

A CONVERSATION WITH JOYCE SIDMAN

What inspired you to write *Winter Bees & Other Poems of the Cold*?

In Minnesota, winter is such a big part of our lives. Even as we see its beauty, we spend a lot of time complaining about it. One day, when I was on the phone with my editor (grumbling about subzero weather), she challenged me to find out how animals deal with it. I didn't fully explore the idea right away, but slowly, those winter animals took hold of my imagination.

Describe the research you undertook in writing it.

A major part of my research took place while walking my dog every day. I listened for tundra swans, watched chickadees, waded through blizzards, and followed fox tracks in fresh snow. I also read some wonderful books about winter, such as Bernd Heinrich's *Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival*, and *The Snowflake* by Kenneth Libbrecht.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

While investigating beaver lodges in late winter, I got a little careless on a frozen pond and accidentally fell through the ice. Fortunately,

I managed to slide myself to safety. The air temperature was relatively mild (20s) and I wasn't far from home, so no frostbite, thank goodness!

What do you hope your readers take away from *Winter Bees & Other Poems of the Cold*?

I always hope my books make readers wonder about the other creatures that share our earth: the mysterious ways they live and the challenges they face. How every aspect of their life is superbly suited to their survival. And how we often see ourselves in them.

How did you come to collaborate with illustrator Rick Allen?

While the book's editor usually chooses the illustrator and shepherds the book to creation, I knew right from the start that I wanted Rick to illustrate this book. Rick had already illustrated one of my books, and he lives in snowy Duluth. The man knows winter. Fortunately, my editor agreed! I am thrilled with the art he produced for *Winter Bees*.

Can you describe your writing process?

I need an interesting question to propel me. In this case, it was: How do animals survive the bitter cold and dark of winter? Then I start reading and researching. The research will steer me toward a voice or a phrase that will begin the poem in my head. I do a lot of thinking before I commit anything to paper. Once I start writing, I rewrite and rewrite until the poem satisfies me—both on paper and aloud. All the interesting, pertinent facts that don't fit in the poem go into the nonfiction note.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I feel lucky to live within such a talented, supportive book community here in the Twin Cities. The children's literature people here are the best—so willing to help and celebrate each other. I also feel lucky to live outside the city itself, close to woods and prairie. Natural places nourish my soul.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

In fall and winter, I teach week-long poetry residencies in local schools and travel a lot with my family. In spring and summer, I love to be outside: getting my hands dirty in the garden, hiking, taking photos of flowers and insects. Recently, I've been a bit obsessed with tree frogs, and have taken many, many photos of them. Maybe there's a book in it . . .

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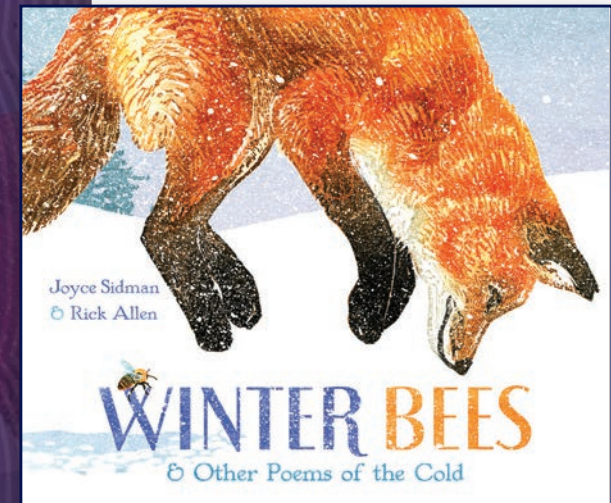
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27TH ANNUAL



CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WINNER

Category sponsored by Books For Africa



Winter Bees & Other Poems of the Cold

by Joyce Sidman,
illustrated by Rick Allen

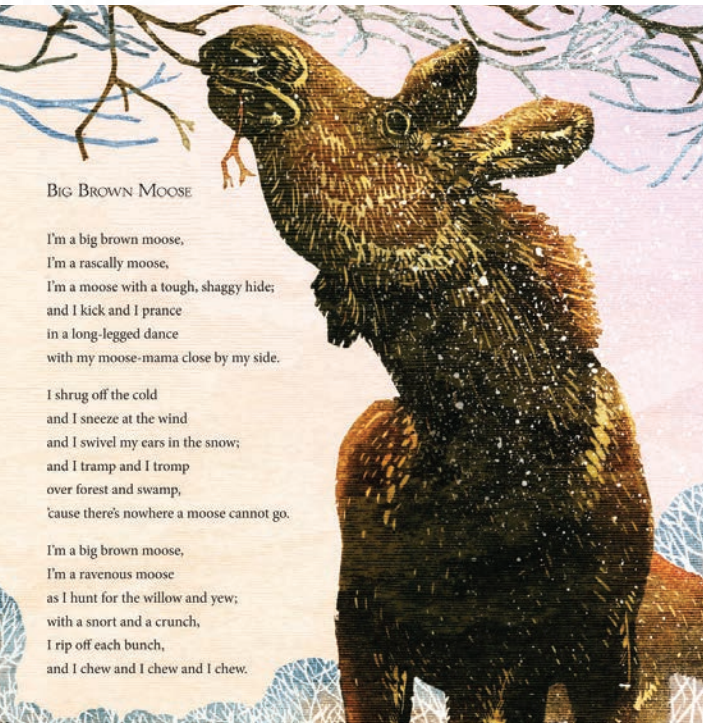
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS/
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT



A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
THE FRIENDS OF THE SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

SUMMARY

Discover winter's safe places for the hardy animals of the north in this outstanding picture book collection of poems. See the tundra swans settle into sleep. Hear the *fee-bee* of the chickadee singing from its perch in the evergreen. Watch beavers dive deep beneath the frozen pond, and moose wade through sparkling snow. With stunning linoleum print illustrations by Rick Allen, poet Joyce Sidman beautifully captures the drama of the cold and finds warmth, community and wisdom in the dead of winter.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Were there any facts in *Winter Bees* that surprised you? In your opinion, which animal has the best plan for survival?
2. Which is your favorite animal depicted in this book? How about a favorite poem? Favorite illustration? Why?
3. Why do you think the orange fox on the cover appears on almost every page, but doesn't have its own poem?
4. What do the swans dream about in "Dream of the Tundra Swan"?
5. Why do you think the poet decided to include poems about snowflakes, trees and skunk cabbage? What roles do each play in the animal world?
6. Can you guess why the entire book of poetry is titled after "Winter Bees"? What do you learn about bees in winter here and why is that so central to the book?
7. Why are there two different animals featured in "Brother Raven, Sister Wolf"? How does the poet signal which animal's point of view is which?



