



Standing in the Rainbow

Fannie Flagg

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Along with Neighbor Dorothy, the lady with the smile in her voice, whose daily radio broadcasts keep us delightfully informed on all the local news, we also meet Bobby, her ten-year-old son, destined to live a thousand lives, most of them in his imagination; Norma and Macky Warren and their ninety-eight-year-old Aunt Elner; the oddly sexy and charismatic Hamm Sparks and the two women who love him as differently as night and day. Then there is Tot Whooten; Beatrice Woods, the Little Blind Songbird; Cecil Figgs, the Funeral King; and the fabulous Minnie Oatman.

The time is 1946 until the present. The town is Elmwood Springs, Missouri, right in the middle of the country, in the midst of the mostly joyous transition from war to peace, aiming toward a dizzyingly bright future.

Standing in the Rainbow Details

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From Reader Review Standing in the Rainbow for online ebook

Lynne says

Fannie Flagg understands how small towns in the Midwest used to be, how they changed and how they got flattened by malls built on the outskirts of town. She writes of Neighbor Dorothy, who broadcasts her daily show from her living room. Dorothy reminded me so much of a friend's mother, "Gert," who was known by everyone in their small town on the Wisconsin-Illinois border.

The characters were believable - I knew those people - they just had different names. That the young people grew up and left home to make good was so much a part of our own ethos. Those who remained were resigned to staying put, neither envying or criticizing those who left. They had lives that were full and were part of the continuity we depended on as we were being raised.

Even Bobby, the lazy son the Doc the pharmacist and Neighbor Dorothy, eventually found his center. He demonstrated courage and moxie in Korea, refused a medal for it and moved on with his life.

Some may find the wacky things that happened to be unbelievable, but if you were raised in a town like this, you know how absolutely hilarious things could get because there are characters who keep life spicy, no matter how bland it might seem to outsiders. They are just part of the fabric of the community and knowing everyone's business is critical to keeping some semblance of balance and neighborliness.

Overall, I thought it was a good read. Well defined characters, quirky events and the odd predicament were combined masterfully. Guess I'll be looking for Ms. Flagg's other books!

Ron Charles says

Fannie Flagg, the queen of fried green tomatoes and small town farce, comes on like a thunder storm of sentimental humor. You can run for cover under the awning of Great Literature, you can put up an umbrella of sophisticated disdain, but it's no use: Once you're caught in this warm downpour of kitschy comedy, you quickly give in and start singing in the rain.

Her latest novel, "Standing in the Rainbow," opens with a statement "To the Public at Large" from old Mrs. Tot Whooten, the ridiculously untalented hairdresser of Elmwood Springs, Mo. "As a character in this book," she says, à la Huck Finn, "I can tell you that everything in it really did happen, so I can highly recommend it without any qualms whatsoever."

But it may be that Mrs. Whooten is no more reliable as a critic than she is as a beautician. "I like a book with a beginning, a middle, and an end," she tells us, "and hopefully a plot and a few laughs in between." By that perfectly reasonable standard, there are some bad hair days in "Standing in the Rainbow."

Not that you could ask for a better beginning -- or more laughs. Indeed, the first 200 pages of this overlong novel are wonderful, a charming comedy about Bobby Smith, the archetypal 10-year-old boy. He's a mischievous little scamp with a heart of gold and a frog in his pocket.

His world -- a few miles of farmland, the neighbors' yards, and a block of stores -- is a universe of adventure and wonder. "Bobby even felt sorry for anyone who was not lucky enough to have been born here."

Indeed, this is the best of all possible worlds. America had just won World War II, thanks in no small part to Bobby's efforts to recycle rubber and scrap paper. There are only two problems in his life: (1) An irrepressible grin that makes teachers suspect he's always up to something and (2) parents so well known in town that somebody immediately tells on him the minute he does anything wrong.

His father, a paragon of good will and responsibility, is the town pharmacist, and his mother is affectionately known throughout the Midwest as Neighbor Dorothy. Her radio show, broadcast every morning from their living room, provides millions of housewives with a little family chat, a few recipes, organ music by Mother Smith, and a feeling of connection and trust that today's advertisers would kill for. (Even President Truman sends Dorothy's dog a birthday card.)

