

Kudzu artist Marlette dies in car crash: A Pulitzer Prize winner

News in the [August 7, 2007](#) issue

Doug Marlette, whose editorial cartoons often lampooned fundamentalist religion but whose folksy comic strip *Kudzu* celebrated a rural Southern Baptist pastor, was killed in an automobile accident July 10. He was 57.

The Pulitzer Prize winner, who recently joined the staff of the *Tulsa World*, died near Holly Springs, Mississippi, reportedly after a truck in which he was a passenger careened off a rain-slicked highway.

Marlette had been en route from the Memphis airport to Oxford, Mississippi. He was helping with a high school production of a musical based on his syndicated comic strip, which lovingly—but insightfully—depicted life in his native South. Marlette had just flown in from North Carolina, where he had delivered a eulogy at his father’s funeral in Charlotte on July 6.

“The Creator endowed him with such creativity that he was literally one of a kind—and a real Baptist,” said James Dunn, former executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. He and Marlette had struck up a friendship in 1972, when both were speakers for a meeting at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

“He could see the ironies and the contradictions [in political and religious life] so clearly and then reduce them to just a few strokes in a cartoon,” Dunn said.

Dunn and another famous progressive Baptist preacher, Will Campbell, were reportedly the inspiration for one of the lead characters in *Kudzu*, a preacher named Will B. Dunn. The *Kudzu* cartoons were published in the *Century* regularly in the 1970s and 1980s, as were some of his editorial cartoons.

James Dunn said Marlette, who was raised Southern Baptist, was strongly committed to the doctrinal distinctions that moderate Baptists celebrate, especially the priesthood of all believers and the separation of church and state.

Marlette won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning in 1988, after publishing a series of drawings skewering the religious right's increasing involvement in secular politics. They included one depicting Jerry Falwell as a snake in the Garden of Eden.

Those prize-winning cartoons appeared in the *Charlotte Observer*, where Marlette had worked for 15 years, and in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which he joined in 1987. He moved to *New York Newsday* the next year and later worked in Tallahassee. -*Associated Baptist Press*