8. Identify the words in "Chickadee's Song" that the poet repeats in the final stanza. Why do you think those particular words are repeated?
9. What seasonal changes do you notice in "The Whole World Is Melting"? How do they compare to the first signs of spring in your area?
10. What are some of the ways that humans survive the winter? Can you see any similarities between humans and the animals featured in this book?

ABOUT JOYCE SIDMAN & RICK ALLEN



Newbery Honor winner **Joyce Sidman** is one of the most distinguished poets writing for children today. For her body of work, she won the Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children given by the National Council of Teachers of English. Sidman is the author of many books including *Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors*, winner of the 2010 Minnesota Book Award for Children's Literature. She lives in Wayzata, Minnesota, where she has grown to know the cold. Visit www.joycesidman.com.

On the frosty tip of Lake Superior at the Kenspeckle Letterpress in Duluth, **Rick Allen** creates stunning prints, pressing original linoleum cuts, curious wood engravings, eccentric broadsheets, and other printed ephemera in collaboration with his wife and creative partner, Marian Lansky, and their assistant, Janelle Miller. Visit www.kenspeckleletterpress.com.

27TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

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**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CATEGORY
SPONSORED BY: BOOKS FOR AFRICA**

A CONVERSATION WITH NANCY KOESTER

What inspired you to write *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life*?

American history fascinates me, especially the anti-slavery movement and the Civil War. And I've always loved reading biographies, because they tell a personal story against the backdrop of history and culture. But it was a conversation with an editor from Eerdmans Publishing Co. that inspired me to write *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life*. The editor told me that they wanted someone to write a Stowe biography, and I decided to write a book proposal, and things took off from there.

Describe the research you undertook in writing it.

Stowe was a prolific letter writer, and her correspondence is collected in many places. Some of her letters are published, but many are not. So I read her letters in special collections at the Stowe Center in Hartford, the University of Virginia, the Rutherford B. Hayes presidential Library in Fremont, OH, and the New York Public Library. To research topics connected with Stowe's life, I used the Princeton Seminary Library, Firestone Library at Princeton University, the Cincinnati Historical Society, and Cincinnati Public Library. I visited places where Stowe lived in Hartford, Cincinnati, and Brunswick Maine. And yes, I did use the internet. It was convenient, but not as much fun as actually going someplace. I read all of Stowe's novels, and quite a few books by 19th century American women. I read quite a bit about slavery in the U.S. I bought lots of used books about

Stowe, and read and marked them all up. No wonder it took me nine years!

What did you enjoy most about writing this biography? Did you encounter any challenges in writing it?

I enjoyed getting to know the Beecher family; Harriet's parents, her brothers and sisters became real to me. My biggest challenge was that I was sometimes overwhelmed by the sheer amount of material. I wrote too much and had to cut back so that the story line did not get smothered in details.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life*?

I hope that readers will be fascinated by life in the 19th century, especially from a woman's experience. I hope readers will feel like they get to know Stowe as a person of faith, courage and resilience. She made mistakes and had blind spots, of course, but she attacked slavery with her pen and in so doing, she made history.

"I hope readers get to know Stowe as a person of faith, courage, and resilience."

Please share a little bit about your journey to becoming a published author.

My dad was a journalist and a pastor, and as a child I loved to hear the sound of his big

manual typewriter, especially the bell that rang every time he slapped the carriage return to start a new line. He would give me some manuscript pages and ask me to find his mistakes and make suggestions. He made a game of it, and got me interested in writing. My journey as a writer has taken me from sermons and Bible studies (when I was a pastor) to lectures and syllabi (as a professor) to writing a textbook on religion in America. But *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life* is far and away the best work I have done.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

As a young adult I did a lot of canoeing in the Boundary Waters (Canoe Area Wilderness). This gave me joy in the beauty of the wilderness, but paddling over huge lakes against the wind, or portaging through clouds of mosquitos taught me patience and perseverance. More recently, I have been part of the Twin Cities Shape Note Singers. Thanks to Shape Note, I came to know and love some of the music that Harriet Beecher Stowe sang as a child, in that wild, stark sound like bagpipes wailing.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I love going for walks in Como Park, singing Shape Note music, making pizzas, and, of course, reading novels and history.

Could you share a little about your current work or plans for a future project?

My book, *The History of Christianity in the United States*, is being re-released August 1, 2015 from Fortress Press. I've been busy finding new images and short primary sources for that book. My next book will be a biography of Sojourner Truth, the former slave and advocate for women's rights and the abolition of slavery.

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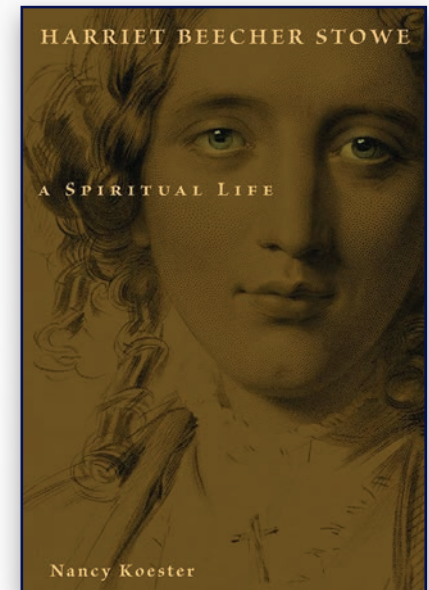
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27TH ANNUAL Minnesota Book Awards

GENERAL NONFICTION WINNER

Category sponsored by Minnesota AFL-CIO



Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life

by Nancy Koester

Wm. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING Co.

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
THE FRIENDS OF THE SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

SUMMARY

Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* converted readers by the thousands to the anti-slavery movement and served notice that the days of slavery were numbered. Most writing about Stowe treats her as a literary figure and social reformer while downplaying her Christian faith. In this compelling biography, Nancy Koester highlights Stowe's faith as central to her life—both her public fight against slavery and her own personal struggle through deep grief to find a gracious God.

