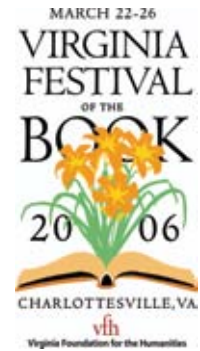


Good Grief by Lolly Wilson recommended by Cathy Maxwell

A program of the Center for the Book at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the "VABooks!" column suggests books for Virginians to read in common. This month, Cathy Maxwell—best-selling author of fifteen historical romance novels—recommends *Good Grief* by Lolly Wilson. We hope that individuals, book groups, families and neighbors will read and discuss VABooks! selections.



I write Romance. It's a part of my job to think about why we fall in love. More important—how do we stay there? What is the combination of traits, the standard of measure that makes one person so individual and unique, he or she quickly becomes the center of our world? I could study this subject a lifetime and never reach a clear answer.

One thing, I do know: Love makes us vulnerable. It rams aside preconceived notions. It knocks us on our butts. It also opens us to depths of emotion we'd never have thought possible. Especially when, heaven forbid, we lose that love.

Lolly Winston's book *Good Grief* was receiving big buzz at a national writers conference I attended last year. Editors and agents raved. It was called "brilliant." "Funny." "Original." "A must read."

To be honest, I don't even know why I was at that conference. My husband had died six months earlier. I was going through the motions. Pretending to live when I wasn't. Half of me was missing. He was gone into the grave. Those of you who have lost someone you dearly love understand what I mean.

I don't tell you this for sympathy. You need to know my state of mind when I opened my copy of *Good Grief*. I was the last person in the world to think a story about a woman mourning the death of her husband to cancer was funny.

But two pages into that book, I was laughing. No, I was more than laughing. I was doubled over with laughter. You see, Lolly Winston understands that even in our darkest hours, in our humanity there is humor. She writes about Sophie Stanton, a young widow who struggles to get back on her feet after losing her husband—and freely admits that one can't.

Not immediately. People we love deserve a good mourning. It's okay to be turned inside out. And Winston reminds us that even in spite of the indignities of cancer treatment and in defiance of death, we still have the power and courage to laugh. Life does continue. Gracious, precious life.

Sophie Stanton is charmingly grouchy and brutally honest about herself and others as she edges past grief. In a small town full of quirky characters, the same sort that you have as neighbors, she reevaluates and rebuilds her life. Change, even that forced upon us, is not a bad thing. In the end, Sophie discovers there are many forms of love—none of which ever die. I savored *Good Grief* to the last word and then passed it on to my college-aged daughter.

She loved it, too.