

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Readers' Choice Award Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards
Autobiography, Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Finalist

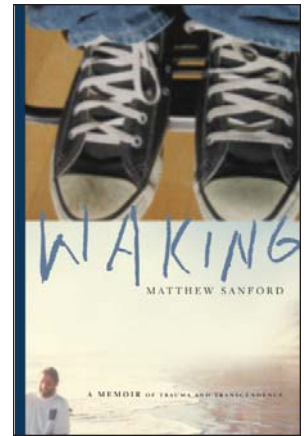
Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence **by Matthew Sanford**

Rodale, 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

Thirteen-year-old Matthew Sanford's family was returning to Duluth, Minnesota from Missouri where they spent the Thanksgiving holiday with relatives, when their car skidded on an icy road and rolled three times. Matthew's father and sister were killed in the accident which left him paralyzed from the chest down. This pivotal event set Matthew on a lifelong journey from his intensive care experiences at the Mayo Clinic to becoming a paralyzed yoga teacher and founder of a nonprofit organization. *Waking* is Matthew's story of healing and rebuilding, a journey which involves a rejection of much of what traditional medicine tells him and the turn to yoga as a core practice of his daily life.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does the author mean by silence? Give examples of silence in your own life.
 2. What is meant by the author's belief that silence both connects and disconnects us simultaneously?
 3. What is the relationship between silence and aging?
 4. How does the age and innocence of the author impact his journey of healing and self-discovery? How might his journey have been different if the car accident had occurred in his adult years?
 5. What roles do the descriptions of the body play in the narrative?
 6. What roles do the author's mother and brother play in his recovery?
 7. How has the book stretched or changed your understanding of yoga?
 8. Yoga has been a powerful, life-changing practice for the author. What other factors are key to the author's journey of transcendence? What other practices might be helpful to someone who has experienced life-changing trauma?
 9. Are there aspects of the author's life which you felt were missing from the telling of the story? If so, why do you think those pieces are missing, and was it a conscious decision on the part of the author?
 10. Does the book get you thinking about the health care system differently?
 11. The author hopes that each reader will see himself or herself in the story. In what ways do you see yourself in the story?
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A CONVERSATION WITH MATTHEW SANFORD:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I wanted to share an insight about consciousness and the mind-body relationship, one that my life has shown me over and over. My story, although extreme, is one that we all share. We all have our stories of traumas and hardships; and we are all leaving our bodies – the process of aging guarantees it. My goal was to write a book that leads the reader to see themselves in my story, to write a book that had a shared truth at its core – we all have healing to do. Like most idealistic writers, I wanted to write a book that might make a difference in the world, big or small.

Q. How long did it take you to write *Waking*?

I started the book right after my sons were born in early 2000 and finished at the end of 2004.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

I had to recount and, in many ways, relive a slew of very painful experiences. I was also writing *Waking* during a very busy time in my life, in the midst of founding the nonprofit organization, Mind Body Solutions, followed by the opening of a yoga studio in 2002.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from reading this book?

I hope they think about their own life and their own stories in new and powerful ways. I also hope that they feel new potential within their mind-body relationship. Most importantly, I hope they feel hopeful.

Q. How and when did you first decide to become a writer?

I never set out to be a writer. I have always felt that I had an insight to convey, and writing a book became one of the vehicles of my sharing. That being said, I do consider myself a writer now and not just because my book was published. Rather, I can now say that I love the writing process. It definitely helped my confidence, though, that *Waking* was published.

Q. What are you currently writing, and what inspirations do you have for future books?

I have a whole book of content that didn't make it into *Waking*. This content is more philosophical in nature, and I imagine it to become a series of intimate essays on mind, body and consciousness. I also have two books going that are more practical in nature: a guide to increasing presence with the body and a book on the intersection of yoga and disability.

ABOUT MATTHEW SANFORD:

Matthew Sanford has been exploring the intersection between mind and body since becoming paralyzed as a young teen. He is the founder of the nonprofit organization Mind Body Solutions and does motivational public speaking throughout the country on the mind-body relationship. He is a yoga instructor who specializes in adapting this practice for people living with disabilities. Sanford lives in Orono, Minnesota with his wife and son. *Waking* is his first book. For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.matthewsanford.com.