Her broadcasts, recounted here in high-fidelity wit, draw a constant stream of celebrity guests, from the Little Blind Songbird to the wildly dysfunctional Oatman Gospel Family. Only Flagg could carry off this parody of revivalist faith-healing Christians -- complete with a ventriloquist dummy -- without sounding derisive.

Off the air, we follow Bobby's antics (particularly the annual bubble-gum blowing contest), his pretty sister's hysterics over some boy (or her mother's confidential remarks about her love life to millions of listeners), and a town full of comically strange characters who wouldn't be rude to one another if their lives depended on it.

This ain't no Winesburg, Ohio. These scoops of Elmwood Springs go down like peach ice cream -- almost too sweet but undeniably delicious. Flagg is one of those authors who doesn't worry about creating great significance, but then ends up doing so anyhow.

The characters in "Standing in the Rainbow" are so wholly free of self-pity and esoteric angst that if they made contact with a typical piece of New York literary fiction, they would explode in a burst of strawberry-rhubarb pie.

Death is not frequent in this little town, but it comes, and not always as expected. Sometimes a healthy child fades in the middle of the night, while a sick old lady lives many decades more. Still, if there's any sadness in this book, it's not the periodic passing of a loved one, it's the lingering sense that the values in this town have passed away and left us in a climate awash with commercialism, self-absorption, and cynicism.

Indeed, change is hard on a small town, and it's particularly hard on this novel. As the 1940s wane and we move into the '50s, the narrative veers away from Bobby and his family and picks up the story of Hamm Sparks, an ambitious tractor salesman.

Hamm is a perfectly wonderful side character, but when he steals the novel's focus and drags the plot to the Missouri State House, it's like watching Kramer try to spin off from "Seinfeld." There's just not enough there beneath the antics. Flagg knows Dorothy's kitchen down to the last doily and can of tomatoes, but her creation of the governor's office seems laughably -- though not comically -- fake.

Unfortunately, this detour lasts for almost 200 pages that never seem like anything more than a distraction. Her previous novel, the bestselling "Welcome to the World, Baby Girl!" maintained a much better focus. "Yet, even though other things in the world may have changed," Flagg assures us, "the 'Neighbor Dorothy' show remained the same." And indeed, it's a great relief when we finally get back to Elmwood Springs, if

only to see how it all winds down.

Beneath the sentimentality, there's a real celebration of life here, an affirmation that success and happiness are the results of simple kindness, gratitude, and courage. If some long storms rumble through this novel, fans probably won't mind. There's still a rainbow arching right over it, and it's something to see.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0808/p1...>

Julie Paugh says

I'm sorry, but this book was just 'okay' for me. While it shared the same tone and humor as "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" it lacked the heart and soul. Like FGTATWSC, it chronicles the lives of a family and community of a small town; it begins in the 1940's and extends into the '90's. My biggest problem with this book is that there was no story to it. It was entertaining most of the way through and felt fun to visit the characters like they were my own friends and family but it was all very shallow. And this book certainly made me yearn for a time period I never knew myself. Flagg does Americana very well, I will certainly hand her that much. My second problem with the book was that the characters were all pretty bland. Even Neighbor Dorothy who was like the glue that touched them all...well, let's just say she was no Idgie. And some of the characters (Hamm and Norma) I found just out-and-out annoying. I might have liked the book better, had the focus been more on Bobby who was the most interesting character and a central character in the early years. But Bobby was just shuffled to the side when he became an adult and the tiny bit of plot focused on Betty Raye and Hamm's political careers (for me this was a big yawn)

Don't get me completely wrong, there is an entertainment factor here and I see that a lot of reviewers rated this much higher than I did...I did enjoy about 65% of this book. I was just hoping to find a story that was as rich and textured, poignant and humorous and as real as "Fried Green Tomatoes..." but this fell disappointingly short of the mark.

Christa says

I couldn't find the plot that was supposed to capture my interest. There were at least 10 main characters who all had stories going on. Sometimes those stories intermingled and sometimes they didn't. If someone asked me who the main character was, I wouldn't be able to say. There were big chunks devoted key people like Hamm and Betty Raye, Dorothy, Bobby and Norma, but there wasn't a single plot line that followed through the entire novel. It was really about the passage of time. The book walks through 4 decades of people who lived in or visited Elmwood Springs, MO and how the passage of time changed their lives. I think Fannie Flagg's best time periods are the 40s and 50s. These were the strongest sections for me in the book because she built a world that I could completely envision. Once it moved into the other decades, it lost that definition and those sections were much shorter and less detailed.

