mentor." Four years before Mays' death in 1984, the Governor of South Carolina, Richard Riley, gave him the Order of the Palmetto. This is the highest award the state can give anyone. Larry Lebby painted his portrait, and it was hung in the statehouse. You can see it there today.

Nick Aaron Ford loved to teach but is best known as a scholar and an author. He wrote poetry and short stories as well as non-fiction. Born in 1904, he grew up near Ridgeway. Benedict College, which then had a high school, provided his education. He received a bachelor's degree at Benedict and a M.A. and PhD. at the State University of Iowa. Observers considered him a gifted teacher. He began his career teaching English at Schofield High School in Aiken. He also served as principal there before moving to Florida to accept another position. Schools in Texas and Oklahoma benefited from his teaching and administrative skills. In 1945 he accepted a position at Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland, where he stayed until he retired twenty-eight years later. His autobiography, written in retirement, is entitled Seeking a Newer World: Memoirs of a Black American Teacher. Dr. Ford also wrote many scholarly articles and nine other books, several of them with coauthors, including The Contemporary Negro Novel (1936) and Black Studies: Threat or Challenge? (1973). For Best Short Stories of Afro-American Writers (1950), he read over 1,000 stories which had been published between 1925 and 1950 in Afro-American newspapers. After he retired he served as Director of the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities. This group ran programs that allowed minority students to work and earn a Ph.D. at the same time. Before his death in 1982, this scholar and activist received many awards.

Few people of any background can sing in eight different languages like Eartha Kitt. Most people think of her as an actress and singer, but she is also the writer of three autobiographies, including *Thursday's Child* (1956). Born in the South Carolina town of North in 1928 as the child of sharecroppers, she lost her parents at an early age. She had to support her sister by picking cotton. When she was eight years old, her aunt took her to New York City. There she attended school and learned to play the piano. However, she still had to help support herself. She did this by sewing. As a young woman, she

won a scholarship to the Katherine Dunham dance school and then toured with them. In Paris she was seen by Orson Wells, the famous producer. He selected her to play Helen of Troy in his 1951 production of *Dr. Faustus*. She later appeared in Broadway shows and received several Tony nominations. In her autobiographies she described her difficult childhood and the difficult path to fame.

When she was a child, Vertamae Grosvenor wanted to be an actress. As an adult she realized her ambitions. She performed in Personal Problems, an opera that she also authored, and hosted *Horizons*, a highly regarded documentary series. Born in 1938 in Fairfax, South Carolina, she moved with her family to Pennsylvania as a child. Regular trips to the library fed a passion for reading about a life where people of African background could be anything they wanted. Leaving high school for a job, she saved her money. She went to Paris, the place of her dreams, and lived there for five years. Marrying and returning to New York, she began to write while her children were small. It is said that some people will do almost anything to make a living. Grosvenor did many different things, one of which was to sew an apron for an elephant! In 1970 her young son appeared on television and received a contract to have some poems published. The publisher took a look at a cookbook she was writing and decided to publish this too. She continued to write. An article in the Village Voice led to a job on National Public Radio. Her published works include Vibration Cooking: Travels of a Geechee Girl (1970) and Thursday and Every Other Sunday Off: A Domestic Rap (1972). Through her work, Grosvenor helped popularize African-American cooking for all Americans.

Continuing the Oral Tradition

Our discussion of literature began with the oral tradition and ends with it as well. Perhaps we are completing a circle by coming back to our roots. Despite all the changes of modern life, this tradition has survived.

For modern-day children, storytelling is more than just a way to preserve the past. Storytelling is a way to open doors to all the wonders found in books and to the variety of career choices open to the educated. Catherine

African-Americans and the Palmetto State



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