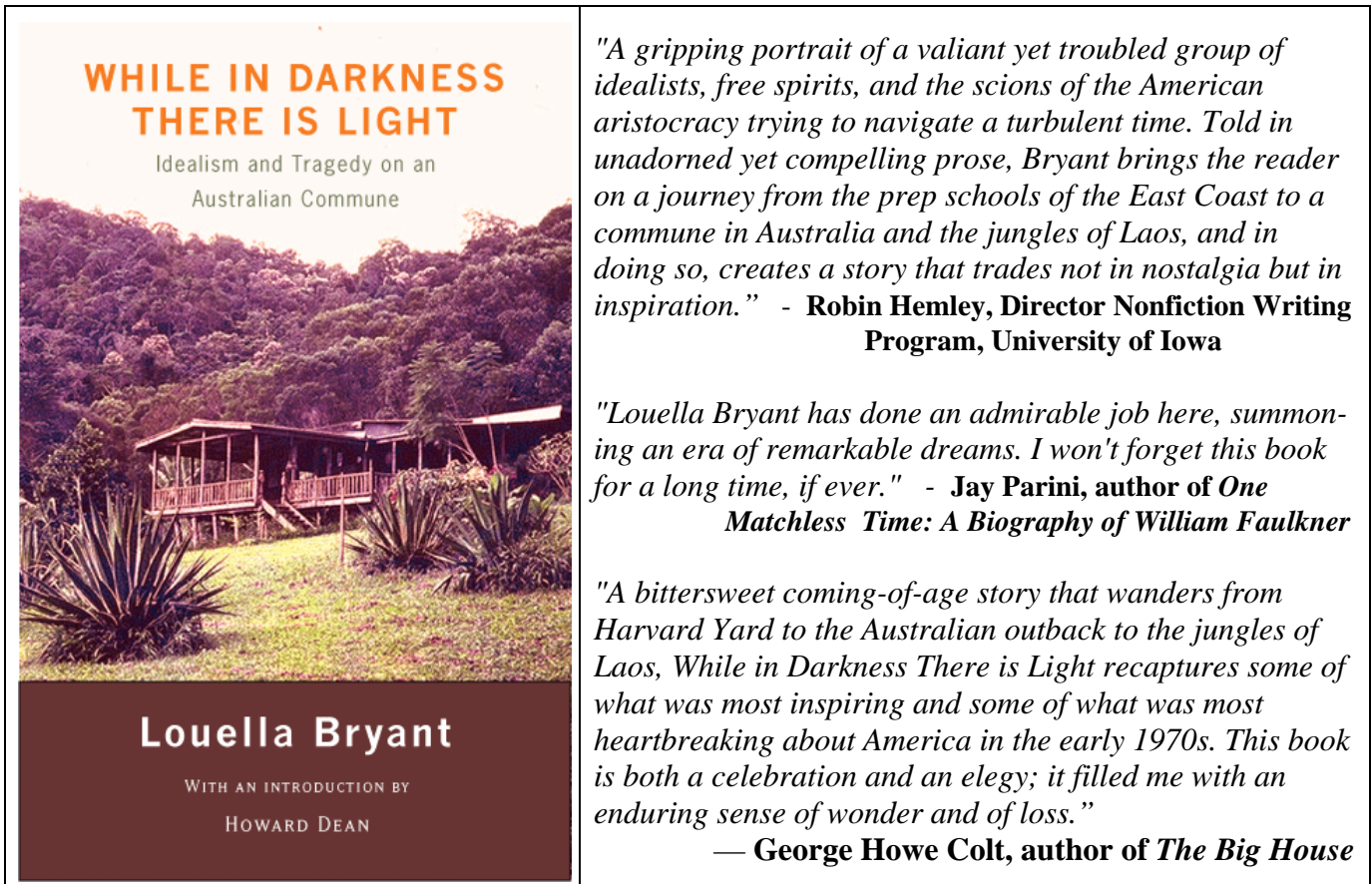


Writer explores idealism, risk, and tragic consequence of young expatriates in Australia during the Vietnam War era



*While In Darkness There Is Light
By Louella Bryant*

During the era of the Vietnam War, a group of young American men, insulated by privilege and innocent of heart, sought to make positive changes in a tumultuous world and, along the way, had some extraordinary adventures. Their exploits, their dreams and, ultimately, the necessity of facing their realities are themes of the rich and utterly unforgettable book, **WHILE IN DARKNESS THERE IS LIGHT** (Black Lawrence Press, an imprint of Dzanc. On-sale: 9/1/2008).

WHILE IN DARKNESS THERE IS LIGHT
By Louella Bryant
Black Lawrence Press

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THE STORY

Before he disappeared in Laos, Charles Maitland Dean spent a year in Australia with a group of friends from the exclusive St. George's School in Newport, Rhode Island. Two of the friends, Kim Haskell, son of a U. S. Congressman, and Rich Trapnell, whose father was a DuPont executive, had dropped out of college after the riots following the Kent State shootings and established an agricultural commune in Far North Queensland called Rosebud Farm.

Disillusioned with American politics after McGovern's devastating loss to Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential election, Charlie Dean and St. George's schoolmate Harry Reynolds found their way to Rosebud Farm, where they lived for the fall and winter of 1973-74. Most of their time was spent working the fields, hiking, fishing, clearing on Kim's 3400-acre Bloomfield property, battling wild boar, python, and tropical heat, and imbibing their share of alcohol and drugs.