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A Reading and Discussion Guide

Autobiography, Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

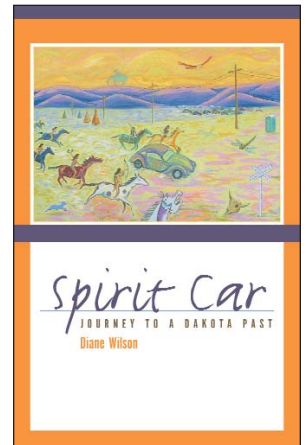
***Spirit Car: Journey to a Dakota Past* by Diane Wilson**

Borealis Books (an imprint of the Minnesota Historical Society Press), 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

Growing up in the 1950s in a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Diane Wilson experienced her family life as being like everybody else's. When she reached her thirties, however, Wilson began wondering why her mother so rarely spoke about her past. Her unanswered questions took her to South Dakota and Nebraska, where she searched out information on her maternal relatives through five generations. *Spirit Car* is the result of Wilson's quest for discovery, a book of vignettes she created in her desire to honor the lives of her Dakota Indian family. The story of Wilson's family begins with a vivid account of the 1862 Dakota War in Minnesota, and then follows the family's nomadic travels across South Dakota and Nebraska in their struggle to survive.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Compare what you learned in school about the 1862 Dakota War to the way this story unfolds. What, if anything, has changed in your understanding of this event?
2. How might the author's life have been different if she had had a strong sense of her Dakota heritage as a child?
3. Whose story is the author telling? For whom is she writing the story?
4. What impact is achieved by the Dakota Indian history being told through personal family stories? How is the effect different from reading about the same events in a history book?
5. Would Lucille's life likely have been better or more difficult without her boarding school experiences? What do you think the boarding schools represented to the Dakota Indian families?
6. Talk about what the author means when she talks about riding in her spirit car. Have you ever had a similar experience in connecting with the past?
7. Give examples of when the author uses humor in the book. What role does humor play?
8. What is the biggest loss the author is writing about? Discuss the various losses documented in the book.
9. The last sentence of the book is the author's response to her mother, Lucille: "Yes, I think things are changing for the better." What do the author and Lucille mean by this statement?
10. In thinking about your own family, do you know how and why they came to America (if non-Native)? Do you know of any significant history your family members lived through, such as wars or depressions or world-changing inventions like the telephone?
11. What is the value of understanding and having connection to one's family over several generations? How might learning about something significant and troubling in your family's history change you?
12. The book jacket describes the book as a counterpoint of memoir and carefully researched fiction. What is your understanding of the term "carefully researched fiction", and do you think this technique adds or detracts from the cohesiveness of the book? Do the stories we tell about our own lives incorporate some degree of fiction?

A CONVERSATION WITH DIANE WILSON:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

My inspiration was a story my mother told me about being left by her family at the Holy Rosary mission school on the Pine Ridge reservation. I grew up in a suburb of Minneapolis, which is a long way from the Pine Ridge reservation. As I was raising my own daughter, I started wondering about my mother's story. I followed my family's trail back four generations and discovered a much larger story—that of the Dakota people—which became the framework for the book. It's also a story of rediscovering cultural identity, and how this search changed my family.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing *Spirit Car*?

With support from the Minnesota Historical Society and the Jerome Foundation, I spent weeks in South Dakota traveling between research sites and reservations, visiting mission schools, and digging up shirttail relatives. I interviewed everyone I could find and absorbed the details of the land, especially the colors and the horizon line. I also interviewed my mother and three aunts about growing up in reservation boarding schools.

Q. What do you hope your readers take away from reading this book?

People have told me that reading a family story has helped them understand Native history because they can relate to events on a personal level rather than at a state or national level, as history is often written. I hope they see how the past lives on in the present, how an event like the 1862 Dakota War in Minnesota is very much a part of our contemporary lives. I also hope they see the beauty and wonder of their own family stories and how much we're shaped by the generations who came before us.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I've always loved reading, devouring hundreds and hundreds of comic books when I was a kid. When a 7th grade teacher read my humor assignment out loud to the class as an example of how not to write the essay, it very nearly ended my writing career for good. Eventually I found my way back to writing because it's my way of understanding the world. Reading good books, taking occasional classes, and working with mentor Cheri Register helped me learn how to write – as did lots and lots of rewriting.