Portrait of Harriet Beecher Stowe by Francis Holl, c. 1855.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Stowe was shaped by the New England Calvinism of her father, Lyman Beecher. What particular beliefs and attitudes about this religious ethos made an impression on you? Was it a positive or a negative impression? Why?
2. Consider Stowe's adolescence. How did you see her character taking shape in chapter 3? How would you describe Stowe's religious faith during this time of her life?
3. Why is the Lane Rebellion so important for Stowe's story, even though she was not directly involved in it?
4. What was it like for you to read about the cholera epidemic, and the death of Stowe's child? How did this experience change her?
5. Comment on Stowe's understanding of slavery and race in the section that begins on page 112. Aside from the obvious fact that some of her views are outdated, what were her beliefs and how did she act on them?
6. What was Stowe trying to accomplish in writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? What strategies did she use?
7. How did Stowe experience what today would be called sexism, as people responded to her book? What do her own responses reveal about her character?

8. When Stowe's son Henry died of accidental drowning in 1857, Stowe was plunged into a crisis of faith that lasted several years. What was most painful to her, where did she find comfort, and how did she change in the process?
9. How would you describe Stowe's family life—her relationship with Calvin and with her children? Do those relationships fit what you might expect for a 19th century woman?
10. Why was Stowe so powerfully drawn to spiritualism later in her life? Why did she tell her readers to avoid spiritualism, but not follow her own advice?
11. Stowe made three extended trips to Europe and spent many winters in Florida (which must have seemed like a foreign country to a New England Yankee). How did these experiences change or challenge her?
12. Describe the relationship between Stowe and one or more of her siblings—for example, Catharine, Henry, or Isabella). What were the high and low points of the relationship(s)?

ABOUT NANCY KOESTER



Nancy Koester is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and has taught religion and church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul and at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. She is also the author of *Fortress Introduction to the History of Christianity in the United States* and, in the field of spirituality, she has published *Journeying Through Lent with Luke* and numerous Bible studies. Visit www.nancykoester.com.



Nancy Koester at Meet the Finalists on March 20, 2015.

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**GENERAL NONFICTION CATEGORY
SPONSORED BY: MINNESOTA AFL-CIO**

A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE KLASSEN

What inspired you to write *The Secret of Pembroke Park*?

When I was young, I discovered an abandoned house in the woods near my home. It was missing its upper story, so the staircase lead to nowhere. A moldering piano slouched in the corner and a tattered blue dress hung on the wall. I would sit and stare at the place and wonder what happened to the people who lived there and why had they left so suddenly, leaving their possessions behind? I was inspired to weave a bit of that real-life mystery into this book.

Describe the research you undertook in writing it.

I researched village life and Anglican church services in the early 1800s (the hero is a clergyman) as well as historical secret rooms—both in books and in person. I traveled to England, attended services, and toured several English manors, one of which has a secret room of its own. On-location research is my favorite kind!

Did you encounter any challenges during the writing process?

The Secret of Pembroke Park is my longest book to date, written in less time than usual, so that was a challenge. Thankfully I had brainstorming help from fellow authors and support from a great editor and understanding family. Piecing together the clues to keep readers guessing was a challenge as well, but one I enjoyed.

What do you hope your readers take away from *The Secret of Pembroke Park*?

That our worth as people does not come from external things like wealth or looks. Life itself, faith, family, and friends are the truest treasures we can have.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer? Please share a little bit about your journey to becoming a published author.

I have always wanted to be a writer. (My mom saved a second grade report card that said, “Julie’s stories and poems show great potential.”) But

it wasn’t until I had worked in publishing for many years that I got serious about finishing my first novel. I learned a lot by working with other writers and editors, which no doubt helped me realize my lifelong dream of becoming a published author.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I don’t know that it does specifically, but I love living in a city and state that supports and values literature so highly. A recent study lists Minneapolis as the country’s “most literate city” with St. Paul close behind at #4. I’m living in the right place!

How do you most enjoy spending time when you’re not writing?

I enjoy watching BBC costume dramas, spending time with my family, and hiking in our many beautiful state parks when the weather allows.

Could you share a little about your current work or plans for a future project?

Happily. I will have two new books this year. *Lady Maybe* releases in July, and is about a woman whose startling secrets lead her into unexpected danger and romance. And in December comes *The Painter’s Daughter*, a Regency-era spin on the popular marriage-of-convenience storyline. Thanks for asking!

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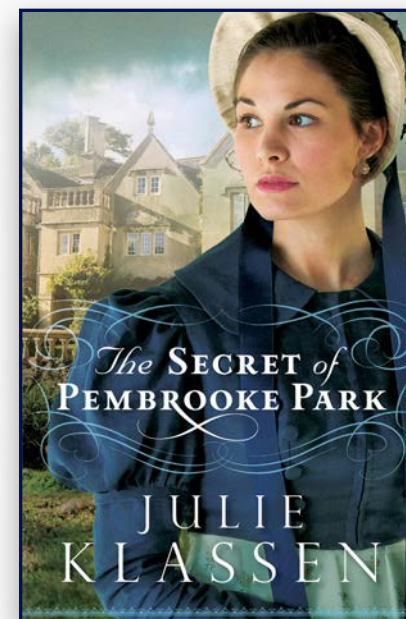


27TH ANNUAL Minnesota Book Awards



GENRE FICTION WINNER

Category sponsored by Macalester College



The Secret of Pembroke Park

by Julie Klassen

BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
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SUMMARY

Facing financial ruin and suffering a romantic disappointment, Abigail Foster is astounded when she and her father receive an offer from a strange solicitor—the use of a distant manor house abandoned for eighteen years. The Fosters find a host of mysterious things at Pembroke Park, including rumors of a secret room filled with treasure and a handsome local curate with dire warnings about the manor. Abigail searches for the treasure amid old friends and new foes; will she find it, and her heart's desire, or only danger?

