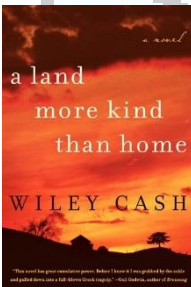




**Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons
Teacher's Book Review**



***A Land More Kind Than Home* by Wiley Cash
Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, February 27th, 2013**

Faith healing is a subject of great controversy among Christian denominations. Some view it as the product of devout believers endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, while others perceive it to be the product of ignorance practiced by religious zealot. This week's book focuses on the subject of healing in all of its forms and uses a tragic incident of faith healing in a backwoods southern Pentecostal church as a backdrop to explore the broken spirits of its central characters.

The story is told through three different perspectives. The first is the town's elderly midwife and Sunday school teacher, Adelaide Lyle, whose mission is to protect the children in the congregation from their demented minister who has already been responsible for concealing the cause of death of a parishioner, who was convinced to handle a poisonous snake to demonstrate her trust in God. The second narrator is Jess Hall, a nine year old boy whose mother is actively involved in the church. Her marriage to Jess' father is strained since the birth of his autistic brother. The final narrator is the town sheriff, Clem Barefield, whose sad task it is to investigate the second death of a parishioner at the hands of the minister.

Every character in the novel is broken in some form or another. Jess' relative wholeness, compared to those around him, is represented early in the novel through his carefree spirit and intense loyalty and protectiveness toward his autistic brother. However, every other relationship in the book is in need of healing. Jess' parents are estranged, even though they live under the same roof. When Jess' grandfather returns to his hometown, the reader learns of the dysfunctional relationship he had with his own son and the scars it has left. Even the town's sheriff is unscathed. His own son died a tragic death as a result of a work related accident which he blames on Jess' grandfather, who was the supervisor at the time. Both live lives filled with

guilt and regret. Even Jess' best friend, Joe Bill, lives under the tyranny of his sadistic brother in a town where the parents never seem to be really aware of what is happening to their children.

The reader is given some hope from the start of the book that the elderly Adelaide has both the intelligence and courage to save these people from themselves and their own ignorance. She believes that since she delivered most of them as babies, it is her duty to guide and protect them in their lives. Her struggles to save those around her culminate in the essential question underlying the book. Is an individual's awareness of his/her own broken state a necessary prerequisite to the healing process? Then the related question is, of course, whether it is possible to be broken and not know it or deny it to the extent that it is no longer recognized by the individual or those surrounding him/her.