Q. What are you currently writing?

The next book will be a progression of some of the themes in *Spirit Car*, although it won't be a family memoir. I found myself wondering, when a person/community has done the work of reclaiming cultural identity, what's next? How do you restore what was lost, how do you heal the traumas of the past, how do you assume responsibility for the knowledge that was given? I believe the answer to those questions is closely tied to our relationship to the land, to the earth.

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

Tending the garden, reading, walking the dog, listening to the birds and the wind, kayaking.

ABOUT DIANE WILSON:

Diane Wilson is a creative nonfiction writer whose essays and memoir use personal experience to illustrate broader social and historical context. Her work has been published in many local publications including *The American Indian Quarterly*, *Minnesota Women's Press*, and the *Pioneer Press*. *Spirit Car* is her first book. In addition to her writing, Wilson works as an arts administrator in Shafer, Minnesota, the community where she lives with her artist husband, Jim Denomie. She is a master gardener who maintains a large butterfly garden filled with native plants. Wilson also helps organize the biennial Dakota Commemorative March on the Lower Sioux reservation. For more information about the author, visit www.wilsonwords.com.



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A Reading and Discussion Guide

Poetry Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

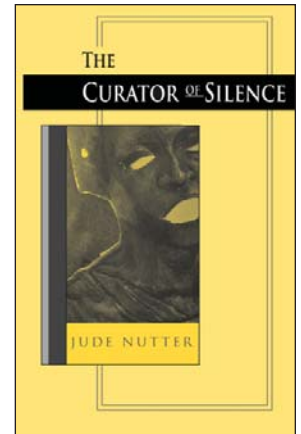
***The Curator of Silence* by Jude Nutter**

University of Notre Dame Press, 2007

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

Jude Nutter's vision for *The Curator of Silence* was solidified during the two months she spent living in the Antarctic, surrounded by profound silence. In this collection, the author explores the many types of silence as well as the kinds of human experience which enliven, threaten, and sometimes deepen that silence. Nutter considers both literal and obvious silences such as death, abandonment and loneliness, and the silences that are more mysterious and paradoxical in nature, such as the (mis)perceptions of childhood, the isolation of Antarctic explorers, and the seemingly distant, and often fearsome, lives of animals.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Talk about the first poem, "To the Reader." To what extent is this poem successful in engaging you, and how does it set the tone for the rest of the book?
 2. What is the significance of the title of the book, specifically of the use of the word "curator"? What is your understanding of this particular poem?
 3. How does the final poem, "Crow," speak to you? Why do you think this was selected as the last poem in the collection, and to what extent does it provide closure?
 4. Give examples of the types of silence that the collection explores. What key messages or themes about silence does the author communicate?
 5. The two months the author spent in the Antarctic, a place of deep silence and solitude, solidified her theme of silence for the collection. What has been your deepest or greatest experience of silence?
 6. What themes, besides silence, do the poems address? What connections or relationships exist among the poems?
 7. What emotions, images or memories does the collection conjure up for you?
 8. To what extent do you experience the collection as a cohesive or seamless work? Do all of the poems work for you as part of the collection, and if not, which ones seem out of place?
 9. Which poem in the collection speaks most directly to you, and why?
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A CONVERSATION WITH JUDE NUTTER:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I had been writing poems that circled around the idea of silence for a long time. I am interested in how language fails and betrays us, as well as in how it saves us. My trip to the Antarctic in 2004 really cemented the theme for me, even though the Antarctic work was not a prominent presence in the collection.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *The Curator of Silence*?

I didn't face any challenges specific to the collection itself. The challenges were those I face on a daily basis as a poet: struggling with language, matching content and form, listening to the individual poem and having the courage to go where it leads. Simply dealing with my own doubts and insecurities as an artist is a huge and constant challenge, as is maintaining one's belief that art really can change the world.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from reading your book?

