



Savannah Blues

By Mary Kay Andrews
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Introduction *Savannah Blues* is a delightful, witty novel by an author who is destined to become the Susan Isaacs of the South. It's the story of a woman who is coming to terms with a life that has suddenly changed -- seemingly not for the better -- and it has a delicious revenge-against-the-bimbo-who-stole-your-ex plot. Eloise "Weezie" Foley has lived in Savannah all her life, long enough to know the language...and where the best garage sales are happening. Weezie, once the wife of successful architect, Talmadge 'Tal' Evans III, is now an "antiques picker," buying antiques at the source and reselling them to dealers. She discovered her talent for spotting valuable "junk" when she was fixing up her elegant Savannah townhouse. Then Tal fell for another woman. The divorce settlement left Weezie living with her dog in the backyard carriage house while her ex and his girlfriend, Caroline DeSantos, romp in the rooms she lovingly restored. No matter how awkward the proximity, Weezie won't sell. As she says, "On Charlton Street I'd make my stand-to live and die in Dixie." (p. 3) It's enough to make any woman bitter, or at least to let her dog piddle on Caroline's prize camellias. *Savannah Blues* is a story of family ties and influence; of a woman putting her life back together after an emotionally devastating divorce; and of a fascinating city, Savannah. Much of *Savannah Blues* revolves around

family. Weezie's father spends his nights watching *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* while her mother, Marian, sips iced tea laced with Four Roses. Marian's tipping is the family secret, which is getting harder to keep. Then there's another family hiding skeletons, that of Weezie's new boyfriend Daniel, the chef at the hottest restaurant in town. His past is a closed door, and opening it might be Weezie's biggest mistake. One more critical family looms large in this story, or at least its legacy does: the late Anna Ruby Mullinax's crumbling plantation on the Skidaway River. Beaulieu is an historic treasure, one worth preserving if Weezie and her friends can save it from the developers' bulldozers. Weezie is spunky and wisecracking but she's also at a turning point in her life. Unsure if she is really over Tal, she ends up playing "she loves me, she loves me not" with gorgeous, he-man hunk Daniel. While she progressively gets back on her feet and builds her antique business, she needs to find out where a relationship fits in her future -- if one fits there at all. Tal's cheating hurt her badly. Dare she trust Daniel? And can she decipher the devious goings-on around her? Savannah, sultry in the summer heat, has a piece of history on nearly every street corner and a disturbing darkness lurking beneath its surface charm. Sliding sinuously in and out of the story, this intriguing city contributes a specific world view, and perhaps a touch of schizophrenia, to Weezie's character and that of her eccentric friends and relatives, from the many-times married BeBe Loudermilk, Weezie's best friend, to her gay Uncle James, an ex-priest turned lawyer who's still in the closet about his homosexuality. Old Savannah is filled with bias; new Savannah has forgotten its values. What is worth preserving when the two clash is a central question at the heart of *Savannah Blues*. Mary Kay Andrews has produced a work of fiction that is fun and funky, introspective and multi-layered -- the debut of a new Southern voice in women's fiction. **Questions for Discussion**

1. Discuss Weezie's character. What are her values? Her fears? Her ambitions? Does she change in any fundamental way by the end of the novel?
2. The first chapter sets up one emotional triangle -- the ex-wife, the husband, the girlfriend. Discuss Weezie's marriage to Tal: was it a "good marriage"? What went wrong? At the beginning of Chapter 7, Weezie says, "Right after Tal announced he was in love with somebody else and wanted a divorce, I was so depressed, all my friends were afraid I was suicidal. I ran around and did all the things women do when their lives are shattered into little pieces." In your own experience, what are those things? Yet even after all Tal has done, Weezie still entertains thoughts of reconciliation. Do you find her post-divorce emotions for him typical or unusual?
3. Bebe Loudermilk also makes an appearance in the first chapter. In what respects is she the archetypal best friend? Of all the people who form Weezie's "support system," do you think Bebe is the strongest member? Why or why not?
4. Daniel is a sexy guy. Besides the chemistry between Weezie and him, what do they have in common? What weighs in against this relationship lasting? What does it have going for it? What's your long-range prognosis?
5. Weezie's mother Marian has been drinking for years. What event forces Weezie to face the reality of Marian's alcoholism? Do you find what happens to Marian after the intervention to be convincing, or not?
6. What does the plantation Beaulieu represent? Is it worth saving? Should great old houses such as this one be preserved? Nearby Charleston, South Carolina, has an aggressive preservation program with very strict regulations forbidding the demolition or alteration of older buildings. Do you think such a program should be instituted nationwide? How much of our heritage should we save?
7. Discuss whether you believe the South is more sensitive to, or aware of, American history than other parts of the United States? Why or why not?
8. Is Savannah unique as a city? What contributes to its special character? Can you think of any other city that would have served as well as a backdrop for this story?
9. Weezie's "antiquing" embodies this past decade's enthusiasm for the yard sale, garage sale, flea market, Antiques Roadshow, and eBay. What do you make of this phenomenon? In the 1950s, for example, few people wanted "old things." Everyone wanted new furniture, new homes, new appliances. Today's chic "vintage" clothing were once called hand-me-downs. Speculate on the reasons for this change of perception.
10. Provenance, or a record of origin for an antique, is important in proving its authenticity. Fakes abound in *Savannah Blues*, from furniture to people. In what way is nearly everyone in the novel a fake -- and who becomes authentic, or true to themselves, by the end of the book? Do you think self-deception is always destructive?

About the Author: Mary Kay Andrews is a former antiques "picker" and a recovering journalist who covered the famous trial that was the subject of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia.