

These High, Green Hills Short Guide

These High, Green Hills by Jan Karon

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Characters

Father Tim's marriage to Cynthia opens a new dimension in his life. Physically, he is still the same short, balding priest with diabetes and a tendency to obesity. He is grouchy, especially with Emma, his secretary, and jealous of the Owens' relationship with Dooley, but he is compassionate and generous toward those who need spiritual guidance. Marriage to Cynthia unlocks emotional reserves that wash away his self-doubts.

With new-found courage, he overcomes his fears and flies in a small plane to attend Dooley's school program. Like a commando, he goes to the Creek with Lace Turner to rescue Poobaw. With his prayers, he inspires Pauline Barlowe's recovery. He earns Miss Sadie's respect as the favorite of all ministers she has known in her long life. He looks forward to future retirement with enthusiasm.

Cynthia's sparkling personality fades somewhat after her marriage to Father Tim. In previous books, she was the focus of Father Tim's emotional conflict, and her career consumed much of her time. In *These High, Green Hills*, she stands in his shadow as a supporting character.

They work as a team in ministering to Mitford.

Previously, Dooley Barlowe's incorrect speech and poor manners have reflected his dysfunctional family background: an absentee father, an alcoholic mother, brothers and sisters who are scattered.

Living with Father Tim and being educated in an excellent boarding school have gradually influenced Dooley, so much that he seems like a stranger to Father Tim and Cynthia when he returns to Mitford. Tall and handsome, he is no longer an impulsive, tactless child, miserable because of unhappy memories and uncertain of his future.

Dooley's vocational goal is to become a veterinarian, like Doc Owen. His interest in animals sublimates his love for the younger brothers and sister whom his real mother gave away. Without consulting Father Tim, Dooley arranges to spend the summer at Meadowgate Farm with the Owens so that he may work with animals. This hurts and disappoints Father Tim and Cynthia. A talk with Marge resolves the problem when she tells them that she did not encourage Dooley's decision. They agree that Dooley belongs to God, not to Father Tim or to the Owens. At the end of the book, Dooley overcomes his emotional reticence and tells Father Tim and Cynthia that he loves them.

Even so, all is not perfect bliss: The discovery of Dooley's mother Pauline and his younger brother Poobaw living at the Creek disrupts Dooley's life and opens old wounds. His future relationships with his mother who abandoned him and his younger brother Poobaw are uncertain. Karon does not resolve this conflict at the end of the book.



Teenaged Lacey Turner lives in a mountain shack that shelters an invalid mother, a younger brother, and a drunken father with a violent temper. She begins her inner transformation with baptism and a vow to live a Christian life.

Filthy, ragged, bruised, and bloody, Lace arrives on the rectory doorstep. Absalom Greer has told her to come there if she ever needed help. In a drunken rage, her father has beaten her because she refused to steal. Father Tim and Cynthia doctor Lacey's wounds and feed her. They offer to do more, but she insists she must go home to take care of her mother. Independent and strong, Lace feels responsible for family and friends who remain at the Creek.

Later, Lacey rescues Pauline Barlowe when she is badly burned and leads Father Tim to Poobaw, who is hiding at the Creek. He is Pauline's child and Dooley's little brother. While Pauline has skin grafts and therapy, Father Tim and Cynthia agree to take care of Poobaw.

Karon introduces a new character in her Mitford series, youthful Scott Murphy, who arrives to administer Hope House. He tells Father Tim that he was called to work with the elderly after three grandparents who had enriched his boyhood were killed in a car accident. His surviving grandmother lay in a coma in a nursing home for many weeks. After much soul searching, he decided not to abandon her or any other elderly person to loneliness and death.

Social Concerns

In Mitford, the village setting of Jan Karon's novels, successful families provide security for individuals and harmony in the community. On the other hand, dysfunctional families cause far-reaching emotional strife and physical harm to both individuals and the community.

