

Dear Readers,

So happy for your book club's interest in the *Bag Lady War*. The reasons I wrote it are many – too many to deal with in one book. Some of them are to follow in my current work; I probably won't live long enough to get to all of them!

As you know, *The Bag Lady War* is a satire, where anything can happen. The reason for writing in satire is that people don't want to be preached to. As Aesop found, unusual ideas can be slipped into a story if the reader can identify in some way with the characters. If the reader grows close enough to the characters to care what happens to them, the writer's points of view are more easily accepted, outlandish as they may be. A satirist's tools are imagination, irony, and pathos – sweetened with a large dose of humor. The reader assists by suspending reason and accepting (more or less!) preposterous solutions to a grave situation.

Younger readers may not have witnessed, as I have, the continual ungluing of the American fabric. True enough, our nation had many ills in its youth, most of which we have worked together to cure. But in all sectors of the population we had in common the love of our country, as well as a good sense of respect and responsibility, nowhere more evident than in the Second World War. In spite of our rogue citizens – various outlaws and assorted crooked politicians – we have managed to sustain a lifestyle unheard of anywhere else in the world. Our founding fathers set the standard, pledging to this end their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor, and we strived to fulfill their dream. Children once looked to their parents for guidance, rather than to rock stars and street people. And no one sang of killing and raping. Watching our nation unravel has been painful.

My story probably began when President Lyndon Johnson quietly transferred the cash-cow Social Security Fund into the General Fund to make the national debt appear smaller and to give Congress more money to work with. Following his lead, every president since has tinkered with the Social Security Fund, stretching it to fund many other programs. Who would have dreamed such a thing could happen? Workers who trusted the government with their retirement funds would one day discover the fund had been used for other purposes, and they, the old folks who counted on that little pension, could be left out in the cold. If you do the math, you would find that, left alone, the fund would have continued to produce, as intended, indefinitely.

To make matters worse, during President Reagan's presidency the ACLU interpreted the law that says one cannot be incarcerated against his will UNLESS HE HAS COMMITTED A CRIME to include mental patients. Under threat of massive lawsuits by the ACLU, mental institutions were forced to open their doors and free the inmates if it could not be proved they had committed a crime. Unable to care for themselves, many settled in on the streets and fell prey to drugs, resorting to crime to get along. And there we see them today, living a tough life and often making life tough for others. Undoubtedly it is harder for folks in the inner city, where there is a higher concentration of the homeless. And harder still on the elderly.

But here I am, preaching. Following is a list of questions I compiled at the request of book clubs. Hope it helps.

1. Are the characters believable?
2. Is the story believable, and does it flow well, keeping the reader's interest?

3. Who do you think is the protagonist? Could more than one person share that role?
4. Do you see the Bag Ladies' decision to declare war on crime as the result of a moral dilemma or simply an openly immoral, selfish act?
5. Are our political leaders really working for us?
6. Was it a good idea to empty institutions of the mentally unstable? What impact has that had on the population as a whole?
7. Do you think the advent of illegal drugs helped drive the story? Gangs? Threatened poverty?
8. If such a thing as *The Bag Lady War* really happened, whose side would you be on - the elderly or the crooks?
9. For what purpose was each secondary character throughout the book introduced? Do you think each accomplished his purpose? Molly Flannery - Ophelia Jackson - Betty Jean and Hap - Hali - Rex McClung - Herb and Pearl - Gertie and Waldo ...
10. Do you think 80-something-year-old ladies could do what The Bag Ladies did?
11. In the third chapter, page 40, (regular print edition) do you agree with the reasons suggested for the decline in our social structure? What suggestions would you have?
12. Is euthanasia a viable solution?
13. If the justice system were to be overhauled, what would you like to see done?
What could be done to reduce crime in America?
What could be done to effectively help the homeless/mentally ill in America?
14. Given that women took to the streets to demonstrate for the right to vote, and people demonstrated in the streets to secure equal rights for people of color, does it seem impossible that oldsters should seek to play out their concerns in a similar way?
15. Does it seem that criminals' rights are better protected than those of the average citizen?
16. Do you feel the ACLU may have gone too far in trying to balance the rights of the people? For instance, where do your rights end and mine begin?
17. Were you able to deduce what "the Bag Ladies" meant before it was revealed?
18. Have you ever wondered what you would do if you found yourself alone and a tiny step from financial ruin when you grow old? Most of us have family to turn to – but what if you didn't, and your neighborhood is being terrorized by a gang of hoodlums and your Social Security threatened?
19. Were you enlightened to read about the prison system for women?

About me: I am a native Oregonian, born in Silverton. I met my husband, Jack, at the University of Oregon, where he was a business major and I a science major. We've been married for 57 years and have 5 wonderful daughters and 8 incredible grandchildren. We lived in Southern California for many years, and returned to Oregon after Jack retired in 2004. We have enjoyed traveling extensively – which is why it took 10 years to write the book.

About the book: *The Bag Lady War* was published at the end of 2007. I've sent out over 100 books nationwide to encourage interest. Bloomsbury in Ashland is selling them briskly, as are the Tudor Guild Gift Shop of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland and Barnes and Noble in Medford. It is also available on line through iUniverse.com, barnesandnoble.com, amazon.com, and by order through most bookstores.

Events: In-studio radio interview with Bill Meyer on the KMED Bill Meyer show; newspaper interview for the Ashland Daily Tidings (with front page, in-color placement); television interview with local RVTV, to eventually air on local TV and YouTube; Author of the Month in August at the Ashland Public Library; a play reading from the first chapter of *The Bag Lady War* by the Ashland Community Theater; and many book club engagements. Check out my website, carolsecoy.com. You can follow my events here, and learn about my next satire, *Lightly Dusted Crow*, which deals with domestic violence.

I have been thrilled with my reader response, including a very encouraging letter from the Warden of the prison where I did my research, the California Institution for Women at Corona. The most commonly-heard comment has been, "This ought to be a movie!"

Happy Reading! Looking forward to meeting all of you!

Carol SeCoy