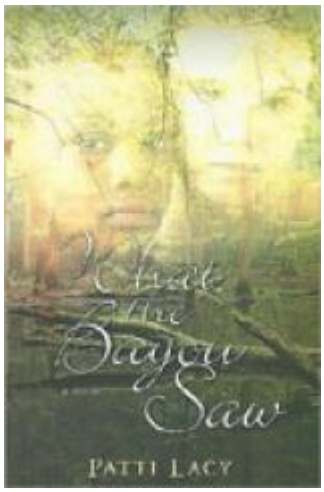
What the Bayou Saw

by Patti Lacy



About the Book

The Past Can't Stay Buried Forever

Since leaving Louisiana, Sally Stevens has held her childhood secrets at bay, smothering them in a sunny disposition and sugar-coated lies. No one, not even her husband Sam, has heard the truth about what happened when she was almost twelve years old.

Now a teacher in Illinois, Sally has nearly forgotten the past. But when one of her students is violently attacked, Sally's memories of segregation, a chain link fence and a blood oath bubble to the surface like a dead body in a bayou. Lies continue to tumble from Sally's lips as she scrambles to gloss over harsh reality. Finally cornered by her deceit and nudged by the Holy Spirit, she resolves to face the truth, whatever the consequences.

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Discussion Guide

1. What character traits would you assign Sally? Is she a woman you'd like to befriend?

2. How does the approaching Midwestern winter heighten Sally's angst about the conflict with her racist students?

3. Discuss both obvious and hidden prejudices that unfold in the first few chapters of the novel.

4. Compare and contrast racism in your community with the incidents in twenty-first-century Normal, Illinois, and in the 1960s Deep South.

5. Does Shamika garner your sympathy? Ruby? Detective Price?

6. Do you feel the author did an effective job of portraying the novel's male characters? Can a female writer truly get "in the head" of Sam and Detective Price? In the same vein, can a white writer effectively capture the voice of African American women?

7. Sally's awareness of her lying problem increases over the course of the story. Discuss the use of Sam, Ed, and Ella as vehicles to convict Sally of her sin.

8. Through the eyes of young Sally, we glimpse images of race relations in the South during the late 1950s through the early 1970s. Which images resonate with your own experiences? Which images are outside of your frame of reference?

9. What role does the Holy Spirit play in this novel?

10. Compare and contrast the novel's portrayal of the Colossians 3:18 admonition for wives to submit to their husbands with your own views.

11. As Sally glimpsed Ella through a chain-link fence, her view of black folk began to change. What personal incidents have transformed your mind-set on sociopolitical issues?

12. Was the rape scene difficult to read? Should the portrayal "down bayou way" have been less graphic? Why or why not?

13. Though Ella has limited scenes in the novel, she plays the role of a heroic character. What Christian values does she exhibit?

14. Sweet Willie, the horn player, was chosen to represent the highs and lows of the life of a jazz musician. Discuss the ways that role was developed in the novel.

15. Despite (or perhaps because of) the gritty issues examined in this novel, the author chose happy endings for the book's characters. Do you agree or disagree with that choice?

Author Bio

Patti Lacy graduated from Baylor University with a B.S. in education. She taught at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois, until 2006, when she began to pursue writing full-time. She has two grown children and lives in Illinois with her husband, Alan, and a dog named Laura. Visit Patti's website at www.pattilacy.com.

Critical Praise

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