

Bren McClain Back in Beaufort

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
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Bren McClain will be at NeverMore Books in downtown Beaufort on Friday, March 23, signing copies of her award-winning novel *One Good Mama Bone*, published by Pat Conroy's Story River Books.

Set in early 1950s rural South Carolina, *One Good Mama Bone* chronicles Sarah Creamer's quest to find her "mama bone" after she is left to care for a boy who is not her own, but the product of an affair between her husband and her best friend and neighbor, a woman she calls "Sister."

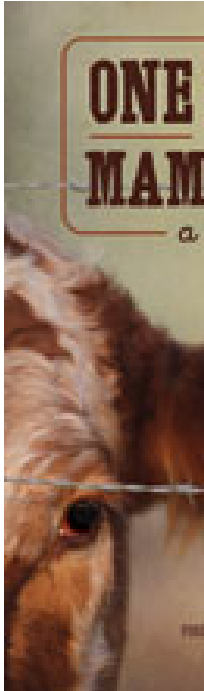
When her husband drinks himself to death, Sarah, a dirt-poor homemaker with no family to rely on and the note on the farm long past due, must find a way for her and young Emerson Bridge to survive. But the more daunting obstacle is Sarah's fear that her mother's words, seared in her memory since she first heard them at the age of six, were a prophesy: "You ain't got you one good mama bone in you, girl."

Among other kudos, McClain's novel was named a 2017 Great Group Reads selection by the Women's National Book Association, and long listed for The Crook's Corner Book Prize Foundation for the best debut novel set in the American South.

We spoke with Bren McClain about her past year on the road with *One Good Mama Bone*...

Lowcountry Weekly: You were here in Beaufort a little over a year ago, at the beginning of your “Mama Bone Barnstorm Book Tour,” which was to include 25 stops all over the country. How’s that going? Are you exhausted yet??

Bren McClain: Ha! Twenty five stops grew into 125! And let me tell you – I am having the time of my life. Are you kidding me? It took me 27 years to get here, and I told myself that when I got published, I would leave no stone unturned. And that’s exactly what I’m doi



ng. Not exhausted – but exhilarated!

LCW: “Mama Bone” is one of just 22 books selected by the late Pat Conroy for publication by his southern fiction imprint Story River Books. What’s it like being part of that elite group, the Story River family?

BM: It’s like living in literary nirvana. And I feel I am being escorted by Pat’s enormous heart, which means I am traveling in teetotal love. I called my tour the “Mama Bone Barnstorm Tour,” but I misnamed it. I should have called it the “Mama Bone *Love* Tour.” How blessed am I?

LCW: Bring us up to speed on “Mama Bone.” How has the book been received over the past year?

BM: I received this in an email just yesterday from a reader who has a brain injury and has not been able to read fiction in almost a decade. But she read “Mama Bone” and wrote: “Your work,

your Mama Bone, awakened a damaged piece of my brain and soul.” *Oh my.* There’s nothing higher for me. And then there are the readers, who tell me they notice cows now. Two last week said they want to make a pilgrimage to meet my Mama Red, the mother cow in the novel. All of this is beyond my wildest imagination. We’ve already run through two hardback printings and are now going strong in paperback!

LCW: You’ll be signing copies of “Mama Bone” at NeverMore Books in downtown Beaufort. After a yearlong book tour that took you cross-country, what are your impressions on the state of the Independent Bookstore in America?

BM: They are our saviors. They are the heart of communities across this land. They provide sustenance for our minds and our hearts. They tend to the people they serve. They are glorious and necessary and oh so lovely.

LCW: What are you reading these days?

BM: I am reading fiction that may be considered as comparisons for the novel I am writing now, a historical piece set in SC that deals with the human cost of the Savannah River Plant. One that I just finished is Lisa Wingate’s *Before We Were Yours*. Am also reading nonfiction for research. Books on mental asylums!

Bren McClain will be signing books and mingling with readers at NeverMore Books on Friday, March 23 from 4-6 pm. NeverMore Books is located at 702 Craven Street in Beaufort.□