

A Question & Answer Session with *Star of Flint* author Jill Smith Entrekin

ROOM 272 PRESS: According to your author bio, you're a native Georgian. Have you lived in Georgia all your life?

JSE: *Yes, I grew up in Thomaston, a textile community in West Central Georgia's Flint River Valley. I attended West Georgia College, (now the University of West Georgia), where I majored in English and minored in secondary education. I met my husband Dana in college, and when we graduated, we married and moved to the Atlanta area. I spent the next 31 years raising two daughters and teaching in Georgia public schools.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: When did you first develop an interest in writing?

JSE: *I think I was born with a love for the written word. My father was the editor and later owner of the Thomaston Times and Free Press in Thomaston, and my mother was an avid reader who kept books in ready supply for my three siblings and me.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: How does your Georgia upbringing affect your writing style?

JSE: *I realize why Harper Lee wrote only one book: she couldn't improve on perfection! Southern authors like Lee, William Faulkner, Ferroll Sams, Lewis Grizzard, and Pat Conroy, to name a few, impress me with their ability to write with such angst and passion while simultaneously interjecting humor in their stories. Their works reflect just the delectable Southern style that I can only hope to emulate. I've climbed Georgia magnolias, floated down and fished in Georgia's rivers, and eaten Georgia barbeque my entire life. As a child, when I wasn't climbing trees or riding my bicycle through the streets of my hometown, I was spending my days at the newspaper office where I relished both the sound of my daddy's old Underwood typewriter as he hammered out the day's top story and the smell of fresh ink on newsprint as the big presses spat out the weekly news. I come from a part of the state whose population speaks with a "Flint River" dialect, which I've never tried to overcome. While I'm a firm believer in proper grammar and usage in the written and spoken word, I also think that one's dialect is part of one's true character.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: Why did you become a teacher instead of a journalist?

JSE: *Most of my female friends attended college to major in education or nursing, unless they were pursuing a husband for what we jokingly labeled the "MRS." Degree. I truly loved my years as a teacher and have never regretted choosing that vocation. In my first year in the classroom, a ninth grader told me he'd never read a book from start to finish until we studied *To Kill A Mockingbird*. That hooked me, and I spent the next 30 years trying to instill in my students a passion for good literature.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: Your bio indicates that *Star of Flint* is your first novel. Why haven't we heard from you before now?

JSE: *When I was younger and juggling a family and a career, I had little time to write. As I reflect upon those years now, I realize that I was not ready then to tell this story. I needed to grow both emotionally and spiritually, and I also needed to detach myself from the story to write it.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: So, the book is about your life?

JSE: *I knew that question was coming. While it is somewhat autobiographical, my work has more fiction than truth in it.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: What about the characters? Are they real or fictional?

JSE: *I'd have to say that the majority of my characters are composites of several personalities whom I've met over the course of my life.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: Do you see yourself in the main character Allie?

JSE: *Of course, the narrator Allie is loosely based on me. However, I had a much more stable childhood than Allie does, and I could only dream of being as witty and intelligent as she is.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: When did you start to write your book?

JSE: *My husband and daughters pestered me for years to write. When I retired, the three of them became relentless. I had the time, so I dove in.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: How did you get started when you began to write *Star of Flint*?

JSE: *As a high school English teacher, I often modeled writing assignments for my students. I assigned a "memory" essay to my ninth graders after we had read Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory." I created a model for my students about a Christmas gift I'd made as a child. That particular writing became the springboard for my story, and I actually used it in Chapter 13 of the book.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: How long did it take you to write *Star of Flint*?

JSE: *About 3 years total. However, half that time was spent at my computer while the other half was spent spinning the tale in my mind. I did my best thinking when I was walking or mowing the lawn.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: Your website offers a preview of your second novel, *Buck's Junction*. Will any of the characters from *Star of Flint* make an appearance in this book?

JSE: *Yes, some of those characters will be returning. However, I think I'll let readers discover for themselves which *Star* characters make an appearance in *Buck's Junction*.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: When will *Buck's Junction* be available?

JSE: *It's still in the works right now. I may have to escape to some quiet beach to finish it.*

ROOM 272 PRESS: What do you do when you're not writing or promoting your book?

JSE: I'm a Yoga/Pilates enthusiast, and I rarely let a day go by without a three mile walk with my boxer Sundance. I am active in a Bible study at my church, and I relish my time with my three amazing grandchildren. I reserve Friday nights for back porch sunset viewing with a glass of wine, some sixties music, and my husband, who also happens to be my best friend.