Timothy Kavanaugh and Cynthia radiate joy and fulfillment in their marriage after years of solitary life. Father Tim thinks that marriage to Cynthia is a miracle almost as wonderful as his salvation experience. Always a sympathetic listener, Cynthia shares Father Tim's problems and helps him find solutions. She becomes his "deacon." Using her former house as a studio, Cynthia continues her career as illustrator and author of children's books. When she finishes a book, she insists that Father Tim accompany her on a romantic retreat.

Dooley Barlowe, Father Tim's foster child, is away at boarding school during much of the book. Without their knowledge, he arranges to spend the summer at Meadowgate Farm with Doc Owen, a veterinarian, and his wife Marge. Father Tim and Cynthia are hurt by Dooley's rejection. Marge points out that Dooley's unwillingness to confide in them is typical of a teenager who is maturing and becoming independent.

Doctor Hal Owen and Marge are a stable married couple. Owen is a respected member of the community and Marge maintains a comfortable, well-run home. They are active members of Our Lord's Chapel. Although they are approaching middle age and have a grown daughter, they rejoice in their baby Rebecca Jane. Father Timothy considers the Owens to be his brother and sister; before his marriage, he used their home as a refuge and relied on their advice concerning Dooley.

Father Tim thinks of his parishioners as an extended family. Having no living blood relations except his cousin Walter, he ministers to Miss Sadie and Louella as though they are beloved elderly relatives.

He seeks advice from Absalom Greer and Homeless Hobbes as if they are respected uncles. He thinks of Doctor "Hoppy" Harper, Mule Skinner, J.C. Hogan, and Percy Mosely as brothers. Father Tim loves Puny Guthrie, rectory housekeeper, like a daughter. After she gives birth to identical twin girls, he assumes the role of grandfather. Puny brings Sissy and Sassy to work so that Father Tim can hold them and play with them.

Unfortunately, dysfunctional families do not experience joy and fulfillment. In the Creek community, near Mitford, people live in squalor and poverty. Alcohol, drugs, and violence are like a cancer.

Absalom Greer recounts his experiences at the Creek to Father Tim and says that he preached fervently on the wages of sin, but those people are "like a hard freeze on a



peach crop." At age ninety, Absalom cannot continue such a difficult ministry. Now, no one holds services at the Creek.

Karon's description of the Creek community creates a picture of run-down cabins without electricity or plumbing, piles of garbage and refuse, unemployed men, slovenly women, unschooled children, common-law marriages, wife and child abuse, alcoholism, and drug pushers. In contrast to Mitford, where law and order reigns, the Creek is the setting for violence, anarchy, and evil.

Another social concern involves Mitford's aging population. The town's leading citizen and benefactress, Miss Sadie Baxter, is ninety years old. Mentally alert and independent, she has managed her own affairs with the help of her friend and servant Louella, a black woman only a few years younger than Miss Sadie. The first signs that her lifestyle must change are a leaky roof and too many stairs to climb in her Fernbank mansion. Police chief Rodney Underwood tells Father Tim that Miss Sadie must not drive her 1958 Plymouth any more because she is a menace to pedestrians. Miss Sadie breaks her wrist which ends her driving and curtails her independence.

The two women move to niece Olivia's empty house, which temporarily solves the problem. Soon, Hope House, a retirement home, will be completed. Eventually Miss Sadie suffers a broken hip and dies, and Louella becomes the first resident in Hope House.

Other Mitford residents that are growing old are Uncle Billy and Miss Rose, who live in an apartment in the Porter mansion that houses the Mitford Museum. The city council has voted to maintain the house and to take care of the old couple because Mitford has no mental hospital or nursing facility. Uncle Billy remains his cheerful self in spite of Miss Rose's increasing eccentricities and paranoia.

As Father Tim's "deacon," Cynthia calls on senile and childish Miss Pattie.

Patiently, Cynthia plays games with her and allows her to nap on her shoulder.

The old woman responds to Cynthia like a child. Cynthia's kindness allows Miss Pattie's daughter a few hours of solitude and freedom.

Although they are only in their sixties, Father Tim and Cynthia will soon face retirement from Lord's Chapel. At first, Father Tim grows angry if anyone mentions retirement, especially Cynthia.

Gradually, he comes to accept it as an opportunity for new experiences, not the end of his life or ministry.

Another social concern is typical of many small towns in America: community traditions. The nondenominational Thanksgiving feast at Lord's Chapel is like a family reunion. Everybody brings food. Such bounty! Esther Bolick plays the piano, and the youth choir sings "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come."



Dooley sings a solo. During kitchen clean-up one parishioner says, "The Baptists ate like they're bein' raptured before dark!" Later, church members deliver sixteen baskets to shut-ins. Then they all go to watch the sunset and finish the hymn, "All is safely gathered in/ Ere the winter storms begin." In spite of doctrinal differences, the people of Mitford worship together and experience the joys and hardships of life as a community.

At Christmas, Lord's Chapel parishioners celebrate the birth of Christ at a midnight service. Father Tim is moved by the decorations and candles in the church and the lovely music with words that promise spiritual renewal. These symbolic expressions of Christianity reflect Father Tim's faith. Father Tim and Cynthia celebrate Christmas alone because Dooley is touring Europe with the choir from his school. Cynthia gives Father Tim a world globe with a light, something he has always wanted, and he gives her an emerald ring. Neither of them has ever before been the recipient of a love gift that fulfills a secret longing.

Cynthia's first "prim and proper" Primrose Tea in the rectory is a grand success. In preparation for it, she redecorates the rectory and prepares special refreshments. Father Tim's life is disrupted, but the tea is the talk of Mitford.

It allays Episcopal women's fears that Cynthia will not be a "proper" priest's wife.

Another community celebration is on the occasion of Miss Sadie's ninetieth birthday. The celebration is supposed to be a secret, but of course, she finds out.

Father Tim tells her it is her duty to people who love her to act surprised.

Mitford townspeople gather outside of Fernbank to sing "Happy Birthday" and give thanks for her contributions to Mitford. Esther Bolick bakes her a huge peanut butter cake with grape jelly filling.

On July 4, while North Main Street businesses celebrate Independence Day, people on South Main are celebrating the triumph of a Christian's death: Miss Sadie Baxter's. Louella and Dooley sing at the funeral, and Father Tim preaches and conducts the traditional Episcopal burial ritual. Father Tim buries her funeral urn under a rose bush in the church yard and marks the spot with a simple marker: Sadie Eleanor Baxter, Beloved.

Another social concern is the hospital.

Several episodes take place in this setting: a child's unsuccessful appendectomy, treatment of Miss Sadie's broken hip from which she does not recover, and Pauline Barlowe's burn treatment. Because the community hospital is small, Doctor Harper often seeks the help of specialists. Karon's episodes at the Mitford hospital accurately reflect the care and concerns of doctors, nurses, priests, and families in small towns, where people know each other well. Father Tim visits patients daily and prays for their recovery.



Doctor Harper confides that he and his staff pray in the operating room before surgery because they rely on a spiritual healing power greater than themselves.

When Father Tim is making his daily rounds at the hospital, a nurse asks him why God breaks people's hearts with sickness and death. He explains that the hearts of people who have faith in an eternal spirit cannot be broken, but those without such faith have brittle, hard hearts that break easily and cannot be consoled.

The Mitford community celebrates Miss Sadie's life and death because her generous and optimistic spirit continues to touch so many lives. Hope House is her memorial. In contrast, Buck Leeper's heartbreak and lack of faith in an eternal spirit has warped his life. Until he meets Father Tim, he has been unable to forgive himself for the accidental death of his younger brother.

Other social concerns in *These High, Green Hills* involve modern innovations: computers, private planes, unisex barbers, and policewomen. Bishop Cullen informs Father Tim that he must keep church records on computer. This is not popular with Emma, the church secretary, or with Father Tim. So far, Lord's Chapel records and the filing system for them have been informal and haphazard. They dread having to learn how to use the "infernal machine," and they postpone it as long as they can. Eventually, a technician arrives and teaches Emma how to use the new computer with its specialized language and functions. Soon she is "hooked" and becomes an expert. Change in a small community is often depicted in literature as disruptive; here, change becomes beneficial to community needs as well as to individuals, once they overcome their initial fears and adapt to new technology.

