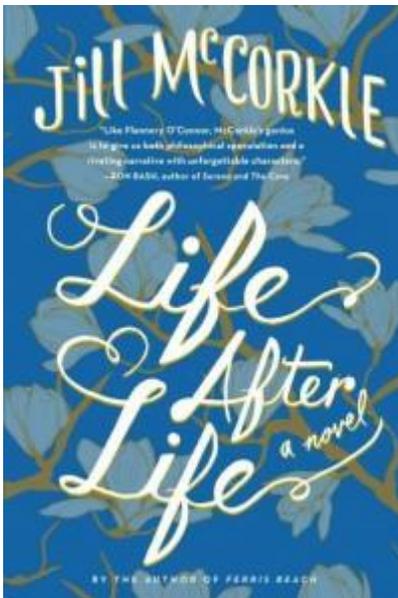


Book Review: *Life After Life* by Jill McCorkle



Life After Life, Jill McCorkle's most recent novel, has nothing to do with religion or the afterlife. Instead, it has everything to do with the living of life and, in particular, those later years in which living can be the most difficult and the most precious. With life, however, comes death and the importance of remembrance.

McCorkle utilizes her short story writing skills in chapters given over to individual residents of the Pine Haven Retirement Center in fictional Fulton, North Carolina, employees, visitors, and neighbors. A graveyard next to Pine Haven holds surprising significance for more than one character.



Fulton is a small, sleepy town, but the microcosm of Pine Haven is bursting with elderly energy, verbal activity and animated gossip. Residents of the home include Marge, who keeps a murder-crime scrapbook, and Rachel, a former Yankee who harbors a secret as to why she moved to Pine Haven.

Toby is a jolly, retired English teacher whose demeanor sparks rumors about her lifestyle, and Sadie is a retired 3rd-grade teacher who, with her Polaroid camera, is an arts-and-crafts wizard able to create pictures of people in places they'd always dreamed of going. Stanley is a rude, crude man feigning dementia in order to force his son to become independent.

In addition to the residents, Joanna, the hospice worker, delicately records the lives of each passing; C.J., the tattooed-and-pierced single-mom beauty operator pampers the residents; and 12-year-old Abby from next door makes more friends at Pine

Haven than at school.

As the stories and characters connect one to another, lives are celebrated to show that old age needn't be feared. The stories are filled with details that embrace everything from broken dreams to tender confessions, and backward glances of regret to goodhearted bickering. McCorkle's writing is insightful, humorous, heart-warming, heart-wrenching and downright Southern.

It is, like life, a joy that has its moments of sorrow. – *Jeanne E. Fredriksen*

Life After Life by Jill McCorkle. Algonquin Books: Chapel Hill, NC. 2013. 368 pages. This review appeared in *The Rolesville Buzz* newspaper.