DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both Sam and Charlotte Anne expect life to go back to normal when he comes home from the war. In what ways is post-war life different from what they expect? How do the differences between their expectations and reality play into their difficulties?

2. Annie says, “Memory’s a slippery thing. It changes and morphs, solidifying only at the insistence of the most powerful things. It gets so that no one’s ever quite sure what actually happened.” Do you agree with her statement? Why or why not?

3. When Sam comes home from the Pacific, he finds Hot Springs still a hotbed of mob activity. In what ways do you agree with how Sam reacts to the illegal activity? In what ways do you disagree?

4. Sam and Annie are part of what journalist and author Tom Bro­kaw called the Greatest Generation. How is Sam’s struggle with reliving his experiences in the war different from your understand­ing of that generation? How is it the same?

5. Which character do you most identify with? What was their approach to the inexplicably hard things in their life? How does that affect that person’s interactions with others?

6. The novel includes a good deal of discussion about the nature of evil and the character of God. The characters acknowledge that God doesn’t stop bad things from happening. How do they—particularly Dovie May—reconcile the hurt and pain in their lives with their concept of a loving God?

7. Dovie May says, “Sometimes God uses broken things to save us . . . Ain’t no light that can get through something solid. It sneaks through the broken places.” What do you think about this idea?

8. Annie asks, “Was love enough to break through the murky fear and pain?” How do you think she would answer that question by the end of the story? How would you answer it for your life?

9. Sam often sees himself as a monster throughout the book. Why? Does that change by the end? As the story ends, how do the characters view the nature of heroes and happily-ever-afters?