

Mary Baldwin College Alumnae/i Book Club

March 2009

What we are reading in
2008:

Jan 1: *How My Magic Refrigerator Sent Me To Paris Free. 7 Rules To Make Dreams Come True* by Lolly Anderson

Feb 5: *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen

Mar 5: *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield

Apr 2: *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride

May 7: *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City* by Anonymous

June 4: *Polite Sex* by James Wilcox

July 2: *Founding Mothers* by Cokie Roberts

Aug 6: *Follow the River* by James Alexander Thorn

Sept 3: *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah

Book Announcement!

Apr 2: *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride

At a time when the relationship between African-Americans and Jews is deeply fissured, *The Color of Water* reminds us that the two groups have a long history of coexistence -- sometimes within a single person. The author's mother, Ruth Shilsky, was born in Poland in 1920, the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi. She grew up in rural Virginia, hemmed in by anti-Semitism and small-town claustrophobia, and at the age of 18 she fled to the cultural antipodes of Harlem. There, four years later, she married a black man named Dennis McBride, and since her family promptly disowned her, she launched a second existence as (to quote her son) "a flying compilation of competing interests and conflicts, a black woman in white skin." The lone Caucasian in her Brooklyn housing project, she somehow raised 12 children without ever quite admitting she was white. In retrospect, of course, her son is able to recognize that his parents "brought a curious blend of Jewish-European and African-American distrust and paranoia into our house." However, as children, James McBride and his 11 siblings didn't dwell on questions of their mother's color. Only later, after he became a professional journalist, did McBride feel compelled to tackle the riddle of his heritage. Bit by bit, he coaxed out his mother's story, and her voice -- stoic, funny, and with a matter-of-fact flintiness -- alternates perfectly with his own tale of biracial confusion and self-discovery.

May 7: *Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City* by Anonymous

For eight weeks in 1945, as Berlin fell to the Russian army, a young woman kept a daily record of life in her apartment building and among its residents. "With bald honesty and brutal lyricism" (*Elle*), the anonymous author depicts her fellow Berliners in all their humanity, as well as their cravenness, corrupted first by hunger and then by the Russians. "Spare and unpredictable, minutely observed and utterly free of self-pity" (*The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland), *A Woman in Berlin* tells of the complex relationship between civilians and an occupying army and the shameful indignities to which women in a conquered city are always subject--the mass rape suffered by all, regardless of age or infirmity.

We are on the MBC website!!
www.mbc.edu/alumnae

Join us online!!
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MBCAlumBookClub>

If you are in the Richmond, VA area we would love for you to join us! All meeting times are 7pm and last approximately 1 hour.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Theresa Cash Lewis '99 at pinkferrets@gmail.com or the Alumnae/i office at 1-800-763-7359.

June 4: *Polite Sex* by James Wilcox

Tula Springs, La., the locale of Wilcox's four, highly praised comic novels (*Modern Baptists*) is present here only as a reference point in the story of two young women, girlhood friends in Tula Springs, who come to New York City in the '70s. Just out of Smith and longing both for an acting career and a chance to lose her virginity with a husband who will worship her for having saved it, Emily Brix settles instead for a tedious job in a Times Square movie production company and a marriage of convenience. As her life slowly slides downhill, Emily remains adrift, out of place, unsure of who she is and what real love might encompass. Clara Edward, once third-runner-up in the Miss Louisiana beauty pageant, comes to the city in flight from an abusive fiancé. Aspiring only to remain unbruised, Clara winds up as a TV star, married to a gentle man who dotes on her.

July 2: *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* by Cokie Roberts

Drawing upon personal correspondence, private journals, and even favored recipes, Roberts reveals the often surprising stories of the fascinating women--such as Abigail Adams, Eliza Pinckney, and Deborah Read Franklin--who fought the Revolution as valiantly as the men.

Aug 6: *Follow the River* by James Alexander Thorn

Mary Ingles was twenty-three, married, and pregnant, when Shawnee Indians invaded her peaceful Virginia settlement, killed the men and women, then took her captive. For months, she lived with them, unbroken, until she escaped, and followed a thousand mile trail to freedom--an extraordinary story of a pioneer woman who risked her life to return to her people.

Sept 3: *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah

"In the more than fifty violent conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are some 300,000 child soldiers. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them." "In *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Ishmael Beah, now twenty-six years old, tells a story: at the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. At sixteen, he was removed from fighting by UNICEF, and through the help of the staff at his rehabilitation center, he learned how to forgive himself, to regain his humanity, and finally, to heal."