

2020 ALEX ALBRIGHT  
CREATIVE NONFICTION PRIZE WINNER

# TROUBLE IN THE HEARTLAND

BY ANDREW D. SCRIMGEOUR  
WITH ART BY BEN LONG

**ANDREW D. SCRIMGEOUR** is Dean of Libraries Emeritus at Drew University, Madison, NJ, and lives in Cary, NC, with his wife. His stories have been published in *The New York Times* twice on Christmas weekend, and he is completing a book of Christmas stories. His essays and stories have also appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*; *The Authors Guild Bulletin*; and *The Moment: Wild, Poignant, Life-Changing Stories*. He co-authored with David S. Herrstrom *The Prophetic Quest: The Stained Glass Windows of Jacob Landau* (Penn State University Press, 2021). Also in 2021, Knopf Press will publish his *Poems about Books and Libraries* in the Everyman's Library Pocket Poets Series. The editor of *Just Call Me Bob: The Wit and Wisdom of Robert W. Funk* (Polebridge Press, 2007) and *Evaluating the Legacy of Robert W. Funk: Reforming the Scholarly Model* (SBL Press, 2018), he is writing a full-length biography of Funk, also the subject of this prize-winning essay.

**ROBERT FUNK WAS NERVOUS.** His wife and a few friends were beside him, keeping the conversation light, hoping to distract him, as they walked past the red brick buildings of Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. It was the evening of March 27, 1998, and they were headed to Mees Auditorium where Funk was scheduled to give the keynote address for the Ohio Academy of Religion, a regional association of scholars teaching in the field of religious studies. The event was open to the public. A local radio station and the *Columbus Dispatch*, the major newspaper of the capital city, had given Funk's visit top billing that day.

Since Funk founded the controversial Jesus Seminar thirteen years earlier, virtually no other person in religion except the pope had attracted as much sustained attention from the American media. A few days before his arrival in Columbus, the Jesus Seminar had published its second big report, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*. The media immediately fanned the

Final judge Philip Gerard said of his selection for the 2020 Albright Prize, "This piece demonstrates a storyteller's eye for detail and significant action. It's a kind of reportage with its own narrative intelligence informing the story of a lecture . . . fraught with controversy and opening a vein in the moral fiber of many of those who have come to protest. The writing is fluent and restrained, vivid and full of an unusual kind of suspense."