



These titles were chosen by bookshelves in all 50 states in America's best We honor authors for their art.

MELINDA HAYNES

The Sunday Wife

AVA'S MAN Black EPIC

FANNIE FLAG
Standing in the Rainbow
FANNIE FLAG
Standing in the Rainbow
FANNIE FLAG
Standing in the Rainbow

Fannie Flag
Signing Here

THE ALABAMA BOOKS MITH

"When someone calls me a Southern writer, I think of it as a tremendous compliment," says Fannie.

southern.

Scribe

Fannie Flagg captures the spirit of home in a wonderful feel-good novel.

The small Missouri town in Fannie Flagg's new book, *Standing in the Rainbow*, represents the author's memories of growing up in Alabama. "All of my books are set in the South," she says. She chose the location "to be true to the radio homemaker character, Neighbor Dorothy." Real-life radio homemakers were primarily Midwestern women who broadcast from their living rooms. "But I put the setting in the southernmost point of Missouri, so we're safe," she says, then laughs her famous chuckle.

Not the Class Clown

Despite her public persona, Fannie considers herself an introvert. "I was an only child, very lonely and very shy," she recalls. The future writer was also extremely dyslexic. With the help of a wonderful teacher, she learned to speak up in the sixth grade. Still, Fannie says, "My basic instincts are to be introverted and very quiet. I think my true personality is that of an observer." She headed to Hollywood as a writer, but the industry saw the stunning, funny redhead quite differently.

After years of success as an actor, Fannie experienced an epiphany. "When I was acting in New York in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, I wasn't as happy as I should have been," she recalls. Even though the show was nominated for a Tony, "I thought, 'You are taking away a job from someone who would just love to do this.'"

Mining a Golden Memory

So she began penning a host of impressive novels, including *Daisy Fay and the Miracle Man*, *Welcome to the World, Baby Girl!* and *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*. The latter captured her an Oscar nomination for the screenplay.

When she began work on her most recent novel, Fannie's recollection of visiting on the front porch with her grandmother and Woodlawn neighbors came to mind. "I thought, 'I want to go back to that time,'" she says. "I had become very despondent because of all the negativity and cynicism and America bashing. Everything on television and the movies seemed to be very negative and dark.

"I rarely believe anything is without hope," she continues. "The human spirit amazes me."

BY NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON
PHOTOGRAPHY LACY KERR ROBINSON

Film Folly

Fannie's perspective often perplexes the Hollywood moguls. "They don't understand my stories," says Fannie. "'It's so cheerful,' they'll say, or 'It's a feel-good novel,'" Fannie mimics. Her tone and emphasis suggest the comments are meant as insults. "I tell them, 'I'm so sorry that I didn't write a feel-bad novel,'" then she breaks into laughter. The larger purpose of good-hearted entertainment, however, remains a serious point to Fannie.

"Right now, I think we need a release from negativity. We've got such stuff to get over and around," she says. "But you never know—we might just make it. I just cannot give up on the human race." She wryly adds, "I'm sure I would sell more books if I could, but I just can't do it."

Optimism is one "obstacle" this shy actor and dyslexic author never intends to overcome.

STANDING IN THE RAINBOW

Stretching from the 1940s to 2000, this story invites us to visit with Neighbor Dorothy, a radio homemaker who broadcasts daily from her house to the homes of isolated listeners. Dorothy Smith's folksy chit-chat includes recipes, updates on quirky locals, and bursts of organ music.

No one provides more steady fodder for Dorothy's patter than that of husband Doc and their two children. Also working their way into the story are the Oatman Family Southern Gospel Singers, salesman-turned-politician Hamm Sparks, and funeral king and secret transvestite Cecil Figs. (Random House, \$25.95)

