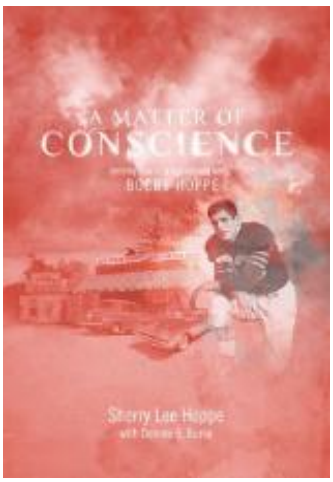
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A Matter of Conscience: Redemption of a Hometown Hero, Bobby Hoppe

Sherry Lee Hoppe with Dennie B Burke



About the Book

1:00 a.m., July 20, 1957.

Auburn football star Bobby Hoppe was enjoying a beautiful mid-summer night as he headed home from a date with his girlfriend. He certainly wasn't expecting trouble as he drove down the steep, winding road in North Chattanooga. When a darkened car, its headlights off, cruised up behind him, he assumed it was old high school buddies playing a prank. But as the driver pulled alongside and pointed a pistol at his head, Hoppe recognized his sister's ex-lover, a disreputable whiskey runner. A shot was fired, the car fell back, and Hoppe fled for his life.

No one in town wanted to believe the hometown hero was a killer, and the authorities turned their heads, allowing the case to become another unsolved homicide. But for Hoppe it was a moment seared into memory, plaguing his conscience constantly. He fled to Auburn, to the football field where he could exorcize his demons by running and hitting, and where his senior leadership helped lead the Tigers to the 1957 national championship. As years passed, Hoppe struggled to appear normal. No one saw into his dark conscience or knew he was always seeking penance, yet never able to forgive himself.

In an historic indictment, Hoppe was charged with first-degree murder 31 years later, although witnesses had died, police records had been lost, and memories had faded. Bobby Hoppe's demons were exposed to the light and his loved ones saw for the first time what lay hidden behind his stoic mask.

Sherry Hoppe knew her husband intimately, they shared a deep love, but until the eve of that fateful indictment she did not know his innermost secret, that Bobby Hoppe had killed a man.

Through reliving the dramatic trial, where one of America's great attorneys, Bobby Lee Cook, defended her husband

with all the skill and wit he could muster, Sherry Hoppe tells the story of her love and the mystery submerged in Hoppe's conscience as he faced the consequences of that fateful morning in July. In the weeks before his death in 2008, with Bobby's blessing, Sherry began to write his story, pouring through trial transcripts, combing through boxes of old newspaper clippings and interviewing friends, family and witnesses.

Fifty years have passed since that traumatic event, and mystery still surrounds Bobby Hoppe, his demons have been banished, but what really happened that night?

Discussion Guide

1. How do different characters in the book define ?conscience?? How did they each deal with their own conscience?

2. What do you think about Judge DiRisio?s ruling that Godwin?s testimony did not violate the penitent/priest confidentiality statute?

3. What do you think about about Judge DiRiso?s ruling to allow the case to go forward after 31 years?

4. How well do you think the justice system worked in Bobby?s Hoppe?s investigation and his historic indictment and trial?

5. Was Hoppe?s self-defense plea believable? Why or why not?

6. Godwin was forced to admit he was offered ?big money? to tell his story. How does that make you feel about him?

7. Were you surprised by the ending of the book? Do you think Hoppe killed Hudson? Why or why not? If you don?t think Hoppe killed Hudson, who do you think killed him?

8. As a reader, what intrigues you the most about this book? Stories about Bobby?s football prowess? Tales of the trial with Bobby Lee Cook as defense attorney? Insight into the love that sustained Sherry and Bobby through months/years of tribulation?

Author Bio

Dr. Sherry Hoppe was named president emeritus of Austin Peay State University in 2007 after serving there almost eight years. Well regarded for her visionary leadership, she was also president of two other colleges. She is co-author of **Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils** (University of Tennessee Press, 2007), the authorized biography of a civil rights leader. She has co-edited four published books (Jossey-Bass [2], Praeger, and Peter Lang) and authored eight chapters in three books. She served six years on the Commission on Colleges Executive Council and was active on the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Board of Directors. Sherry lives in Chattanooga, where her hometown hero grew up.

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