



Ancient Highway

Bret Lott

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From the bestselling author of *Jewel* and *The Difference Between Women and Men* comes a haunting novel of home, family, and the pursuit of lost dreams. *Ancient Highway* brilliantly weaves together the hopes and regrets of three characters from three generations as they reconcile who they are and who they might have been.

In 1925, a fourteen-year-old boy leaves his family's farm and hops a boxcar in a dusty Texas field, heading for Hollywood and a life in the "flickers."

In 1947, a ten-year-old girl aches for a real home with a real family in a wide-open space, far from the crowded Los Angeles streets where her handsome cowboy father chases stardom and her mother holds a secret.

In 1980, a young man just out of the Navy visits his elderly yet colorful grandparents in Los Angeles, eager to uncover his family's silent history.

For the Holmeses, a longing for something else—another place, a second chance—seems to run in the family DNA. From Earl's journey west toward Hollywood glory, to his daughter Joan's wish for a normal existence away from the bright lights, to his grandson Brad's yearning for truth, this deep-rooted desire sustains them, no matter how much the goal eludes them. But ultimately, in each generation, a family crisis forces a turning away from the horizon and the acceptance of a reality that is by turns harsh and healing.

Inspired by stories of his own family, Bret Lott beautifully renders the lives of ordinary people with extraordinary faith in a mesmerizing and finely wrought tale of love and letting go.

From the Hardcover edition.

Ancient Highway Details

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From Reader Review Ancient Highway for online ebook

Joanne says

I am almost two thirds of the way finished with this book and I am struggling to finish it. It provides the story line by skipping back and forth from character and from various points in time. It's very wordy with lots of discriptions that provide nothing to the story so it moves along very slowly.

Stacey Barton says

It took me a while to feel invested in the book and it's characters. But as the book came closer to the end, I felt the satisfying bittersweet feeling of resolution.

Teri Stich says

I chose this as part of my library's 2017 Reading Challenge, a book about a road trip. Well, though the title makes you think it is, it isn't a true road trip book. It is more a road trip through the lives of three generations: Grandfather, mother and son though it did crisscross across the county with them. Moved along very slowly, each chapter focusing on one of the three. Their trials and tribulations in life and the difficulties each had with each other. The back and forth through the years became tiresome and I had a hard time really feeling for any of the characters as the story bounced around to much. Not a bad book just didn't hold me enough.

Sally Ewan says

I am still pondering this book. I didn't really like any of the characters, and I actively disliked several of them! Also, it was about three generations, so while I learned about their lives in different 'seasons', I still feel like there were gaps in my understanding of what brought them to the final resolution. How did they all get so messed-up? It was really depressing to see how much hurt and confusion resulted from selfish behavior.

I read this right after seeing the movie "Slumdog Millionaire", and it really hit me hard how much misery we can create for ourselves even when/despite having all of our material needs met. Here we are in this country, not starving or in danger of our lives being taken violently, yet we are still miserable, unkind, confused and lost. This book showed clearly how bereft of meaning our lives are without God.

Kristen says

I found this book on the "librian's choice" at my library. Now that I'm home, have already read about 50 pages, and am reading the goodreads reviews I'm not sure I want to keep reading it. So far, it's unnecessarily

wordy. I keep getting slowed down by some awkward lengthy sentences.

Lisa says

I liked the characters and the story, but the writing bogged down everything. There were too many sentences along the lines of "She felt like such-and-such, not like she felt when this happened or that happened, but like..." I don't need to be told what things were NOT like, especially not repeatedly.

Kristen Gehrman says

If you flip to the back cover of Bret Lott's, latest novel you might notice that though the College of Charleston professor and bestselling author has been praised by a variety of book reviewers, the jacket of *Ancient Highway* boasts no notation from the New York Times. Upon release on July 8, Times book reviewer, Lisa Fugard, wrote, "Brett Lott's seventh novel, "*Ancient Highway*," explores the failed dreams and rifts of the Holmes family... these winning characters often mired in less than winning prose." I have never had Professor Lott in class, nor have I spoken to him in person. Aside from his convocation speech on his previous novel, *Jewel*, last fall, I have never even encountered him on campus; therefore, as an objective reader, I can say that the New York Times has no idea what it is talking about. *Ancient Highway* is a novel about the flawed, frustrating, frailties of an indomitable institution we like to call family. The novel smoothly transitions back and forth through three generations of a single family, passing down a 'cause and effect' tale that is so accessible you believe all three stories are happening at once. The ancient highway traces the delusions of Earl, a runaway country-boy with Hollywood dreams in the 1920's, to the angry detachment of his daughter, Joan, growing up in the shadow of her father's fantasy. The road ends with Brad, Joan's partly shiftless, partly damaged son, home and confused from the Vietnam War.

