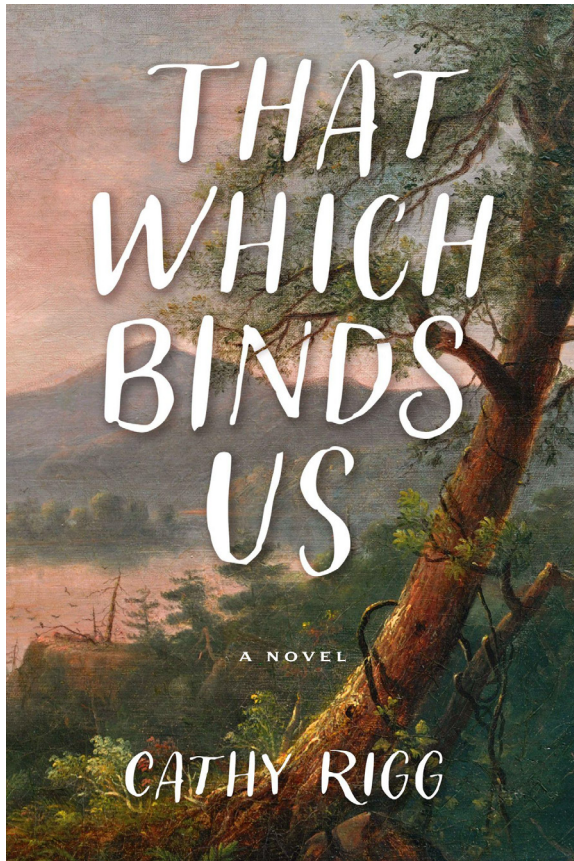




Kendal Cliburn
Marketing Manager
marketing@turnerpublishing.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CATHY RIGG WEAVES A VULNERABLE TAPESTRY OF LOVE, LOSS, AND RESILIENCE IN DEBUT NOVEL



Columbia, SC—In the 1860s, on Virginia’s Appalachian frontier, the fates of five people are forever linked as they navigate love, loss, and the cost of buried secrets amid the strife and turmoil of an unimaginable civil war.

In 1854, on the lawless western edge of Virginia, Elizabeth Young stands among the throngs and watches as her beloved uncle is hanged for murder. She can tell that there is more to this spectacle than meets the eye, and she vows then and there she’ll discover the truth then leave these godforsaken mountains. She’ll go where the land is flat, where life is in the open, where dreams have room to roam.

But fate has another idea. Three strangers with dreams and secrets of their own come into her life: Patrick Hagan, Irish Catholic immigrant and a bright young attorney with a dogged determination to do good and make good; Mary Lenore Kitchens, the sophisticated teacher who’s come to Virginia’s hinterlands, for who knows why; handsome Ben

Grubb, local boy, banjo prodigy, a mischievous sort who wants only to play. Soon their lives become inextricably linked, along with that of Red Hopkins, an old friend to Elizabeth’s Papa, and in marches the Civil War.

Punctuated by class and the realities of a devastating conflict, *That Which Binds Us* is a broad work of historical fiction that celebrates our best and explores our worst, that serves to remind us that across continents and cultures and generations, love holds the greatest power of all.



Cathy Rigg was born and raised in the Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia where her people, on her mother’s side, go back generations. She moved to South Carolina after college and founded the brand marketing firm, Riggs Partners. Rigg’s fiction and poetry have appeared in *Litmosphere: Journal of Charlotte Lit*, *Still: the Journal*, *Clinch Mountain Review*, and other publications. She and her husband divide their time between Columbia, SC, and Burnsville, NC, where they stare at the view and obsess over the bears on a ridge high above Asheville.

That Which Binds Us

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FICTION / Historical / Civil War Era

PRAISE FOR *THAT WHICH BINDS US*

“*That Which Binds Us* is an Appalachian love story with glorious twists and turns, longing and grief and resplendent redemption. Elizabeth is an original character of strength and purpose. You won’t be able to put it down!” —**Adriana Trigiani, bestselling author of *The Good Left Undone***

“Cathy Rigg’s *That Which Binds Us* is the best sort of historical fiction, bringing real people to life to tell their stories. Every page lives and breathes, and the Civil War itself in all its horror and loss comes alive like the people. By letting the characters tell their own story in their own words, we are drawn like moths to a flame. We endure terrible times with them, but we’re ultimately redeemed, as are they, by their love, strength, humanity, and reverence for the land and community they call home.” —**Rita Sims Quillen, author of *Wayland, Hiding Ezra, and Some Notes You Hold***

“Rigg has written a historical novel of exquisite storytelling, with an ear tuned to the voices of mountain people.” —**Amy D. Clark, coauthor and editor of *Talking Appalachian: Voice, Identity, and Community* and host of the *Talking Appalachian* podcast**

“*That Which Binds Us* is a superior work of Southern Appalachian fiction, marking the debut of a gifted writer to watch. Mining the rich literary terrain of authors like Lee Smith and Adriana Trigiani, while breaking new ground of her own, Cathy Rigg has written a heartfelt historical tale of a people and their place that resonates long after the last page is turned.” —**Amy Greene, author of *Bloodroot***