I hope they will see that poetry is not an "elite" art form; that it does require work and patience, but that close reading pays off. I consider myself a narrative poet and believe in creating a poem that holds together and delivers an emotional truth. I am not interested in fragmented, elliptical poetry as I think the world is already fragmented. I hope that readers will discover a place to rest in the poems – find a "momentary stay against confusion."

Q. What do you like most about *The Curator of Silence*?

This is a tough question! Obviously, I am attached to all my poems. I am thrilled to see the poems all together and am constantly finding new connections and relationships between them. This, I think, is the real joy: the collection, any collection, is dynamic and is always offering up new surprises. Clearly, the production and layout of the book are superb. The University of Notre Dame staff did a spectacular job and were a joy to work with!

Q. How and when did you first decide to become a writer?

I never consciously decided to become a writer. I think it was decided for me, by default. Words became my medium for understanding the world and my place in it. I wrote to find out what I did (and didn't) know and what I felt. It was, and is, the only activity that made sense to me, and it gives my life depth and meaning.

When I think back, poetry has always been a presence in my life and I cannot imagine existing without it.

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

I walk, a lot. "I loaf and invite my soul," as Whitman said. Much of my time is spent reading, teaching, and connecting with other writers, all things which I greatly enjoy. My friends are very precious to me, so I make sure I have time and energy for them.

ABOUT JUDE NUTTER:

Jude Nutter was born in North Yorkshire, England and grew up in northern Germany. She currently resides in Edina, Minnesota. Nutter's poems have appeared in numerous international journals and anthologies and have received several national and international awards. *The Curator of Silence* is her second book-length collection and was the 2007 poetry winner of both the Minnesota Book Award and the Ernest Sandeen Prize. Nutter's first collection, *Pictures of the Afterlife*, was published in 2002. She is a writing instructor at The Loft Literary Center.



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A Reading and Discussion Guide

Children's Literature Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

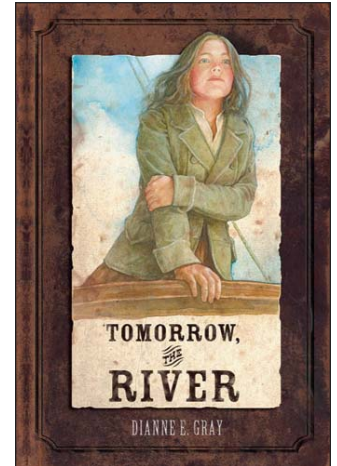
***Tomorrow, the River* by Dianne E. Gray**

Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

Tomorrow, the River is the tale of fourteen-year-old Megan Barnett, who in the late 1800s travels by train from Nebraska to Iowa. There she joins her sister's family on a Mississippi riverboat for a summer of river travel. From the time Megan boards the train, her summer adventure begins with meeting a parade of interesting characters – some of whom are not what they seem. She is relieved to join her sister's family on the riverboat, *Oh My*, but quickly learns that river travel can be fraught with danger – both on the boat and off.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Newspaper articles are scattered throughout the book. Why do you think the author chose to incorporate them? In what ways do they add to and/or detract from your experience in reading the book?
2. Does Megan strike you as a typical fourteen-year-old? Give examples of when she does and/or doesn't.
3. How might Megan's character and story be different if the story took place 100 years later?
4. What is the significance of Megan's interest in photography?
5. What, if anything, surprises you about Megan's relationship with Horace?
6. What clues are given that Doc isn't the person he pretends to be? Have you ever had an encounter or relationship with someone who wasn't what he or she appeared to be?
7. The author confesses that she's very fond of the character Megan but that she's totally in love with the riverboat, *Oh My*. What do you think the boat represents? Why do you think the author is so attached to *Oh My*?
8. In the book Megan asks herself, "Did one make their own luck, or did luck simply happen?" What are your thoughts on this question, both in terms of the book and your own life experiences?
9. As the novel unfolds, Megan learns that many of the rules governing a young woman's behavior, such as wearing long skirts, "sink like rocks when it comes to the river." What other examples of such rules are given in the book? Can you think of rules that exist for young people today that cause similar hindrances?
10. How do you believe Megan's summer of train and river travel adventures changes her?
11. If you had a whole summer to set aside for adventure, where and how would you choose to travel? Would you be open to the kinds of unexpected and sometimes dangerous experiences that Megan encounters?