That isn't to say that I didn't enjoy it. It took me awhile to warm up to it. The first 60 pages are just short chapters introducing the bevy of characters and that gets old after awhile. Once it got through the introductory stuff, it started to pick up speed and be more readable.

If you like Fannie Flagg, it's worth a read. It was slow and boring in places but that can be overlooked for the

overall sense of the book. I'm still puzzled by the title because it's only referenced once and I don't see how it relates to any of the character's plots.

Kelly says

It is nice to imagine a town such as the one depicted in this book. This is a fun positive read where you meet an interesting collection of characters and see them develop over the years.

Rachel M says

I felt such a sense of nostalgia when I read this book, for a place and time I never experienced. It's the same feeling I get when I watch A Christmas Story or It's a Wonderful Life.

When you're little and you get sick, you always know there's a place for you on Mom's lap - there is a comfort in knowing that you will be taken care of.

I never experienced the 40s and 50s, but I sense from that time that the same secure feeling existed - a confidence in the greatness of America, and its ability to survive and thrive because of its wholesome values. Growing up in the 80s and 90s, I was educated from a sense of disillusionment about this earlier time and about that mentality. Now, we tend to villainize the ignorance and the arrogance of the upper white middle class, that innate sense of American superiority, because of the gaping hypocrisies and all that it left neglected. We note, for instance, that America had internment camps at the same time that we were taking Germany to task about concentration camps.

This pursuit of debunking the popular myth of the wholesome, pure quality of the 40s and 50s isn't without foundation. But I found myself on board with Fannie Flagg's message - there was something special about the 40s and 50s, and the attitude of believing good things of America; there was something good about that time that we discarded somewhere.

Today's generation has followed the Cold War, Vietnam protests, the Monica Lewinsky scandal... and I think the sense of skepticism that has caused us to take the 40s and 50s to task is the same attitude that shapes the way we look at our country now, and at the government. Without hope. Without faith.

The 40s and 50s may have done a lot of things wrong, but I can't stop myself from being nostalgic - just for the hope. This was the time that engendered so many of the hallmarks of American tradition - baseball, apple pie, small town life, white Christmases. I am glad that Flagg wrote about some of these things.

Elizabeth says

This is what they'd call a homespun yarn. Following this yarn was like being led through a very long, very pointless labyrinth. And not an interesting labyrinth, but a plain beige labyrinth in which you go snow blind from the featurelessness of it all. And in the monotony of the labyrinth, somewhere, the hair prickling up your neck, you realise with mounting dread, there are REPUBLICANS!

The whole book is the most chronic piece of self-idyll-mythologising bullshit you ever read. The twee white bread American small town it claims to depict is about as real as the Disney It's A Small World After All ride. Jesus, it makes me long for the gritty cynicism of The Waltons.

And you do wanna go, "Where are all the Blacks? Where are all the Jews? While you're out here mythologising a bygone time that bears fuck-all resemblance to the world at large." Seriously, there a billion boring-ass characters we are introduced to and given their life-story in achingly minute detail. Not one black person. In fact the only black person even mentioned is Huey P. Newton of the Black Panther Party who is classed outright as a "traitor". This is a book which encompasses from the 1940s up to the 1980s. Black people make up 10% of the state's population. One guy. He's a traitor. That's all it has to say.

It's basically a genre of Aryan twee. Propaganda doesn't even begin to cover it. The sympathetic, homespun, charming, down-to-earth, tell-it-like-it-is character who goes into politics suggests during the 60s that they ought to nuke the gooks. This reasonable suggestion is met with downright rudeness by peace protestors who have the gall, get this, to ACTUALLY PROTEST one of his speeches. The rudeness of shouting over a man who's speaking is cast as a grave sin against the reasonable message he's trying to convey, namely the atomic incineration of men, women and children whom the government has chosen to dislike.

