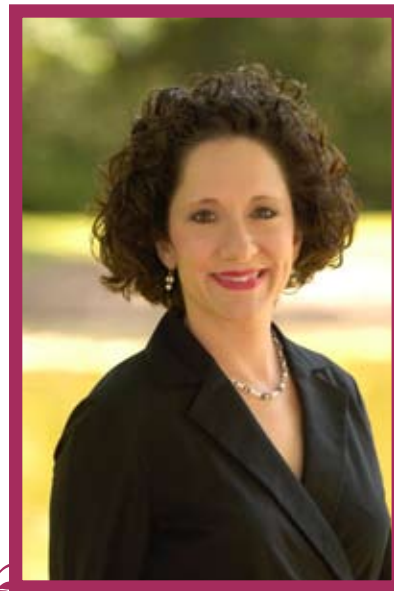


10 Ways to Know if You're a SWAG...

- 1) You feel the urge to bake a pound cake after reading the obituaries.
- 2) You have had professional photographs made of your children barefoot and dressed in their Sunday clothes.
- 3) You believe that cocktail dresses do not double as church clothes.
- 4) You'd rather have a fight with your husband than your best friend.
- 5) You have stolen magnolia leaves, or you know someone who has.
- 6) You have monogrammed the middle of your shower curtain.
- 7) You could live without Yankees who equate your accent with a low IQ.
- 8) You know better than to eat the potato salad at a family reunion.
- 9) You are socially conditioned to believe that tanned fat looks better than white fat.
- 10) Your children hide their Easter baskets and Valentine's Day candy from you just in case you have a dieting lapse.

About Melinda Rainey Thompson



Melinda Rainey Thompson will always be "from" the small town of Greenville, Alabama, even though she has lived in Birmingham for the past twenty-five years. She has an undergraduate degree in English from Tulane University, where she was a Kappa Kappa Gamma, and an MA in English from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She was a member of Birmingham-Southern College's English faculty from 1988 to 1994. In August 1999, Melinda began writing and publishing *The SWAG Letter*, which continued for the next four years. Her first book *SWAG: Southern Women Aging Gracefully* was published in 2006.

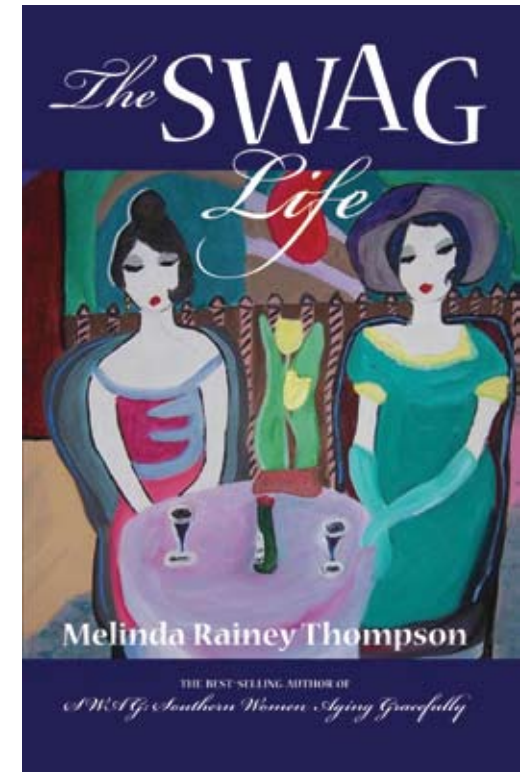
Melinda is married to Bill Thompson, a judge on Alabama's Court of Civil Appeals. They have three children (Warner, Nat, and Lily), ten fish that were supposed to die by now, and an eighteen-year-old cat that refuses to go into the light.



JOHN F. BLAIR
PUBLISHER

1406 Plaza Drive, Winston-Salem, NC 27103
800.222.9796 fax 336.768.9194
www.blairpub.com

READING GROUP GUIDE



THE SWAG LIFE

by Melinda Rainey Thompson

ISBN: 978-0-89587-351-4

\$14.95 paperback

Publication Date: September 2007

Humor

Reading Group Guide for *The SWAG Life*

SWAGS ARE WOMEN LIKE ME—SOUTHERN WOMEN attempting to age gracefully without any outright sweating. SWAG is a philosophical point of view, a conscious choice about how to live the rest of our lives. The parade goes in only one direction, of course, but it's the way we walk the parade route that matters, I think. My favorite SWAG characteristic is our shared sense of humor. It's unique. We don't take ourselves too seriously. We've elevated self-deprecatory humor to an art form.

