



Conversations with Willie Morris (Literary Conversations Series)

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"I've been asked all over America . . . why Mississippi is so distinctive. You know, we have our failings, but we're coming along all right. But as to why Mississippi is so artistic and athletic I always say there is something in the quality of two things: memory . . . and the sour-mash bourbon."

During the three decades since the *London Sunday Times* trumpeted *North Toward Home* as "the finest evocation of an American boyhood since Mark Twain," southerner Willie Morris (1934-1999) wrote seventeen other books, including a second well-received volume of autobiography. Throughout his lengthy literary career, which began when he contributed his first sports column to a local newspaper at the age of twelve, he attained national prominence as a journalist, nonfiction writer, novelist, editor, and essayist.

In *Conversations with Willie Morris*, the first collection of interviews and profiles devoted to this American author, Jack Bales compiles twenty-five fascinating and incisive conversations (some never before published) with a man who for over forty years confronted the turbulent issues of his generation. "I have no alternative to words," Morris occasionally replied when asked about his far-reaching career. And throughout his life he unceasingly spoke out on matters that concerned him, writing at various times with outrage, humor, sadness, and affection -- but always with passion and candor.

The diverse topics covered in this collection reflect the scope of Morris's wide-ranging interests. As he speaks with journalists, public radio and television hosts, social historians, and even a professional comedian, he candidly discusses his own life and literary career, sports, other authors, the 1960s, politics, the Civil War, dogs, the complexities of race relations, and, of course, the South and his beloved Mississippi.

After reviewing the author's *Homecomings* some ten years ago, a *Boston Globe* writer concluded, "There's damn fine life left in this man's prose." As is evident by Willie Morris's eighteen books, countless essays, and the insightful profiles and interviews gathered here, there is little doubt that this man's prose will be remembered as fresh, lively, and thought-provoking.

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