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Sam has discovered that her father, whom she has known only through pictures of a young, awkward boy, truly suffered, that the horrors of Vietnam were much worse than she could ever have imagined, even with her "morbid" imagination. Her rejection of his suffering leads to her rejection of him and his family and their decaying farmhouse with its smells of manure and dirt and sweat. The fact that she seeks refuge in the mall to read the diary does not surprise me -- it is Ernest Hemingway's "clean, well-lighted place" writ large. Nor is it surprising that her Aunt Donna speaks longingly of a new brick house full of modern appliances. What the mall offers, what the new brick house offers, is an escape from an environment that is sometimes unbearable. Sure, there are wildflowers and creeks with wild goose-plum trees and honeysuckle vines, but there are also mangy dogs and rot and decay. This scene forces me to acknowledge that the rural Kentucky of my past was not always a pastoral paradise. I remember family dinners where folks were "telling stories and making their own music and having fellowship." But I also remember rusty buckets and cow manure and being shut out of "fellowship" because of my gender.

What I discovered in my journey through Mason's works and into my own past over the last few months was that I do not finally agree with the critics who have single-mindedly lamented the encroachment of the modern world into an agrarian Kentucky paradise. Rather, I think I agree with Mason when she says that for her characters, "for all of them, the oldest to the youngest, the world is opening up in both promising and disappointing ways" (Wilhelm 38). Of course, I am ever conscious of the possibility that I've been seduced by the blue light special, the possibility that I'm still trading my bag of popcorn for a moon pie.

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They were ignorant and country anyway. They lived in that old farmhouse with the decayed smell she always remembered it having -- the smell of dirty farm clothes, soiled with cow manure. In their bathroom earlier, she had almost slipped on the sodden rug that lay rotting around the sweating commode. In the living room, the television was missing a leg, and a complicated old antenna -- all claws and a fan of rods -- sat in a corner, looking like a monster from outer space. The contraption was an effort to pick up cable so that Pap could catch the Wildcats' basketball games. Mamaw picked peas in a rusty bucket with a rag plug stopping up a hole. (206)

Sam has discovered that her father, whom she has known only through pictures of a young, awkward boy, truly suffered, that the horrors of Vietnam were much worse than she could ever have imagined, even with her "morbid" imagination. Her rejection of his suffering leads to her rejection of him and his family and their decaying farmhouse with its smells of manure and dirt and sweat. The fact that she seeks refuge in the mall to read the diary does not surprise me -- it is Ernest Hemingway's "clean, well-lighted place" writ large. Nor is it surprising that her
Aunt Donna speaks longingly of a new brick house full of modern appliances. What the mall offers, what the new brick house offers, is an escape from an environment that is sometimes unbearable. Sure, there are wildflowers and creeks with wild goose-plum trees and honeysuckle vines, but there are also mangy dogs and rot and decay. This scene forces me to acknowledge that the rural Kentucky of my past was not always a pastoral paradise. I remember family dinners where folks were "telling stories and making their own music and having fellowship." But I also remember rusty buckets and cow manure and being shut out of "fellowship" because of my gender.

What I discovered in my journey through Mason's works and into my own past over the last few months was that I do not finally agree with the critics who have single-mindedly lamented the encroachment of the modern world into an agrarian Kentucky paradise. Rather, I think I agree with Mason when she says that for her characters, "for all of them, the oldest to the youngest, the world is opening up in both promising and disappointing ways" (Wilhelm 38). Of course, I am ever conscious of the possibility that I've been seduced by the blue light special, the possibility that I'm still trading my bag of popcorn for a moon pie.

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Bobbie Ann Mason's New Kentucky Home


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Bobbie Ann Mason, the second living author to be elected to the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame, paused from typing on her iPad to watch birds at a bird feeder out her living room window in Anderson County. Behind her is a blowup of a photo of her younger self with the first celebrity she ever met, Smiley Burnette, sidekick of movie cowboy Gene Autrey, who made an appearance in Mayfield in the early 1950s. She recalled in a 1986 essay in The New Yorker that Burnette charged a dollar to pose for photos and wasn't very nice. Tom Eblen teblen@herald-leader.com. Lawrenceburg. When readers of li...Â Authors plan book on variety, diversity of old Kentucky homes. Bobbie Ann Mason (born May 1, 1940) is an American novelist, short story writer, essayist, and literary critic from Kentucky. Her memoir was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. A child of Wilburn and Christina Mason, Bobbie Ann Mason grew up on her family’s dairy farm outside of Mayfield, Kentucky with four siblings. As a child she loved to read with encouragement from her parents, however choices were limited. These books were mostly popular fiction about the Bobbsey Twins and the Nancy Drew mysteries Bobbie Ann Mason, American short-story writer and novelist known for her evocation of rural Kentucky life. Mason was reared on a dairy farm and first experienced life outside rural Kentucky when she traveled throughout the Midwest as the teenage president of the fan club for a pop quartet, the.Â She attended the State University of New York at Binghamton (M.A., 1966) and the University of Connecticut, Storrs (Ph.D., 1972); her dissertation on Vladimir Nabokov was published as Nabokov’s Garden: A Guide to Ada (1974). In 1972 Mason became an assistant professor of English at Pennsylvania’s Mansfield State College.