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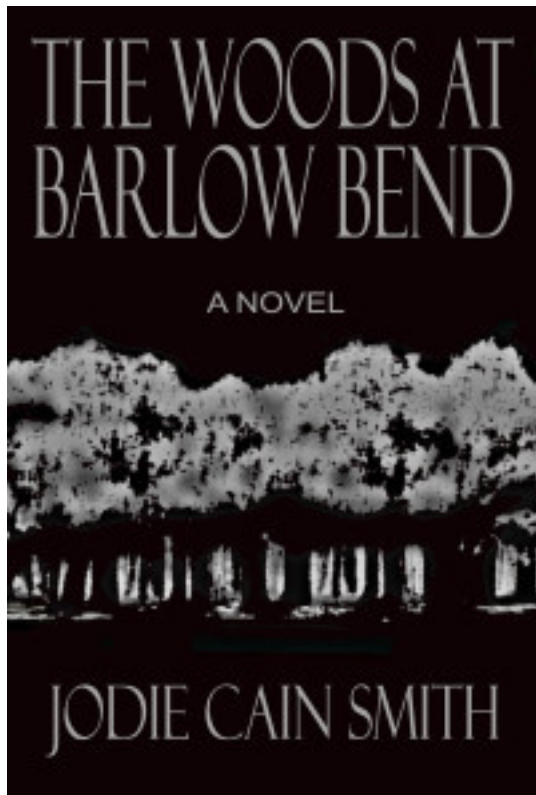
Jodie Cain Smith

Many published authors have likened writing a book to giving birth. They say the process from conceiving the idea of the story and actually writing it and then waiting for its publication is very similar to finding out you're about to become a parent and then meeting your child.

For local Columbia author Jodie Cain Smith, the analogy is a reality. Not only was her debut novel, *The Woods at Barlow Bend* released Wednesday, November 19th with a launch party planned for November 22nd at the Trustus Theater, she is also pregnant with her first child.

Smith, a self-proclaimed “wife, writer, traveler, and ruler of her own queendom, wherever it may be,” said she is happily anxious with all of the new beginnings in her world.

“Since I became an Army wife, I’m used to moving ahead,” she said. “We have lived in half a dozen states and experienced every kind of weather from Texas heat to harsh blizzards in Maine.”



Growing up in Mobile, Ala., as one of four children, Smith said her grandmother would regale her with the tales of her adolescence in the 1930's Depression era in the rural south. One haunting tale involved the mysterious death of Smith's great-grandmother.

"Addie Andress was killed in a strange hunting incident at the age of thirty-four," Smith recounts. "Her husband, and my great-grandfather, Hubert Andress, was then accused and tried for her murder. My grandmother was fourteen at the time, and it was up to her to raise her three siblings."

"The book is fiction but based on a true story about death and loss and most importantly redemption," Smith said. "While losing her own mother and becoming a mother figure overnight to her family, my grandmother was still just a child herself."

Smith said the story resonated with her and as it "rattled around" in her head, she knew she had to tell it.

“I spent months researching the facts and gathering as much information as I could before I actually sat down to write it,” she said.

Smith said she pored over census reports and school records as well as searching through countless family photographs and even visited old cemeteries for information.

Her grandmother passed away in 1996, but Smith said it was important to her during her writing to stay as true to the story as possible.

“I want to recreate my grandmother’s voice in the telling of it,” Smith said. “There was no gray area with Granny. She had a tough moral fiber and was one of the most generous people I’ve ever met. She would tell me about her mother who was a fiercely independent woman, even in that time. My great-grandmother lived by her own rules and did exactly as she pleased. She even owned her own car, which was pretty rare for a 1930’s woman.”

As far as comparing pregnancy to publishing a book, Smith laughed and said neither one was “exactly easy.”

“There were times when I was actually weeping while I was typing,” she remembered. “And I wanted those emotions to just jump off the page at the reader.”

While writing a story based in her family’s history was no easy task, Smith said she’s glad she did it. “I’m basically splaying myself wide open,” she said. “Of course I’m nervous about people reading the work, but it really was something I felt I had to do.”

Smith earned a BFA in Theater Arts from the University of South Alabama, and that’s where she met her husband, Jay. It was during one of their moves that Smith went back to school and earned her MAE in school counseling at Northern Michigan University.

She said she expected a roving life when she married into the military, but Smith said that no matter where she moved, she always sought out her two

passions, tennis and theater.

“Even in the smallest towns, I have been fortunate enough to find community theaters and find a court where Jay and I could play tennis,” she said. “Those two things are things that keep me grounded.”

The theater she found in Columbia was Trustus, and she has been involved as an actress, singer, and teacher.

“I feel very fortunate to have the relationship I have with Trustus,” Smith said. “Having a theater family always makes me feel at home and Trustus is a wonderful family to have.”

On Saturday, along with her publishing company, Deer Hawk Publications, she will be hosting her book launch reception at the Trustus Side Door Theater on Lady Street in the Vista from 4-6 p.m.

When asked to compare birthing a baby and a novel, Smith chuckled. “Well, the baby will only take nine months,” she said. “The book took three years, but it won’t keep me up at nights either. I’m just thrilled with both of them!”