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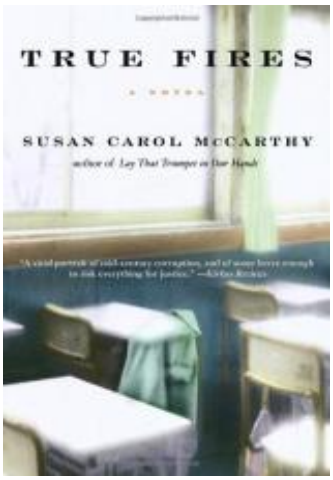
True Fires: A Novel

by Susan Carol McCarthy



About the Book

Susan Carol McCarthy's award-winning debut novel, **Lay That Trumpet in Our Hands**, portrayed an unforgettable circle of characters brought together by the civil rights movement. Now she brings to life the explosive story of a family caught in a frightening tide of small-town injustice. At the heart of **True Fires** is a white family accused of being black in a segregated society where spurious ancestry can be deadly. Challenging the town's self-serving sheriff, an unlikely alliance is born between Lila Hightower?daughter of the county's most powerful man?and Ruth Cooper Barrows, a veteran reporter. Battling their own personal struggles as well, Lila and Ruth are unstoppable as they take on the corrupt Old Guard, assisted by remarkable children. Inspired by real events, **True Fires** beautifully captures the spark of hope that dwells in every generation.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the significance of Florida as the setting for this novel. How does this locale compare to Daniel's recollections of North Carolina and to your cultural impressions of other Southern regions?

2. Access to quality education lies at the heart of the novel. What aspects of this debate are still played out in today's public schools? What factors determine a child's educational opportunities in your community?

3. What are Lila's motivations in defending the Dare children? Would she have achieved the same level of success if her cause had been integration and the Dare children's ancestry had been undeniably African American?

4. Big Nick the Bolita King and Sheriff DeLuth maintain a delicate balance of power. What determines whether a citizen has power in the town of Lake Esther?

5. Susan Carol McCarthy included several scenes depicting one of Sampson's bee colonies. Are "She Who Decides" and

"He Who Provides" reflected in the novel's main characters, or is the colony in a way superior to humanity? Discuss the colony's many roles in the novel, including as a self-defense mechanism and source of livelihood.

6. How do submissiveness and gender play out in Lake Esther? How does Lila's experience with love compare with the marriage between Birdilee and the sheriff, or between Ruth and her husband?

7. Discuss your own recollections or understanding of this time period. What new insight, historical or otherwise, did you gain from **True Fires**?

8. The press and the courts were key to the kinds of social change described in **True Fires**. In the novel, a judge and a journalist proved to have more impetus than the governor. What does this indicate about America's political structure?

9. The novel is just as much Lila's story as it is the Dares'; in a way, she is also seeking freedom. From what does she want to free herself? Does she succeed?

Author Bio

Susan Carol McCarthy lives in Carlsbad, California. Her acclaimed debut novel, **Lay That Trumpet in Our Hands**, was the winner of the 2003 Chautauqua South Fiction Award and was named one of the Best Fiction Books of 2002 by *San Diego Magazine*.

Critical Praise

"Provokes more than enough moral indignation on the part of the reader to keep one turning pages... well-paced."

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