Honestly, I would rather take an ice cream scoop to my own brain than read one more word of this book. Shoot yourself if you ever feel tempted.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

I enjoyed the first third or so of this book, even though it was an obvious reboot of Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe. Dot Weems and her paper have become Dot Smith and her radio show, and Stump's daughter Norma and hubby Mackey have become a different Norma and Mackey in this book. There's a diner and a hairdresser, but this time they are minor scenarios, and a big "mystery disappearance" (the explanation of which was eyerollingly bad). However, when she got into all the politics the book bogged down, only to be followed by the author's elucubrations on aging and death and the decay of society, thinly disguised as part of the story. By the end I was skimming.

For another thing, I spent some time in Missouri, where my father was born and many relatives lived, in the sixties and seventies, and again in the early nineties, and Flagg's version is a lot more Southern-fried than I remember. She can't help portraying Missourians as Alabamans. Not only that, but she has her characters using 1980s slang in the 1970s (such as "out of the loop") and talks about a character getting a CT scan in 1969, when they weren't even invented until 1972.

I had hoped she had matured as a writer, but she was content with tweaking the book that made her famous. Hugely disappointing.

Donna says

This is my 3rd Fannie Flagg book. I've read Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe and The All-Girl Filling Station's Last Reunion. I enjoyed the humor in those and she knows how to create endearing characters. This book also had some very memorable characters that were well drawn. I love that.

This one started off strong. It reminded me of reading old-time newspapers from doing genealogy research. Crazy personal stories appeared in the local newspapers. In some ways, this book sounded like a collection

of those kinds of stories and they were stitched together in these pages. I did enjoy reading the personal type of quirkiness of the characters. However, I think this book was too long because it seemed like so much of the same. The stories started looking like rambling and towards the end, I kept wondering when it was going to end. So three stars.

Wendi says

You know, sometimes I just need a book that is not going to scare me, get my hackles raised, or make me sad and depressed. This is the perfect book to cleanse the soul after reading some heavy books. I had been reading "The Alienist" and "Wicked", but I found myself feeling so heavy and sad. So I put the books down and went to find something light and airy.

I love this book. It's sweet. It's a throwback to times when neighbors actually knew each other and liked each other. It's a feel good book with many, many characters. No one is alike. So there is a story line for everyone. And it's wonderful. It really made me wish that our society would slip back into that way of life. When things were a bit slower, but more appreciated. When we weren't so worried about how people looked at us that we ignored our neighbors. I don't know any of my neighbors. I live in an apartment and there are seven other families living in my building and I have no idea who any of them are.

The book is cozy and will take a load off your mind or your heart. But don't think it's boring because there is a bit of mystery throw in.

This is one of my favorite books.

Linda says

This was kind of a strange book. It didn't really have a plot but was more a series of anecdotes about a bunch of people. I also didn't realize until I had finished it that it was a prequel (though written after) another of her books.

The characters were all appropriately quirky and most of the stories about them were interesting but as the book progressed I felt like I was lacking any real connection to any of them. So, while I enjoyed it, I can't say I loved it (and I generally like Flagg's books a lot).

Danielle says

This is my first Fannie Flagg book, but it won't be my last. I really enjoyed this book. Reading it was like talking to my 86 year old Nanie on a Sunday afternoon. You could be talking about the neighbor's dogs with her one minute and the tone never changes when you switch and talk about a relative with a serious illness. Then you are back discussing the high price of tomatoes, all in a five minute conversation. I got caught up on the comings and goings of the novel's small community, just like I do with my Nanie's updates.

I was so sad when the book ended. Not because anything was left unfinished, but because I miss the characters. I really grew to care about them. I long to live in their community. Okay, I'll just come out and

admit it. I want to BE Neighbor Dorothy.

I thought the beginning was a little slow, but now that I have finished, I wouldn't change the beginning. Its pace was vital to the success of the novel.

AshleyA (MamaNeedsBooks) says

Love Fannie Flagg! And listening to her books? Even better.

Mr_mck says

Oh my, the question: "What did you think?" I feel like I'm cheating this one only giving it 3 stars, but there were parts in the middle why I was wondering why I was reading it at all. It definitely got better.