Julie Klassen accepts her award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What secrets did you figure out early on in the book? Was there anything you guessed incorrectly?
2. Did your first impression of any character turn out to be wrong? Have you had a similar experience in real life?
3. When Abigail, and later William, saw the figure in the hooded green cloak, who did you think it was? The same person who wore it in the climactic scene, or someone else?
4. Did you ever think you were meant to marry one person, only to discover in hindsight he or she wasn't the person meant for you after all? What would you tell a young person pining for someone who doesn't return his or her affections?
5. Did you grow up feeling like a favored child or an overlooked child, or did your parents make a point of treating their offspring equally? What is your view of Mr. and Mrs. Foster's parenting style in this regard?

6. Do you think Abigail chose the right man? Did you vacillate or feel torn about which man was meant for her?
7. Did you feel any sympathy for Miles? Do you think he got the ending he deserved?
8. What about Harriet? What did you think about her desire to make restitution for the wrongdoings of her father?
9. Abigail is tempted to believe she needs a large dowry—a treasure—to make herself valuable and worthy of a man's love. In the end, Abigail learns "... she had never needed a treasure to make herself worthy. How thankful she was to be treasured by God, and the man who loved her." Can you relate?
10. Do you agree or disagree with this concluding line? "Ah, the weary wonder of this life. Of faith. And family. And friends. The truest treasures we can ever know or possess." Is there anything you would omit or add?

Questions adapted from publisher.

ABOUT JULIE KLASSEN



Julie Klassen is the author of nine novels, including three winners of the Christy Award for Historical Romance (*The Maid of Fairbourne Hall*, *The Girl in the Gatehouse*, and *The Silent Governess*). She has also won the Midwest Book Award and has been a finalist in the Romance Writers of America's RITA Awards. Visit www.julieklassen.com.



Julie Klassen at
Meet the Finalists on
March 20, 2015.

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**GENRE FICTION CATEGORY
SPONSORED BY: MACALESTER COLLEGE**

A CONVERSATION WITH KAETHE SCHWEHN

What inspired you to write *Tailings*?

I didn't set out to write a memoir. I've never thought my life was very interesting; however, I realized a few years ago that Holden Village, a retreat center in the Cascade Mountains where I spent almost every summer of my youth, is a fascinating place. So I set out to write a book about Holden, not about myself. When I submitted an accretion of pieces of the Holden story to my two Loft mentors (through the Mentor Series Program) both said Holden was interesting, but that my own story had to be the book's through-line. I was not pleased.

Describe the research you undertook in writing your book.

I read a short book about Holden's past as a mining village. I interviewed a geologist and asked questions (via e-mail and Facebook) of past village directors and community members. I listened to teaching sessions from the 1980s and paged through my own journals from that time period. I rifled through photos and other documents in Holden's tiny museum and I took my own photos of the mine tailings.

What did you enjoy most about writing your memoir? Did you encounter any challenges in the process?

In graduate school I studied poetry. I was forever writing persona poems because I hated using myself as a central character—I never wanted to be the "I." The best and worst part of writing the memoir was having to learn to inhabit that "I" as myself, or as a version of myself that was much closer to the "real life" me. That was both terrifying and liberating.

What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I hope readers take what they need from the book; that is, I think we take different things from books based on where we are on our own journeys. No reader will resonate with every aspect of the book but I hope that for each reader there's at least a moment of identification or recognition, a moment where the words somehow make the reader feel less alone.

How does being a Minnesotan and the particular community in which you live inform your writing?

I am incredibly grateful for the way my community supports my writing. This book was written with the help of a Minnesota State Arts Board grant and a Loft Mentor Series award. It was fed the wine and wisdom of two Minnesota writing groups and then first promoted at Content, Northfield's amazing independent bookstore. The MN Book Award nomination then provided other amazing opportunities to engage with the wider Minnesota community. I feel ridiculously grateful and lucky to live in this state.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

Right now I teach at St. Olaf College and have two amazingly energetic young kiddos (ages 1 and 5). Writing is currently getting squeezed into the cracks between everything else. I have completely forgotten what I like to do when I'm not teaching, writing, smearing peanut butter onto bananas or playing the "Frozen" matching game.

Could you share a little about your current work or plans for a future project?

I'm currently working on a post-apocalyptic novel involving a community that resembles Holden in many ways (except for the fact that the women are giving birth to inanimate objects).

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MEMOIR & CREATIVE NONFICTION WINNER

Category sponsored by Northwestern Mutual



Tailings: A Memoir

by Kaethe Schwehn

CASCADE BOOKS/WIPF AND STOCK PUBLISHERS

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
THE FRIENDS OF THE SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

SUMMARY

In August of 2001, Kaethe Schwehn needed her own, personal Eden. She was a twenty-two-year-old trying to come to terms with a failed romance, the dissolution of her parents' marriage, and her own floundering faith. At first, Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center nestled in the Cascade Mountains, seemed like a utopian locale: communal meals, consensus decision-making, and eco-friendly practices. But as the months wore on, the idyll faded and Kaethe was left with 354 inches of snow, one prowling cougar, sixty-five disgruntled villagers, and a pile of copper mine tailings 150 feet high. *Tailings* is a lyrical memoir of intentional community told from the front lines, a passionate and awkward journey about embracing the "in-between" times of our lives with grace and hope.

Kaethe Schwehn accepts her award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author writes that Holden provides a "liminal space, a way of dwelling deliberately in the unknown." What have been the most meaningful liminal spaces you've inhabited? What did you learn during those times?
2. What aspects of life in Holden did you find appealing? Would you want to be among the sixty-five people who keep the village alive during the winter? What would be some of the benefits and challenges of this experience?
3. Describe the author. Which aspects of her character do you identify with most and least? Do you get the sense that she was fully honest in her portrayal of her twenty-something self? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the book's linear structure and use of language. Was it apparent to you from the beginning that Schwehn is also a poet? Can you find examples of poetic influence in the tone of the book and style of writing?
5. The author discusses several definitions and interpretations of vocation, highlighting one from Frederick Buechner who believed vocation is about finding the place where "your deep gladness meets the world's deep need." What is your

own personal definition of vocation and how do you see it reflected in your work?