“Cathy Rigg has come up with the liveliest, most interesting and compulsively readable historical novel I have seen in many a year—I love this book! Of course I’m a Virginian too...but these themes are universal and the writing is wonderful.” —**Lee Smith, award-winning author of *Silver Alert* and *Dimestore***

“Cathy Rigg’s *That Which Binds Us* is historical fiction at its best, showing us exactly what it meant to survive the Civil War as it impacted the old ways in Appalachia. Rigg’s novel is a fine-tuned ballad made of strong women, lost love, and family secrets. The characters are ones I recognize via my own ancestors, and its setting—from Cumberland Gap to Pound—is a place I know and love. This is a novel I will long remember.” —**Karen Salyer McElmurray, author of *Wanting Radiance* and *I Could Name God in Twelve Ways***

“Cathy Rigg’s ability to evoke place is special. While reading her captivating debut novel, *That Which Binds Us*, one feels the mountains of Southwest Virginia beneath one’s feet. The ridges and seasons fill the reader’s eyes, nose, and ears—a literary feat made more astonishing by the equally dizzying ease with which Rigg transports her reader to a world nearly two centuries gone. Research and imagination meld with crack storytelling skills to make *That Which Binds Us* a brilliant depiction of the Civil War years in the Appalachian mountains and one humdinger of a read.” —**Robert Gipe, author of *Trampoline, Weedeater, and Pop***

“Cathy Rigg’s debut novel offers a rich patchwork of voices, all deeply rooted—and fiercely loyal to—the mountains of Southwest Virginia, and who will, in one way or another, be forever changed by the Civil War. *That Which Binds Us* is a heartfelt, hard won tale of devotion, endurance, and the inexhaustible resilience of those who call Appalachia home.” —**Allison Alsup, author of *Foreign Seed***

“Even a close-knit, isolated mountain community in southwest Virginia cannot escape the terrors of the American Civil War in this multi-voiced story told cleverly by Cathy Rigg. *That Which Binds Us* is unforgettable historical fiction about the saga and secrets of tenacious Elizabeth Young, her family, and neighbors whose realities are brought to life through Rigg’s scrupulous attention to one small corner of Appalachia, documenting place, culture, and language with loving kindness.” —**Marianne Worthington, author of *The Girl Singer***

“In *That Which Binds Us*, Cathy Rigg weaves a story rich in history, authentic voices, and a strong sense of place. The characters in this historical fiction are poignantly crafted, and the southern Appalachian landscape is captured in lyrical description. Like the mountains themselves, the storytelling lingers in the heart and imagination.” —**Jayne Moore Waldrop, author of *Drowned Town***

“Cathy Rigg, with her historical novel *That Which Binds Us*, has laid firm claim to Virginia’s Appalachian Civil War era. And to my heart. This is a story of loss, yes, but also of love — and that’s what bound itself to me.” —**Bren McClain, author of *One Good Mama Bone***

“Rigg’s love for the mountains of southwest Virginia resonates on every page, while her decades-long research immerses readers in the mid-nineteenth century through characters that are so well-drawn, they climb off the page and sit alongside you as their story unfolds.” —**Patricia L. Hudson, author of *Traces***

“Rigg deposits us in an Appalachia we’ve all read about, but Elizabeth Young’s journey through the Civil War provides a searing, personal exploration of the era. *That Which Binds Us* compels readers from the first page to the last.” —**Laura Leigh Morris, author of *The Stone Catchers***

A Q&A WITH CATHY RIGG, AUTHOR OF *THAT WHICH BINDS US*

Tell us about yourself.

Like my heroine, Elizabeth Evangeline Young, I'm a girl born of the mountains of Southwest Virginia. Unlike Elizabeth, I was fortunate to have grown up there at a time when I was afforded every opportunity. I had a happy childhood, a wonderful high school experience, then I left home for college at Clemson University where I had a grand time and graduated with a degree in English. I meant to become a journalist; I became a copywriter instead, and at 28 established a creative boutique called *C. C. Rigg's, an ad studio*. The company has just celebrated its 37th year in business and is today known as the brand marketing firm Riggs Partners. What a grand life I've lived in the flatlands of South Carolina, with a community I adore and a career I've loved! In recent years, I've stepped back from that work a bit to focus on some other creative interests, including writing this novel.

Give a brief description of your book.

That Which Binds Us is a story of five people whose lives intersect against the backdrop of the Civil War. It's study in the ways friends, family, and acquaintances affect each other—for better, for worse—and what happens when ordinary people are thrust into extraordinary circumstances. At the center is Elizabeth Evangeline Young, a smart, spunky girl who wants more for her future than the life the ancient Appalachians she's surrounded by can promise. She dreams big and loves hard; as one character notes when regarding Elizabeth, "She's all rough and tumble, that one, her spirit propelling her forward faster than common sense can regulate." As soon as she vows to escape, into Elizabeth's life come three people with dreams and secrets of their own. There's Marilee Kitchens, the sophisticated teacher who's come to this wild, western frontier hoping to save the poor little "unfortunates" through education. There's Patrick Hagan, Irishman, immigrant, attorney—a man who's recently settled in Hunter's Valley, who goes on to make millions in land deals and who builds the impressive estate, Sulphur Springs. And there's Ben Grubb, Elizabeth's forbidden love—a local boy and banjo prodigy whose passion and God-given gift is making music. Ben becomes an unwilling soldier, nevertheless, fighting for a cause he doesn't believe in, serving in a war that rips at the seams of the very way of life he's hoping to protect. *That Which Binds Us* is a novel about land and love and loyalty; it's about cultures that cross and clash; it's about people in a time of hateful war who find there's more that unites us than divides.

