

Hannah's Dream

by Diane Hammond

About the Book

An elephant never forgets . . . but can she dream?

For forty-one years, Samson Brown has been caring for Hannah, the lone elephant at the down-at-the-heels Max L. Biedelman Zoo. Having vowed not to retire until an equally loving and devoted caretaker is found to replace him, Sam rejoices when smart, compassionate Neva Wilson is hired as the new elephant keeper. But Neva quickly discovers what Sam already knows: that despite their loving care, Hannah is isolated from other elephants and her feet are nearly ruined from standing on hard concrete all day. Using her contacts in the zookeeping world, Neva and Sam hatch a plan to send Hannah to an elephant sanctuary—just as the zoo's angry, unhappy director launches an aggressive revitalization campaign that spotlights Hannah as the star attraction, inextricably tying Hannah's future to the fate of the Max L. Biedelman Zoo.

Praise for the Book

"Irresistibly touching, delectably uplifting, Hammond's understated yet gargantuan tale of devotion and commitment poignantly proves that love does indeed come in all shapes and sizes."

— *Booklist (starred review)*

"Featuring a cast of endearingly quirky characters (notably, an elephant named Hannah), this charming story enchants and provides a nice balance of lighthearted and poignant moments . . . uplifting."

— *Library Journal*

"Sweet . . . [T]he moments of genuine emotion will charm readers in search of a happy ending."

— *Publishers Weekly*

Courtesy of Harper Collins

About the Author

Title: Diane Hammond

Known As: Hammond, Diane Coplin; Hammond, Diane
American Novelist

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Personal Information

Born in NY; married; husband's name Nolan; children: Kerry. Addresses: Agent: c/o Author Mail, Doubleday, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Career

Writer and editor. Has served as spokesperson for the Oregon Coast Aquarium and the Free Willy Keiko Foundation.

Awards

Oregon Arts Commission, literary fellowship.

Works

Writings

- *Keiko's Story: The Real-Life Tale of the World's Most Famous Killer Whale* (juvenile biography), Peduncle Press (Waldport, OR), 1998.
- *Going to Bend* (novel), Doubleday (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Homesick Creek* (novel), Doubleday (New York, NY), 2005.

Has published work in *Yankee*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Washington Review*.

Media Adaptations

Going to Bend was adapted for audio cassette, read by Hillary Huber, Blackstone Audiobooks, 2004.

“Sidelights”

Novelist Diane Hammond has written two novels steeped in what she called the "insular culture of coastal Oregon" in an interview for *Book Browse*. A native New Yorker, Hammond adjusted to a dramatically different lifestyle when she moved to Oregon, which included isolation and weather that dominated everything. Her first novel, *Going to Bend*, tells the story of two women in their early thirties who have grown up together in the small fishing village of Hubbard, Oregon. Petie Coolbaugh is a gruff, cynical woman who is trying to survive economic and emotional hard times. Her husband, with whom she has two young children, is often unemployed and their relationship is troubled. Her friend Rose Bundy is a single mother who has a sunnier outlook on life, but faces an equal dose of hardship. When a brother and sister from California move to town and open a café, Petie temporarily finds work making soup and Rose becomes involved in producing a cookbook with the café owners.

Reviewers commended the author for her skilled handling of the story. *Booklist* reviewer Bill Ott explained that while he feared the book would be "a working-class weeper," Hammond has created "something considerably more subtle." Kate Ayers commented in a *Bookreporter.com* review that "the glimpse into the lives of Rose Bundy and Petie Coolbaugh is so authentic ... I could smell the soup." Hammond's writing was appraised by a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* as "clean, sharp prose, idiosyncratic dialogue and deep insight into relationships" Similarly, *Library Journal* contributor Rebecca Sturm Kelm praised the novel's "earthy dialog, precise narrative," and "well-placed humor." Writing for *Pop Matters* online, Teri A. McIntyre welcomed the work as ranking among "similar tales that seek to honestly portray the lives of mature, life-addled women."

