

SOUTHERN LITERARY REVIEW

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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS LAUREN CLARK

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AM: Lauren, thank you for doing this interview. I'm glad to have the opportunity to ask you about *Dancing Naked in Dixie*. Before I get to the book, though, I'd like to ask you about your transition from television to writing. How did that transition take place?

LC: I loved working in TV news and it was great when my son was little. I worked for two different CBS stations — first anchoring the weekend news and then the morning news in Dothan, Alabama. The shift was 2 am to 10 am, so after three years, I needed a change and a regular schedule. I then took a job in pharmaceutical sales, but was able to transition into stay-at-home mom and full-time writer soon after. It's what I've always wanted to do as a career.

AM: Okay, on to *Dancing Naked in Dixie*. The protagonist of the book is Julia Sullivan. Tell us about her. What was the impetus behind this character? Did you develop her in stages, or did you have some preconceived notion of her character that you wanted to realize in the text?

LC: Fortunately, Julia Sullivan came to the pages of *Dixie* almost fully formed. She is a well-traveled writer, perpetually busy, and married to her job — largely to avoid dealing with her mother's death, her boyfriend, and a painful estrangement from her father. She's talented, with personality — but definitely has an ADHD side that gets her into some trouble when she acts before she thinks.

There's a lot of me in Julia — especially since I made the move from New York to Alabama twelve years ago. Many of her experiences (sweet tea, fire ants) are based on my experiences.

Julia was developed with change in mind. I wanted her out of her comfort zone, in a totally new environment that she'd decided to dislike. Much of *Dixie* involves Julia discovering secrets about her parents' relationship and realizing that forgiveness isn't as frightening as she believes.

AM: Within the last month, I've become an Alabamian, and I grew up taking family vacations to Destin, Florida, by way of Eufaula, Alabama, so I'm interested in the role that Eufaula plays in *Dancing Naked in Dixie*. Why Eufaula? What made you choose this city?

LC: Eufaula is my favorite Alabama city. When I was an anchor at WTVY in Dothan, I loved driving up on the weekends and having a light lunch, stopping at Shorter Mansion, and browsing in the lovely gift shops. Lake Eufaula is nearby, and on my trips to Atlanta, I would often stop at the state park to take in the beautiful, calming scenery.

I've attended the Pilgrimage several times, but it was during one of the candlelight tours, with everyone in antebellum costume, that I decided Eufaula provided that bit of magic that would make it the perfect setting for a story.

AM: Julia is, you could say, a cosmopolitan jetsetter who, due to events largely out of her control, finds herself living and working in Alabama. Do you think the South is indispensable to your writing? In other words, could the narrative in *Dancing Naked in Dixie* have transpired in some other geographical area? If not, why not?

LC: The South is indispensable to *Dixie*, and all of my books, to some extent, have Southern ties. Julia's story — her cosmopolitan edge and big city sharpness — had to be balanced out with the warm and loving nature of the Deep South. It became the perfect balance to round out her empty life, the yin to her yang.

I am sure that many talented writers could place the story with a "Julia" character traveling from the majestic Pacific Northwest to the warmth of New Mexico or Arizona, but I prefer to write from experience and draw on the sights and sounds that I know and love. For me, there's a certain charm about the Deep South that can't be duplicated.

AM: Where would you direct our readers to learn more about you and your work?

LC: I really appreciate my readers so much and love to hear from anyone who's read my work. I welcome emails at laurenclarkbooks@gmail.com. I'm also on Goodreads ([GoodReads](#)), Facebook ([Lauren Facebook](#)) and Twitter ([LaurenClark_Bks](#)).

You can also find more information about my latest release *Stardust Summer* (February 14, 2013), on my website ([Lauren Clark Books](#)) and blog ([Lauren Clark Blog](#)).

Dixie on Amazon in paperback, ebook, or audiobook: [Click here](#).

Dixie on BN.com: [Click here](#).

AM: Thank you for taking the time, Lauren. I wish you all the best.

LC: Thank you.

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