

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to spark conversation in your book club or readers' group.

1. What was your initial reaction to the characters in *One Lane Bridge*? Which character do you relate to most? Least?
2. What are some of J. D.'s best qualities? Worst? What are some of Karlie's best qualities? Worst?
3. What appeals to you about the setting of this story? Why is this sort of story best set in a small town? In what ways is the town itself a "character"?
4. What are the primary themes of the story? What messages did you discover as you read and thought about the story?
5. What is the greatest surprise in the story? What does this surprise teach you about the characters? About yourself?
6. What role does faith play in J. D.'s story?
7. In what ways do the Clems' needs affect J. D.'s priorities? How does J. D.'s relationship with the Clems affect his own family?

8. What insights into J. D.'s life do you get from the way he relates to his wife? What does this tell you about the sort of marriage he has?
9. What do you discover about J. D. through his relationship with his daughter, Angela?
10. What role does J. D.'s mother play in his story, and why is it such an important one?
11. What stands out to you about J. D.'s relationship with his best friend, Jack?
12. What is Lavern Justice's role in this story?
13. How is J. D.'s story a metaphor for faith? In what ways?
14. What does the one lane bridge symbolize?
15. What role does time play in *One Lane Bridge*? Why is that significant?
16. In what ways is this a story about God's "mysterious ways"? What does the story teach us about God? About trust?

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DON REID

**This is your second novel based in small-town America. What is it about small towns that makes them such a great setting for your stories?**

I grew up in a small town. I love the big cities for an occasional visit, but I've never been tempted to become a part of one. Small towns give you close and personal relationships. You see the same faces on the streets each day. You get to know the people around you and their habits, and they become a part of your daily routine. You know when a baby is born or an old man dies, and you know the families—their needs and their cares. I still love walking the streets of Staunton, Virginia, the small town that I was born in and grew up in. Every person you meet on the sidewalk, every storefront, every corner, and every crossing has a story. Some real, some imagined. But there is always a peace and a drama in every block.

**Tell us a bit about the specific inspiration for the protagonist of this novel, J. D. Wickman.**

I wanted to write about a typical entrepreneur who was trying to establish himself in business and trying to be a loving husband, a responsible father, a loyal and thoughtful son, a good friend, and a substantial citizen to his hometown. And then this odd thing happens to him and stresses every relationship he has. We never know what's going to happen in the next minute or how we may react to it.

I just wanted to see an everyday guy reacting to an unusual situation. I don't think he handled it any better or any worse than you or I might. But I wanted to watch him go about his daily life with this on his mind. Sometimes I wasn't real sure how he would handle it from page to page until each situation manifested itself.

**Which of the characters was most difficult for you to write, and why?**

Maybe Karlie, J. D.'s wife. She loves him and is worried about him. And at the same time she disapproves of what he keeps inviting by taking those trips to the country. She's at odds with him at the restaurant and with their daughter, and yet she respects his perspective. She's the most complicated, the most giving, and the most understanding of all the characters. I always think the woman's story is going to be the hardest for me to write, and then I find it's not. But making sure she doesn't come off one-dimensional is the greatest challenge. Everyone is a mixture of right and wrong in attitude and action. And when writers tend to favor a gender or a race or a role model of some sort and make them forever perfect, I get really annoyed at that.

**Which of the characters are you most like?**

Oh, I guess I'd have to say J. D. I have to have answers. I'll go to any extreme to prove myself right or wrong. It's important to me to know for sure what I'm doing and why I'm doing it, to know what is happening around me and how it will affect me or the people I love. I take my religion on faith, but on worldly issues, I'm afraid I like answers. Just like J. D. If it meant going to the courthouse records or

confiding in strangers who might help him solve his problem, he was willing to do it. We even share the same parenting techniques. J. D. and I are pretty soft when it comes to our children. And his moments with his mother were like moments I used to share with mine. And then there's Champ! Yeah, come to think of it, I guess ole J. D. and I are a lot alike.

**What if, anything, surprised you about the story as it evolved?**

I knew the plot from the beginning. So there were no surprises there. But what does tend to ambush me from time to time are the reactions of my characters. Until I get into the writing of a scene, I never know for sure just what they'll say, what inflection they may use—be it humor or sarcasm—or what actual words they may use. I don't know if they will be defensive or understanding when they are criticized or attacked. I don't know what their anger threshold is until it's tested with dialogue or with a particular adverse character. I love this about writing. Sometimes I am just as surprised as the reader when a gentle character suddenly turns harsh or a villainous type comes out with something sweet and endearing. Mary Sue Seymour, my literary agent, said to me just the other day in an email, "Isn't writing fun?" And, yes, I had to agree. Even when your brain gets tired and weary, it's still fun to see what's coming next.

**Has your experience as a musician helped you as a novelist?**

I think everything that has ever happened to you in life helps you as a novelist. From the most insignificant walk through a park to the most dramatic birth or traumatic death that is close to you, everything is another inroad to what makes you a novelist. I find

myself recalling things from my past that I wasn't even aware of remembering in order to include that feeling in a paragraph. And as far as the music goes, of course there is no better bookmark to the past than a well-remembered and beautiful melody. The right song at the right time creates a mood and a retrospect that no amount of hard thinking could ever achieve. And what are songs if not just short stories that we piece together to make up our lives? I love combining the two: music and novels. Sometimes I'll put on an album from the period I'm writing in to give me the mood as I writing.

### **How do you come up with your ideas for your novels?**

It all starts as just talking to myself in my head. I go to the track and walk. Usually Chipper, my dog, goes along, and I just think. I think of characters and situations and even conversations between characters. But I never write anything down. Not yet. This process may go on for weeks. If it leaves me, then I figure, good riddance. But if it remains and grows and piques my interest, then I carry it in my head for weeks. After a while, I'll write down the good ideas I've weeded out. Only when I feel sure this is good enough to be a book do I start writing the actual story. Those walks are also very important once I get into the story. That's where I rehearse the dialogue and the outlines for each chapter. (Chipper thinks I'm talking to him.)

### **Are you a plotter or a seat-of-the-pants writer? What is it about this approach that appeals to you?**

As I've noted, I would have to say I'm both. I plot the big picture and then fly by the seat of my pants on the daily stuff. I know there are certain facts I have to get in the story line, but I'm not always sure

just where they'll be. I know there is an end to my means but don't tie my hands on how I get there. It's like learning to sing a particular melody and then taking liberties with it and making it your own. I outline but not in the classical way. I have my own homegrown version of how I note what each chapter may reveal. You would need a code to read my notes. And sometimes, after those notes get cold, I wish I knew the code in order to decipher what I wrote.

**When did you first know you wanted to be a novelist?**

All my life. And I would have started sooner if I'd only had the time. I was in the music business from the time I was a teenager—singing, touring, writing songs, writing stage shows, writing TV shows, writing comedy routines. All that time I was an ardent reader but just didn't have the time to pursue writing. Now I do, and I'm loving every minute of it.

**What's next after *One Lane Bridge*?**

I'm going back to Mount Jefferson. The novel before this was called *O Little Town*, and it was set in Mount Jefferson, Virginia. The next book continues in that town with some of the characters from that book. It's called *The Mulligans of Mt. Jefferson*. I love the town and the folks that inhabit it. All I have to do is just walk the streets of my hometown, and I see those characters and their stories just come pouring out. I could write forever about those people who live in my town and in my head.