

## A reader's guide to Saints in Limbo

Written by From Staff Reports  
Friday, 26 June 2009 08:50

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### Saints in Limbo - A reader's guide

#### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Ever since her husband, Joe, died, Velma True's world has been limited to what she can see while clinging to one of the multicolored threads tied to the porch railing of her rural home outside Echo, Florida.

Then one day a stranger appears at her door. Without knowing why, the agoraphobic widow welcomes him into her kitchen for coffee while she tells him stories of how life used to be, before her purposes were "all dried up." Just before disappearing as suddenly as he came, the man presents Velma with a special gift, one that allows her to literally step back into the past through her own memories to a place where Joe still lives and the beginning is closer than the end.

While Velma is consumed with the man's gift, her son Rudy is also being presented with a challenge to his self-centered, complacent lifestyle. And a teenage girl winds her way to Echo, determined to unravel the mysteries her dead mother left behind. As secrets old and new come to light, Velma finds herself unmoored from the fears of the past and feeling her way toward freedom.

This lyrical, Southern novel weaves mystical elements with tangible touches of God's redemptive grace to reveal a pattern of irresistible hope.

#### FOR DISCUSSION

1. Saints in Limbo takes place in the deep, rural south, in fictional Echo, Florida, near the state's

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northern border near Alabama. Have you read other novels rooted in the deep south? Do you believe that the southern landscape has changed in modern culture, or is it changing still? Is this of significance? What do you think should be preserved of the "Old South" and what should be released to the past?

2. Velma clings to the threads on her front porch. What do you believe that she needs from having the threads there? Do you have similar "threads" in your life? What do they provide you?

3. Early in the novel, Velma is given an incredible gift from a mysterious stranger. A rock that allows her to travel back through time into her memories. Are there tangible things or places in your life that are touchstones - like Velma's rock - that elicit your memories? Do they require protection of any kind to keep them? How can you use your touchstones to help you appreciate your memories while living in the moment?

4. Discussing what one has read is very important to Velma's friend Sara, as she is hurt to discover that Velma actually read the copy of *Moby Dick* Sara loaned to her twenty years before. But Velma feels like the story loses something in the discussion. She says, "Talking about them isn't going to change anything. Not gonna bring Moby back." Why do you think Velma feels so apathetic about sharing with her friend?

5. The gift of reliving memories plays a significant role in *Saints in Limbo*. If you were suddenly given this gift to re-experiencing portions of your past, how do you think you'd respond? Would you escape into your past, or avoid those experiences?

6. Throughout the story, in the midst of everyday life, spiritual occurrences touch down and invade the natural world. Do you feel that the spiritual side of life has ever invaded, or overlapped, into your everyday world?

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7. A malevolent force tries to rob Velma of her ability to use her gift to gain wisdom from the experience, and to affect her future for the better. Do you believe a force, or forces, exist that attempt to stop the good things from happening, or certain destinies from being fulfilled?

8. Velma's son Rudy appears to have wasted all his potential and seems to live an unremarkable life. What do you believe are the experiences that set Rudy's course? By the end of the novel, do you feel that Rudy's journey can be seen in a different light? What kind of future can you imagine for Rudy?

9. Velma and Sara are best friends, even though they are different in almost every way. Are your friendships built around people who are much like yourself? If so, why? If not, how has this affected you?

10. Annie's presence in *Echo* serves as a catalyst for several of the characters. Can you think of an experience with a person—friend, family member, or stranger—who served as a catalyst in your own life? Was it a positive or negative experience?

11. Near the end of *Saints in Limbo*, Velma sees the man who brought her gift to her on her birthday, and she now finds that it's gone. She says, "Looks like all I've got left now is today." How do you think Velma feels about this? How does this phrase make you feel?

12. Velma, Sara, Rudy, Rose, and Annie go through "stretching" experiences in the novel, testing them and challenging them to grow. Do you feel as if these characters have changed by the end of the story? Who has changed the most, and in what way?

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