

BOOK CLUB KIT

*the  
Things  
About  
Home*

AVAILABLE  
WHEREVER  
BOOKS  
ARE SOLD

RHONDA MCKNIGHT

## Dear Reader,

I am delighted you choose *The Thing About Home* for your book discussion. In the story you'll meet Casey Black. When her picture-perfect vow renewal ceremony ends in her being left at the altar, the former model turned social media influencer has new fame—the kind she never wanted. An embarrassing, viral video has cost her millions of followers, and her seven-year marriage is over.

With her personal and business life in shambles, she goes on a journey of self-discovery that takes her from New York City to Georgetown, South Carolina, where she hopes to find the family of the deceased father she never knew. What she doesn't expect to find is a three-hundred-acre farm that connects her to family, history, food, faith, and the land in ways that change her forever.

There is joy, laughter, lessons, and love. There is also loss, and secrets—painful ones wrapped in grief—but Casey comes from a line of women who passed on good DNA and journals to prove it.

Get ready for some yummy lowcountry and Gullah dishes. I intend for your stomach to growl a bit, but I also I hope there will be times when you smell the earth, hear the river, and feel the sun on your face in the same way Casey did as she immersed herself in her ancestral land.

I pray your journey through the pages is as inspiring and uplifting as it was for me while I wrote it.

Warmly,

Rhonda McKnight



# Reviews and Praise

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**“In this zippy outing from McKnight (*All She Dreamed*), a humiliated social media influencer rediscovers her roots ... McKnight lays out some vivid low country history, and her fully realized characters—especially Casey and her sometimes superficial, sometimes serious trials—ring true.”**

—*Publishers Weekly*

**“Rhonda McKnight has written a gorgeously vivid, heart-felt novel that stirred my emotions from the first page. I tried to slow down as I came closer to the last page because I didn’t want this book to end.”**

—Victoria Christopher Murray, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Personal Librarian*

**“Expertly weaving a dual storyline of a rich matriarchal past with the tumultuous present, McKnight builds upon her women’s fiction repertoire with a fresh perspective on grief, forgiveness, and finding oneself in the midst of the storm.”**

—Vanessa Riley, award-winning author of *Island Queen*

**“Ms. McKnight does an excellent job exploring not only what coming home can represent, but also the importance of family history and legacy. The reader is not only given a captivating story, but also a lesson in life. A well-written exploration of love and acceptance”**

—Jacquelin Thomas, award-winning author

# Reviews and Praise

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**“*The Thing About Home* is a beautifully written story about family, self-discovery, secrets, and forgiveness. It is a truly wonderful and most enjoyable read!”**

—Kimberla Lawson Roby, *New York Times* bestselling author

**“... a warm, atmospheric reminder that home is more than just a physical place—it’s family and friends and safety and unconditional love.”**

—Emily March, *New York Times* bestselling author

**“You will get lost in this book. Every moment, every step that Casey takes to finding herself is magical. Rhonda McKnight is a masterful storyteller. Hands down, *The Thing About Home* is the best book I’ve read in a long time.”**

—Vanessa Miller, author of *The Light on Halsey Street*

**“Rhonda McKnight has written the perfect southern story—warm, sweet, and full of hope. McKnight captures the heart and soul of Casey’s journey to self-discovery and love.”**

—Preslaysa Williams, author of *A Lowcountry Bride*

**“Family, history, heritage, and legacy all combine in the tightly woven warp and weft of love in *The Thing About Home*—a must read.”**

—Piper Huguley, author of *By Her Own Design*

# Book Club *Ideas*

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Book clubs are about reading good books, of course, but they're also about so much more: making connections, enjoying delicious snacks, socializing with friends, considering new perspectives and ideas, and maybe even learning or trying something new.

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Here's an interesting activity for your book club – bring and/or discuss a historical fact about your family or a little-known history fact.

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Also, why not discuss the novel while enjoying good food? The gastronomic heritage of the Gullah cuisine is an important part of the story. Visit Rhonda's website for links to several great recipes.

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On the next page is a tasty recipe to make for your book club discussions, whether you're gathering in person or virtually. If you bring a dish to your book club meeting, make sure to take pictures and tag Rhonda on social media (see back cover for social profiles and website).



