

Readers Questions by Sharyn McCrumb

Prayers the Devil Answers

1. A “prayer the devil answers” is a wish that is granted in a way you would not have wanted it to happen. (e.g. the couple who wish on the monkey’s paw for \$10,000 and shortly thereafter, their son is killed in an accident, and they receive his insurance money-- \$10,000.) Have you ever had a prayer the devil answered?
2. At the beginning of chapter two Ellie Robbins talks about the hobos who come to the house asking for food or the chance to do odd jobs. Do these encounters influence her decision to take the job of sheriff and to keep that job despite the necessity of having to perform an execution?
3. *Prayers the Devil Answers* was inspired by the Rainey Bethea case—the last public hanging in the United States (Owensboro KY, 1936.) Read up on the original case. Why do you think the author kept only the widow sheriff and changed the particulars of the case itself?
4. How does Celia’s mistake during the Dumb Supper mirror the circumstances of her death?
5. The information about painting is accurate. Are there any Depression-era murals in your area? If not, what scene would you have wanted them to depict in such a mural?
6. A reader said that she thought that Ellie would choose to be buried next to her husband for their sons’ sake. I disagree. A) Besides her disillusionment with Albert, what two things might influence Ellie’s decision? B) What would you have done?
7. In what way is the execution of Lonnie Varden a symbolic killing of Albert Robbins?
8. Ellie Robbins would serve out her husband’s term as sheriff, but she would not run for the office herself afterward. Which of the deputies do you think would be the best successor to her?
9. Ellie seems very brave in some ways and not brave at all in others. Discuss these contradictions in her character.
10. Did the ending surprise you? I think a reader’s reaction to it might depend on their expectations of a main character. Some people think a main character should be a hero/heroine and someone the reader would like as a friend. Other people think main characters can be flawed and serve as an example of the human condition. Which kind of reader are you?

Sharyn McCrumb, named a Virginia Woman of History by the Library of Virginia., was awarded the Mary Hobson Prize for Arts & Letters in 2014 and the Patricia Winn Award for Southern Literature, given by the Clarksville TN/Montgomery County Arts & Heritage Group in 2015.

In addition to presenting programs at universities, libraries, and other organizations throughout the US, Sharyn McCrumb has taught a writers workshop in Paris, and served as writer-in-residence at King University in Tennessee, and at the Chautauqua Institute in western New York.

www.SharynMcCrumb.com ~ FaceBook: <https://www.facebook.com/SharynMcCrumbAuthor>