

Readers Questions for *The Ballad of Tom Dooley*

1. What do you think Pauline Foster's early life might have been like to make her the way she was?
2. What do Zebulon Vance and Tom Dula have in common? How are they different?
3. The author has said that this true story of 19th century North Carolina mirrors *Wuthering Heights*. Can you find a passage in the novel that echoes *Wuthering Heights*?
4. Ann Melton tells a story from Tom's childhood about his rescuing his dog from a deep hole by the creek bed. How does this story foreshadow what Tom does at the end of the novel?
5. If Ann Melton had told this story, instead of Pauline, what might she have said?
6. How did Tom's experience at the POW camp at Point Lookout, MD affect his actions in the novel?
7. Why do you think James Melton seems not to care about Ann's relationship with Tom?
8. How was the Civil War a factor in the events of this story?
9. In the local legends of the Tom Dula case, the storytellers portray Tom and Laura Foster as "Romeo & Juliet" lovers. Do you see any evidence of this? Why do you think people tell the story that way?
10. Discuss the pros and cons of the way Zebulon Vance handled the trial of Tom Dula and Ann Melton.
11. At the close of Tom Dula's second trial, Pauline Foster got married, and since her new last name is never given, researchers are unable to trace her. What do you think the rest of her life was like?
12. Should John Anderson have gone to the authorities and told them what he knew about the disappearance of Laura Foster? Why didn't he go west by himself after Laura died?

Sharyn McCrumb

Sharyn McCrumb is an award-winning Southern writer, best known for her Appalachian "Ballad" novels, set in the North Carolina/Tennessee mountains, including the *New York Times* Best Sellers *She Walks These Hills* and *The Rosewood Casket*. McCrumb, who has been named a "Virginia Woman of History" in 2008 for Achievement in Literature, was a guest author at the National Festival of the Book in Washington, D.C. sponsored by the White House in 2006.

The Ballad of Tom Dooley, (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martins Press, New York, a 2011 *New York Times* Best Seller, tells the true story behind the folk song, made famous by the Kingston Trio: an account of a tragedy in the North Carolina mountains in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Sharyn McCrumb's other best-selling novels include *The Ballad of Frankie Silver*, the story of the first woman hanged for murder in the state of North Carolina; and *The Songcatcher*, a genealogy in music, tracing the author's family from 18th century Scotland to the present by following a Scots Ballad through the generations. *Ghost Riders*, an account of the Civil War in the mountains of western North Carolina, won the *Wilma Dykeman Award* for Literature given by the East Tennessee Historical Society and the *Audie Award for Best Recorded Book*. A new edition of *Ghost Riders* was published in March 2012 by J.F. Blair Press.

McCrumb's previous novel, *The Devil Amongst the Lawyers* (Thomas Dunne Books, June 2010), was a finalist for the Weatherford Award for Appalachian fiction, and was the selection of the 2011 One Community/One Book program in Winchester VA.

St. Dale, The Canterbury Tales in a NASCAR setting, in which ordinary people on a pilgrimage in honor of racing legend Dale Earnhardt find a miracle, won a 2006 Library of Virginia Award as well as the AWA Book of the Year Award.

McCrumb's other honors include: AWA Outstanding Contribution to Appalachian Literature Award; the Chaffin Award for Southern Literature; the Plattner Award for Short Story; and AWA's Best Appalachian Novel. A graduate of UNC- Chapel Hill, with an M.A. in English from Virginia Tech, McCrumb was the first writer-in-residence at King College in Tennessee. In 2005 she honored as the **Writer of the Year** at Emory & Henry College. In 2011 she received the *Perry F. Kendig Award* for Achievement in Literature from the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge, in Roanoke VA.

Her novels, studied in universities throughout the world, have been translated into eleven languages, including French, German, Dutch, Japanese, Arabic, and Italian. She has lectured on her work at Oxford University, the University of Bonn-Germany, and at the Smithsonian Institution; taught a writers workshop in **Paris**, and served as writer-in-residence at **King College** in Tennessee and at the **Chautauqua Institute** in western New York.

Sharyn McCrumb's novels are the subject of the book *From A Race of Storytellers: The Ballad Novels of Sharyn McCrumb*. Ed: Kimberley M. Holloway. Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 2005. A graduate of UNC Chapel Hill, with an M.A. from Virginia Tech, she lives and writes near Roanoke, Virginia.