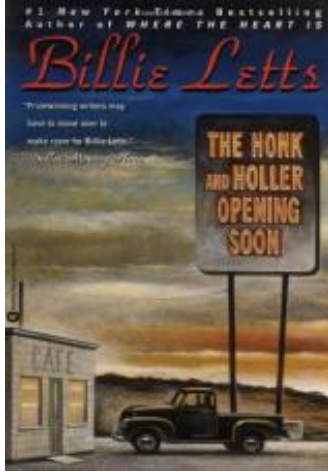


# The Honk and Holler Opening Soon

by Billie Letts

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## About the Book

The neon sign had seemed appropriate when the *Honk and Holler Opening Soon* was being built. But twelve years later, the once-busy highway outside Sequoyah, Oklahoma, is little traveled, and "opening soon" is a tired joke. Today the sign is as battered and beaten as the cafe and its owner Caney Paxton, a Vietnam War veteran who hasn't ventured outside since its opening.

The characters who drift in and out of the Honk don't change much: Molly O, a four-times married earth mother who recognizes a wounded spirit when she meets it; Life Halstead, a widower who eats three meals a day in the cafe so he can be near Molly O; Hooks Red Eagle, Soldier Starr, and Quinton Roach, Cherokee veterans of World War II; and Bilbo and Peg Porter-Bilbo steadily puffing his smokes while Peg struggles for breath through her oxygen mask.

With Christmas only days away, their lives are to be forever changed with the arrival of Vena Takes Horse, a Crow woman on a quest, and Bui Khanh, a Vietnamese refugee looking for home.

A story that crackles and sizzles like burgers on a red-hot grill, *The Honk And Holler Opening Soon* captures a small town's prejudice and tolerance, violence and big-heartedness. It convinces us that dark clouds can really have silver linings. And it leaves us hungry for more writing from Billie Letts and the Oklahoma she portrays with so much vitality and love.

## Discussion Guide

1. *The Honk and Holler Opening Soon* is set in Sequoyah, a very small town in Oklahoma. Is it realistic to believe that a Vietnam vet, a Native American woman, an African American woman and a Vietnamese man might come together under the strange circumstances in the book? Do you find it believable that outsiders such as Bui or Vena could be fully accepted into this insular community?
2. Which of the characters do you feel you have most in common with? Why?
3. Bui Khan, a recently arrived immigrant, understands little of the language and culture of the United States, yet he is in search of the American Dream. What are his chances of achieving that dream?
4. Caney Paxton stayed inside the Honk from 1973 until 1985. What major changes in this culture took place during his period of isolation? How will those changes affect his life outside the Honk?
5. Is the relationship that develops between Caney and Vena believable? Why or why not?
6. What do you believe is the theme of this book? Do you think the author fully developed that theme?
7. It seems that several story lines are not concluded by the end of the novel. Bui Khan's wife has not arrived; Brenda is "lost" out there in the bigger world; Molly O and Life are going out together, but there's no indication how their relationship will end; and although Vena and Caney are together, they still have problems to work through. Why do you suppose the author left so many issues unresolved? Do you find this frustrating?
8. Vena Takes Horse isn't "good at staying still" at the beginning of the book, but at the end, she returns to the Honk. Do you think she's changed enough that she'll stay? Do you think Brenda will return to her mother?
9. Are the problems between Molly O and Brenda common between mothers and daughters?
10. How do the regulars at the Honk contribute to the story?
11. Although all of the major characters in *The Honk and Holler Opening Soon* are adults, the role that children play in the novel is enormous. In fact, many of the novel's pivotal moments revolve around children. Yet Caney, Molly O, Brenda, Vena, Helen, and Bui react so differently to the idea of parenthood. Why is that? Is it easier for Caney and Bui to accept the fact that they are going to be fathers than it is for Molly O, Brenda, Vena and Helen to accept that they are going to be mothers? Is the connection between mother and child always stronger than the bond between father and child?

## Author Bio

Billie Letts is the author of numerous short stories. Her first novel won the Walker Percy Award and the 1996 Oklahoma Book Award. She lives in Oklahoma with her husband, Dennis.

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# **The Honk and Holler Opening Soon**

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