

# PLAIN song PLAINS people

## Novelist spins regional yarns

The dictionary definition of "Plainsong" is: a story about a centuries-old subject that is told in a plain, unadorned manner.

In many ways, the definition is descriptive of the Great Plains region. The land is flat and considered by most people from outside the Plains boring and insignificant.

The atmosphere and its effects on people who live here have changed little over the centuries. The winters are still painfully cold, and the summers are still blisteringly hot. The people still deal with it.

Kent Haruf tells their stories.

"Everything I write about is located out in the northeastern corner of Colorado," Haruf said in a phone interview from his home in Murphysboro, Ill. "It's the part of the world that I think of as home."

Haruf, an author and professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, has written three novels set in the High Plains region of northeastern Colorado. His third piece, "Plainsong," is the story of a number of different people, all coping with different hardships in their lives.

While the setting is a visible part of "Plainsong," Haruf said it wasn't the focus. His focus is on the people who are often overlooked.

"Living on the Plains makes you slow down and look at things more closely, because there aren't things like mountains and forests to look at," Haruf said. "If you're going to see the Plains, you actually have to look at what you see there. Once you do that, there is much to see."

"The Plains aren't pretty, but they're beautiful."

He said the subtle nuances and differences in the people were often hidden beneath the overall aura of the Great Plains. And rather than leave those characteristics — be they integrity or impurity — shrouded amid words of unwarranted warmth, Haruf chooses to expose reality through fiction.

"I'm not trying to romanticize it in any way. Instead, I'm trying to be accurate," Haruf said. "What I describe in the Plains are concrete details, often unnoticeable if you're not paying attention, and I hope the readers would have a better notion of what there is to see."

Despite being an inhabitant of the Great Plains, Haruf is hardly provincial. He graduated from Nebraska Wesleyan University and worked a variety of jobs thereafter. They included a stint in the Peace Corps and teaching English in a remote village in Turkey. He didn't publish any writing until he was 41 years old.

"What those different jobs and different places I've lived have done for me is helped me as a writer, because I've had a range of experiences with a range of people, so I have a grasp of humanity," Haruf said. "Having grown up in a small town, there is a great deal of wealth in knowing the mayor and the town drunk at the same time. You grow up hearing stories."

Unfortunately, many people don't realize the worth of those stories. Fortunately, Haruf isn't one of them.

"It's a mistake to think that life happens elsewhere. It's the hardest thing to teach students that their experiences are worth writing about," Haruf said. "What I'm writing about, and what all good writers are writing about, is not some kind of regional literature."

"What I'm doing is writing about people I know that live out in northeastern Colorado."

STORY BY JASON HARDY



COURTESY PHOTO  
In his third and latest book, "Plainsong," Kent Haruf focuses on the hardships of the overlooked.

# Faith in blues guitarist realized at Zoo

Despite slow start in Lincoln, singer-songwriter always had owner Boehmer's backing

BY JOSH KRAUTER  
Senior staff writer

Zoo Bar owner Larry Boehmer knew Coco Montoya was good, even if the rest of Lincoln was a little slow in catching on.

When the blues singer and guitarist first played at the Zoo Bar, the crowd was small, and Boehmer lost money on the show. But Boehmer didn't say good riddance to Montoya. He immediately called Montoya's management and booked him again.

"I knew he was going to catch on," Boehmer said.

Montoya did catch on and is one of the bar's most popular performers. Fans can see him play two 75-minute sets there tonight.

## Concert Preview The Facts

Who: Coco Montoya  
Where: Zoo Bar, 136 n. 14th St.  
When: Tonight 9:30  
Cost: \$8

The Skinny: Blues musician is equally good at vocals and guitar.

Although Montoya has been fronting his own band for only about five years, he's been playing blues on the road since the early 1970s. He started out as a drummer for blues legend Albert Collins, who taught him how to play guitar.

After his stint with Collins, Montoya played guitar for John Mayall. Montoya said in a press release that his guitar playing

evolved quickly under Mayall because of the pressure in being Mayall's guitarist.

Mayall's three previous guitarists were Eric Clapton, Peter Green, who founded Fleetwood Mac, and Mick Taylor, who later joined the Rolling Stones. Mayall knew he had to be good to compete with his predecessors.

Boehmer first saw Montoya play when he was with Mayall, and he said Montoya impressed him greatly.

"He just basically took my head off," Boehmer said. "He was that good."

Montoya went solo after Collins, who was dying of cancer, told him he should go out on his own.

Since then, Montoya has released three solo albums and toured worldwide.

"There's only a handful of current blues guitarists that really get me excited, and he's one of them."

LARRY BOEHMER  
owner, Zoo Bar

He stops in Lincoln frequently, Boehmer said, and sometimes it's not just to play. One of his songwriting partners, Dave Steen, lives in Lincoln, and Montoya sometimes flies down to collaborate on songs with him.

Boehmer said fans should expect a contemporary, electric blues sound

with a touch of Santana-flavored Latin rock from Montoya. He said Montoya's singing is just as good as his guitar playing.

"He's certainly one of my favorites," Boehmer said. "There's only a handful of current blues guitarists that really get me excited, and he's one of them."