6. In the deepest part of winter, the author writes, "February feels like a single day repeating itself endlessly." How did you experience the description of the never-ending winter, with its isolation and the sameness of one day to the next? Were there any images or ideas that will stay with you long after closing the book?
7. Hospitality is an important part of the culture in Holden. What are some practices that demonstrate the community's commitment to hospitality and how does Schwehn react to them? Can you remember a time when you came as a stranger to an existing group and were warmly welcomed?
8. Why do you think the author chose to leave her "Intended" unnamed until the eighth chapter? Did the sudden use of his name change anything for you?
9. At the end Schwehn concludes: "Holden didn't let me escape the world; instead, the village helped me make more room for the world inside myself." What does this mean to you?

ABOUT KAETHE SCHWEHN



Kaethe Schwehn holds an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and is the coeditor of *Claiming Our Callings: Toward a New Understanding of Vocation in the Liberal Arts* (2014). Schwehn has been the recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board grant and a Loft Mentor Series award. Her fiction, essays, and poetry have appeared in numerous journals. She teaches at St. Olaf College and lives in Northfield, Minnesota, with her husband and two children. Visit www.kaetheschwehn.com.



Holden Village, WA

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**MEMOIR & CREATIVE NONFICTION CATEGORY
SPONSORED BY: NORTHWESTERN MUTUAL**

A CONVERSATION WITH LORI STURDEVANT

What inspired you to write *Her Honor: Rosalie Wahl and the Minnesota Women's Movement*?

I was delighted to be approached by Minnesota Historical Society Press and friends of Rosalie Wahl to write her story. I'd known and admired Justice Wahl since June 1977, when I was present at the Minnesota Women's Meeting in St. Cloud and witnessed the jubilation that met the announcement of her appointment as the first female associate justice on the state's high court.

Encouragement to intertwine Wahl's story with the concurrent rise of the Minnesota women's movement came from Rosalie herself. "I owe it all to the women," she said repeatedly as I interviewed her for this book in 2009-10. While she possessed great personal strength, wisdom and determination, she was clear-eyed in recognizing that the opportunities that came her way were not solely of her own making. She was a great believer in the power of shared human endeavor to create positive social change. I'm confident that she would appreciate being remembered as someone who rode the wave of the mid-20th century women's movement—and then accelerated it when her chance to do so arrived.

What did you enjoy most about writing *Rosalie Wahl's story*?

Researching this book had personal appeal to me. As a young reporter at the *Minneapolis Tribune*, I was assigned to cover several key events in the women's movement. The leading advocates of gender fairness in Minnesota became my sources; I joined many of them at the National Women's Conference in Houston in November 1977, where I covered the state's delegation.

Reconnecting with those sources more than 30 years later was gratifying; hearing their reflections on those "yeasty years" was inspiring.

What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I was asked not long ago whether I thought Minnesota school children should study the life of Rosalie Wahl, much as they might the lives of the nation's founders. I allowed that her story certainly has inspirational value as a tale of triumph over adversity and the virtues "nurtured by the hearth," as Rosalie once said.

But what I hope impresses readers is the value of citizen engagement in grassroots movements to make positive change. Rosalie saw herself as part of a movement. She

did a great deal to bring that movement's values to bear on the judiciary. But as she left the bench in 1994, she told an interviewer that she was cognizant of the limitations of that branch of government, and was eager to re-engage in politics, protests, and other forms of citizen activism. Those activities are vital tools for building a better society, she believed.

I also hope readers take away more awareness of two characteristics of the 20th century women's movement—and of Rosalie Wahl—that I believe are relevant to the movement's renewal in this century. One is the sense of sisterhood that participants in that movement shared. With seeming ease, they forged alliances that crossed boundaries of party, class and geography to accomplish their goals.

The other is their confidence that their goals were attainable. History was on their side, they believed. They had faith that the American system of democracy would deliver desirable results if they worked within it to affect change. As Rosalie said in a speech during a period of retrenchment, "We will not give one inch to despair."

Some of the notions of those Second Wave feminists may have been naïve or simplistic. But their faith in each other and in the possibility of a better life strikes me as essential to their achievements, and assets worth reclaiming by those who seek to complete the unfinished work on the women's movement's agenda.

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***Her Honor: Rosalie Wahl and the
Minnesota Women's Movement***

by Lori Sturdevant

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS

**A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
THE FRIENDS OF THE SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY**

SUMMARY

In 1944, young Rosalie Erwin made the decision to embark on a new academic and career path. She changed her major at the University of Kansas to sociology with the hope that her studies in this field would prepare her for a life dedicated to helping others and making the world a better place. In 1960, she had an epiphany that led to her decision to go to law school. At thirty-eight years of age, Rosalie Wahl (now married and a mother of four) began classes at the William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul. Sturdevant describes how, despite personal struggle, Wahl completed law school and, in 1977 became Minnesota's first female Supreme Court Justice.

Lori Sturdevant accepts her award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Wahl's childhood and her relationship with her grandmother and aunt. How did the influence of these strong women shape her into the smart, confident young woman she would become?
2. Aunt Sara's choice to remain single in order to maintain her financial independence taught Rosalie about the importance of family obligations and their cost. What are some of the sacrifices Wahl made on behalf of her husband and children? How might her path have been different had she not married after completing her bachelor's degree?
3. Of the failed attempt to establish an intentional community in Minnesota, Wahl said: "Those years weren't wasted. I don't think something has to be successful for it to have been worthwhile." What does this assertion say about Wahl's character? Do you share this same attitude?
4. What event in 1960 inspired Wahl to enroll in law school? What other factors, both at home and in the nation, helped to influence the then mother of four to take on such a challenge?
5. What was it like for Wahl as a student at William Mitchell College of Law? How do you view her resolute decision to continue classes just one week after the birth of her fifth child? Would you have done the same in her place?
6. Describe the criminal and civic law clinic Wahl was invited to help launch at William Mitchell in 1973. Why was she given the opportunity and what qualities of her character and teaching style made her so popular with her students?
7. What was the emotional climate of the Minnesota feminist movement in the mid-1970s? Describe how key individuals and groups organized to promote the need for women in the judiciary. How did they ensure Wahl's appointment after Governor Perpich promised to fill the next vacancy on the Minnesota Supreme Court with a woman?
8. How did Governor Perpich's decision to announce Wahl's appointment the way he did contribute to the significance of the event?
9. How did the nature of Wahl's appointment, the particulars of her personal biography, and the campaign against her appointment combine to make this a symbolic and meaningful first for women in Minnesota? Would any woman in her position have generated the same reaction, regardless of her personal qualities?
10. What were Wahl's most significant achievements during her seventeen years on the Minnesota Supreme Court?



