

whom Jesus walks on the landscape of our own communities.

SAINT MAYBE, by Anne Tyler. Knopf, 1991.

Anne Tyler's twelfth novel delves deeply into the resources of religious faith available to Ian Bedloe when his foundations totter to crumbling. *Saint Maybe* is about family and tragedy, guilt and atonement.

Young Ian is from a model middle-class family in Baltimore in the 1960's. His father is a high school math teacher, his mother a homemaker. Sister Claudia dropped out of college to marry and have children. Older brother Danny graduated from high school and works in the post office. Danny meets Lucy Dean at work when she arrives at his window to mail a bowling ball and other possessions to her former husband. Lucy and her two children, Thomas and Agatha, become members of the Bedloe clan when Danny and Lucy marry after the briefest of courtships.

Ian's very normal teenage life of playing baseball, having a girl friend, and dreaming of college, is suddenly changed when he discovers and tells a secret about Lucy. One tragedy follows another, charting an unexpected course for Ian's life and faith.

Home from his freshman year in college and walking Baltimore's streets, Ian hears singing and is drawn into the storefront "Church of the Second Chance." Ian's prayers for forgiveness are met by the Reverend Emmett's counsel that forgiveness is earned, and the burden of the book weighs upon Ian's attempts to atone for his tragic mistake.

*Saint Maybe* portrays a count your blessings kind of family beset by tragedy; and the way they cleave to one another and hide from each other. Around the edges of the story is the ever lingering and ultimately central question about the nature of forgiveness. Ian struggles to understand why, "...Sometimes lately I've hated God for taking so long to forgive me. Somedays I feel like I'm speaking into a dead telephone...nothing comes back to show I've been heard." This novel questions the nature of forgiveness in a way that will impact both preacher and person in the pew.

JEWEL, by Bret Lott. Pocket Books, 1991.

*Jewel* also begins with a family completely content to be ordinary. Jewel Hilburn and her husband, Leston, have a lovely life in rural Mississippi with their two daughters and three sons. In 1943 the birth of their sixth child, Brenda Kay, who has Down's syndrome, rattles the family's stability.

Leston has to give up dreams of owning his own lumber company as medical costs accumulate, and Jewel uproots the whole family to move to California as she pursues the best educational opportunities for Brenda Kay. This youngest child becomes Jewel's sole focus and the entire family is necessarily reoriented.

A first person saga of a strong Southern woman's love for her special child, *Jewel* bears the authenticity of the writer's own family experience. Bret Lott's main characters are based on his grandmother and aunt. His personal knowledge of Jewel's stubborn faithfulness and love for her youngest child creates a poignant drama of this dislocated family.

Some readers may find themselves uncomfortable with the portrayal of Brenda Kay as a stereotypical view of the handicapped. That this child is a gift from God presents a simple piety. But Lott's depth of character runs deeper than that, and at its very heart this novel triumphs self-sacrificing love.