## Ma Black's Easy TRIPLE BERRY COBBLER

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You don't have to be a baker to make this recipe. I am certain Ma Black had a more complex recipe in one of her recipe books, but Casey would have needed something simple. This is a recipe anyone can make and trust me it's delicious. Add some creamy vanilla ice cream and enjoy this treat with your book club members.

### INGREDIENTS

#### FRUIT FILLING

- 3- 3 ½ cups frozen triple berries (defrosted for an hour)
- 2 tsp lemon juice (fresh)
- ½ cup white sugar
- Dash of ground cayenne pepper

#### CRUST

- 1½ cups of self-rising flour
- 1 cup of white sugar
- 1½ cups evaporated milk
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp almond extract
- 1 stick of butter

### PREHEAT OVEN TO 350 DEGREES

#### FRUIT FILLING

- Put berries and the juice from the bag in a bowl.
- Add lemon juice, stir gently.
- Sprinkle a dash of cayenne pepper over it like fairy dust. Stir gently.
- Add sugar and stir again.
- *Set aside the fruit.*
- Take a 9 x 12 glass baking dish
- Place the stick of butter in the center and put the dish in the oven to melt the butter.

#### CRUST

- Combine flour and sugar. Stir together.
- Add half of the milk and stir. Add the rest of the milk and whisk.
- Add vanilla and almond extract.
- Whisk again.
- Pour the batter into the buttered pan.
- Pour the berry filling down the center and any syrup. **Do not stir.**
- Bake uncovered for 45-50 minutes or until the crust is light brown.
- Remove from the oven and cool.

# Author Q & A

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Rhonda McKnight shares her inspiration for stepping into the past for *The Thing About Home* and more...

## **You've always been a contemporary writer. What made you decide to write in dual timeline?**

I love history. My shelves are packed with historical fiction books, but the journey back to the nineteenth century was not on my carefully-constructed outline. I was about three quarters through the first draft, when I had a rough writing day. The original scenes that were to include the Black family history were journal entries, but it was all so boring that I nearly cried when I climbed into bed that night. At two o'clock in the morning, Odessa Conway Black woke me. Her voice was so strong that I got out of bed, went back to my laptop, and wrote her first chapter. The ancestors speak, often it's loud, and clear and they're right.

## **What was the most interesting thing you learned while doing the research for this book?**

I'm an amateur herbalist, but I had to dig quite a bit to figure out what would have been used in the 1800's. Most of what I found didn't make it into the book. Most research doesn't, but it was interesting to learn about the Northern carpetbaggers and their tonics. I also learned about the heirs property laws that made it hard for Black people to keep their land. I originally wrote it into *The Thing About Home*, but it was cut in revision. Hopefully, I can explore the topic in another story.

**Black River, the name Black, Black people...with respect to everything in the story, there's a Black for that. How creative. Any comments about what inspired this literary device.**

I knew I wanted to set the story on Black River. My own family's proximity to the river was the inspiration for that. I knew the river emptied into the Winyah Bay in Georgetown, so I saw it as connection to the ocean and the Motherland. When the story idea first came to me, I decided Elijah would shed the name of his enslaver. Using the name of the river made sense. One of the early titles for the project was Black Mixed With Black—Casey would be a Black woman named Black, mixing with her



newfound relatives named the Blacks at Black River and learning some Black history. A lot right? I loved it and hoped readers wouldn't get sick of it.



The catchline "There's a Black for that" has a double meaning. Black people have contributed a lot to culture and science in this country. Much of it has been hidden but dig into the history and you may find a Black person's thumbprint. There may have been a Black for that!

**Photo credit:** Rhonda McKnight



# An interesting bit of *history*...

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Here's an excerpt from a Deleted Scene from Chapter 27. Nigel tells Casey about the Magnolia Beach Club on McKenzie Beach on Pawleys Island, South Carolina.



Photo credit: Lisa K. Campbell from *Beach Living Photography*, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Nigel turned off the main road. We passed a Shell gas station and down a stretch of road to what looked like a ruin.

