**Q & A with Jill Smith Entrekin, author of *Buck’s Junction***

**You have said that *Buck's Junction* is in part based on your husband Dana's life.  Did you take license with the story or is it pretty much true to life?**

*Such a loaded question!  Yes, my husband's life story inspired me to write this book.  However, I've discovered that the joy of writing fiction is in the ability to take a small particle of truth and twist it however the writer sees fit.  Taking dramatic license with this tale makes for a much better read.*

**Give us your insight into the main characters.  Who are they and what makes them special?**

*While the story's main characters Buck and Lonnie are cousins, they are very different both physically and emotionally.  The one characteristic they share is their complete devotion to one another.  And that devotion is what makes them special.  Growing up in a small Georgia railroad community, Buck is a country boy through and through.  On the other hand, his cousin Lonnie has seen more of the world as his drunken daddy, at the slightest whim, moves Lonnie and his mother from pillar to post. Both boys are tough kids who bear the scrapes and bruises of life by escaping into their shared world of mischief and play. Though Lonnie appears tougher, it's a silent toughness borne out of his own need for self-preservation. Buck's toughness emerges as his way to cope when life throws him more than his fair share of curves.  The thread that holds Buck and Lonnie together is their fiercely unyielding loyalty to one another.*

**What lessons do you hope readers take away from *Buck's Junction*?**

*I fear we live in a society where everyone believes they should always get exactly what they want to be happy.  I think my story disproves that theory. Life is unpredictable and often unfair.  I hope my readers see that we must travel that winding road of loss and disappointment to discover inner strength, peace, and even joy.*

**Your first novel, *Star of Flint*, has a lot of elements of your own life growing up.  Was it harder or easier to write about someone else's life?**

*I cried more often through the writing of my first book.  I guess because I was so close to it.  Having a sense of detachment to* ***Buck's Junction*** *made the writing easier in some respects.  However, the voice of this second book is a male voice.  I struggled somewhat at first with staying in the character and voice of Buck and not sliding back into Allie's voice, the narrator from my first book.*

**What do you think sets Southern fiction apart from other genres?  What draws you to this genre?**

*I think Southerners are more inclined to "wear their feelings on their sleeves," which makes for colorful characters and usually a heart-wrenching tale.  Southern writers aren't ashamed to trample on "political correctness," to tell a true story with honesty and humor.  I'm a Southern girl.  I've eaten Georgia peaches and climbed Southern magnolias all my life.  I never tire of the personalities that bubble with uniquely Southern messages to share in this region of our country.*

**You taught high school English for 31 years.  While you were teaching, did you know you would write a novel one day?**

I *wasn't certain that I could write a novel, but my husband was.  When I retired from the classroom, my youngest daughter gave me a book entitled* ***How to Write a Novel****.  I took the hint, and with my family's encouragement, I started writing.  With my husband's persistent prodding, I saw it through to the end.*

**After teaching for more than 30 years, have you learned any lessons from your time as an author?  What are they?**

*Never go to bed without pen and paper at my side.  Somehow the best ideas come to me in the middle of the night.  When I get stumped or discouraged, I go for a walk.  My Boxer Sundance has benefited from some long walks while I wrote the next chapter in my head.   I've also learned not to be surprised if my story takes a twist I hadn't expected.  Writing a novel is an evolving process for me.  Sometimes my characters make a detour that I had not imagined until I reach that page in the story. Shame on me!  As an English teacher, I always stressed the necessity of a writing plan.  Ironically, I made no outline for either story.  I did have the wisdom this second go-around to keep everything in a notebook.  With the first book, my husband found scraps of paper with notes everywhere.  He learned quickly never to throw away a paper towel covered in my handwriting.*

**Which writers inspire you?**

*My favorite would be Harper Lee.  I was honored to teach* ***To Kill A Mockingbird*** *for most of my career in the classroom.  I know why Lee never wrote again; she couldn't improve on perfection*.  *The British Lit teacher in me adored Ken Follett's* ***Pillars of the Earth*** *and* ***World Without End****.  I'm also quite partial to Mark Twain, whose satirical humor cannot be matched.  I devoured Suzanne Collins' trilogy beginning with* ***The Hunger Games****, and I love Joshilyn Jackson and Billie Letts' abilities to create multi-dimensional, quirky characters*. *I think the late Georgian novelist Ferrol Sams was a master at manipulating words for delightful prose.*

**What is your writing process?  Do you outline?  Just write?  How many hours a day do you write?**

*Okay, I pretty much answered this in a previous question, but I'll finish it here.  After Sundance and I return from our walk, I head straight to the computer and write, write, write!  I've learned to set a timer in hopes to avoid what my doctor refers to as "rest stop rheumatism" from sitting so long.  Once a chapter is written, I sit on the back porch with my husband and read it aloud to him.  He hears problems that I often do not see at the computer.  Then I return to the computer for more revisions.  I used to tell my students that if Shakespeare sat down in my classroom and picked up a copy of* ***Hamlet,*** *he would pull out a red pen and start making changes.*

**What advice do you have for aspiring writers?**

*Revise, revise, revise!  Share your writing with others, and develop a tough hide for your critics.  Most of all, write from the heart.*

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