Homesick Creek is also set in Hubbard, but shares only one minor character with its predecessor. The story again revolves around two female friends and contrasts the problems they find in marriage. Bunny is a waitress married to car salesman Hack. They are financially comfortable, but Bunny is concerned that her charming mate is having an affair with a new co-worker. Her friend Anita has more faith in husband Bob, despite his problems keeping a job and his dependence on alcohol. When Bob begins having unexplained absences, Anita suspects that his drinking is getting worse, yet fails to see a new crisis in the making.

Critics echoed the kind of commentary Hammond received for her first novel. In a *Bookreporter.com* review, Kate Ayers wrote that, "ultimately it weighs in as a story of genuine friendship, love gone wrong, and families in crises." A *Kirkus Reviews* writer commented that "Hammond is deft at balancing the subtle tensions that make for complex characters," and a

Publishers Weekly critic cited the book's "spare language and good humor that easily encompasses rich commentary on marital physics."

Further Readings About the Author

Periodicals

- *Booklist*, November 15, 2003, Bill Ott, review of *Going to Bend*, p. 574.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, November 15, 2003, review of *Going to Bend*, p. 1329; May 1, 2005, review of *Homesick Creek*, p. 496.
- *Library Journal*, December, 2003, Rebecca Sturm Kelm, review of *Going to Bend*, p. 166.
- *Publishers Weekly*, December 1, 2003, review of *Going to Bend*, p. 42; May 2, 2005, review of *Homesick Creek*, p. 173.

Online

- *Book Browse*, [http:// www.bookbrowse.com/](http://www.bookbrowse.com/) (September 29, 2005), "A Conversation with Diane Hammond."
- *Bookreporter.com* <http://www.bookreporter.com/> (September 29, 2005), Kate Ayers, review of *Going to Bend*; (September 25, 2005) Kate Ayers, review of *Homesick Creek*.
- *Curled Up with a Good Book*, <http://www.curledup.com/> (October 8, 2005), Amanda Cuda, review of *Going to Bend*.
- *Pop Matters*, [http:// www.popmatters.com/](http://www.popmatters.com/) (August 25, 2004) Teri A McIntyre, review of *Going to Bend*.
- *Romantic Times Online*, <http://www.romantictimes.com/> (September 29, 2005), Sheri Melnick, review of *Homesick Creek*.*

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**A DISCUSSION WITH DIANE HAMMOND,
AUTHOR OF HANNAH'S DREAM**

Q. You chose an Asian elephant as one of the book's main characters. Have you ever worked with them before?

A. Actually, I feel that Hannah chose me, as did Sam. Thus, my job was to learn all I could about them—and about Asian elephants, about which I knew next to nothing—in order to do them justice. I had spent a lot of time by then with zoo keepers and animal rehabilitators, so developing Samson Brown's story felt at least somewhat familiar. But I spent quite a bit of time, early-on, hanging around elephant barns at zoos in the Pacific Northwest. And two elephant keepers at the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington, were very generous about sharing their day-to-day experiences with me, as well as their thoughts and feelings about the roles and responsibilities of the zoos and sanctuaries that keep these amazing animals.

Q. Many of your characters have alternate identities, some of them playful. Can you talk about that?

A. The most important alter-ego in the book, of course, is Hannah's: in Sam and Corinna's eyes, she is not only an elephant in need of their care and protection, but also the reincarnation of their infant daughter and only child, who was stillborn.

Zoo Director Harriet Saul also has an alter-ego: Max Biedelman, the Zoo's founder. In this acquired persona—which she mangles, repeatedly referring to Max as Maxine, a name the old woman despised—Harriet ultimately finds grace and salvation. Sometimes it is easier to love someone else than to love oneself.

Max Biedelman, by turn, was a lesbian, but belonged to an age and society which didn't openly reveal such things, so she had a lifelong, secret identity. Her admission to Sam that her childhood dream was to be a boy was the closest she ever got to acknowledging her true nature.

In lesser instances, zoo business manager Truman's son Winslow was named after a famous artist because his mother had an unrealized hope that he would become one. And his pot-bellied pig Miles shows a definite preference for Mozart, leading Truman to joke that perhaps Miles *is* Mozart, or is at least channeling Mozart's spirit.

Q. Most of your characters have very close relationships with animals, even above and beyond Hannah. Do you believe that “animals are people, too?” Do you write your animal characters the same way you write your human characters?