The first 100 pages of the 241 page novel jump back and forth, polishing the facets of Lott's well-developed characters. As Lott unearths the roots of what appears to be a failed family, I find myself identifying with all of the characters as they combat with each other. It is in this way that Lott illuminates the realities of a family. Contrary to the New York Times, his prose is delightfully readable with full-bodied descriptions of three eras and three characters. So potent is his portrayal of the selfish secrets and loving lies that seem to exist within all families, the "happy ending" that repulsed the Times actually reinforced my faith in family connection. The confusion and reclusion of Joan, who harbors long-standing hate for her scheming father's squandering of her childhood, humanizes parenthood in a way that reminds the reader that parents will inevitably fail their children. Yet, the redeeming relationship that Earl has with his grandson, offers hope for reconciliation. In reading this, I was reminded of some of the conflict within my own family and felt touched by this real, accessible, yet optimistic tale of forgiveness. The family story of Earl, Joan and Brad is both complex and simple at the same time, attesting to the deep roots that bind us to those we love.

The fact that this story is inspired by Lott's own family only gives you more hope and desire to fortify your own family relationships from which you cannot escape. In a story of hating and loving, losing and finding, *Ancient Highway* is yet another Bret Lott testament to the power and importance of human empathy.

Lisa says

I have this method of finding books, walking by the new book section of the library and picking up whatever jumps out at me. After a number of duds I have thought about giving up this method, but then I find a book like this and decide my method isn't so bad.

Ancient Highway goes back and forth between three generations of individuals focusing in on a short period of their lives. Earl the grandfather we get to know as a teen and young adult, his daughter Joan we follow when she is 9, her son Brad has just left the Navy after 6 years. The story line is interesting and keeps your attention, but the writing style is beautiful. I plan on reading more books by this author.

Sherilyn says

Disappointing and bleak, though one can feel the author attempting to be hopeful. It describes the failures of parenthood down through 3 generations and how that begins to be righted. I kept thinking it would redeem itself so I kept reading, but Lott's characters were not likeable and his writing not easy to read. I felt my time was wasted with this one.

Sandi says

I wouldn't say this was a great book, the story line left a lot to be desired. It left you feeling like you lost a chapter or two. It was hard to keep up with the stories of the characters and it was so slooooooow.

Ann says

I liked this book for the strong voices of each character and for the realistic details of life for would-be actors in 1930s Hollywood versus their lives in present-day Pacoima. The writing was evocative and elegant and in places downright lyrical ("...I also know hope, though it is a kind of scuffed up and scarred hope, a kind of hope that's had an eye gouged out and lost an arm and has only the clothes on its back and no hope for anything other than the hope of itself, because no one out there wants anything to do with it.")

I was a bit disappointed in the ending though. To resolve a whole book's worth of family anger in a scene that would have taken less than 10 minutes felt like a disservice to the reader and to these characters. Life is more complicated than that and so are Earl, Saralee, Joan, and Brad.

Maureen says

I didn't enjoy this book. I couldn't get past 100 or so pages. The book tells the story of three generations of one family, what their hopes and dreams are and how they get screwed up. The story bounces back and forth between the characters, each in a different period of time. I found that a little confusing, but I could have gotten used to it if it were not for the slow paced and depressing writing. At one point, it took the author two

full pages to make a point that wasn't that important anyway. This book was a big disappointment after reading "Jewel" and enjoying it so much.

Linda says

After reading this book, I still don't feel I understand the characters in it. I feel I got a good overview of Earl, Joan and Brad, but I didn't get a sense of what made them tick. I think instead of telling the story in 3 voices, Earl's, Joan's and Brad's, and skipping from the early 20th century to the present, it might have been better to have chosen a character and ran with the story from solely that character's point of view. Earl himself was a goldmine to write about. What the heck happened to him between being thrown off the train and ending up in Hollywood? How did he get from picking lettuce to Hollywood? Same with Joan. I think the story could've been written from her viewpoint also, but the italics in her telling of her story when she was young was very off putting from the writing. Brad was the least interesting to me. I will say that Bret Lott had interesting descriptions of the early 20th century that made it come alive in the telling. Haven't read any of his other works but I'll try him again and see what happens.

David Clark says

Another wonderful Brett Lott novel. His character and place descriptions are fantastic. He has described the costs of unfettered desire. Costs that ripple through the lives and psyches of generations and at times seem overwhelming. And yet, in the struggle hope is not completely crushed. Also, in the process of his tale Lott gives us a wonderful look at 1930's Hollywood and a sobering description of Saigon in 1974.

Glenda says

I like his writing style.
