

# Interview with F. Diane Pickett

FOR THE BOOK SHELF AND GALLERY, THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA

**W**hat is the last book you read and was it an E-book or a “real” book?

Since I am spending the spring in Asheville, North Carolina, I thought it appropriate that I re-read F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. His wife Zelda spent her remaining years hospitalized in Asheville due to her unstable mental condition. I read the real book because I like to hold a book in my hands and feel the pages turn as I follow the writer on a particular journey. Touching the actual paper makes it more real and personal for me and personal touch is sorely needed in this technological world

we have created. From my perspective, the only things people touch with any real feeling nowadays are remotes or smart phones and they get very emotional if those gadgets are misplaced.

**What books are on your nightstand?**

I am looking forward to reading *Everything Must Go* by Elizabeth Flock and I also admire Nora Ephron (*When Harry Met Sally* and others) and am excited to learn why she says “I Feel Bad About My Neck.” Most likely it’s because almost any female over a certain age begins to dread what is known as “school teacher arms” and “turkey necks!” Some of us can still see our necks and that is considered a blessing.

**What titles would you recommend to someone at the following decades of adulthood: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, or any age?**

I think all 20 year olds should read two books. First is *The Sun Also Rises* by Hemingway. I think 20 year olds should read this book in order to get a good sense of the highs and lows of drunken youth. The second book I highly recommend is *The Group* by Mary McCarthy, which was actually written in 1963 about a group of post-collegiate friends in the 1930’s but it is still very relevant today.

As to what I would recommend for 30 year olds, I suspect most of them are glued to *The Bartender’s Guide*. Forty year olds seem to be fascinated with the well-worn book called, *How to get out of the house as soon as the baby sitter arrives*, because they missed this particular book in their 30’s, when they were no doubt captured by the



*Bartender’s Guide* and decided to put off child-bearing until the next decade.

Fifty year olds should be studying the classified ads trying to find part-time jobs in banks to pay off their kid’s college tuition and credit card bills; and 60 year olds are busy reading *Travel and Leisure* – secretly hoping their part-time jobs will give them paid vacation so they can sit at home and read *Where to Retire*. As for 70 year olds, reading anything with large print would be ideal.

**What section do you gravitate toward most frequently in a bookstore?**

I love all bookstores and could spend hours wandering around, taking in all the books on all of the shelves. Some books feel like old friends: I am always glad to see them again. As a fiction writer; however, I tend to gravitate to the fiction section just to see who else is living in a pretend world. Life is all about reality, so it is good to have a break and read someone else’s fantasy.

**Tell us more about your involvement with the Florida Chautauqua Assembly.**

Chautauqua has been an important presence in my life for about 25 years. Though the movement originated in the mid-1800’s in upstate New York, it began as a summer camp for teacher training and grew enormously popular within a decade to become the premier artistic and educational movement of that period. It served as the forerunner to what we now know as “Adult Community Education.”

It began as a summer Assembly and its popularity soon called for an expansion of the program to a warmer climate. A small town in northwest Florida, DeFuniak Springs, was chosen and enjoyed the same success as the one in New York; however, after World War I and the years of the Depression, the event folded, until revived by me in the early 1990’s. It continues today as an annual event that takes place the last weekend in January and consistently attracts notable personalities such as Karl Rove, Jenna Bush Hager, Naomi Tutu and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

**Why did you take up writing?**

I wrote *Never Isn’t Long Enough* (my first novel) last summer during my recovery from surgery related to lung cancer. I was diag-

nosed with breast cancer four years earlier. Naturally, these types of diagnoses lead one on a different journey and I have found writing to be a wonderful new adventure.

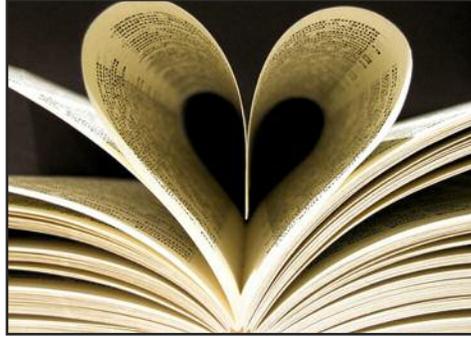
**In your opinion, what topic is most overplayed in the media right now?**

As to media, much of it is simply sensationalism. I mostly read *The Financial Times of London* as they do the best job reporting on international issues and often have a better grasp of our own national politics than we do ourselves. I believe print and electronic media dramatically overplay celebrity scandals and reality shows. Reality shows are as well scripted as anything else on TV and, in my opinion, are mindless torture.

**Your book focuses on Southern culture and religion, the importance of family, etc. What makes a Southerner and what makes you proud to be a Southerner?**

As a Southerner, I value soft-spoken words, family, manners, politeness and consideration; elements that are rapidly disappearing from the "it's all about me" technological world in which we currently live. I also value good fried chicken and tasty corn-

bread made in an iron skillet. Combine that with coconut cake and you will have the preacher for dinner every Sunday and he might even let you out of the pew a little early!



**Let's say you have an hour to kill and there are no books available, just a TV. What would you watch?**

If I am stuck in a place with no books, I get real nervous because I know that TV is going to shake me to my core. I turn if off and go for a walk and wait for the bar

to open or I go to a Wednesday night prayer meeting, whichever comes first! My favorite TV programs tend to be on BBC; they do know how to speak the language and I always learn new words. England has become a second home to me and I have spent a lot of time on British soil over the last decades.

I am looking forward to making a lot of new friends in Thomasville. I know the city fairly well as I used to live in Tallahassee. I wonder where the coconut cake shop is today? And if anyone knows of restaurants still serving red eye gravy, please let a fellow Southerner know. That will be the subject of my next book.