



## Q&A with Sandra Brown

### 1. What was your inspiration for this novel?

A vivid memory of my father's childhood occurred when he was about eight years old. His father, my grandfather, had a showdown with armed federal agents who arrived at his dairy farm demanding that he pour out milk he couldn't sell because of an over-supplied market. My grandfather refused to waste good milk when so many families in the area were going hungry. Gun-toting relatives backed him up, and eventually the agents retreated. No shots were fired, but it was a tense situation that obviously made a lasting memory for my father. My grandfather continued giving away his surplus milk.

I also wanted to write about a fiercely independent and unhappy woman who is taught how to live by a man who is dying.

### 2. How was writing a historical novel different from the suspense novels you regularly write?

Writing *Rainwater* was a refreshing change of pace . . . a change of everything, in fact. Typically I have a fairly good grip on the plot of a suspense novel before I set about writing it. I must know beforehand how the mystery ultimately will be solved. With *Rainwater*, I began with Dr. Kincaid bringing David Rainwater to Ella's door and then let the story unfold on its own.

### 3. How did your background as a Texan influence this novel?

Both sets of grandparents lived in the small Texas town that I used as my model for Gil-ead. When I was a little girl, it was a big treat to walk from their houses to "town" to get their mail from the post office or to pick up something from the grocery store, which was exactly like Mr. Randall's. I was always fascinated by the stories my grandparents and parents told of surviving the Depression. For instance, my maternal grandfather worked on the Katy railroad. He made forty-eight dollars a month – and twelve of it paid the rent on the railroad-owned house in which the family lived. He supported a wife and five children on thirty-six dollars a month. Yet they were a happy, loving family. Those hard times didn't make them bitter; it made them appreciative and strong.



**4. Did you research the era before you set out writing? If so, what sources did you consult?**

Yes, a lot of research was required, particularly into the various government programs – when they went into effect, when they were actively being carried out. The stories that were most wrenching were eyewitness accounts of livestock being shot, not just in Texas but in many plains states. Sometimes it was an entire herd; other times it was the family milk cow. People alive today remember how devastating it was to watch that heart-wrenching slaughter. I used the Internet for newspaper stories and tapped into various libraries to read journals and printed transcripts of interviews.

**5. Did you feel a connection between yourself and Ella—as a woman or a mother?**

As both. I fell as deeply in love with Rainwater as Ella did. As a mother, my heart ached for her. I could appreciate how terribly Solly’s rejection of her touch must have hurt. I get my feelings hurt when the kids don’t call! How horrible it must have been for Ella each time her son rebuffed her affections.

**6. Have you had personal experience with prejudice? How did that affect your writing?**

Again, I reference my grandfather, the railroad man. During the Depression, one of the men who worked on his crew, a black man, owed him some trifling debt. But he was unable to pay it. One day he came to my grandfather’s back door with a hen and offered it as payment. My grandfather said, “That’s a fine chicken, and I’ll accept it, but only if you bring it to me through the front door.” The lesson passed down from him through my mother was that everyone deserved to be treated with “front door” dignity.

**7. What inspired your idea to make Solly an “idiot savant”?**

This will sound strange, and probably a bit cheeky, but it wasn’t an idea that was inspired. That’s just what Solly was. I didn’t know it until he spilled the starch and had his violent fit. It was as surprising to me as it was to Rainwater, who witnessed his autistic behavior for the first time. Then, having researched autism and knowing how misunderstood it would have been during that time period, I realized how well it played into the story.

**8. Did the current economic climate influence your novel at all?**

That was rather a bizarre coincidence. I began writing *Rainwater* before the full impact of the recession had been felt, or even forecast.



**9. Do you have any plans for another book? If so, what will it be about?**

I've been requested to write another book in the vein of *Rainwater*. I'm seriously considering it. I'd very much like to if a story compels me the way this one did, and if the timing is right.

**10. Your descriptions of Ella's Southern cooking were so detailed—are you a cook yourself? If so, what are your favorite recipes?**

I'm no cook, but I love to eat. Usually food tastes best when there isn't a recipe, just a cook who knows what foods and seasonings go well together. I love the "country food" like I described in the book, because that's what I grew up eating. Southern cooking isn't healthy by today's standards, but it's delicious, mostly because of the liberal use of bacon grease for flavoring. And we put gravy on everything!

**11. Solly's brother refuses to sell his watch—a family heirloom from his father Mr. Rainwater. Are there any family relics or antiques that you hold onto?**

My grandmother's wedding ring, a solid gold band. Sacrificially, I think, my mother gave it to me. Whenever I wear it, I feel both of them with me.