

Ford County: Stories

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In his first collection of short stories John Grisham takes us back to Ford County, Mississippi, the setting of his first novel, *A Time to Kill*.

Wheelchair-bound Inez Graney and her two older sons, Leon and Butch, take a bizarre road trip through the Mississippi Delta to visit the youngest Graney brother, Raymond, who's been locked away on death row for eleven years. It could well be their last visit.

Mack Stafford, a hard-drinking and low-grossing run-of-the-mill divorce lawyer gets a miracle phone call with a completely unexpected offer to settle some old, forgotten cases for more money than he has ever seen. Mack is suddenly bored with the law, fed up with his wife and his life, and makes drastic plans to finally escape.

Quiet, dull Sidney, a data collector for an insurance company, perfects his blackjack skills in hopes of bringing down the casino empire of Clanton's most ambitious hustler, Bobby Carl Leach, who, among other crimes, has stolen Sidney's wife.

Three good ol' boys from rural Ford County begin a journey to the big city of Memphis to give blood to a grievously injured friend. However, they are unable to drive past a beer store as the trip takes longer and longer. The journey comes to an abrupt end when they make a fateful stop at a Memphis strip club.

The Quiet Haven Retirement Home is the final stop for the elderly of Clanton. It's a sad, languid place with little controversy, until Gilbert arrives. Posing as a lowly paid bedpan boy, he is in reality a brilliant stalker with an uncanny ability to sniff out the assets of those "seniors" he professes to love.

One of the hazards of litigating against people in a small town is that one day, long after the trial, you will probably come face-to-face with someone you've beaten in a lawsuit. Lawyer Stanley Wade bumps into an old adversary, a man with a long memory, and the encounter becomes a violent ordeal.

Clanton is rocked with the rumor that the gay son of a prominent family has finally come home, to die. Of AIDS. Fear permeates the town as gossip runs unabated. But in Lowtown, the colored section of Clanton, the young man finds a soul mate in his final days.

Featuring a cast of characters you'll never forget, these stories bring Ford County to vivid and colorful life. Often hilarious, frequently moving, and always entertaining, this collection makes it abundantly clear why John Grisham is our most popular storyteller.

Amazon Exclusive: Pat Conroy Reviews Ford County

Pat Conroy is most recently the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *South of Broad*, as well as eight previous books: *The Boo*, *The Water Is Wide*, *The Great Santini*, *The Lords of Discipline*, *The Prince of Tides*, *Beach Music*, *My Losing Season*, and *The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes of My Life*. He lives on Fripp Island, South Carolina. Read his exclusive Amazon guest review of *Ford County*:

In the mail last week, I received a copy of John Grisham's latest fiction. It surprised me that the book was comprised of seven short stories. From the time I first began publishing at Doubleday, they have always made sure that I received a copy of a Grisham book long before it went on sale in the bookstores. He has written 22 books, and I've read them all as soon as they were available in crisp review copies.

I have loved the Grisham books for the same reason that I love the works of John Irving, Richard Russo, or Anne Rivers Siddons: I get hooked by an early page, and pure habit forces me to read until I am issued my walking papers and can return to my normal life. These writers are all wish-bringers who cast spells with the bright enchantment of their stories, and the power of story has retained its glamour and necessity for me. I've always liked it when Grisham took a sabbatical from his impressive fiction to romp in the field of sports or non-fiction.

John surprised me by entering the ring of danger that the short story represents for all writers. In the world of writing, the poets come first as they finger the language like worry beads and wonder where their next meal is coming from. The art of the short story writer is one of economy, concision, and the genius of trying to craft a whole world inside a mason jar. The modern world punishes the short story writer with inattention. The literary reviews keep the short story alive and finger-popping in America today, while the New Yorker tries to strangle the form with its bare hands. But a great short story is a source of joy, and the reading of Chekhov, de Maupassant, Flannery O'Connor and others offer pleasures unmatched by any other form. Since I'm incapable of writing the short story form, I wanted to see how Grisham fared, knowing the critics would sharpen their swords against him no matter how accomplished his stories might be.

Ford County is the best writing that John Grisham has ever done. One of the many things I've admired about his books is his intimate chronicle of Mississippi life in the generations following William Faulkner and Eudora Welty. Grisham writes equally well about the plantation south, the black south, and white-cracker south. Over the years he has used the legal system as an instrument to illuminate the world of mansions and sharecroppers and everything in between as he not only defined Mississippi but also staked it out as his home fictional territory. His short stories were a surprise to me. All of them are very good; three of them, I believe, are great. Grisham has always had a rare gift for breaking hearts when he invokes unforgettable images of the broken, hopeless South. Some of the stories are hilarious, and Grisham's gift of humor has never found a showcase like this. One of these stories should find its way into the anthologies of the best short stories of 2009. It might not happen, but I for one think the stories in Ford County are that damned good.-- Pat Conroy

(Photo  David G. Spielman)

John Grisham has written twenty-one previous novels and one work of nonfiction, *The Innocent Man*, published in 2006. He lives in Virginia and Mississippi.

Other Books

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