Rosalie Wahl on the bench of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

ABOUT LORI STURDEVANT



Lori Sturdevant is an editorial writer and columnist for the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, covering government and politics. The recipient of two previous Minnesota Book Awards, she has edited or co-authored seven books, each detailing the lives of prominent figures in Minnesota's history.

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MINNESOTA CATEGORY SPONSORED BY:
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A CONVERSATION WITH MARLON JAMES

What inspired you to write *A Brief History of Seven Killings*?

There's always been a mystery about the men who tried to kill Marley. As a writer, I think one of the things that galvanizes me is to attempt to solve mysteries. These men fascinated me, but I also became very fascinated with the other people involved.

One example that really inspired this was a Gay Telese essay called "Frank Sinatra has a Cold." It's probably one of the greatest pieces of journalism in the 20th century. Telese was in Miami and Sinatra refused to talk to him. Every time he tried to get an interview, Sinatra's secretary would say, "Mr. Sinatra has a cold." Whether it was inspiration or desperation, Telese hit upon the idea to interview everybody around Sinatra. Who is changing his sheets? Who is picking the song list? Who is the band manager? He built this entire portrait of Frank Sinatra through all of the people around him. It was one of the things that changed journalism and I've always been fascinated with that type of story.

Marley doesn't really ever appear in the book and, in fact, he isn't even named. In the book he's just called "the Singer." It's more about people who, in one way or another, were involved in the assassination attempt or just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

How long did it take you to write the book?

It's funny. The first paragraph I ever wrote for this book is now on page 458. The book had such a crazy genesis. I didn't set out to write a novel—I actually set out to write a novella. I was trying to just go with who I fell in love with first. And, the first character I wrote was actually this gay Chicago hit man stranded in Miami who is there to kill a Jamaican. He has no idea why or what or when and he doesn't care.

I didn't intend to write so many characters. What happened was that I kept starting these single-person novels and they just would go nowhere. One day a friend asked me why I thought it had to be just one person's story. She asked me how long it had been since I last read *As I Lay Dying*. I went back and read that and it

was like my eureka moment. It wasn't one person's story. It was all of these different people telling the story in different voices. And that's how it happened. It took four years to write, largely because I had only a narrow idea of how far it would go when I started.

How do you go about handling the violence in your novels?

Violence and explicitness, in general, can be tricky. On one hand, there is a sort of tasteful violence that I find very false. If you read a story about violence or abuse and you were touched, you're reading the wrong story. You're supposed to be horrified. Violence is violent.

It's a very tricky line. You have to be careful because the response to relentless violence is not continued horror. You just get numb to it. In my books, I do believe violence should be violent but I don't think I go to the point that it is unreadable.

You have to take risks, not just with extreme violence, but also with joy. How do you write extreme happiness in a book without it coming across as maudlin and sentimental? How do you write love? It's the same challenge. You'd be surprised—a kiss is really as hard to write as a stabbing.

From Marlon James' talk at the Fireside Reading Series (Jan. 21, 2015).

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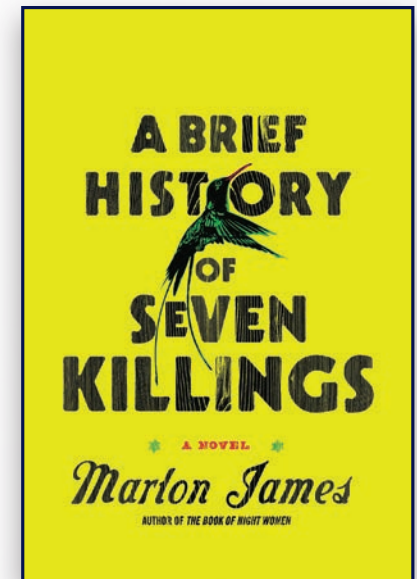
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NOVEL & SHORT STORY WINNER

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A Brief History of Seven Killings

by Marlon James

RIVERHEAD BOOKS/PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
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SUMMARY

Described by the *New York Times* as “sweeping, mythic, over-the-top, colossal and dizzyingly complex,” James’ novel uses the 1976 assassination attempt on Bob Marley as a springboard to explore Jamaican society and culture. Told through multiple narrative voices ranging from gang members to C.I.A. operatives to those caught in the crossfire, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* takes the reader on an unforgettable journey through a tumultuous time in history.

Marlon James accepts his award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel’s structure invites the reader to play detective/journalist. In this sense, did you feel akin to *Rolling Stone* journalist Alex Pierce when reading *A Brief History of Seven Killings*?
2. The majority of the characters in the novel are male, but it’s often Nina and her shape-shifting ways that readers are keen to discuss. Can her constant reinventing of herself, and her journey from Jamaica to America, be seen as belonging to any narrative tradition(s)?
3. The latter parts of the novel are set in the United States, but even before that, America has a pull on the characters whether politically or culturally. Discuss the place of America in the novel and its influence on the characters.
4. In *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, Bob Marley is referred to as just “the Singer”—he is a peripheral figure. Why do you think this is?
5. James employs the voices of multiple characters in this book. Do you feel there is one character that ties the novel together?
6. Some characters have proper names, while others have nicknames. Consider the significance of this.
7. *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, for the most part, progresses chronologically, but would you describe the narrative as linear?
8. Do specific details and cultural references (e.g., names of real people, bands and television shows) add authenticity to James’ fictional creations?
9. Did you find the Jamaican patois alienating or immersive?
10. In an interview in the *New York Times* Marlon James has said that “history is always shaping everything.” How did your understanding of the assassination attempt and its aftermath alter as the novel progressed?
11. Did you find the ending satisfying?

ABOUT MARLON JAMES



Marlon James was born in Jamaica in 1970. He is also the author of *The Book of Night Women*, which won the 2010 Dayton Literary Peace Prize and a Minnesota Book Award. His first novel, *John Crow’s Devil*, was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and was a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice. James teaches Creative Writing and English at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota.



Listen to Marlon James discuss *A Brief History* at the Fireside Reading Series on The Friends’ podcast: THEFRIENDS.ORG/PODCAST.