A. One of the greatest challenges in writing *Hannah's Dream* was to avoid anthropomorphizing—endowing my animal characters with human qualities. To be honest, I'm not sure how well I did: Miles, in particular, is an irrepressible character to whom I gave a very strong sense of whimsy and humor. In my gut it felt right, and animals *do* sometimes laugh, so I think I got away with it. Hannah, too, though clearly an elephant, has a personality that is entirely her own, transcending but hopefully not violating her elephant-ness. And let's not forget the thuggish Kitty, one of three cats belonging to Johnson Johnson. He is 100% cat—but then, I have cats of my own, so I knew I was on solid ground there!

Q. Many of your readers cry at the book's ending. Did you find it hard to say goodbye to Hannah, too?

A. It took me weeks to write the last chapter, especially the pages after Sam and Hannah's arrival at the sanctuary, because it would be my goodbye, too. I broke down as I wrote Sam's final request—*Foot, baby girl*—because it was the act that best embodied the complete and unwavering trust that existed between them. And when Hannah follows Sam down the truck ramp, unaware that it would be the last time, I lost it completely—still do, just in picturing it. Goodbyes happen on the razor's edge that separates the known past from the unknowable future, and they require an enormous leap of faith that whatever comes next will be good. Sam has to know this for both himself and for Hannah.

Q. Every reader chooses a favorite character. Who is yours?

A. That's a hard one. Max is at the top of my list, because she's wise and eccentric and strong, and has the ability to reflect on her actions and admit that some of them—like bringing Hannah to Havenside to become the last elephant—were mistakes.

My secret favorite character is Johnson Johnson. He is a sweet man who defies categorization. He represents wonder—embraces it, in fact—when it's a sense that most of us lose by the time we become adults.

And then, of course, there's Miles, who embodies delight. Who can resist that?

Q. Do you believe that zoos should no longer keep elephants in their collections?

A. Like Neva, I am neither anti-zoo nor anti-captivity. I believe deeply in the educational mission of zoos and animal parks, and feel that they play a critical role in the preservation of species that are becoming increasingly embattled in the wild. Inevitably, the US facilities that keep elephants vary widely. Some zoos have expansive, state-of-the-art facilities that meet their resident elephants' needs and then some. Others, like my fictional Max L. Biedelman Zoo, are old, inadequate, and lacking the enormous resources necessary to upgrade their elephant exhibits. There is no one right answer to the appropriate care for the nation's elephants.

Courtesy of the authors website: <http://www.dianehammond.com/index.html>

Discussion Questions

1. Several characters in *Hannah's Dream* have or are given mixed, scrambled or multiple identities. Harriet, for instance, takes on the persona of Max Biedelman. Which other characters have identity issues, and why?
2. Sam and Max Biedelman develop a deep friendship. On what do the uneducated black zookeeper and worldly old woman base their relationship? Would their relationship be different if they had met today? Or under different circumstances?
3. Animals both large and small play key roles in the lives of the characters in *Hannah's Dream*. Why are they so important to their owners and keepers? In what ways are the various animal/human relationships similar, and in what ways are they different?
4. Why, at the end of the book, does Corinna begin to re-examine her relationship with God?
5. Will Sam and Corinna ever travel to the Pachyderm Sanctuary to visit Hannah?
6. Every character in this book (with the possible exception of Johnson Johnson) has been permanently altered or even defined by one essential event, calamity or crisis. In what ways do these personal histories allow the various characters to understand, and sympathize with, other characters—even if their secrets remain secret?
7. Harriet Saul is initially portrayed as the villain in *Hannah's Dream*, but does she deserve it? Did she change over the course of the book, and if so, how? Why?
8. What's the deal with Johnson Johnson? Is he a savant, a fool, or a genius?
9. Sam and Corinna treat Hannah as the reincarnation of their stillborn daughter. Do they mean this literally or figuratively?
10. Neva Wilson describes Hannah as a “charismatic mega-vertebrate,” a description that also includes whales, dolphins and other large and popular mammals. Do these animals have a place in today's zoos? Why?

Courtesy Harper Collins