



Ann Patchett

Run
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Q: Why did you decide to compress the action of this novel into twenty-four hours, an exceedingly short period of time by novel standards?

A: For all of the characters in the book this car accident set in motion a series of life-changing events. They were all so overwhelmed by what was happening that I never found a point at which I could take a break from the action and say, "Three days later . . ." Because Sullivan has jet lag and Tennessee is in the hospital, their sense of time is shaken up. It meant that at least one of the characters was awake through the entire 24 hour period. By switching the point of view from person to person I could keep the story going around the clock.

Q: How did you prepare as an author for Tip's encyclopedic knowledge of fishes? Is ichthyology a private interest of yours?

A: No, I'm not a closet ichthyologist. I read a lot of evolutionary biology and books about fishes to prepare. Karsten Hartel at the Museum for Contemporary Zoology at Harvard, and Jack Baughman, an old friend of mine who had studied ichthyology in college, were both extremely helpful to me.

Q: If you had to isolate one of the characters from *Run* as the book's protagonist, which would it be, and why?

A: The book really started with the character of Tip because I had always wanted to write about someone who was very smart and obsessed with fishes. I don't think that Tip is necessarily the protagonist but for me he's the emotional center of the story.

Q: How does the process of writing your fifth novel differ from the process of writing your first?

A: I understand my own process now. I know how long it takes me to get started. I know there will be long stretches when I think that what I'm writing is awful. I know how to ignore the voices in my head that tell me to dump the whole book and go get a regular job. When I wrote my first book I was tortured by all of my doubts. Now the doubts come and I just think, oh, you again.

Q: Can you describe how the book's central idea— that of how political responsibility plays out in the smallest and most intimate scale of family life—first came to you?

A: I keep reading the newspaper and looking at all of the hardships in the world and it makes me think about issues of sacrifice and social responsibility. I wonder about the idea of being so privileged that a person as smart as Tip would want to spend his days in the basement of a museum or someone as kind as Teddy wouldn't get farther than his uncle's room in a nursing home. Do we have a moral obligation to use our gifts to help people? Doyle has very clear ideas about this, both for himself and for his sons, but when he's asked to take in a stranger (and a pretty appealing little stranger at that) he doesn't want to do it. These aren't questions that have a right and wrong answer, but I think they are ideas worth struggling with.