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NOVEL & SHORT STORY CATEGORY
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A CONVERSATION WITH SEAN HILL

What inspired you to write this collection of poems?

Unlike with my first book, *Blood Ties & Brown Liquor*, which I conceived of as a book project before writing the poems, I wrote many of the poems in *Dangerous Goods* without a clear project in mind. The earliest poem is from 1997 or so and one of the last ones, "Bemidji Blues," was written in 2011, a few months before Milkweed offered to publish the collection. It was my move to Bemidji that inspired many of the poems in the book, though I'd been exploring some of the themes—travel and home, alienation and desire—long before I ever heard of Bemidji, Minnesota. I was moved to write out of and away from the initial culture shock and alienation I experienced in moving from the Deep South to northern Minnesota.

The Liberia thread in *Dangerous Goods* came from a brief mention of central Georgians immigrating to Liberia in a history book I read as research for *Blood Ties & Brown Liquor*. That book led me to letters written to the Milledgeville newspaper by two African American men who'd immigrated with their families in the early 1870s. The men represent two reactions of African Americans trying to make a home in Africa. Sandy Gannoway returned home to

Milledgeville after two years whereas Allen Yancy was firm in his determination to stay in Liberia even though he had lost three of his children and his mother to disease there. It was this bit of Milledgeville history that piqued my curiosity, snagged my imagination, and stuck with me for years.

Describe the historical research you undertook in writing the book.

I was thrilled to win one of the American Antiquarian Society's fellowships for creative writers, which allowed me to spend several weeks in their reading room conducting research, exploring and gathering material. It's an unbelievable resource for anyone interested in American history before 1876. I went to the AAS to research mostly the history of Liberia, but I also researched Minnesota history there. I wanted to explore history that seemed to resonate with my situation. Most of my days at the American Antiquarian Society were reading books about the American Colonization Society and Liberia in the 19th and 20th centuries; I read period newspapers and firsthand accounts and the American Colonization Society's newsletter, and I looked at 18th and 19th century maps of Africa, and I followed leads down rabbit holes.

Where did the idea for postcard poems begin?

The postcard poems started in 2005 on a slow meandering late summer road trip from Bemidji to Vancouver, BC with the fiction writer Lauren Cobb. I'd never been a sender of postcards, but for some reason when I saw a couple of common nighthawks flying low over some railroad tracks in Hartline, WA one evening, I felt like that was some sort of gift, and I also felt the impulse to share it with the poet Nicky Beer. So that night at the hotel I wrote a poem and bought a postcard and mailed my first postcard poem the next morning.

I thought that this could be the beginning of a series. I'm a casual birder and am often seeing birds (even when not looking for them), so I decided that each poem in the series would have to take off while on a trip from a bird sighting that I felt moved to share with a friend. And, I'd have to write it and mail it before I returned home. The thing of it was trying to capture the place and the mood and the import of the moment and the relationship with the addressee—trying to figure out how to make an epistolary poem out of a postcard.

After three or so years, Lauren or I had the idea that I should write postcards to and from abstract concepts, states of being, and inanimate objects. Most of the postcard poems that ended up in the book were from this phase of the project. Ultimately, they were the ones I felt were most compelling as poems and would be most compelling for a reader.

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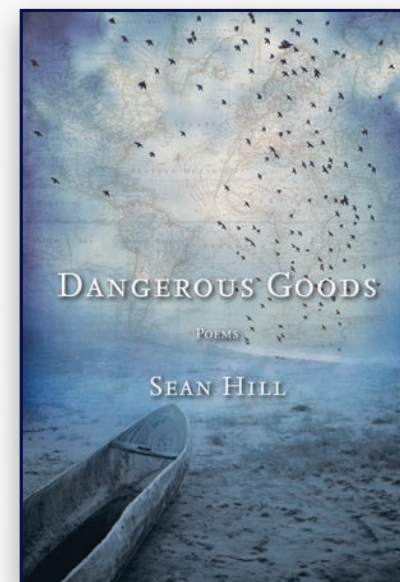


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Dangerous Goods

by Sean Hill

MILKWEED EDITIONS

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
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SUMMARY

A collection of verse on travel, distance, and history, *Dangerous Goods* features poems of reminiscence and coming of age, observations on modern life and times past. From the Bahamas, London, and Cairo, to Bemidji, Minnesota, and Milledgeville, Georgia, Hill explores the relationship between travel, migration, alienation, and home. Here, playful “postcard” poems addressed to “Nostalgia” and “My Third Crush Today” sit alongside powerful reflections on the immigration of African Americans to Liberia during and after the era of slavery. Part shadowbox, part migration map, part travelogue-in-verse, *Dangerous Goods* is poignant, elegant, and deeply moving.

Sean Hill accepts his award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were your first impressions when you read the title of this collection? What did you think it meant? Has your sense of the title changed after reading the book?
2. What are the main themes of *Dangerous Goods*? Which poems explore and express those themes best for you? Why?
3. What patterns can you identify in Hill’s writing? Are there images or subjects you see him returning to throughout the collection? What specific images stand out for you?
4. Hill employs epigraphs at the beginning of each section. How do the epigraphs affect your reading of the poems?
5. There are a series of postcard poems in the book. In which sections do these appear? What is the effect of scattering the poems throughout the book? How do these epistolary poems relate to the other series in the book? (i.e., the Liberia poems, the Bemidji poems, and the history-based Minnesota poems)
6. Describe how the natural world—birds, the seasons, meteorological occurrences, etc.—operates in these poems.
7. Specific dates, people, and historical events are major forces in this collection. Which historical threads do you find most compelling? Why? How does the use of footnotes affect your reading of the work?
8. In “Still Life with Starling and Man,” Hill writes: “Nostalgia’s a small act/of thievery from the here and now.” What are the essential ingredients of nostalgia? Do you feel nostalgia for a time and place you’ve left behind?
9. Which poem or poems do you like best? Why? What is it about the narrative, the lyric quality, the language, the imagery, and/or the structure that appeal to you?
10. What did you learn about poetry, history, or life as a result of reading this book? What does this collection make you want to read next?

