

# Driving With The Dead: The Haunting History and Haunting Poems of Kentucky Voices

Kentucky, a state steeped in rich history and vibrant folklore, holds secrets that go beyond its rolling hills and picturesque landscapes. Within its heart lies a tapestry woven with stories of the departed, their spirits lingering in the shadows and whispers of the past. These tales have inspired a captivating collection of poetry known as "Driving With The Dead," a literary journey that explores the intersection of mortality, memory, and the indomitable spirit of Kentucky's people.

## The Genesis of "Driving With The Dead"

The genesis of "Driving With The Dead" can be traced to the work of Kentucky poet and author Frank X Walker. In 2003, Walker embarked on a pilgrimage across the state, tracing the routes of iconic Kentucky writers such as Wendell Berry, bell hooks, and Harriette Simpson Arnow. As he traveled, Walker found himself drawn to the cemeteries that dotted the landscape, each one a testament to the lives lived and the stories left untold.



## Driving with the Dead: Poems (Kentucky Voices)

by Joel Agee

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 1066 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Print length : 82 pages



Inspired by the profound sense of history and loss he encountered, Walker began collecting stories and poems about Kentucky's dead. These included tales of famous figures like Daniel Boone and Abraham Lincoln, as well as lesser-known individuals whose lives had left an indelible mark on the state's collective memory. Over time, these fragments of history and human experience coalesced into the anthology "Driving With The Dead," published in 2007.

### **Voices from Beyond: The Poetry of "Driving With The Dead"**

"Driving With The Dead" is a symphony of voices, each poem a testament to the enduring presence of the departed. The poets represented in the anthology hail from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, reflecting the rich tapestry of Kentucky's literary heritage. Among them are luminaries like Nikki Giovanni, Jane Hirshfield, and Wendell Berry, alongside emerging voices that bring fresh insights and perspectives to the conversation.

The poems in "Driving With The Dead" explore a wide range of themes, from the inevitability of death to the power of memory. Some poems confront the harsh realities of loss and grief, while others celebrate the lives of those who have passed on. Throughout the anthology, there is a palpable sense of connection between the living and the dead, a recognition that the departed continue to shape our present in myriad ways.

In her poem "Driving With The Dead," Nikki Giovanni writes:

>They are not dead

>They are just away

>With a communicator

>In the middle of the highway

Giovanni's words capture the essence of the anthology, reminding us that even in death, our loved ones remain with us, their spirits guiding and inspiring us on our own journeys.

### **Exploring Kentucky's Haunted History**

Beyond its literary merit, "Driving With The Dead" also offers a unique lens through which to explore Kentucky's haunted history. The anthology includes poems that delve into the state's darker folklore, from tales of restless spirits and haunted places to the legacy of slavery and the Civil War.

In his poem "The Ghosts of Panther Creek," Frank X Walker recounts the tragic history of a coal mining town where hundreds of miners perished in an explosion in 1917. Walker's evocative language brings the ghosts of the miners to life, their cries still echoing through the desolate landscape.

>They walk the hills now

>As ghosts in the moonlight

>Their faces etched with pain

>Their voices carried on the wind

"Driving With The Dead" invites readers to confront the often-hidden narratives that have shaped Kentucky's past and present. By giving voice to the departed, the poets in the anthology create a space for healing and reconciliation, allowing us to come to terms with our own mortality and the complexities of our shared history.

## **Preserving Kentucky's Literary Legacy**

The publication of "Driving With The Dead" marked a significant milestone in Kentucky's literary history. The anthology brought together a diverse group of poets to honor the state's rich literary tradition and explore the enduring themes of death, memory, and the human spirit.

Since its release, "Driving With The Dead" has received widespread critical acclaim and has become a staple in Kentucky schools and universities. The anthology has also inspired a variety of events and initiatives to promote Kentucky literature and preserve the state's haunted history.

In 2017, the Kentucky Humanities Council launched the "Driving With The Dead Poetry Trail," a series of roadside historical markers that highlight the poems and stories featured in the anthology. These markers invite travelers to explore Kentucky's literary heritage and connect with the voices of the departed.

"Driving With The Dead" is more than just an anthology of poetry; it is a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and the resilience of the human spirit. Through its haunting verses, the anthology invites us to embrace the mysteries of life, death, and the indomitable spirit that connects us all.

As we travel along the winding roads of Kentucky, let us remember the voices of those who have gone before us. In the whispers of the wind and the shadows of the trees, their stories linger, reminding us that the past and present are inextricably intertwined. And as we drive with the dead, let their words guide us, inspire us, and help us to find meaning and purpose in our own ephemeral existence.

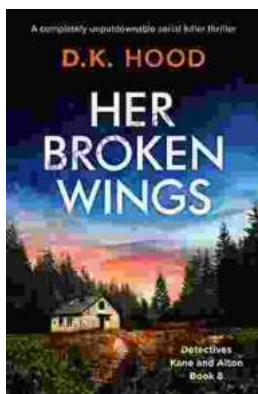


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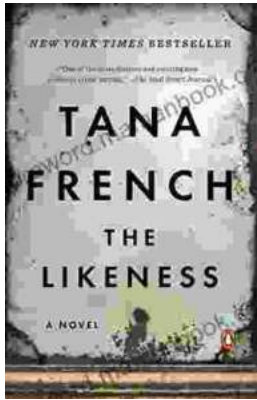
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