Southern women are a force of nature, a peculiar product of geography, disposition, and natural inclination. It's a volatile mix of nature and nurture. Like most Southern women I know, I have a seemingly inexhaustible supply of personal experiences. These experiences provide writing fodder for me and, hopefully, entertaining reading for you. I remind you that writing is much cheaper than therapy—for both of us.

The SWAG Life isn't the result of a grand plan. To me, this book is an inevitable follow-up to my first book, *SWAG: Southern Women Aging Gracefully*. I have so much more to tell you! You should know, however, that it wasn't a bit convenient for me to publish another book so soon, so don't go expecting another one next year. I'm still catching up around my house from the first whirlwind book experience. I had the time of my life, but it has been *busy*.

Publishing a book is like giving birth. Once you're in labor, the only way through the experience is full speed ahead until it's over, no matter how much you might like a rest. You feel lucky, but it's exciting, scary, and full of surprises the whole way. Once that baby is born and napping contentedly in a bassinet by your side, you're ready to put your feet up for a few minutes and reflect on the experience. I was poised to do just that. That's when I repeatedly found

myself stumbling across interesting chapter ideas for a *new* book even though I wasn't even *thinking* about writing one. It was a lot like being told you're pregnant while still nursing a six-month-old infant. I was not a bit happy about it.

When I first felt the itch to jot down a few ideas for another book, I fought it. "Have you lost your mind? What in the world are you thinking?" I asked myself. I hate to be the one to point the finger of blame, but I think the real agitators in this are all of you readers. When I traveled throughout the South on my first book tour, I realized that there is way too much material out there to cover in one book. I could spend the rest of my life writing about Southern women.

Each decade of life brings its own challenges, conversations, and revelations. My life, the lives of my friends and acquaintances, and our interactions

"If you don't have
anything nice to say,
come sit by me"

with complete strangers are a constant source of material. As a Southern writer, I find it impossible to resist the temptation to record all the juicy dramas that play out regularly right in front of me while I'm going about my daily business. I want to write about these events so that you can enjoy the sagas as much as I have! Honestly, writing *The SWAG Life* has been a lot like tattling. I've enjoyed it way too much. You know the old saying, "If you don't have anything nice to say, come sit by me"? I'm telling it like it is. I don't have to make anything up.

I have loved connecting with all of you, and I consider it the highest form of praise when a reader tells me, "I laughed out loud reading your book!" It has been incredibly comforting to discover that

women all over the place are struggling with the same life questions that I am and laughing about them together. It makes all the difference in the world. Don't you agree?

I've learned that women can take the most mundane tasks and make them into something extraordinary. That's a gift. It's a way to find joy in the ordinary trials of daily life that isn't dependent on money, good health, leisure time, or anything else out of our control.

One of my biggest complaints about human beings is that we tend to live for the highlight films. What I'm trying to capture in *The SWAG Life* is the exalted moments of heaven sandwiched right in the minutia of the daily grind. They're there. You just have to take time to notice them.

It's hard to believe that the SWAG story began with a monthly mailing from my home to twenty or so friends. Because this is the South, that subscription list grew to thousands of readers living all across the country. Thanks to all of you who read *SWAG: Southern Women Aging Gracefully* and gave it to friends and relatives as gifts. I hope you enjoy reading the second installment, *The SWAG Life*, every bit as much. I wrote it just for you!

PRAISE FOR *SWAG: SOUTHERN WOMEN AGING GRACEFULLY*

"Reading Melinda Rainey Thompson's *SWAG* is like sitting on Granny's porch swing eating a piece of pound cake with a sleeping cat wrapped around your ankles. You feel full, warm and, most of all, grateful to be a Southerner."

—Celia Rivenbark, author of
We're Just Like You, Only Prettier