This is not the type of story I normally read. I would not have picked this one up, and I guess I really didn't. My sister Jackie handed it to me as I was leaving after a recent visit to "the condo." And I'm guessing the reason behind the reason she did is a character in the story with our mother's name. I don't recall ever seeing the name "Beatrice Woods" in print anywhere before! And this Beatrice loves to sing. Imagine that.

I was describing the book to someone a couple of weeks back and said, "It really isn't about anything. It's kind of just about life." And I think that's exactly what its purpose is: to talk about life. The main characters in the beginning of the book are the Smith family. But they don't really make it to the end of the story, except as passing references. So, maybe it is really about the fictitious town in Missouri, kind of a self-proclaimed "every town" in mid-America. Well, except that in the end, none of the characters are still in the town, and the town itself has lost its identity and looks like every other town with its Walmart, Cracker Barrel, Wendy's and McDonald's. What it seems to be is the story of America from the 40's through the 90's, changes in places, people and attitudes, and the struggles of everyday people to adjust, adapt and survive. Nothing really extraordinary happens. People grow, have families, struggle, and basically just live life. Yet, in every life, there seems to be a few exceptional moments where something totally unplanned happens, leading to decisions (sometimes made in haste) which prove to be turning points. Sometimes they work out, and sometimes they don't. Kind of like one of our favorite family quotes, "Nobody planned it that way; it just happened to happen." Like the one unnamed family from which the book draws its title, driving in a rainstorm one day, sees a rainbow and decides to follow it to its end, and finds themselves standing and dancing in and out a beautiful array of colors.

Life does keep moving, and we move along with it. And if we take advantage of the opportunities when they present themselves, we can find ourselves dancing in a rainbow, or just wondering what could have been.

So, Fannie Flagg, sorry for just giving you 3 stars. Please know that it means I really did enjoy the book, but I hold onto my 4 and 5 stars for ones I find truly exceptional. And this book is really about the ordinary, and how exceptional ordinary is.

Martha Davis says

love Fannie Flagg. There are just no two ways about it. She could write her shopping list and I would read it. She writes about people I want to know and places I want to live. Her worlds are the way we want to the world to be, the world we think of when we think back nostalgically to “the way it used to be”.

I read Standing in the Rainbow when it first came out and, of course, loved it. Then awhile back I was clicking through my libraries list of downloadable audio books and saw it listed and thought it was time to reread this wonderful story. Now, I’m just starting to really get into audio books. To be honest I used to think it was kind of cheating to listen to a book rather than read it. I was wrong and a snob and I’ve changed my evil ways because I’ve loved listening to audio books.

I think what stands out for me the most with this particular Fannie Flagg story getting to see the passage of time and how Elmwood Springs and all it’s inhabitants change, yet stay the same. We follow the Smith family and all their friends and loved one from just after the end of WWII all the way through the new millennium. What I truly loved was how as much as the world changed the fundamental truths of love and family and friends stayed the same.

What I had forgotten from the first time I read Standing in the Rainbow was just how many stories were told in this story. I remembered Neighbor Dorothy and her wonderful radio show. I remembered several stories of the residents of Elmwood Springs, the Goodnight Sisters and their adventures during and after the war, Beatrice-the little blind songbird and her longing to travel, and Dorothy’s children Bobby and Anna Lee and the trials and tribulations of their growing up. But, I had forgotten about the Oatman Family Singers and wonderful Minnie Oatman. I had forgotten about that Betty Raye Oatman came to stay with the Smiths and how that was to change her life forever. I had forgotten Hamm Sparks (I don’t know how I could have forgotten a name like that) going from tractor salesman to Governor of Missouri and the wonderful Cecil Figgs and the unexpected turn of events that gave him a whole new life. There is a heck of a lot of story in this book.

This audio version was read by Kate Reading and she did a bang up job. There were a lot, and I mean a lot, of characters in this book. And almost all had dialog. Somehow she made them all very distinct and recognizable. I knew who was talking throughout the whole book. I’m in awe of the work these readers do. I listened to this every evening when I would go out to walk and I would get excited about the idea of listening the same way I did when I was little and knew my mom was coming to read me a story. It really is wonderful having someone read you a story when you’re all grown up. I don’t know what I was thinking poo-pooing audio books; I’m now an official fan.

Oh, and when you hear the story that gives the book it’s title you will totally want to stand in a rainbow.
