

# Transcript of Book Beat radio feature on Alec Wilkinson

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- With Book Beat, I'm Don Swaim. Alec Wilkinson's book, *Moonshine*, is the true story of a colorful liquor control agent named Garland Bunting, who tracks down bootleggers and still operators in North Carolina. *Moonshine* is Wilkinson's second book, the first was called *Midnights*, about Wilkinson's one year as a cop on the midnight shift in Wellfleet, Massachusetts.
- In Wellfleet, where I was a policeman, liquor was really part of the fabric of wintertime life. If one stood in front of the liquor store for a period of the day, one would see many, many people of the town coming in to make their purchases.
- That is not the case in North Carolina, where eccentric liquor laws have made it all but impossible to buy booze, and which it encouraged the illegal manufacture of often tainted goods.
- A person who knows, or has heard of moonshine, generally hears of it spoken of in a kind of respectful way, as if there were craftsmen out there in the woods coming up with a certain powerful concoction that was superior to anything that he could buy, and I was amazed to hear, really, what a filthy product it is.
- Alec Wilkinson made half a dozen trips to North Carolina in order to profile the talkative Garland Bunting, who has driven cabs dressed like a woman, peddled fish, and worked as a carnival barker to entrap the moonshiners. Incidentally, after Bennington College, and a year on the Wellfleet police force, Alec Wilkinson went off to Europe as a rock musician. Back in the US, *The New Yorker* liked his contributions to the Talk of the Town column enough to give him a staff job. Wilkinson says he found life a little casual when he started work at *The New Yorker*.
- Nobody explains how the phones work or where to get your pencils, or things like that, and you're just sort of, somehow, kind of, the door opens and you stand there and try to figure out what to do.
- Alec Wilkinson did find out what to do, of course, and a *New Yorker* assignment led to a short but lively book, *Moonshine: A Life in Pursuit of White Liquor*, published by Knopf. With Book Beat, I'm Don Swaim.