

Author to Author with Mindy Friddle

The Author: Catherine Landis

The Book: *Harvest* (St. Martin's Press)

The Event: Novelist Catherine Landis and poet Bill Rogers will each read at The Handlebar on Monday, September 26 at 7 pm. It's all part of The Reading Room, a series sponsored by the EMRYS foundation. Books will be available for purchase.

Passion prompted Catherine Landis to write her second novel, *Harvest*. Passion for an issue, and fear that a way of life in the South is disappearing. "I was compelled to write *Harvest* because of the epidemic of destruction of our rural, farm, and wild land, what you might call suburban sprawl," she said recently from her home in Tennessee. "It's an issue I've been concerned about for as long as I can remember."

Harvest tells the story of a Tennessee farm family from the 1930's to the beginning of the new century. The family struggles with the ramifications of displacement due to the Tennessee Valley's Authority's construction of Norris Dam, and generations later, faces modern day problems such as encroaching development. It's a testament to her skill as a writer that Landis' treatment of volatile issues in the novel, such as the loss of family farms, is evenhanded. "I deliberately left my opinion out of it," she said. "I tried instead to tell a story about a particular family on a particular piece of land."

As a reviewer in the *Charlotte Observer* noted: "Instead of pandering to sentimental or anti-development rhetoric, Landis keeps the novelist's balanced perspective. Her characters are living, breathing individuals, not pawns at the service of issues."

Landis researched her novel by poring over original reports from 1930's era TVA relocation workers. (A photograph she came across adorns the novel's cover.)

A graduate of Davidson College and a former newspaper reporter, Landis lives in Knoxville with her family. *Harvest* follows Landis' well-received first

novel *Some Days There's Pie* (St. Martins' Press, 2002), which she says took five years to write. It took another two years to find an agent to represent it.

"Some people appeared stunned by how different my second book was from the first," she said. "In turn, I was stunned that they were stunned!" While *Some Days There's Pie* was narrated by a 20-year-old southern woman, *Harvest* with its darker theme and family dynamics, "demanded something different and more serious. It was best told in third person from the limited point of view of three different characters," Landis said. She's currently working on a third novel, "loosely about the criminal justice system," that is quite different from her two previous novels.

"Personally, I have worked very hard NOT to have my writing change my life," she said, "partly because I have a very full life outside of writing, with my family and friends and volunteer work, stuff that keeps me grounded and humble."

As for the publishing business, Landis would rather not think much about it. "There are some first novelists who make a great deal of money and attain national recognition, but there are a few people who get to play center field for the Atlanta Braves, too. The odds are about the same."

Her advice to budding writers: "Wishing, dreaming, talking about it, going to workshops – you can do all of that you want, but unless you're writing, you aren't going to get there. By writing, I mean learning how to self-edit and rewrite; I mean learning how to be honest with yourself and your limitations; I mean taking chances. I also advise this: If your goal is to 'be a writer,' change it. The only goal worth having is, 'to write.' "

Mindy Friddle is the author of the novel "The Garden Angel" (St. Martin's Press/Picador.) Visit her website, www.mindyfriddle.com, for more information on writing and publishing.

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