Father Tim, for example, has always been afraid of flying. A late invitation to Dooley's school concert makes driving to Virginia impossible, so flying becomes imperative. With much trepidation, Father Tim flies with Omer Cunningham in his "rag-wing tail dragger" to the school.

Previously, Dooley has thought of Father Tim as a person without the audacity to make such a trip. Dooley is impressed that he cared enough to fly. On the way home, Omer flies over Mitford and nearby communities, and Father Tim sees for the first time the Creek community with its shacks, rusting cars, and garbage. Up to now, Homeless Hobbes has been his only contact with this rural slum. The sight of this scar on the landscape alerts Father Tim that something must be done to help Creek residents. Much later, his friends at the Grill, unaware that he has flown in Omer's plane, discuss its construction and say it's nothing but chicken wire covered with a bedsheet. Always modest, Father Tim just smiles, unwilling to share his daring experience. It might seem like bragging. The plane trip serves two purposes in Karon's book: to emphasize that Father Tim has conquered a fear in order to please Dooley and to introduce the Creek as a future location for conflict.

In Karon's second book, *A Light in the Window* (1995; see separate entry), Father Tim reluctantly goes to Fancy Skinner's unisex barber and beauty shop because his male barber is sick. In *These High, Green Hills*, he continues to procrastinate about going



there. Finally, bossy secretary Emma orders him to get a haircut at Fancy's, because he "looks like a chipmunk."

Fancy snips fast and talks faster and gives him a haircut that she says his wife will "eat with a spoon." Father Tim agrees that the haircut makes him look better.

He has flown in a plane to please Dooley and gets his haircut by a female barber to please Emma and Cynthia.

Techniques

These High, Green Hills is a character-driven book in which the characters' actions are important because of who they are. They face moral dilemmas with no clear answers. By the end of the book, they make decisions that will change their lives. In her characters, Karon tries to emphasize the goodness of the human spirit.

Because character development is more important than fast action, These High, Green Hills moves forward in short episodes, rather like a daily log, or diary.

Twenty-one chapters are subdivided into short segments that skip from one event to another, as Father Tim interacts with other characters.

Karon writes in the third person, with her point of view filtered through the heart and mind of Father Timothy Kavanaugh, rector of Our Lord's Chapel in Mitford, North Carolina. In These High, Green Hills, she resolves his inner conflicts by showing how forgiveness brings freedom and marriage enriches life.

Karon is especially adept at mimicking Southern speech patterns. Her authentic dialogue supports characterizations and adds humor. Conversations among the guys at the Grill and Fancy's monologues as she cuts Father Tim's hair are hilarious reproductions of the speech of real people. Dialogue between Dooley and Father Tim and Lace and Father Tim contrast the effects that age, education, family background, and economic status have on characters.

She also thinks that sex is healthy, although she does not include explicit sex scenes. However, readers know that Father Tim and Cynthia find comfort in each other's physical bodies. As they "spoon" in his bed after a stressful day, he wonders how he endured those lonely years of bachelorhood. He is amused to discover that Cynthia snores. When she is late coming home, he is sick with worry.

They linger in bed on a rainy day. They look forward to romantic "retreats," away from his parish duties and her publisher's deadlines. These small getaways are nothing more than spending the night in her small, yellow house, away from the rectory, or going on a picnic, but they return to their duties refreshed.

One of the important settings in Karon's Mitford series is the hospital. In previous books, Karon has included Father Tim's symptoms and treatment for diabetes, Olivia's near-fatal heart disease and transplant, Russell Jacks's pneumonia, and Tommy's head injury. Father Tim visits patients at the hospital daily, and Doctor Harper is a secondary character in all of Karon's books.

