

Ordinary Grace: A discussion and book review

I'm going to depart from the usual posts about my writing and talk instead about my reading. I am a voracious reader, primarily for entertainment but occasionally to learn more about writing. Admittedly much of what I read does not impact me deeply, but I just finished a terrific novel that I want to share with you, *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger.

Nobody will ever confuse Krueger for Shakespeare. He is not a brilliant author but he, more than any other author I know, focuses his writing in a way I would like to. His characters are typically embroiled in a mystery, but that is almost secondary to their growth as human beings. It is their personal moral struggles and their psychological challenges that are in the forefront. Their reactions to their circumstances and not the circumstances themselves are what truly matter. In his characters' relationships with others, we see people in all their love, generosity, selfishness, and fears.

That is what is important in life and what I want to incorporate in my work.

If you are interested, here is a review I wrote for Goodreads about *Ordinary Grace*

This book absolutely captured me, one of the best I have read in years. It was many things, an intriguing mystery, a coming of age story, a tale of two brothers, and a meditation on God's role in our lives.

To select one aspect that I most appreciated is difficult, but it might be the sensitivity with which William Kent Krueger handled the relationship of two brothers, both young boys, ages 11 and 13. The story is told through the eyes of Frank, the older boy. He is impulsive and a bit irreverent, but he does possess a conscience and you truly feel his struggles and worry about some of his actions

Their father is a Methodist minister and he is a compassionate and forgiving man. I found him very likeable. His life is far from easy, but he is a model of rectitude and reverence for God, while still functioning very much in the secular world. He is a man of action in an often confusing and emotional set of circumstances.

Okay, I do have a few minor criticisms, and believe me, they are minor compared with how profound and moving I found this book to be.

Because it is told exclusively through Frank's eyes, a first person narrative, there are several important points in the story where the reader can only learn information because Frank is eavesdropping. That feels a bit forced at times, though it is necessary in order to maintain the first person point of view.

My second quibble is the lack of fully drawn female characters. As a male author myself, I too have this problem at times. There are really only two female characters in *Ordinary Grace*, the

mother, Ruth and a neighbor, Lise Brandt. Both are important yet given little room to define themselves, especially Ruth. I would like to have known her better.

And I have one last criticism - the fact that many people in the story have a handicap, either blindness, deafness, a stutter, or homosexuality (not necessarily a handicap, but treated as such in Minnesota in 1961). These problems work with the story, but I wondered if they were all necessary. Perhaps they were. It just felt a bit odd to have so many people with such problems. I did feel the stutter of the young brother was nicely handled.

There are miracles in the book which I won't reveal, but you see God's grace throughout in a beautiful and believable way.

In summary, this is a special and moving novel, well worth reading and thinking about.