

some groups request tours and information to make it an educational experience, most just want to come and pet the animals. White gets a kick out of the preschoolers and the things that interest them most. "Four-year-olds are so interested in poop," she says with a big grin. "Some parents get so uptight about it. When we get groups of four-year-olds, like from the Merrimack Valley Day Care Center, 20 kids will gather and point. It's so normal."

An estimated 5,000 people visit the family-run business each season. Its four members contribute their time each day cleaning, attending to visitors, working in the gift shop, or doing whatever tasks need to be done. Sometimes, the show is also taken on the road. Companies or groups will often pay to have a miniature

horse, donkey and goat, with accompanying babies, attend their functions.

Many visitors are interested in buying, as they love horses but don't ride. "If you really like horses and don't want to ride them, why own a big one?" she asks. White calls the surge in popularity "mini-mania."

Gate receipts help maintain the farm's daily operations. However, White's primary income is derived from the sale of miniature horses, pygmy goats, miniature donkeys and dogs. Offspring have been shipped all over the United States and abroad, including recent exports of a miniature donkey and two horses to Bermuda. White characterizes the petting farm as a working breeding farm. Most attempts at breeding the animals are done before the farm opens,

since some parents may have adverse reactions to this kind of sex education of their children.

White's Miniature Horse Petting Farm has become a favorite spot for introducing youngsters to the farm. The diminutive size of the animals calms the fears most children feel when encountering enormous farm animals. White especially welcomes the physically and developmentally handicapped to enjoy the lovable, "huggable" animals. Picnic tables allow families an opportunity to relax and enjoy themselves in an unhurried manner. Bring lunch, bring the kids and be prepared to bring home a smile. ■

**Larry Martel/Pittsfield**

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## Literature

# The Lady of Peyton Place

June 1994

*"Indian summer is like a woman. Ripe, hotly passionate but fickle, she comes and goes as she pleases so no one is ever sure whether she will come at all, nor how long she will stay."*



**Metalious sought refuge from an angry world when she moved into this house in Gilmanton**

**T**hus begins *Peyton Place*—the book that forever altered the way America looked at the godly virtues and homespun manners of small towns. The woman who wrote these words, Grace Metalious,

was neither sophisticated nor worldly; she was not raised in a teeming metropolis nor did she graduate from a university. She possessed neither great wealth nor beauty. But she had a gift so powerful that the mere mention of her name

invokes feelings of outrage and awe, condemnation and commendation. Her writing was fueled by the fire of her vivid imagination and matched with a style that was simple, rough and very powerful.

Was Grace Metalious the forerunner





**Friend and neighbor Jeannie Gallant is writing a book about Metalious**

of the feminist movement, with her explicit descriptions of women and their sexuality? An unknown girl from the backwoods of New Hampshire? Or was she a rebel, angered by the submissive role a '50s housewife was forced to accept? Perhaps the best explanation may be that she was a combination of these things. But the forces that shaped this rebellious writer were rooted in the most traditional of circumstances.

She was born Grace Marie Jeanne D'Arc de Repentigny in Manchester in 1924, the child of lower-middle-class, French-Canadian parents. Her father deserted the family when she and her sister were young, and her mother eventually became an alcoholic, leaving the children's upbringing to her grandmother. This matriarchal environment, coupled with her mother's pretensions to social status, bred in Metalious an inability to form close friendships with women. She could never quite trust nor be completely comfortable around them.

While most of Manchester's French-Canadians lived on the west side, Metalious' family lived in the wealthier north end. From childhood, she was taught to believe she was superior to the other French-Canadians who labored for a living in Manchester's mills. Her mother, who was socially ambitious,

told her never to marry one of the immigrant mill workers, but to set her sights on someone who was socially acceptable. They were a poor family, however, and her mother's fantasies and delusions of grandeur planted the seeds that formed Metalious' lifelong hatred of hypocrisy.

Metalious was a voracious reader and a bright girl whose IQ exceeded 150. She attended Manchester Central High School, where her intelligence was noticed by her high school teachers (one of whom was Louis Freedman, the father of Dr. James O. Freedman, current president of Dartmouth College). Nevertheless, a college education was not in her future.

At the young age of 17, she married George Metalious, the son of a Greek immigrant. In marrying him—a poor man—Metalious turned her back on her mother's values and her strict Roman Catholic upbringing.

World War II was raging, and her husband enlisted and went off to the battlefield, leaving Grace alone to take care of their daughter. She worked in Manchester as a secretary and a mill hand to support her family, which included her grandmother, mother and sister. When her husband returned, they both worked to survive, but the struggle proved to be too much for the young family. Eventually, they decided that the only way to move ahead was for George to attend the University of New Hampshire on the GI Bill. They both took jobs and saved as much of their salaries as they could.

It was during this time that Metalious began to write short stories, but, plagued by feelings of inferiority and shyness, she did not allow anyone to read them.

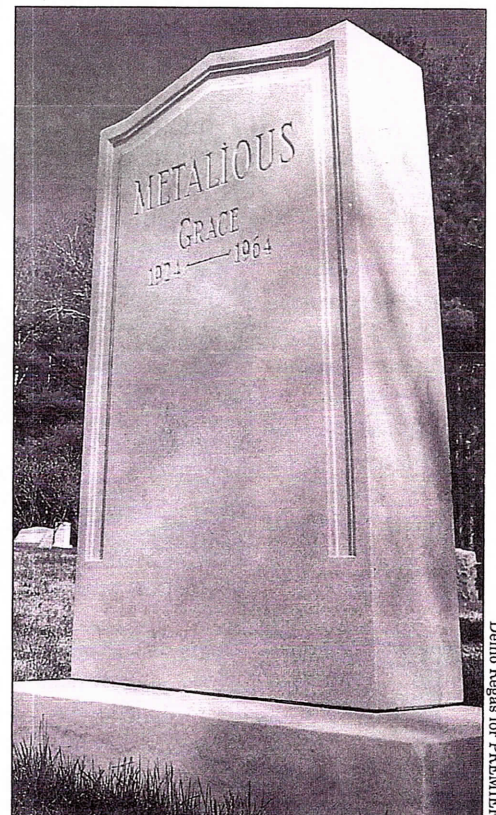
When George graduated, he took his first job teaching school in Belmont; his salary was between \$2,500 to \$3,000. While her husband taught, Metalious continued to write. It was the only way to fight off a world that seemed dreary and about to close in on her.

"'I am trapped,' I screamed silent-

ly, 'I am trapped in a cage of poverty and mediocrity, and if I don't get out, I'll die,'" she wrote of those first years of marriage. According to Jeanne Gallant, a close acquaintance and neighbor who knew Metalious during her last years, (Grace) "had a gift, a flair for writing. She saw it as a way out of poverty ... she wanted to make her family wealthier."

In the mid-'50s, Metalious and her family lived in Gilmanton, where George was principal of Gilmanton Elementary School. It was here that she began work on a novel she called *The Quiet Place*. Part of the plot included the story line in which a young girl shoots her father to protect herself from his incestuous advances. This incident actually took place some years earlier in Gilmanton, involving a prominent citizen and his daughter.

In writing *Peyton Place*, Metalious structured the town and its citizens from various places she had lived, such as White River Junction, Vt., Belmont and Gilmanton. Her story lines were woven from various incidents that she either read in newspapers or heard about through town gossip. When the book was finished, Metalious scoured writing





magazines searching for a literary agent. She came upon the name of Jacques Chambrun and settled on him, in part because of his French name. After being turned down by a number of publishing houses, *Peyton Place* was finally accepted and published in 1956.

Even before the publication of her book, Metalious was viewed by Gilmanton residents as eccentric. She did not keep a clean home; dishes were piled up in the sink and empty beer cans were strewn about. Her preferred mode of dress was a man's shirt and jeans. She refused to play the part of the principal's wife. She did not attend parents' meetings nor become involved in any of the social aspects her husband's position demanded. She loved her three children, but raised them around her writing schedule. Gallant recalls, "She slept all day and worked all night."

The publication of *Peyton Place* not only confirmed the town's view, it turned the townspeople completely against her. Metalious stripped away the veneer of respectability that had shielded the citizens of Gilmanton. She exposed in broad daylight the hypocrisies of small-town morality, leaving naked, through her novel, some of the town's most prominent people. And the townspeople reacted furiously.

Residents felt their peace and privacy had been invaded by the book and the hordes of reporters that descended upon the small town to interview the author. They felt they and the town had been unfairly portrayed, and resented the fact that their orderly way of life had been shattered and thrown open to intense public scrutiny.

People in "town did things to her and went out of their way to be cruel," Gallant remembers. "In 1960, the year of the drought, the fire department was bringing water to different people ... she had gone to the fire department and requested water ... the firemen said, 'who did she think she was, because of all her fame and her money, she thinks she can buy ... water,' ... she even offered to pay but ... she never got it."

Things grew worse: Her husband lost his job as principal of the elementary school and divorced her. Her children were harassed in school. A second marriage to a local disc jockey also ended in

divorce after he embezzled money from her and ended up in jail. Her lawyer, later judge, Bernard Snierson, handled Metalious' finances but, due to his inexperience, negotiated a lump-sum settlement for book and movie rights. Consequently, her children received no benefits or royalties.

Her last years were unhappy ones. She bought a lovely home in Gilmanton, which served as a retreat from an angry world. But even here, she found no peace. She was, Gallant charges, "heart-broken and disillusioned" by the treatment she received from Gilmanton residents. *Peyton Place* cost her everything—her marriage, her family and her financial security. Even writing lost its appeal. She wrote a sequel to her blockbuster, entitled *Return to Peyton Place*, followed by *Tight White Collar* and her last book, *No Adam in Eden*.

But none of her other works ever achieved the phenomenal success of *Peyton Place*. Her drinking, always something of a problem for her, increased steadily in the last two or three months of her life. She drove peo-

ple away from her and seemed to lose her will to live. "Life disappointed her," surmises Gallant. She died in February 1964 of liver disease, at the age of 39.

When Metalious was a little girl, her grandmother advised, "Be sure of what you ask for—you may get it." In writing *Peyton Place*, Metalious hoped her book would bring her the things she wanted most: a happy home, a loving family and financial security. But her blunt style of truth-telling cost her all of it. Some see her today as a strong woman who was ahead of her time, someone who tried to balance the demands of home and family with a writing career. But those who laud the writer have overlooked the woman, her feelings, passions and convictions. She wanted to have a stable, ordinary life that would allow her to pursue her heart's passion—writing. In a corner of the town's cemetery is a white tombstone that reads, "Metalious, Grace 1924-1964." Her grave overlooks a small pond surrounded by trees. In these quiet surroundings, she is, finally, at peace. ■

Diane T. Padilla/Gilmanton

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