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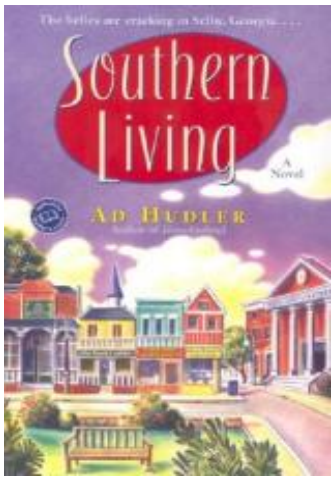
Southern Living

by Ad Hudler



About the Book

Welcome to the utterly eccentric world of Selby, Georgia, where the folks sprinkle three things liberally over their daily lives: sugar, religion, and the wicked fun of Southern living.

Margaret Pinaldi is the quiet daughter of a hell-raising abortion-rights advocate who recently died?bequeathing Margaret a house in Georgia. Finally free from her mother's demanding presence, this transplanted Yankee is finding herself for the first time, courtesy of the Deep South. And, much to her surprise, she likes it.

A former International Dogwood Festival Queen, Donna Kabel once had cute male suitors chase her like hounds to the fox. But all that changed after a car accident left her with a huge facial scar. Now Donna works in the produce section of Kroger. But it seems that the scar that could have cost Donna her inner strength has actually spurred her to reinvent herself.

Thirty-four-year-old Suzanne Parley, the chardonnay-alcoholic wife of a fifth-generation Selby neurosurgeon named Boone, longs to have the most exquisitely decorated house in the affluent Red Hill Plantation community. Childless and directionless, Suzanne suddenly comes up with a bold plan to make her bored husband love her again: she'll simply fake a pregnancy.

On the eve of this year's all-important Dogwood Festival, the disparate lives of these three women will converge in a brilliant comedy of Southern manners like none other. With this funny and poignant novel, Ad Hudler joins Fannie Flagg and Adriana Trigiani as one of our best chroniclers of Southern life.

Discussion Guide

1. Food plays a prominent role in the lives of each of the three main characters. Discuss those relationships, their

similarities and differences.

2. The theme of religion is woven through the book, too. Margaret has an aversion to it, after countless run-ins with anti-abortion activists. Donna's father hammers it home to her but she, too, remains a religious outsider. How does religion shape the two women's lives?

3. Selby, a sleepy old Southern town, is in the midst of a transformation with the sale of the newspaper to a big Northern chain and the influx of Asians and Northerners who have relocated to work at the Toyota plant. Discuss what those changes are and the positive and negative effects.

4. Donna and Margaret seemingly come from different worlds. Donna is a home-town Southern girl, a high school graduate who strives to fill her homemaker mother's role in her domineering father's life. Margaret grew up fatherless, has a master's degree and was raised in the North by a well-educated, feminist mother. What is it that makes them bond despite those differences? Conversely, Suzanne and Donna have quite similar backgrounds yet never develop much of a relationship. Why?

5. Margaret, Donna and Suzanne all undergo change. Discuss what their metamorphoses have in common and what's different? What role do men play in each one's transformation?

6. Does the fact that Margaret doesn't know who her father is play a part in how she views men?

7. What role does makeup play in Donna's life? If she'd had her scar repaired early on, might she still have been so driven to become a supermarket success?

8. Which character do you find the most interesting? Why?

9. In her letter to Margaret, Ruth Pinaldi tells her: "If you choose to be a gentle breeze for most of your life, also remember there will be times that call for the roar of a hurricane ? and you must blow the bastards away. History does not remember the 'good girls.'" Do you agree? Why or why not?

10. Randy is a well-educated Northerner who loves fine food, which initially appears to give him much in common with Margaret. Why then does she turn away from him in favor of Dewayne?

11. What role does race play in the book? Are Boone and his Sugar Day Country Club peers racist or is the club all white because blacks and whites are more comfortable with that arrangement?

12. The Chatter items sprinkled throughout the book change in tone and nature as the plot progresses. Discuss those differences and what they appear to show. What purpose do they serve?

Author Bio

I grew up on the High Plains of Eastern Colorado, in a four-generation newspaper family. I started cleaning toilets and sweeping up around the presses when I was nine and started writing for the paper when I was in my mid teens. My mother was the only feminist in Eastern Colorado, and early on she had us boycotting products that were endorsed by

anyone who spoke out against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. My fiction often features strong women, no doubt attributable to my mother's influence.

From there, I studied art history and journalism at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and, after graduating, got my first job with the newspaper in Fort Myers, Florida. I was a lowly reporter when I met my wife Carol, the advertising director and a Kansas native. Eight years older than me and in management, she was forbidden fruit, but I was inexplicably drawn to her and began to pursue in earnest.

We married, Carol soon gave birth to Haley Joy, and our family began moving across the country (Rochester, New York; St. Paul, Minnesota) as Carol trained for her dream job of newspaper publisher. I stayed home with our daughter and wrote freelance magazine articles.

Carol landed her first publisher job in Macon, Georgia, and it was living in this beautiful, quirky city that first inspired me to write fiction. We've since returned to Fort Myers, where we live in a 1951 ranch-style home on the Caloosahatchee River. Carol is publisher of the paper where we met, and I'm still the primary caregiver of the family. I try to get my writing done while my daughter's at school. Fiction writing and housework complement each other well; one is brain-intensive, the other is brain-dead, and after struggling on a paragraph for twenty minutes, folding the white load provides a welcome respite.

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Critical Praise

"[An] engaging debut . . . With self-deprecating humor and adroit expression, Hudler delves deep into the American psyche of gender roles. . . . The dialogue rings with authenticity."

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