



LONG UPON THE LAND: Book Club Discussion Guide

Irrelevant factoid: According to Wikipedia, George G. Blaisdell, the founder of the Zippo Manufacturing Company, produced the first Zippo lighter in early 1933. "It got its name because Blaisdell liked the sound of the word zipper and zippo sounded more modern."

Margaret Maron on the writing of *Long Upon the Land*: In *Bootlegger's Daughter*, the very first Deborah Knott novel, her brother Will lights his cigarette with "a Zippo so old and battered that its square corners were rounded off. It was Mother's originally, a souvenir she'd brought home from the Seymour Johnson Airfield after World War II. The lighter is burly and masculine-looking. . . yet she was never without it. When she died and her things were divided, there were the usual two- and three-way battles, and some of those battles went all the way to skinned knuckles and bloody noses; but that beat-up Zippo was the only items all the boys fought over—not just her sons but her stepsons, too. Even the ones that didn't smoke. Yet I was the only one who knew who'd given her the lighter and why she kept it."

Actually, it turns out that Deborah didn't know as much as she thought she did.

Over the years, alert readers have asked me about the lighter and the story behind it, and I was forced to say I didn't know either.

When I decided to write about how Deborah's parents met and married, the time seemed ripe to dig down and see if I could come up with the reason that Zippo meant so much to Deborah's mother. In Chapter 1, I show Deborah reflecting on how unlikely their union was:

It never occurred to me to wonder how she could have married a roughneck bootlegger who barely finished grade school and who had eight little boys to boot. She was a privileged town girl. . . . He grew up in rural poverty, the son of a small-time moonshiner.

Her father was a prominent attorney whose associate tried to get him to run for governor. His father died in a car crash while running from a bunch of revenuers.

In exploring that storyline, I finally figured out the lighter's significance and it surprised me almost as much as it surprised Deborah.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. *Long Upon the Land* takes its title from the commandment "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Compare the Knott family's feeling for the land with the Earp men.
2. Pines are often harvested for lumber. What does it say about Sue's feeling for the land when Kezzie tells Deborah that he could show her that pine tree that holds a bullet from Joby Earp's rifle?
3. The court case that takes Deborah to New Bern also involves family land in the form of a burial plot. Did you find the outcome of that case reasonable? Which cousin had the strongest family loyalty?
4. Do you know how your own parents met?
5. Sue teases Kezzie that she fell in love with his sons before she fell in love with him. Do you think there's any truth in that?

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