When the wet season drenched the farm fields, Harry went back to Boston and Charlie, still affected with wanderlust, traveled on to Southeast Asia. In September 1974, he and Australian companion Neil Sharman disappeared somewhere along the Mekong River. Months later, it was discovered that they had been taken prisoner by communist Pathet Lao soldiers and held captive in a crude prison camp for three months before being executed by rifle fire.

With the perseverance of Charlie's brother, Howard Dean, Charlie's remains were recovered in 2004 while Howard was a candidate for U.S. President. But questions remained unanswered. What was Charlie doing in Southeast Asia, where fighting continued even though the United States had withdrawn troops? And what happened at the Rosebud Farm commune during those months leading up to Charlie's death? Howard Dean's heart wrenching foreword details the recovery of his brother's remains.

Bryant's research, based on journals, letters, and interviews with friends and Dean family members, imbues the story with authority. As she probes the subtleties of identity, alienation, and the bonds of friendship, Louella Bryant touches a chord in all of us. With **WHILE IN DARKNESS THERE IS LIGHT**, Bryant earns a place among our most admirable American writers.

WHILE IN DARKNESS THERE IS LIGHT

By Louella Bryant

About the author:

Louella Bryant was born in Bethesda, Maryland, and grew up in northern Virginia. Her stories, poems and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines, including *Vermont Life*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Sacred Fire* and *Vermont Quarterly*, among others.

Behind the Book

In early spring of 2004, when Howard Dean was running for President, my husband, Harry Reynolds, sat on the front porch of our Vermont house and talked about Howard's brother Charlie. Harry had met Charlie in 1968 as a freshman at St. George's School in Newport, Rhode Island. Charlie was a year ahead of him and Howard was a senior. Harry's father, Director of Alumni Affairs, was friends with the Dean boys' father, who was on the Board of Trustees. There were only two hundred students then—all boys—and everyone knew each other well.

Harry had told me about visiting a St. George's School classmate in Australia for six months after he graduated from Harvard in 1973. Harry is not much of a talker, and the information about his time at Rosebud Farm in Far North Queensland came in fragments. I remember him mentioning Howard's brother Charlie, but I didn't get many details. I knew Charlie had died, but I didn't know how or why. When Howard appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, Harry began to open up about that time in Australia with Charlie. He told me about how Charlie had asked him to travel with him in Southeast Asia and how he told Charlie that he didn't have the money and needed to go back to the states and get a job. He talked about letters Charlie had sent from Bangkok and about hearing that he'd been taken prisoner by the communist Pathet Lao and later executed.

This sounds like a book, I said. Do you still have the letters?

Fortunately, Harry is a packrat. He disappeared, and I heard him rummaging in the attic. He came down with a shoebox filled with letters he had written to his parents from Australia that his mother had saved and the letters he had gotten from Charlie. And then he handed me a journal covered in red leather. I leafed through the pages, barely holding onto the binding after thirty years, and found an almost daily accounting of those days in Australia.

Okay if I use these? I asked. He is usually a very private person, but he nodded.

In our twenty years of marriage, I have been alternately dazzled and puzzled by the blue blood culture of my husband and his friends. They grew up on country club tennis courts and went on family ski vacations. They spoke of ancestors who came over on “the first boat” and famous forefathers from Europe. Their ancestry, I was led to believe, gave them special claim to America’s heritage.

My own upbringing was much different. My parents were from a mill town in southwest Virginia. My maternal grandfather was a foreman at a paper mill, which polluted both the town and the James River that ran through it. For extra cash he ran illegal moonshine, but he lost all his savings in the stock market crash. My paternal grandfather owned a feed store, the income from which barely fed his wife and twelve children. I doubt either grandfather had ever swung a tennis racket.

My father escaped the Blue Ridge Mountains by joining the Navy and married my mother, whom he had known since high school, when he returned home during a two-week leave. In 1947 he moved his new wife to subsidized postwar housing near Washington, DC, where he was stationed. Their lifestyle was meager, and they always worried about money. I inherited their frugal outlook.

During the Vietnam era, I was a student at George Washington University and joined in demonstrations on the mall, feeling the monstrous energy and nearly uncontrollable power of thousands of young people coming together in the nation’s capital for a common purpose. Afterward I would go back to my apartment, change out of my jeans, and go downtown to my job as secretary at a law firm. No matter what was happening on campus, I had tuition and rent to pay. That was my reality.

The story of Charlie Dean attracted me for a number of reasons. I could barely imagine the panic Charlie’s parents must have felt in hearing their son had disappeared and the grief they inevitably went through when they heard he’d been killed. Harry told me his brother’s death had hit Howard hard, and I wanted to know the depth of that experience. I also figured that researching that time in Harry’s life would teach me more about him, and the journal entries revealed a vulnerable young man trying to find himself, much the way I suspected Charlie had felt. But I was also interested in diving into the lives of young men from a culture completely foreign to me, one that gave them the means to to travel the world, buy huge chunks of land, build a 57-foot sailboat, and know that they would never have to be chained to a desk or to scramble for a living.

What I learned surprised me. I discovered that we each simply want to leave an imprint on the earth that shows we were here and that we had good intentions. At heart, it seems we are all the same.