

Dear Reader,

So happy for your interest in the *Bag Lady War*. As you know, the book is a satire, where anything can happen. The reason for writing in satire is usually to advance a political view without turning the reader off by preaching. As Aesop found, the story can be fanciful as long as the reader identifies with the characters and cares what happens to them. A satirist's tools are imagination, spiced with irony and pathos, and sweetened with a large dose of humor. The reader assists by suspending reason and accepting (more or less!) preposterous solutions to a grave situation.

We have all witnessed the continual unraveling of the American fabric. True enough, our nation had many ills in its youth, most of which we have worked together to cure. But we had in common the love of our country as well as a good sense of respect and responsibility. 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 and church for guidance rather than to rock stars and street people. And no one sang of killing and raping.

My story probably began when President Lyndon Johnson transferred the surplus from 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. Who would have dreamed such a thing could happen? Workers who trusted the government with their retirement funds would one day discover the money had been used for other purposes instead of being allowed to grow, and they, the old folks who counted on that little pension, could be left out on a limb. If you do the math, you would find that left alone, the fund would have continued to grow and produce 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. It must be worse for folks in the inner city, where there is a higher concentration of the homeless. And worst of all for the weak and elderly.

But here I am, preaching. Following is a list of questions I compiled at the request of my 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 immoral and selfish act?
5. Was it a good idea to empty institutions of the mentally unstable? What impact has that had on the population as a whole?

6. Do you think the advent of illegal drugs helped drive the story? Gangs? Threatened poverty?
7. If such a thing as *The Bag Lady War* really happened, whose side would you be on - the elderly or the criminals?
8. 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
9. Do you think 80-something-year-old ladies could do what The Bag Ladies did?
10. 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?
11. Is elected euthanasia a viable solution?
12. 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?
13. 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?
14. Does it seem that criminals' rights are better protected than those of the average citizen?
15. Do you feel the ACLU may have an impossible task in trying to balance the rights of the people? For instance, where do your rights end and mine begin?
16. Were you able to deduce what “the Bag Ladies” meant before it was revealed?
17. 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?
18. Were you enlightened to read about the prison system for women?
19. What did you think about the women's sex education lecture to the young inmates of the California Institution for Women (pp 301-305, regular print edition) and to their attempts to help them in general?

About me: I am a native Oregonian, and met my husband, Jack, at the University of Oregon, where he was a business major and I a science major. 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. I think you will also enjoy the book I am currently working on, *Lightly Dusted Crow*, in which our three old ladies deal with domestic abuse. It seems there is no stopping them!

Events: In-studio radio interview with Bill Meyer on the KMED Bill Meyer show; newspaper interviews; television interview with RVTV, a snippet of which is available on YouTube; Author of the Month at the

Ashland Public Library; a play reading from the first chapter of *The Bag Lady War* by the Ashland Community Theater; participation in many west coast book club discussions of *The Bag Lady War*; an invitation to sign my book at the AARP convention in Las Vegas and at the yearly Holiday Gala in the capitol building in Salem, Oregon, as well as invitations to address retirement centers and a group of local unwed high school mothers. *The Bag lady War* is now a screenplay awaiting option.

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!"

I enjoy making myself available to book clubs for their revue of the book.

Happy Reading!

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