Karon describes Pauline Barlowe's burn treatment with realistic detail: the breathing tube, the dressings, the morphine to deaden the pain, the skin grafts and therapy, and she carefully describes Miss Sadie's last days in the hospital after she falls and breaks her

hip. Many readers will identify with the problems and pain of an elderly relative who must endure an extended stay in the hospital.

As in all of her books, Karon includes verses of scripture from the Bible, which Father Tim recites when he or other characters need courage. She also includes verses of traditional Thanksgiving and Christmas songs. The effect is reader identification with Father Tim and members of his congregation as they participate in worship.

Karon's tone is one of gentle satire throughout the Mitford series. She writes about Mitford and the people who live there with warm affection, as though she knows them personally. Because she thinks her readers need laughter to help them cope with life, she balances life-threatening experiences with local color and humorous dialogue. Various characters emerge from being lost in a cave, feeling guilt and self-doubt, enduring child abuse, physical agony, and the infirmities of old age because they place their faith in Paul's words: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4: 13). Any reader who has lived in a small southern community can identify with Karon's characters, settings, and conflicts.

Themes

Karon's characters emerge from her books, two-by-two, like the animals on Noah's ark. She cannot resist pairing them off, making marriage an underlying theme.

Father Tim and Cynthia adjust to marriage after years of single life. Father Tim finds sharing his home and bed with Cynthia a source of wonder and pleasure, although his peace and quiet in the rectory is temporarily disrupted when Cynthia redecorates the old house and moves the furniture, but he admits that she improves it.

Always affectionate and sympathetic to Father Tim's needs as his marriage partner, Cynthia also becomes his "deacon."

She allays Mitford women's fears that she is an incompetent preacher's wife when she successfully hosts the first annual Primrose Tea. She calls on Miss Pattie, a duty that Father Tim always dreads, and helps him minister to Lacy, the abused girl from the Creek. They cope with Dooley's teenage rejection and welcome his brother Poobaw into their home at the end of the book.

In addition, Cynthia continues her own career, writing and illustrating books for children, which does not interfere with her role as Father Tim's wife. She initiates "marital retreats," away from the rectory so that they can recharge their energies.

"You can't shine if you don't fill your lamp," she says. Marriage does not change Cynthia's personality as much as it does Father Tim's.

J. C. Hogan, crusty editor of the Mitford Muse, interviews the new police officer in town and rides around in the patrol car with her. She is attractive Adele Lynwood, fortyish, divorced, with two grown children. J.C.'s friends notice that he suddenly becomes concerned about his appearance and manners. Usually, he is tactless and crude. When Adele rejects his romantic overtures, he complains to the guys at the Grill that she would rather clean her pistol than go on a date with him.

At the Main Street Grill, Mule, Percy, and Father Tim discuss these unusual changes in their friend, bachelor J.C.. For breakfast, instead of sausage, grits, and gravy, J.C. orders fruit and cereal. He loses weight; he dresses neatly; he gets a haircut; he carries a fresh handkerchief instead of a paper towel. It can mean one of two things: J.C. is either sick or he is in love. J.C.'s romance goes off and on throughout the book. Mule and Father Tim offer a few pointers on how to court a woman, and by the end of the book, J.C. and Adele marry.

Other happily married couples in Mitford include Verna and Percy Mosely, owners of the Grill; Mule and Fancy Skinner, real estate agent and unisex barber; Olivia and Hoppy Harper, beautiful newcomer and Mitford's doctor; the prolific Cunninghams, mayor and parents of many daughters; Puny and Joe Guthrie, housekeeper and deputy sheriff; Emma and Harold Newland, church secretary and mailman. The stability of their



marriages is reflected in the stability of the Mitford community. In Karon's Mitford series, a single person's life is incomplete, a conflict that is resolved by marriage.

Karon arranges other characters in pairs. Two-by-two relationships include ninety-year-old Miss Sadie Baxter and her lifelong friend and servant Louella. Punny Guthrie gives birth to identical red-haired twin girls, Sissy and Sassy. Dooley delivers twin calves in his first solo attempt at veterinary medicine and names them Kenny and Jessie after his missing brother and sister.

