

## Celebrating authors

# A glimpse into a writer's early life

**W**hen she was 6, Flannery O'Connor taught a chicken to walk backward in the backyard of her childhood home in Savannah. A film crew traveled from New York to shoot a newsreel of this accomplishment, but the stubborn chicken refused to cooperate. The enterprising filmmakers salvaged their day's work, however, by running footage in reverse of the chicken walking normally. Then, for comic effect, they added shots of ducks, cows and horses "walking" and even "running" backward.

O'Connor won three O. Henry Awards for short fiction and was awarded the National Book Award posthumously in 1972. But the incident from her childhood stayed with her, and, she later voiced a tongue-in-cheek remembrance: "I was just there to assist the chicken, but it was the high point in my life. Everything since has been an anticlimax."

Visitors will hear stories like this at the Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home on Savannah's Lafayette Square, where she resided for the first 13 years of her life. The Greek Revival townhouse was built in 1856 and contains mementos from O'Connor and her family, such as framed family photos and an exquisitely designed perambulator with O'Connor's initials gilded on the side.

First editions of O'Connor's works are on display as well as one of her childhood books, "The Fairy Babies," on which she wrote a thumbs-down assessment on the title page: "Not a very good book."



JONI SAXON-GIUSTI / THE BOOK LADY BOOKSTORE

Authors Danëlle Lejeune and Don E. Cellini share their books during the Annual Savannah Local Author Day.



RICH WARREN



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The Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home in Savannah contains artifacts honoring the writer's life, such as this soft-sculpture portrait, at left.

Visitors also will learn that O'Connor was known by her family and friends as Mary Flannery. She sewed outfits for her chickens, wrote stories about a family of ducks traveling the world and, as an only child, was doted upon by her parents. She was especially close to her father and created

little poems and drawings for him that she'd leave under his breakfast plate.

In 1938, the family moved to Milledgeville, her mother's hometown. Not long afterward, her father died of lupus, the same disease that would take O'Connor's life in 1964 at age 39. And though the world largely remembers the writer for the wildly creative years she spent at Andalusia, the farm outside Milledgeville where she famously raised peacocks, her childhood home in Savannah also gives insight into the world-renowned writer she would become.

—Rich Warren

### When you go

The Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home is at 207 E. Charlton St., Savannah. Tours take place every hour between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Visit [flanneryoconnorhome.org](http://flanneryoconnorhome.org) or call (912) 233-6014 for more information.

To see the filmed footage of O'Connor's chicken, visit [bit.ly/focbc](http://bit.ly/focbc).

**Annual Savannah Local Author Day**, March 27, Lafayette Square, Historic District, Savannah. The Book Lady Bookstore celebrates local and regional authors from 1 to 4 p.m. in conjunction with the Flannery O'Connor Birthday Celebration and Parade. (O'Connor would have been 97 this year on March 25.) Visit with authors and enjoy activities, such as chicken-poop bingo, a wacky parade, vendors, music and costumes inspired by O'Connor and her book characters. (912) 233-3628. [bit.ly/savauthor](http://bit.ly/savauthor).