APPENDICES

Biography of Kathryn Stockett

Born in 1969 in Jackson, Mississippi, writer and editor Kathryn Stockett earned her undergraduate degree in English and creative writing from the University of Alabama, then headed to New York City with plans to work in publishing.

She spent nine years there, working both in magazine publishing and in marketing, before moving to Atlanta, Georgia, where she lives with her husband and daughter. Since moving back to the South, Stockett has been focusing on writing for herself, having shifted her attention to fiction. Her debut novel, *The Help*, was published by Amy Einhorn Books in 2009, and proved to be one of the hit books of the summer season.

*The Help* garnered instant attention due to its unusual and rarely addressed subject matter: the relationship in the South between white families and the domestic servants, who were primarily black, whom they employed in their homes during the 1960s. Having grown up during this period in Mississippi, Stockett was familiar with the dynamic, but nervous about addressing it in a novel, understanding that it was a controversial subject and could result in criticism from both reviewers and from general readers. In an interview with a writer for Bookreporter Web site, Stockett explained her attitude as a child:
“Growing up in Mississippi, almost every family I knew had a black woman working in their house—cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the white children. That was life in Mississippi. I was young and assumed that’s how most of America lived.” Only after she moved north did Stockett realize that she had grown up in a microcosm, and that her memories of her childhood were not of a universal experience. She found herself reminiscing with other Southerners she met in New York, trading stories about growing up with black domestic help. Gradually, those memories began to spark an idea and she decided to write a story about her relationship with her family’s maid when she was a child.

Early on in the writing process, Stockett chose to frame her narrative from the point of view of a black maid. It seemed logical, and she had no qualms about her choice because at the time she did not believe anyone else would ever read the story. Only when she reached the stage of getting friends to look at her work did she start to get nervous about how she had portrayed the characters and whether their voices rang true. Stockett told the interviewer for Bookreporter Web site: “I’ll never know what it really felt like to be in the shoes of those black women who worked in the white homes of the South during the 1960s and I hope that no one thinks I presume to know that.”
Summary of the Novel

The Help By Kathryn Stockett

Book Summary

The Help, Kathryn Stockett's debut novel, tells the story of black maids working in white Southern homes in the early 1960s in Jackson, Mississippi, and of Miss Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan, a 22-year-old graduate from Ole Miss, who returns to her family's cotton plantation, Longleaf, to find that her beloved maid and nanny, Constantine, has left and no one will tell her why. Skeeter tries to behave as a proper Southern lady: She plays bridge with the young married women; edits the newsletter for the Junior League; and endures her mother's constant advice on how to find a man and start a family. However, Skeeter's real dream is to be a writer, but the only job she can find is with the Jackson Journal writing a housekeeping advice column called "Miss Myrna." Skeeter knows little about housekeeping, so she turns to her friend's maid, Aibileen, for answers and finds a lot more.

Aibileen works tirelessly raising her employer's child (Aibileen's seventh one) and keeps a tidy house, yet none of this distracts her from the recent loss of her own son who died in an accident at work while his white bosses turned away. Two events bring Skeeter and Aibileen even closer: Skeeter is haunted by a copy of Jim Crow laws she found in the library, and she receives a letter from a publisher in New York interested in Skeeter's idea of writing the true stories of domestic servants.
Skeeter approaches Aibileen with the idea to write narratives from the point of view of 12 black maids. Aibileen reluctantly agrees, but soon finds herself as engrossed in the project as Skeeter. They meet clandestinely in the evenings at Aibileen's house to write the book together as the town's struggles with race heat up all around them. Aibileen brings in her best friend, Minny, a sassy maid who is repeatedly fired for speaking her mind, to tell her story, too. Hearing their stories changes Skeeter as her eyes open to the true prejudices of her upbringing. Aibileen and Minny also develop a friendship and understanding with Skeeter that neither believed possible.

Along the way, Skeeter learns the truth of what happened to her beloved maid, Constantine. Constantine had given birth, out of wedlock, to Lulabelle who turned out to look white even though both parents were black. Neither the black nor the white community would accept Lulabelle, so Constantine gave her up for adoption when she was four years old. When the little girl grew up, she and Constantine were reunited. While Skeeter was away at college, Lulabelle came to visit her mother in Jackson and showed up at a party being held in Skeeter's mother's living room. When Charlotte Phelan discovered who Lulabelle was, she kicked her out and fired Constantine. Constantine had nowhere else to go, so she moved with her daughter to Chicago and an even worse fate. Skeeter never saw Constantine again.

Skeeter's book is set in the fictional town of Niceville and published anonymously. It becomes a national bestseller and, soon, the white women of Jackson begin recognizing themselves in the book's characters. Hilly Holbrook, in
particular, is set on vengeance due to the details in the book. Hilly and Skeeter grew up best friends, but they now have very different views on race and the future of integration in Mississippi. Hilly, who leads the Junior League and bosses around the other white women in the town, reveals to Stuart, Skeeter's boyfriend, that she found a copy of the Jim Crow laws in Skeeter's purse, which further ostracizes Skeeter from their community.

In the end, it is a secret about Hilly that Minny reveals in Skeeter's book that silences Hilly. The book becomes a powerful force in giving a voice to the black maids and causes the community of Jackson to reconsider the carefully drawn lines between white and black.