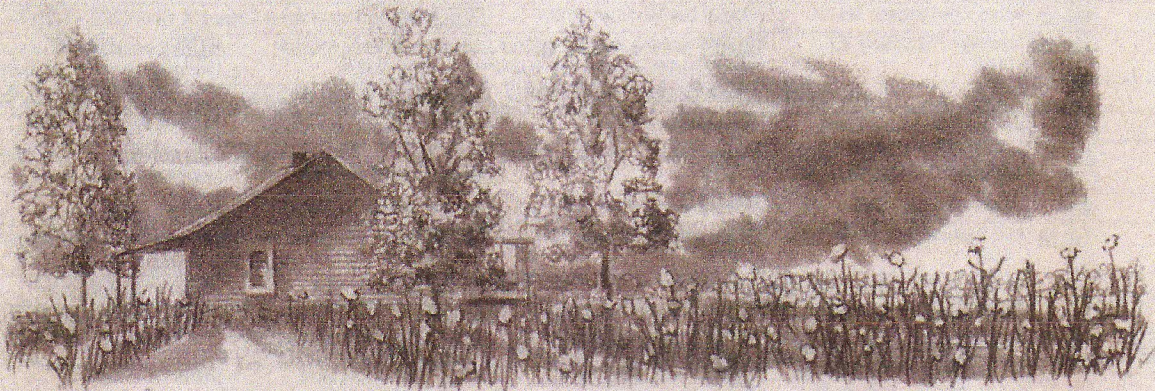


PUBLISHING

# Painting the right house

*Author John Grisham taps local artist for title page artwork*



BY ROBERTA T. VOWELL  
THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

**T**O LOUIS JONES, it seemed a simple assignment. Draw a house. Heck, go ahead and *paint* a house. After all, that was the title of the book he was illustrating: "A Painted House."

This is not just any book. It's a John Grisham book. John Grisham of "The Firm," "Pelican Brief" and a shelf-full of courtroom thrillers that also fueled some hot movies.

The author tapped local artist Jones to recreate the setting of his new work, a very un-Grisham tale of a boy growing up in the rural South, for the book's title page.

So Jones painted a house. Then he painted another. And then five

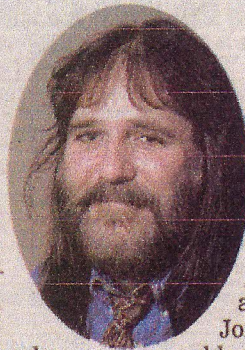
Louis Jones' assignment for Grisham's "A Painted House" was to re-create the setting of a boy growing up in the rural South.

more dang houses before Grisham was satisfied.

Today, the book goes on sale at bookstores around the world. First printing: 5 million copies.

That's a whole lotta house.

"It was a big honor to work with him," Jones said. "But it's real scary at the same time. If the art is bad, 5 million people are going to think, 'Boy, he really doesn't have it.'"



Jones is acquainted with big publishing numbers. His work has graced the "Conversations with God" books, which have sold something like 20 million copies worldwide.

Still, Grisham is in another league. In fact, Jones was reading one of his older works, "The Rainmaker," when he got the call telling him that Grisham tapped him.

"From what I understand, he came through our Norfolk gallery," said Jones, who also owns a Virginia Beach gallery with his wife, Susan. "He lives near

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LOUIS  
AND  
SUSAN  
GALLERY

# JONES ART

## Artist: A lot of effort went into finding the right house for Grisham

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Charlottesville. I don't remember meeting him, but I talk to hundreds of people a day.

"He's real, real familiar with my work."

Jones did not create the cover of "A Painted House," which is a photo taken from a collection of commercial work. Instead, he was hired to draw the title-page illustration, right under "By John Grisham."

The artist read the manuscript, then produced the house of Grisham's book. Except that it wasn't Grisham's vision. So the author sent it back.

"He kept saying, 'You have to be accurate to the book.' But he wouldn't tell me what was wrong."

Grisham rejected six drawings. Each time, Jones re-read the book, then tried again.

"Finally, I was reading it, and in it, the boy is lying in bed listening to the rain on the roof. And I realized, it's a one-story house."

Mission accomplished.

"He could have told me six drawings before that," Jones

said. "But I understand his reasoning for that. He wanted us to be there, to see it as clearly as he did."

The Grisham work is one more chapter in an eventful time for Jones.

In 1999, he settled his lawsuit

against the makers of the 1998 Robin Williams movie "What Dreams May Come." Jones had accused the filmmakers of copyright infringement for allegedly using his paintings in the movie. Jones sought \$2 million in damages; the terms of the settlement are confidential.

His father, renowned local artist Herb Jones, died in 1998, and he recently lost his beloved brother-in-law.

"My wife, Susan, and I, we've never had a normal day," Jones said. "Either wonderful things happen to us, or horrible things. It's never a smooth road."



FILE PHOTO

John Grisham rejected six of Louis Jones' drawings. Each time, Jones re-read the book, then tried again.

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