

Signal **ARTS**

Signal writer catches first break with 'Kudzu Debutantes'

BY CARI GERVIN
COMMUNITY NEWS WRITER

Cathy Holton is that rarest of endangered species — and I'm not talking about the ivory-billed woodpecker.

No, Mrs. Holton is a member of another virtually non-existent breed, the published author who sent in an unsolicited manuscript.

For those of you who don't keep up with the publishing industry, this is how it used to work: A writer would write a book. He or she would send it to a publishing house. Someone would read it and either accept or reject the

manuscript. Famous authors had agents to negotiate cushy deals and movie rights.

Today, this is how it works: You have to have an agent. If you don't already know an agent or a published author, or you don't happen to be famous, it's almost impossible to get an agent. Very few agents even accept unsolicited manuscripts, and no publishing houses do.

Simply put, if you haven't networked with people in the publishing industry, you aren't going to get anything published unless you get really, really lucky.

Cathy Holton got really, really lucky.

After years of rejection, Mrs. Holton wrote a novel, found an agent and signed to a two-book deal with Ballantine, a division of Random House. Her first novel, "Revenge of the Kudzu Debutantes," was released yesterday. A sequel will be out next spring.

The novel tells the story of three middle-aged Southern belles in a fictional Georgia small town who decide to get

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

■ Cathy Holton will be signing copies of "Revenge of the Kudzu Debutantes" at Barnes & Noble on Tuesday, June 6, at 7 p.m. and at Wild Hare Books on Saturday, June 17, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. For a full review of the novel, read this Sunday's Chattanooga Times Free Press.

revenge on their cheating lawyer husbands.

Chattanooga readers will appreciate little nods to local folks, like a deli called Shapiro's and a high school named Tyner. Most notably, longtime residents will recognize the Kudzu Ball, which used to be held on the same night as the Cotton Ball as a good-natured spoof. Be warned, however — Mrs. Holton's Kudzu Ball is nothing like the original affair!

Sitting in her living room, Mrs. Holton said she was inspired to write a novel in which women get even with their



Cathy Holton, sitting here in her living room, endured years of rejection before finally getting a novel published.

PHOTO BY CARI GERVIN

lying spouses after years as a paralegal in an Atlanta law firm.

"So many (women) had no clue that divorce was on the horizon, and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if the women could have figured it out beforehand!'" Mrs. Holton explained.

The book lampoons genteel Southern traditions, like debutante balls and the Junior League. Mrs. Holton, a 20-year Signal resident, said her satire is meant in good fun.

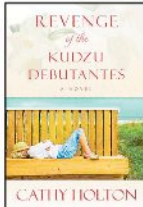
"I think of it as a gentle poke at some people who take things too seriously," Mrs.

Holton said, noting that several of her friends are former debutantes and members of the Junior League.

While "Revenge of the Kudzu Debutantes" could be viewed as a Southern version of Olivia Goldsmith's "The First Wives Club," Mrs. Holton said that after next year's sequel, she will be taking her writing in a different direction.

"I don't want to be pigeonholed," Mrs. Holton said. "I love these characters, but I also want to try other things too."

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"Revenge of the Kudzu Debutantes" was released by Ballantine in hardback yesterday.

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