



DEATH'S HALF ACRE: Book Club Discussion Guide

Irrelevant factoid: Shelby Stephenson, who let me plunder his poetry for the captions that begin each chapter, lives about five miles from me and is my third cousin, once removed.

Margaret Maron on the writing of *Death's Half Acre*: The impetus for this book grew out of some newspaper articles about the culture clash when newcomers from more urban areas move into housing developments surrounded by farms. I also had personal opinions about some of the decisions made by our local government. (Don't we all?)

DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. It is often said that a Margaret Maron book is “a mystery and more” in that she puts serious economic and social issues into the traditionally-plotted whodunnit. *Home Fires* and *Storm Track* examined lingering racial problems. In *Hard Row*, it was migrant labor and domestic violence. What are some of the issues in *Death's Half Acre*?
2. The south is still referred to as “the Bible Belt.” Do you think the Church of Jesus Christ Eternal is typical of the area or an aberration?
3. Is there significance in the fact that the church has no widows when the book opens, but will probably acquire windows soon after the book ends?
4. Dee Bradshaw is a spoiled slacker who identifies with her father's patrician background rather than her mother's more plebeian origins. Does she come to understand and admire Candace? What changes her perception?
5. What did the dollhouse symbolize for Candace? For Dee? For Cameron?
6. Deborah sits in judgment on two main cases: two women who came to blows over a dog and a chicken, and three adolescent boys and their four-wheel ATV's. What are the larger issues behind these cases?
7. At one point, Deborah says, “Confession may be good for the confessor's soul, but it can play havoc with the heart and soul of the person forced to hear that confession.” Discuss.
8. Someone once said, “The mission of the modern newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Deborah attributes part of the problems of local government to the lack of an effective newspaper to play watchdog and ombudsman. Is she right? How effective is your own local newspaper in rooting out corruption?

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