

Dear Joan -

I'm afraid to
went a bit overboard
in my editing. Sorry. Use
what parts which may
be helpful.

I did correct some
of the facts and made the
transition somewhat smoother,
a luxury a writer with not
much space to fill seldom gets.

Good luck
Sincerely,
Howard Bentley

Birds of a Feather

by Joan Scott

When she was first lady of the State of Texas, Laura Bush began an annual benefit for Texas libraries, the Austin-based Texas Book Festival. This autumn as the festival was once again observed, Stuart and Scott Gentling, Fort Worth's celebrated artists, authors and lecturers, were invited to speak and to sign copies of their new book. The Gentling brothers, who won praise for their handsome painted decorations of the city's Bass Performance Hall ceilings, are in the spotlight once more with a new University of Texas Press trade edition of their huge 1986 elephant folio OF BIRDS AND TEXAS. The new book bears the same title. When the folio made its debut it was described by author-historian A.C. Greene as "the most stunning and prodigious book in Texas history." The Dallas Morning News called it "the most magnificent book ever produced in Texas."

Although the UT Press book is an impressive 9 7/8" X 12 7/8", it is considerably more convenient to read than the original folio which measured 23" X 29 1/2" and weighed more than forty-six pounds! Thirty additional color plates augment the fifty landscape and bird plates of the folio, and the new book retains all the original text including an essay, My Life with Birds by John Graves that has since become famous. Graves, is

arguably our finest Texas writer. Stuart has also written a new essay, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, AUDUBON AND US, that reads like a mystery novel and tells of their remarkable discovery of a long-lost Audubon painting and how it saved their folio project. The new book is in every sense an art book and not a bird guide. The beauty of its color plates have even won favorable comparison to the work of the greatest 19th century bird painter John James Audubon and his BIRDS OF AMERICA.

At the last minute Scott was not able to attend the Austin Book Festival with twin brother Stuart. He was busy putting the finishing touches on his portrait of George W. Bush for the Texas Capital Dome. Stuart who does most of the promotional work for the brothers anyway managed to make most of the elegant parties that the occasion afforded. At the opening night black-tie dinner he even shared a table with Lady Bird Johnson (a Gentling folio owner) and festival author Liz Carpenter. He also enjoyed an authors' soiree at the Governor's Mansion where he had an amusing conversation with our new Texas first lady Anita Perry.

Gentling's festival weekend came to an end with an exclusive book signing at the Austin Museum of Art at the invitation of Laura Bush. It was widely reported that, because of security considerations and the inconveniences they would cause to

festival visitors, Mrs. Bush would not be able to attend. Just after he began to present a brief talk to the museum guests word came to Stuart that the first lady of the land was on her way for a visit. She arrived with her mother and a group of friends in tow and stayed for the entire book signing. All this glamour in the company of great ladies is routine for Stuart; afterall, the Gentlings have as their friends outstanding Fort Worth women like Ramona Bass and culture maven Martha Hyder.

Twins Stuart and Scott Gentling were born in Rochester, Minnesota and came to Fort Worth at the age of five when their father, after taking his residency at Rochester's Mayo Clinic, took over as head of the anesthesiology department at Harris Hospital. Their mother was fond of telling friends here that famous child specialist Doctor Benjamin Spock was the twins' pediatrician. After attending Fort Worth public schools, the brothers attended Tulane University and later the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Although they occasionally paint in oil and acrylics, they are primarily painters of watercolors. Their artistic and scholarly interests have taken them into some unusual areas of study as we shall see, but the Gentlings still maintain that they are primarily painters of still lifes, portraits, and landscapes. Their painting of birds, their artistic investigations of archaeological subjects such as the Aztecs, and their other art history researches have won acclaim and

will result in future books, but these interests are essentially sidelines or serious hobbies.

In the course of their studies the Gentlings have assembled a fascinating number of collections of Greek, Roman and pre-Colombian objects, 18th century clothing, Audubon memorabilia, and antique musical instruments. Their taste in collecting also ranges from 17th century European prints and Islamic ceramics to 20th century African sculpture, and works by contemporary abstract and surrealist artists. The Gentlings have lectured widely in the Metroplex. They have given talks at the Dallas Museum of Art, the Amon Carter Museum, the Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art and the Kimbell Art Museum where they also have exhibited their paintings for the Bass Performance Hall and for the popular Artist's Eye series. In fact they may be the only artists ever to have had work on display in all of Fort Worth's major museums. The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History here owns all forty of the original Gentling bird paintings created for their famous folio. The museum displays them about every five years.

President and Mrs. Bush are not through with the Gentling brothers yet. They have commissioned them to paint two large Texas bird paintings for the family quarters at the White House. The backgrounds for the paintings will be scenes from the Bushe's

Bushe's?

Prairie Chapel Ranch at Crawford, Texas. Scott and Stuart will be traveling to the ranch in the next few weeks to record landscape subjects to add to the images they captured on their August trip to the ranch. They still laugh about the three-and a-half-hour tour the president personally gave them in his white truck in the 100 degree heat. At the end of the tour both Gentlings were exhausted, but Mr. Bush was as fresh and lively as ever.

The twins were grateful for the opportunity to get to know the president better. When Scott returned home he made several significant changes to his portrait before sending it to Austin where president and Mrs. Bush enthusiastically unveiled it at the capital rotunda January 4th on national television. At the reception Scott told president that he was now working on a private, more informal portrait of the president dressed in his jeans and work shirt. The president was delighted and told Scott what a good job he thought Scott had done with the governor's portrait. Bush had chosen Scott over a half dozen or so portrait artists whose brochures had been sent to the Oval Office by San Antonio art dealer and friend Alice Carrington. The president had been especially impressed by Gentling's portraits of friends Perry and Nancy Lee Bass, Dallas developer Trammell Crow and famed naturalist Jane Goodall.

He has further honored Scott by asking him to paint his portrait as president for the White house and the official

portrait of Mrs. Bush as well. The Gentlings are delighted with their friendship with president and Mrs. Bush and the opportunity to work for them in the future. Their friendship with the first family actually came about as the result of their OF BIRDS AND TEXAS. In 1998 the Gentlings presented the Governor's mansion with one of their folios. Mrs. Bush later acquired a set of bird plates and had them framed and prominently displayed in one of her husband's offices. Later the Gentlings even had a small art exhibit in Mrs. Bushe's capital office, and their friendship bloomed.