Another theme in *These High, Green Hills* involves people who are "lost and found." Being lost in an unexplored cave forces Father Tim and Cynthia to confess dark places in their past lives. Not knowing if they will be rescued from the cave, they reveal painful secrets to each other and discover that in spite of these character flaws, they love each other anyway.

Father Tim tells Cynthia that he entered the ministry because of unresolved conflicts with his harsh and proud father.

Since boyhood, Father Tim has been dogged by the feeling that he could never please his father or do anything right. His ministry has allowed him to help others overcome those same conflicts, but he has never overcome his own self-doubts.

Cynthia confesses that she tried to commit suicide after her first husband cruelly rejected her. In the darkness of the cave, Father Tim and Cynthia are able to shed their self-doubts and inhibitions. As singles, they were weak; as soul mates, they are strong. The cave experience allows them to forgive and forget those old wounds and frees them to serve God better.

Pastor Absalom Greer tells Father Tim about a revival he conducted at the Creek before his retirement. The people listened but were unrepentant. He thought he had failed to save any of them until a young girl came down out of a tree and asked God to forgive her sins. After Greer baptized her, others came, and he baptized them, too, but Lacey (Lace) Turner led the way.

Pauline Barlowe is also "lost and found." A badly burned woman from the Creek is in the hospital after her common law husband threw kerosene on her and set her on fire. The unidentified woman suffers third degree burns on her face and body. If she survives, she must recover from pneumonia, skin grafts, and months of therapy. The pain is intense, but Father Tim sits beside her bed and prays with her, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Later, he discovers that she is Pauline Barlowe, Dooley's missing mother. She has repented of her alcoholism and is one of those baptized by Absalom Greer.

Dooley and Poobaw live nearby, but she does not know where Jessie and Kenny are. Father Tim and Lacey go to the Creek to rescue Poobaw. Aware of the danger, Father Tim summons unexpected courage from scripture, Paul's words to Timothy: "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." In



every case, those who are spiritually lost find courage, love, and solutions to their problems through relying on their faith in God.

Another theme is built around growth and change. Dooley grows in "wisdom and in stature" throughout the Mitford series. During his adolescence in *These High, Green Hills*, he is away much of the time at boarding school, discovering his own talents and goals. He travels to Europe with the school choir. When he returns to Mitford, Father Tim is surprised by his size and poise. On the other hand, Lace Turner, the young girl who provides for her invalid mother and rescues Poobaw, is reminiscent of Dooley at the beginning of the Mitford series. Her speech, clothing, and manners are primitive. She is a survivor in a harsh environment. Her salvation experience under the influence of Pastor Greer changes her life, and she shows courage and ingenuity in opposing her abusive father. Her contrast with Dooley shows how love and care can help a child mature into a poised, cultured person. Before the book ends, Karon hints that Olivia Harper may help Lace become an attractive, respectable Mitford teenager.

At the beginning of the Mitford series, Father Tim performs his priestly duties with grace and compassion, but his life lacks any personal intimacy. During the four books' episodes, his spirit slowly grows and changes. First, the dog Barnabas breaks down his emotional reserve, then Dooley, then Cynthia, then Puny and her babies. Thus, he has not only helped characters such as Dooley, but they have helped him. Caring for others can be caring for oneself. Love has a transforming power; in *These High, Green Hills*, Father Tim refuses at first to think about retirement or even to discuss it with Cynthia. However, changes in Mitford and changes in his own life convince him that the future is not static, that with Cynthia at his side, life will have many challenges and opportunities. On several occasions, he and Cynthia discuss where they would like to retire someday. They choose a setting remarkably like Mitford, surrounded by *These High, Green Hills*.

Key Questions

Previous books in the Mitford series portray Father Tim as an earnest and devout priest but one who is inhibited by self-doubts and indecision. In *These High, Green Hills*, his fears are resolved when he realizes that the cause of his self-doubt has been his father's harsh criticism.

