



# Lonely Are the Brave | A Reader's Guide

by Larry Zuckerman

ISBN 978-1-947976-39-9

Cennan Books of Cynren Press

## Questions and Topics for Discussion

### About the Book

When Rollie Birch returns home from the Great War in 1919 with a cluster of medals, he feels as if he's landed in the wrong country. His wife has died, leaving behind an infant daughter born while he was overseas. His small logging town of Lumberton, Washington, has grown but still runs on gossip. Almost overnight, Rollie the hero becomes a pariah for his scandalous decision to raise his daughter by himself—a child rumored not to be his—and for refusing to talk about his wartime exploits.

The past two years have changed Kay Sorensen as well. Daughter of the Lumberton timber baron, Kay spent the war working for her father, organizing patriotic and charitable efforts, and discovering her love for politics and business. But when her husband—Rollie's former platoon commander—returns, Kay expects, correctly, that he'll make her quit her job. She's dreamed of marriage as an equal partnership; now, she chafes under her husband's cold tyranny. Did the war change him?

Rollie might know, and Kay steels herself to beg information from a man her husband has publicly insulted. But neither Kay nor Rollie can anticipate how secrets, lies, and horrifying revelations may destroy them. Do two lonely, passionate rebels have the moral courage to stand up to gossip, defy cultural boundaries, and dare reinvent themselves in a world forever changed?

### Thoughts from the Author

I love writing historical novels about characters considered radical because of how they live. They're quiet subversives who'd never dream of preaching revolution, yet everybody, or nearly everybody, shuns them or tries to shut them down.

With *Lonely Are the Brave*, I wanted to portray my home state, Washington, a snake pit of fear and hypocrisy in 1919, a year after the Great War. I imagined a veteran who returns to his small town, and let's suppose he's won a pile of medals. In what way would he be radical?

First, I considered the labor movement, because attempts to unionize loggers and miners had met with violence repeatedly in recent years. But that conflict seemed too noisy for Rollie, my war hero, who wants to slip back into civilian life unnoticed. I needed a subtler flashpoint, one his neighbors might even call insidious.

My early days as an at-home father came to mind, now thirty years past. I recalled the time I'd brought my infant son to the bank, and because we'd traveled by bus, I'd felt like an exotic zoo animal, as the other passengers pretended not to stare. At the bank, the teller, a woman who had offered no more than "hello, how are you?" to two previous customers, asked me, "Playing Mr. Mom today?"

That day and over the years, I learned that if you break unwritten rules about who does what at home, people will let you know. So I made Rollie a widower and full-time father to his infant daughter and populated his town with gossips who question his manhood.

But I also wanted a woman's story, the flip side of Rollie's. That led me to Kay, the timber heiress who fights to get her husband to see her as his equal and who dreams of a business career. She's a radical, too, and pays accordingly.

It's amazing how everyday subversion can rile people up.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does Rollie decide to stay home with Genevieve? What do you think of his reasoning? Have you known any men who have chosen to be at-home fathers, and if so, how did they arrive at accepting that role?
2. Kay has mixed feelings about Harry's return from the war. Why? What is she hoping for, and does she get it?
3. Rollie is Lumberton's most decorated war hero, yet he wishes people wouldn't ask him about his exploits. Why? What consequences does his refusal to share these stories have? And is there any aspect of his war he wishes someone would ask about?
4. Kay belongs to a leading Lumberton family, and people envy her. How does she feel about her social position, and does she think they see her for who she is?
5. Rollie and Bonnie have a special relationship as siblings. How would you describe it? How do they influence each other?
6. As the novel begins, Kay admires and trusts her father implicitly. Does her perspective change, and if so, how?
7. How would you describe Lumberton as a place to live? In 1919, when the novel takes place, what would the advantages and disadvantages be of living there?
8. When Kay shows her feelings or desires to Harry, how does he react? Why do you think he behaves that way?
9. Kay supposes that the war might have changed Harry and asks Rollie if that's true. Why does he hesitate to answer?
10. During the scene at the creek when Rollie tells Kay what happened during the war, what does each character learn about the other? How do they feel during their conversation and afterward?
11. What happens at the Fourth of July picnic? What does it show about Rollie and Kay? What consequences do their actions have?

12. After Rollie and Kay make love, when next she sees him, she ends their affair. Why? Do you think she's justified? What does Rollie do to contribute to the rift?
13. Hypocrisy is a major theme in *Lonely Are the Brave*. Who acts like a hypocrite, and in what ways?
14. Both Rollie and Kay become social outcasts in the town they love. How does each of them suffer, and how does each feel about that?
15. Does Genevieve's illness teach Rollie anything, and if so, what?
16. By the end of the novel, which characters have changed, and in what ways?

## About the Author

Larry Zuckerman, named for a Shakespearean actor because of crossed paths during World War II, has been blending drama with history ever since he took up writing at age fifteen. His first book, *The Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World*, was excerpted in the *New York Times* and won an award in the United Kingdom. *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* resulted from his lifelong passion for that tragic era, which inspired *Lonely Are the Brave*, his fiction debut. He has appeared on NPR's *Morning Edition* with Renée Montagne, delivered a keynote address at the 2009 World Potato Congress in Christchurch, New Zealand, and was a historical consultant for *Hot Potatoes*, an award-winning PBS documentary. A former at-home parent to two sons, now grown—another inspiration for *Lonely Are the Brave*—he lives in Seattle.

## Get in Touch

Larry would love to hear from readers! He encourages you to contact him with questions or thoughts at [lzuckerman1@gmail.com](mailto:lzuckerman1@gmail.com) or through his website, [LarryZuckerman.com](http://LarryZuckerman.com). Follow his blog at [NovelHistorian.com](http://NovelHistorian.com).