“This is McKenzie Beach. I want to show you the old Magnolia Beach Club Hotel,” Nigel said. We climbed out of his truck. Before I could ask, he continued, “It was opened in 1936. Black owned and for Black travelers. Because of Jim Crow, Black entertainers needed some place to stay when they had shows on the island and Black people needed lodging at the beach. Ray Charles, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Billie Holliday, and a bunch of others performed here. My great-grandparents honeymooned here for a weekend.”

“Wow.” Once again I felt moved by the power of our history. “It should be a historical landmark.”

“It is. Just not officially.”

I stepped back away from the building and raised my camera. It was a long one-story building, divided in half horizontally with dingy white concrete on the top and red brick on the bottom. Square holes used to be windows. Ivy and other plants climbed up the walls and through the crevices. I was careful not to get too close. Snakes and other manner of vermin were likely living here, but I took a bunch of pictures. I was glad Nigel brought me here. I had more treasure to add to my collection.

# Discussion Questions

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These discussion questions can also be found on pages 365 - 367 of the book.

1. Casey's relationship with her mother is fraught with tension. What would be difficult about having Victoria as a mother? Do you think Casey was too hard on her?
2. Victoria's history with the Black family was indeed complicated. How right or wrong was she at the time of Matthew's death? Was she at all justified in keeping Casey away from them? She was estranged from many of her own relatives. Do you think she was selfish or a living example of a hurting person, hurting other people?
3. How might Casey's life have been different if she grew up knowing her grandmother and the other members of the Black family? Do you/have you had someone like Granna in your life? How have they influenced you?
4. The theme of grief was present in many aspects of this story for all the characters. Casey's mother said, "Sometimes we have to grieve the dead thing in the quiet of the night. When we lie on our beds, we can shed our tears because life doesn't allow us to stop moving." How has this thinking played out in your life and the lives of women you know? Do you consider it to be necessary or potentially unhealthy?
5. How did Casey's experience with her family's faith affect her? Do you believe it played a part in her emotional healing and the decisions she made in the final chapters of the book?
6. The freedom to do what we want as opposed to what others expect can be a hinderance to finding our true purpose, particularly for women. Discuss some of the examples of this in the book and share a personal story about how this thinking has benefited or harmed you.

# Discussion Questions

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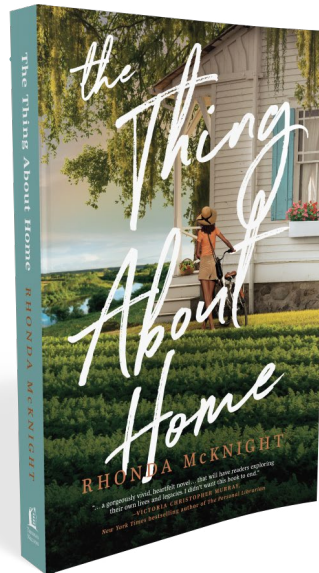
7. There were several parallels between Casey's life and Odessa's. Discuss the similarities and differences. What are some things you can and should do that women before you could not? Have you fully actualized your advantages?
8. Do you think Odessa compromised too much for the men in her life— first for Elijah and then for her father? Do you think she'd make a different decision today?
9. I have no doubt Granna had been praying for a new wife for Nigel when her lovely, albeit wounded, granddaughter showed up in their lives. She did everything she could to push them together. Was this wisdom or overstepping?
10. I enjoy writing about emotionally intelligent men. Nigel was hard not to love, but Casey and Ava were wrong about what he wanted. Why do you suppose that was?
11. Casey and Nigel discuss the fact that neither of them learned very much about Black history in school. Did you learn anything from this story?
12. Casey ultimately got everything she wanted because she made the decision to choose a different life. Her mother advised her to pivot (be honest with her followers) the day after the video, advice she did not take, which ultimately led her to Georgetown. She eventually did pivot in many ways and was transparent with her followers. Why do you think she couldn't do it initially?
13. The use of symbolism for home and farming were heavily used in the novel. What were some examples that resonated with you? How do you define home?

# About the Author



**RHONDA MCKNIGHT** is the author of several bestselling novels, including *An Inconvenient Friend* and *What Kind of Fool*. She is the winner of the 2015 Emma Award for Inspirational Romance of the Year.

She loves reading and writing books that touch the heart of women through complex plots and interesting characters in crisis. Themes of faith, forgiveness, and hope are central to her stories.



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