

From: Talking to Texas Writers, Twelve Interviews
by Patrick Bennett
Texas A&M University Press, 1980.

Introduction

One warm May afternoon a group of us from McMurtry hunted out the hardscrabble farm near Glen Rose that John Graves is trying to bring back to life between sessions with his typewriter. The roads were rough and not easy to follow, but we got there. Hup, Graves's English sheep dog, came bounding out to meet us like an eighty-five-pound welcome wagon on four feet. You knew at a glance that Hup was not the Passenger who fit so snugly into the canoe of Graves's classic *Goodbye to a River*. "I never had anything this good-natured around before," said Graves. "He's just what you see. He's absolutely benevolent. He likes the cat; he likes chickens. He doesn't like snakes very much."

Graves came along behind Hup, at a more sedate pace, dressed in khakis, shyly friendly himself. He is perhaps the writer most admired and respected by his fellow Texas writers. We accompanied him to the screened-in porch of the farmhouse, where he made coffee for the group—there were five of us. Hup ran around the outside periphery, frantic to get inside with all those friendly petters.

"Oh, you can let him in. I don't want to leave him in very long because he's got ticks. He's a clumsy mutt, a Mr. Magoo; he doesn't see too well because of all that hair."

It wasn't long before we had to put Hup back out because he kept getting tangled up with the tape-recorder wires. Graves said, "More people in Glen Rose know Hup than me."

In his doggish way Hup overstated our welcome, but while wandering around Texas collecting opinions for this book, I haven't been confronted with any biting dogs. Texas writers have been open and hospitable. They also seem to be hardworking and unassuming.

A few months after the Glen Rose visit, I phoned Graves one morning to check on Hup's name, the proper spelling of a dog's name being a subject that seldom works through into normal conversation. I was in a hurry and framed my question with stumbling ineptness.