

**ONE WRITER'S  
BEGINNINGS**  
by Eudora Welty  
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with alligators. Being at odds with their own society gave these eccentric globetrotters an advantage over their more inhibited countrymen: unfettered curiosity. All were, as Water-ton put it, "well fitted out for adventure."

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1909, Eudora Welty has, with an absolute indifference to self-promoting fanfare, established herself as one of America's foremost writers of short stories and novels, many of which deal with the power and mystery of family relations. Here, in the space of three lectures (originally delivered at Harvard University in 1983), she relates the story of her genesis as a writer. Along the way, Welty manages not only to evoke the book-filled world of her childhood (back when "the dark was dark") but also to describe the lasting influence of her parents. When she was a little girl, living in the house she inhabits to this day, her father, an insurance executive, a lover of clocks, telescopes, and gadgets, scored the soles of her shoes so that she would not slip on the hardwood floors. From him, the future writer acquired a lasting fascination with time, a keenness of observation, and the knowledge that one could never take enough precautions. From her mother, she learned, among other things, about secrets—that, specifically, "one secret is liable to be revealed in the place of another that is harder to tell, and the substitute secret when nakedly exposed is often the more appalling." (Her mother would not explain where babies came from but did tell her, in morbid detail, about the death, at his birth, of an older brother.) Looking, as she did over the years, at the affection between her parents, Welty became, as she puts it, a "loving kind" of observer. And what she looked and listened for most of all were stories—stories that came out of gossip, jokes, and fibs. "It took me a long time," she recalls, "to realize that these very same everyday lies . . . were in fact the basis of the *scenes* I so well loved to hear about and hoped for and treasured in the conversation of adults."