How did you get the idea for this story? Is it from your family's history?

One would think so, right? It's what I meant to do when I decided to write a novel of our mountains. But as I researched, it was Patrick Hagan who showed up. An immigrant and an attorney with a purported stellar reputation as a litigator and gentleman both—how had I never heard of him? Or of his elegant 19th century estate *right there* in Scott County, just across the ridge from my own childhood home? The mansion had 17 rooms, indoor plumbing, and hot running water—and this was at the time of the Civil War! It was unimaginable to me, particularly in our area, where so many made do with so little. And then I discovered this learned, sophisticated man who spoke with a lilt and who often referenced classical literature in his closing arguments and who became a land baron—Patrick Hagan married a local girl to whom he was, for more than 50 years, devoted—a girl who one census record listed as illiterate. *How did that happen?* I wondered. I wrote the novel to find out.

The story is told via five first-person narrators. That's ambitious! When did you make that decision, and why?

It's one of those things the story told me. I began writing the novel purely from Elizabeth's point of view. I was captivated by Patrick Hagan, but I was fascinated by Elizabeth, and since there was so little information about her, I had a wonderful time creating her character, identifying her motivations, developing the backstory of her family and upbringing. In fact, before I typed the first word of the novel, I wrote down the working title, *The Story of Elizabeth Young*. But when I got to Chapter Two, a different character stepped forward and insisted on speaking. The same thing happened as I began Chapter Three. I realized this was exactly as the story needed to be told. These are very different people with different voices and different backgrounds, certainly. But they also present very different points of view. I found the contrast—as well as the overlapping—an effective, if challenging, way to go.

It strikes me there are several different themes in the book—home, land, family, honor, loyalty, legacy. Which of these is most significant, would you say?

You're so right about that. And it's interesting. Just as with the multiple voices of the novel, it's the chorus of these themes that I think matters here. They represent the values of many people of Appalachia today, and they're the same values that have guided us for generations. As I look at this story in particular and at what Ben Grubb represents, they're the values that determined so much about how our communities responded to the reality of a Civil War. So many young men in Southwest Virginia fought not because they believed in the "southern cause," but because as members of the Home Guard, they were promised they'd never have to leave their mountain home. This of course proved not to be true.

What was the most challenging part of writing this book? What did you love the most?

I'll start with the "love" because that's easiest. I love the characters, and of course I particularly love Elizabeth. I love her spirit. I also love the letter Marilee wrote to Patrick at the end. Writing it came easily to me, as if I was simply transcribing, and it's always a joy and a surprise when that happens. I also really like Ben's letters during the war. They required a great deal of research, needless to say, but somehow channeling his emotions as he experienced such loss and so much boredom and also the horrors of war came naturally.

As to the challenges. Without a doubt, the most difficult aspect of writing *That Which Binds Us* was addressing the politics of the day and the politics of the war. There's little question but that Patrick Hagan was most surely a slave owner; it would stand to reason given his vast holdings and his allegiance to the Democratic Party of the day, even if I found little detailed evidence. Still I made for myself an argument in favor of "my" Patrick directing his political passions elsewhere. Given his character's escape from poverty and the Potato Famine (something purely fabricated by me, as the author), and given a noted devotion to liberty and to "fighting the tyranny of the majority in the oppression of the minority," it felt a reasonable case for the character I created.

What other books have inspired you?

Gosh, there are so many, but I have to start with Lee Smith's canon, and in particular her debut, *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed*. The slim novel was published in 1968, just after Lee graduated from Hollins College. Several years later I was a high school student with a summer job shelving books at the Lonesome Pine Regional Library in my hometown of Wise, Virginia. I loved that job. I'd study every cover, read most descriptions—it was fascinating to see what folks in my community were reading and found compelling. One day 15-year-old Cathy picked up *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed*, read the first page, and I subsequently announced to my parents: "I'm going to be a writer. And I want to write books like this." I mean...just consider the Lee Smith catalog and I'm hitting highlights here: *Fair and Tender Ladies*, *Oral History*, *On Agate Hill*, *Guests on Earth*, *The Last Girls*, *The Christmas Letters*, *Blue Marlin*, *Silver Alert*. Her short stories. Her essays, including the fabulous collection, *Dimestore*. How I love that book. I love everything Lee Smith writes.

This novel, That Which Binds Us, is your debut, as well.

It sure is, although instead of me being a recent college graduate or a feisty young woman with a fresh MFA, I recently became a grandmother. And I've just turned 65! (How did *that* happen?) Still my age serves only to make this publishing of my first book all the sweeter. This is a gorgeous, gorgeous time in life.