ABOUT SEAN HILL



Sean Hill was born and raised in Milledgeville, Georgia, and received an MFA from the University of Houston. He has received fellowships and grants from Cave Canem, the Bush Foundation, The MacDowell Colony, the University of Wisconsin, the Jerome Foundation, and Stanford University where he was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry. His first book, *Blood Ties & Brown Liquor*, was published by the University of Georgia Press in 2008. In 2009, Hill became an editor at Broadside Press. He lives in Bemidji, Minnesota. Visit www.seanhillpoetry.com.



A map of Trans-Atlantic migration routes from the cover of *Dangerous Goods*.

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POETRY CATEGORY SPONSORED BY:
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A CONVERSATION WITH MARGI PREUS

What inspired you to write *West of the Moon*?

The story was inspired by my great-great grandmother's diary. She emigrated from Norway in 1851 and kept a diary of her experiences which I was reading (in English translation, fortunately) thinking that she might make a good subject for a novel. But when I ran across a passage on board the ship in which she hires a maid, a young girl traveling all alone with no prospects in America, I suddenly became a lot more interested in this girl, about whom very little was known.

Describe the research you undertook in writing the book.

I got to read a lot of Norwegian fairy tales which was pure pleasure. I also read other diaries and letters of Norwegian immigrants of the time, about the immigrant experience and about 19th century Norway. *Growth of the Soil* by Knut Hamsun was my constant companion while writing.

What did you enjoy most about writing this story? Did you encounter any challenges in the process?

Once I had the language of the fairy tales in me, it was fun to write with that kind of language, rhythm and pace. The biggest challenge was knowing what should happen next! My previous two novels were based on the lives of real people and so I had their real experiences to follow, but I knew next to nothing about this girl, so had to make pretty much everything up!

"I got to read a lot of Norwegian fairy tales which was pure pleasure."

What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I hope they have an enjoyable reading experience, that's my main desire. I don't really have a goal about what I want to "say" when I start out writing a novel, but in this story it turns out that my protagonist Astri has many ethically challenging

decisions to make. There are many more questions than answers in this story, I think, and I hope readers will take a little time to consider them.

"Once I had the language of fairy tales in me, it was fun to write with that kind of... rhythm and pace."

Please share a little bit about your journey to becoming a published author.

I started making up plays in kindergarten and most of my life I've been involved in theater in some capacity (including 25+ years writing for and directing *Colder* by the Lake Comedy Theatre in Duluth) but I always, always wanted to write stories. It took me a long time to figure out how to do it, I guess.

How do you most enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

Anything outside that doesn't involve sitting in front of a screen: skiing, paddling a canoe, gardening, swimming, walking in the woods.

Could you share a little about your current work or plans for a future project?

The sequel to *West of the Moon* is what I'm floundering around in right now.

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West of the Moon by Margi Preus

PUBLISHED BY AMULET BOOKS/ABRAMS

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
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SUMMARY

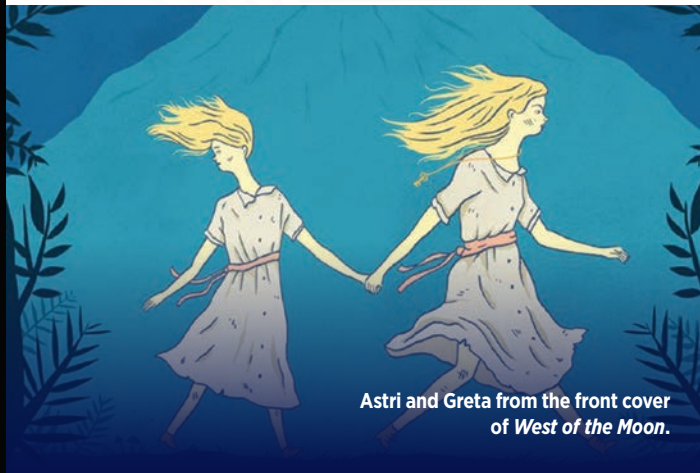
Thirteen-year-old Astri and her younger sister, Greta, long to leave Norway and be reunited with their father in America. After a daring escape from a mean goat farmer, Astri retrieves her little sister and, armed with a troll treasure, a book of spells, and a possibly magic hairbrush, the two set off for America. In this exciting tale the two girls journey across the sea on an adventure that they hope will lead them to their father—but trouble along the way threatens to separate the sisters forever.

Margi Preus accepts her award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of *West of the Moon*, the author develops a strong sense of place without naming the country or time where the novel is set. List some clues she gives in the first pages that tell you about setting.
2. Astri's aunt, who is supposed to be her guardian and protector, sells her to Svaalberd the goatman. Later, Astri goes back to rescue her sister Greta before leaving for America, even though she risks being recaptured. What do we owe to our family members? What if a family member is uncaring or mean?
3. The goatman treats Astri horribly while she lives with him. What would you have done in Astri's place? Did Svaalberd deserve what happened to him?
4. Astri makes wishes for several fairytale objects, like seven league boots or a magical ball of yarn. Although she doesn't receive these items, she does get something from each person who helps her along the way. What "gifts" is she given by the dairymaid, the farmwife, and the innkeeper? How do these gifts help her on her way?



5. Astri asks herself a lot of questions about the rightness or wrongness of things. "It isn't stealing to take something that's stolen already, is it?" she asks. And, "Is it all right to use a bad thing for a good cause?" And, "Is it a worse sin to lie to my sweet sister than to steal from a cruel master?" What are your answers to these questions?
6. Think about where Spinning Girl is when Astri and Greta leave her. How does her story end? What do you think happened to her?
7. Older passengers on the ship form relationships with both Astri and Greta, and their help makes it possible for the girls to survive in America. Would you call these adults a new family for Astri and Greta? Why? Who are some people in your life who have offered you help when you needed it most?
8. The author did very careful research to make sure the story was historically accurate. How does reading the appendix at the end of the book change or enhance your view of the story?

ABOUT MARGI PREUS



Margi Preus is a *New York Times* best-selling author of books for young readers, including *Shadow on the Mountain* and *Heart of a Samurai*, winner of a Newbery Honor and the Asian/Pacific American Award for Children's Literature. Preus has traveled the globe to research her novels and, along the way, has made friends in Japan, Norway, and many other places. She lives in Duluth, Minnesota. Visit www.margipreus.com.

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