

Dear Book Club Members:

Thanks so much for reading my novel *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*. Authors always wonder what chords we strike with people out there who read our books. It's good to know that my characters found kindred spirits out there. I am a native North Carolinian, with parents from opposite ends of the state-- thus, from two different cultures, mountain and flatland. Lee Smith has the same split in her family. It makes for the outsider mentality necessary to writers.

There is quite a lot of discussion about the meanings in the book in the essays on the themes of *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* on my web site:

<http://www.sharynmccrumb.com/themes.html>

Nora Bonesteel is probably the most compelling character in the novel. She represents the people who have the sight, not uncommon in communities with people of Celtic heritage. The paranormal is a fact of life in mountain culture, and its roots are traceable to Celtic Britain, particularly Scotland. If you can find Elizabeth Sutherland's book *Ravens and Black Rain*, she discusses the paranormal in traditional Scots culture. You will find it similar to the experiences reported in Appalachia.

Good luck with the book discussion.

All best wishes,

*Sharyn McCrumb*

### Discussion Questions for *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*

1. You will be better prepared for this discussion, if you do a little Googling first. Find the names Tavy and Taw in connection to the folklore of Cornwall. Also read up on the concept of "liminality."
2. This book contains many examples of people and things caught between life and death-- on the threshold. (Liminality.) I can think of five off the top of my head. How many can you find ?
3. Nora Bonesteel's gift of the Sight is not uncommon among people of Scots-Irish descent. What examples of it have you seen in people you know ?
4. What effect does paper manufacture have on water quality? If this were happening in your community, how would you deal with it ?
5. One of the problems of Appalachian stereotyping is that people assume that Appalachia is synonymous with poor people. But Laura Bruce is from Roanoke VA, which is also in Appalachia, so the differences between people are more a question of economics and social class rather than regional affiliation. It is important to stress this. "Cities are judged by their richest inhabitants and rural areas are judged by their poorest."