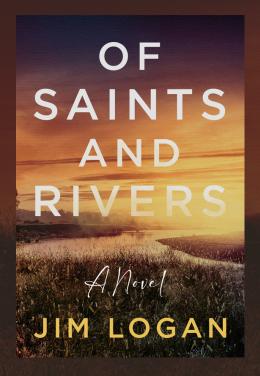
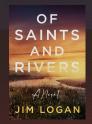
## **BOOK CLUB KIT**



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 1. What new things did you learn about the book's time and place settings?
- 2. Did the novel's history or personal-story element interest you most?
- 3. Which part of Jordan's journey most captured your interest?
- 4. Aside from narrator Jordan, what characters most intrigued you?
- 5. What character changed the most over the course of the story?
- 6. The book asks some tough questions. Do any still linger with you?
- 7. What life truths did you take away from reading the book?

## **AUTHOR INTERVIEW**

Q: Many reviewers say the book reads like a memoir because of Jordan's complex and rich narration. How did you develop the character of Jordan, and was there a specific process to get into his head?

A: Much of the novel is based on events and characters from my family's history. Jordan's character was a mix of family members, including myself, and many of his thoughts and questions were my own.

Q: The book explores a lot of American history, and even more specifically, Oklahoma history. What inspired you to use this backdrop, and did you draw on any of your own experiences growing up in Oklahoma while writing the novel?

A: We're told to "write what you know." Being a fourth-generation Oklahoman, the backdrop was a natural one, and the novel draws heavily on actual experiences from the lives of all four generations of my family, going back to the 1800s. As a history buff who grew up roaming the creeks and rivers of small-town, western Oklahoma, much of it fell into place pretty naturally.

Q: What did you discover about yourself when writing Jordan's story?

A: With his journey somewhat closely tied to my own, the writing was in some ways cathartic—you can say things in a novel that you could not otherwise. I've become more aware of the roles of irony and chance in our lives, and how love and loss so often travel together.

Q: Jordan and his father have a complicated relationship that impacts them in both positive and negative ways. Who in your life have you learned from, and who has impacted you the most?

A: My own relationship with my father was very troubled as a boy-he demanded a lot of me, and his military-style discipline at times bordered on abuse. Over time, the scars healed. My last words to him, as he lay dying of a burst aorta, were that I loved him. I've since become more appreciative of the values he instilled in my brothers and me and their impact on our lives. My mother's love—like that of Jordan's mother, Rachel—was ever-present and unconditional. While I learned more from my father. I loved my mother more. Others have had a positive impact on my lifeteachers, mentors, ministers, friends—some of whose first or last names made their way into the novel's text.

Q: The book follows the McClellan family over a span of many decades. What made you decide to structure it this way, and did that present any unique challenges?

A: I felt a span of sixty years was necessary to tell my story, which followed three generations of the family from the late 1880s until 1951. While it could easily have included another sixty years, I felt that would require too long a novel—a bit unrealistic for a first-time novelist. Since the story began just before the meeting of the narrator's parents, I felt it was logical to end it shortly after their passing.

Aside from the need for researching such a long period for the sake of historical accuracy, considerable care was taken in deciding on things like character birthdates and ages to mesh with actual events—was brother Danny the right age to have fought in World War II, etc? The long period created certain structural problems related to the placement of plot points, and long family sagas can present special problems in establishing an early, core conflict—in this case, between son and father—and maintaining it through sixty years.

Q: The book follows Jordan as he experiences multiple historical events, world travels, and even prison—all in vivid detail. What did your research process look like to ensure the accuracy and realism displayed in *Of Saints and Rivers*?

A: Having written historical articles for magazines for several years, I was already familiar with much of what I wrote about in my novel, and much of my research material (books, news articles, etc.) was already on my bookshelves. Since my grandfather spent nearly three years in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester (before being pardoned by the Governor), before I was born, I immersed myself in the study of descriptions and maps of the place. While I've been to the Caribbean and Mexico, I knew little of sailing the seas and did considerable reading on such during my writing. The same is true of the chapters involving seminary, though I've personally known several who've attended seminary. There were also Catholic nuns in our family.

## A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

What began as a simple wish to leave behind some record of our family history and what I felt, loved, and believed, grew somehow, over time, into a novel. As a result, there are a number of real-life family parallels in the story: my great grandfather actually witnessed the killing of his family by Indians as

a boy, before becoming a Texas Ranger, U.S.
Marshal, riding the
Western Cattle Trail,
and settling along the
Canadian River in
western Oklahoma. The
family homestead
was later lost
during the Depression.



As a young man, my grandfather served prison time for hitting and killing a pedestrian while



driving intoxicated. The wars, along with terminal disease, took a heavy toll on our family and, like Jordan, I had a troubled relationship with my father when young. I seriously considered entering the ministry before changing my

Jim Logan's father. World War II.

mind over troubling theological questions. Among my brothers, myself, and family, we had our share of early romantic misadventures.

While some creative license was taken for the sake of story, much of Jordan's journey mirrored my own. It's essential with historical novels that the dates and facts of significant historical events be accurate.



A bulldozer pushes rubble from a tornado from a tornado-leveled lot at Woodward into the street where loaders will pile it on trucks for removal.

A major challenge was the meshing of these with the story's plot and sixty-year timeline in



Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester. 1927.

such a way that all were credible—requiring a careful story outline before any writing even began.

A major (and agonizing) decision was in deciding halfway through the novel

—to change the narrative voice from thirdperson omniscient to first person. While third person offered the advantage of an all-seeing, all-knowing perspective, I felt the first-person narrative offered a much more intimate sharing with the reader.



Author's maternal grandfather and young author on tractor, north of Granite, 1945.

It's primary limitation—
especially in following the
lives of five different family
members—lay in its much
narrower window of
perspective. In the end, I was
able to compensate for this
through creative use of
journals, letters, news stories,

conversations, overheard remarks, and other means. I felt it important to touch on a few important themes—prejudice, addiction, marital and parental conflict, love and loss, grief, religious doubt, forgiveness, and the role of chance in our lives. I



Author's mother was a pretty farm girl from Granite. She was the 1941 Homecoming Queen at Southwestern College in Weatherford.



Jim Logan's grandfather, Doug Logan, before prison sentence. Old Mr. Tener, of western-wear fame, once called him 'a real cowboy!

feel good writing asks important

questions, is truthful, and brings a bit of sunlight in the end. And—to paraphrase the writer Wallace Stegner—I feel truth is often best told as fiction.