

Hutcheson goes home to Alabama in 'Saratogan Trees'

Home-fried chicken and biscuits dripping with golden butter. Candy licorice whips and cherry jawbreakers. Katydid and fireflies. These words embody the world of Ark Griffith, a 12-year-old boy living in the 1940s town of Alusia, Ala.

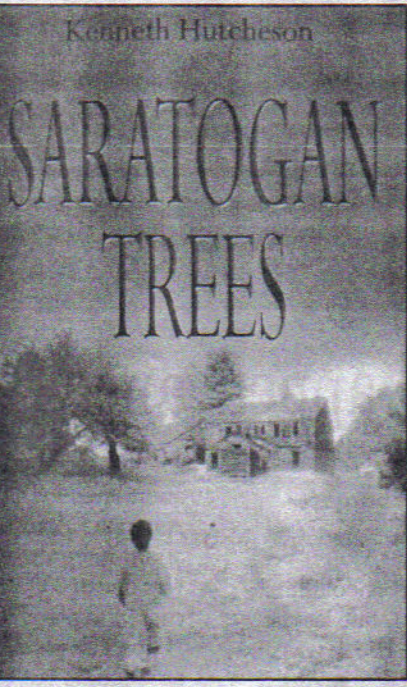
Constantly flanked by his younger brother, Crackers, Ark encounters adventures typical for a boy in this quiet, unsophisticated village. Living next door is his mentally impaired cousin, Nell, for whom he is also responsible. Following Ark, Crackers and Nell through the seasons, the reader is drawn into a place where the day can be measured by the piercing cry of the cotton-mill shift whistle. Catching turkeys is a rite of passage and the only newcomers are newborn babies.

Trouble plagues the town in the form of the Buckalew Boys. Known for their drinking and bullying, they terrorize the modest citizens of Saratogan, the area of Alusia where Ark and his

BOOKS WITH AN ALTITUDE

family live. And, whether it's against the "colored folk" in the other township, Nell and her unnerving "fits," or the Griffith family, themselves, prejudice abounds in this corner of the world. Luckily, Ark's Uncle Boyd is a prominent figure in his life and helps guide him through some of the rough waters of his early adolescence, broadening Ark's range of view.

The drowning death of a local child embroils the residents and the heat climbs to a fever pitch. Ark soon learns that growing up reveals ugly truths and complexities far beyond that of the innocence of childhood. Uncle Boyd gives him some good advice: "You'll have to be like this old tree here. Stand firm, even when those great



windstorms pass through." Local author Kenneth Hutcheson charms the reader by creating truly genuine characters located in a humble setting. His clear, straightforward

writing gently pulls the reader into a place where one can almost feel the weight of the summer humidity pressing upon the skin. Ark Griffith is pure and so real that it feels as if one is running through the thick Saratogan woods alongside of him. Perhaps Kenneth Hutcheson's beginnings as the son of cotton millers in rural Alabama gives "Saratogan Trees" the incredible, authentic flavor so solidly carried throughout this wonderful story. Short but sweet, "Saratogan Trees" is an uncomplicated, yet deep, read. With this story, Kenneth Hutcheson shows us that the simple life "ain't" so simple!

Kenneth Hutcheson, born May 12, 1935, in Albertville, Ala., was a rehabilitation counselor in Colorado when he began writing in the 1960s. He has written three novels and four plays and currently lives in Golden with his wife, Nadene.

Canyon Courier News 4/24/05