

Dispatch from the Road: A Visit with the Pulpwood Queens

By Mindy Friddle

The paperback edition of my novel “The Garden Angel” is just hitting bookstores. Last week, I kicked off my paperback book tour with a visit to Beauty and the Book in Jefferson, Texas-- the only combined hair salon and bookstore in the country. Kathy Patrick, owner, is also founder of the Pulpwood Queens, a book group franchise with more than 60 chapters all over the country-- from Los Angeles, to Houston, to Myrtle Beach. The motto? “Tiaras are mandatory and reading good books is the rule!” Each chapter has a “head queen” who runs the group. Men are “timber guys” and “head kings.”

Kathy’s store, book group, and successful author events have received national attention, including appearances on *Good Morning America*. A Sunday feature on the group in *The Los Angeles Times* called Kathy’s book clubs “one part Empire of Oprah, one part Steel Magnolias and one part Walt Whitman standing on the street corner hawking Leaves of Grass.”

Picador, my paperback publisher, was delighted to send me all the way to bayou country to visit the Pulpwood Queens—the group is well-read and powerful, and their book selections help boost readership and sales for authors.

The Pulpwood Queens book club selections (www.beautyandthebook.com) have included “Liberating Paris” by Designing Women television show producer Linda Bloodworth Thomason and “Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood” by Rebecca Wells. An event still in the works will feature author and musician Kinky Friedman—who happens to be running for governor of Texas and whose t-shirts sport the irresistible slogan: “let’s get Kinky in the governor’s mansion.” But Kathy also takes pride in including a number of debut novels in her selections. Hallelujah!

I arrived at the appointed time at Beauty and the Book—a restored historical house with a picket fence and an enormous front porch—a place that provides customers with “go to town hair” and novels. A crowd of eager book club members milled about the grounds, donned in rhinestones and feathered boas. After a covered dish dinner, we settled on the porch, I read a few pages from my novel (in keeping with the theme I read from a scene in which a character is knitting a hair doily) and then we talked about writing and publishing. I found some of the most attentive readers ever—a number of whom brought notes and written questions for me. I was then ushered inside where I sat in a cheetah-print barber chair among rows of Redken supplies and hairdryers to sign books for a line of readers that filled the shop and spilled out the door.

Kathy drove me to the Shreveport, Louisiana airport at 5:30 the next morning. It was still dark, but she was perky as usual, and brought coffee and croissants. We traded author stories, book lists and some delicious gossip. Kathy Patrick’s passion for reading extends in many directions—she’s a strong advocate for literacy and believes in the power of reading to change lives. Her own book, *The Pulpwood Queen's Tiara Wearing, Book Bearing Guide to Life*, is forthcoming from Warner Books.

I wouldn’t wear a tiara for just anyone, but for Kathy Patrick’s Pulpwood Queens? Yep. Crown me.

Mindy Friddle is the author of the novel “The Garden Angel” (St. Martin’s Press) **and in paperback (Picador)**. Visit her website, www.mindyfriddle.com, for more information on writing and publishing.

Interested in forming a local chapter of The Pulpwood Queens Book Club? Visit www.beautyandthebook.com to find out more about the national network of book clubs and to contact Kathy Patrick.