After his marriage to Cynthia and their experience in the cave, he is able to forgive the past and look forward to the future.

Several characters from previous books have either disappeared or faded into obscurity, like Edith Mallory and Buck Leeper, and a few new characters have emerged. Scott Murphy arrives to administer Hope House, and Lace Turner from the Creek becomes Olivia's foster child.

Other conflicts are resolved: Miss Sadie dies and leaves her estate to Dooley.

Pauline Barlowe returns, repentant that she abandoned her children, and Dooley is reunited with Poobaw, his little brother.

1. Now that Father Tim and Cynthia have put the past behind them and look forward to future challenges, what do you think these challenges will be?
2. In the care of Father Tim and the Owens, Dooley has adjusted to life without a mother or siblings. He is silent when he emerges from his mother's hospital room after their reunion. What is he thinking? Can he forgive her?
3. What will be the effect of Dooley's inheritance on his future?
4. Lace Turner is much like Dooley when he first came to live with Father Tim at the rectory. What adjustments will she have to make in order to live in the Harper home?
5. In what ways is Scott Murphy, administrator of Hope House suited for his job?
6. Which characters seem flat or undeveloped in *These High, Green Hills*? Could Karon have omitted them?
7. How true to life is Karon's portrayal of the men who have breakfast together at the Grill? What do you find especially humorous about Karen's satire of J.C.

and his love affair?

8. Discuss problems at the Creek. What causes people to live in such squalor when prosperous communities like Mitford exist on the other side of *These High, Green Hills*? What is the solution to alcoholism, poverty, and abuse in communities like the Creek?



9. How effective are retirement homes like Hope House in caring for the elderly in your community?

10. Which secondary characters from previous Mitford books do you wish Karon would include in her next novel?

Which ones are you content to have fade away?

Literary Precedents

Mark Twain has influenced Karon's writing. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876; see separate entry) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884; see separate entry) were two of Karon's favorite books in her youth. Like Twain, Karon emulates authentic regional speech patterns and uses dialogue to develop characterizations. The cave scene is especially reminiscent of Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher's adventure when they are lost in a Missouri cave during a school picnic.

Karon says that she went deep into an unexplored limestone cave in Virginia to gain authentic insight into what it is like to be lost underground in the dark.

Father Tim and Cynthia find a different kind of treasure and meet no Injun Joe when they are lost in the cave, but they are confronted with their mortality.

They may never be rescued. Both confess fears that have handicapped their lives.

The treasure they find is forgiveness of those who have twisted their hearts.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Pap Finn, a drunken gambler and ne'er-do-well, beats his child, Huck. Lace Turner experiences the same abuse. She even calls her father Pap, as does Huck, before he runs away with Jim. Lace is much like Huck, intelligent and self-reliant. Cynthia's reaction to Lace's filthy clothing and bad smell are reminiscent of the Widow Douglas's reaction to Huck's lack of "civilization." Both women want to help these youths, but Lace and Huck reject their methods.

Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837/1839) has similar social problems to those in *These High, Green Hills*. In Victorian England, happy, prosperous families lived in close proximity to dysfunctional families living in squalor and poverty. The abusive relationship between Bill Sykes and Nancy in *Oliver Twist* is mirrored in Pauline Barlowe's and Lace's parents' lives. Alcoholism and crime contribute to their degradation. Just like Oliver, Dooley and Lace are fortunate to escape such an environment.

Related Titles

These High, Green Hills is the third novel in the Mitford series, which includes *At Home in Mitford* (1994; see separate entry), *A Light in the Window* (1995; see separate entry), and *Out to Canaan* (1997). A fifth Mitford novel is in progress. Father Timothy Kavanaugh, rector of Our Lord's Chapel Episcopal Church, is the protagonist of all books in the Mitford series.

Cynthia Coppersmith, his love interest, and Dooley Barlowe, a foster child, are important secondary characters. The setting of the series is Mitford, North Carolina, a fictitious community, where love, laughter, and faith strengthen its citizens as they overcome adversity.



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