

News From:



JOHN F. BLAIR, PUBLISHER

1406 Plaza Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27103
fax 336-768-9194

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CONTACT: Kim Byerly 800-222-9796
byerly@blairpub.com

A village full of stories in new novel *Rocks That Float*

They get by down on Randleman Road. They manage as best as they can.

Vivia Wardlaw makes beauty-pageant dresses in the home she is afraid to leave. After more than 50 years of marriage, Fairy Etta is as dedicated to her husband, Cone, as she ever was, even as he slips farther and farther away from her and from their shared memories. Every Christmas, ex-soldier Bonus Wooten writes to the parents of the wife he brought home from Vietnam, even though she was killed by a car years before.

The mill closed, and the pond is said to be polluted, and the New Highway cut Randleman Road off from the rest of Walthourville, but the residents of the old mill village make do. Totch cannot get a license to sell his barbecue, so he sells teddy bears and postcards instead. Customers just happen to get a free barbecue sandwich and a bottle of beer with each purchase. Miz Mayme sells her delicious pastry “bolenos” all over Osilo County, but since her home’s kitchen cannot pass the health inspection, the cash payments never see the inside of a register or ledger book.

Against all odds, and often against the rules, the people on Randleman Road keep their heads above water in Kathy B. Steele’s debut novel, *Rocks That Float*.

Jimmy Stevenson, a young geologist reeling from divorce, comes to Walthourville for a three-year project and ends up in a house on Randleman Road. Gradually, he finds himself involved in the lives and strange customs of his neighbors. He loans books to Vivia’s inquisitive, precocious granddaughter. He goes fishing with Mayme’s unemployed ex-son-in-law, who helps Mayme deliver shoeboxes full of bolenos and still lives in the house his ex-wife owns. He starts dating Karen, the other newcomer to Randleman Road, who is fleeing her own divorce from a husband who could not share the burden of their autistic daughter.



Jimmy stays on Randleman Road even though his real-estate agent thinks he is nuts, his parents think he does not want to grow up, and his coworkers up in the state capital think he is living on the street that civilization forgot. He sees his neighbors’ self-sufficiency as a remnant of another time. But when those neighbors ask Jimmy to disregard a rule he cannot ignore—to deal with a crisis that requires the order of the outside world—he has to decide between community and conscience.

“*Rocks That Float* is a series of stories,” Steele says, “beads on a string; Jimmy’s story is the string. Everyone, seamstress to sheriff, has a story, and . . . everyone chooses what laws and rules to value.”

About the Author: Kathy B. Steele is a geologist with degrees from the University of North Carolina and the University of South Carolina. She has also worked as a waitress, well driller, teacher, and cartographer. She lives with her husband and daughter in rural Edgefield County, South Carolina.

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Author: Kathy B. Steele

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