A CONVERSATION WITH DIANNE GRAY:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I have lived in the Mississippi River town of Winona, Minnesota since 1995. One cannot live so close to this great river and not be enthralled, intrigued, and awe-struck by its ever-changing beauty—and its illustrious history! A novel set on the river was inevitable.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing *Tomorrow, the River*?

This book required an enormous amount of research. Among the topics were riverboat construction, steam powered engines, the pearl button industry, early photography, river navigation, railway travel, 1890s medical practices, upper Mississippi's natural history (birds, fish, etc.), and cultural norms and expectations for young women in the late 1800s.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Of my three novels, this is the first one with an adventure theme where the protagonist is on the move through much of the story. The main challenge for me was in the pacing. I had to ask myself, "How much time should Megan spend in any given place before moving on?" and "When and where should the tension peak and resolve?"

Q. What do you like most about this book?

I'm really fond of Megan, but I'm totally in love with the riverboat, *Oh My*. If I had the money, I'd have her built and then spend my summers plying the waters of the Mississippi River.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I first discovered my passion for writing when working on my master's degree at Hamline University. During the course I took from novelist Mary Rockcastle entitled "Writing from the Roots," I wrote a six-page fictional piece about four young women in a prairie meadow. This was for an assignment where we were to write from a place in childhood. Mary read the piece and said, "I think you have the beginnings of a book, a children's

book. Keep writing." By the time I finished the program, I'd written the draft of my first novel.

Q. What are you planning to write next?

My next writing project will be a new direction for me – contemporary fiction instead of historical. All I will say at this point is that there is a mother, a daughter, and a 1976 Winnebago motor home.

ABOUT DIANNE GRAY:

Dianne Gray lives with her husband in the Mississippi River town of Winona, Minnesota, the setting which inspired her third novel for young readers – *Tomorrow, the River*. She grew up on the flat plains of rural Nebraska, the setting of her first two novels for young people. Gray discovered her passion for writing as a student in the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Hamline University. In the author's words, she and her husband have two wonderful daughters, two "way cool" sons-in-law, and three charming grandsons.

Gray's other novels are:

Together Apart, 2002; and

Holding Up the Earth, 2000.

For more information about the author and her work, visit www.prairievoices.com.



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A Reading and Discussion Guide

Genre Fiction Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

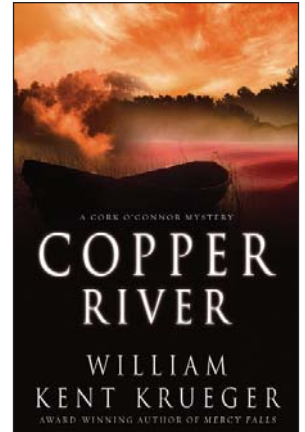
***Copper River* by William Kent Krueger**

Atria Books, 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

Copper River, William Kent Krueger's sixth novel in the award winning Cork O'Connor series, finds the protagonist running for his life from professional hit men who have already put a bullet through his leg. Desperate, he finds sanctuary outside a small town called Bodine, on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, in an old resort owned by his cousin, Jewell DuBois. Though Jewell, a bitter widow whose husband may have been killed by cops, keeps Cork at arm's length, her fourteen-year-old son, Ren, is looking for a friend. When the body of a young girl surfaces along the banks of the Copper River and another teenager vanishes, Cork must choose between helping to solve these deadly mysteries and thwarting the hit men who draw closer to him with every hour.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Talk about the story's setting. Why do you think the author chose this particular setting?
3. Comment on Ren and Charlie's relationship. What strikes you as typical about this teen relationship, and what, if anything, do you find unusual about it?
4. What is the cougar's purpose in the story, and what does the animal represent?
5. Discuss your understanding of Cork and Dina's relationship. Does anything surprise you about their relationship? Do you expect their relationship to continue beyond *Copper River*?
6. What did you experience as the biggest unexpected twists or developments in the story?
7. If you haven't read *Mercy Falls*, the precursor to *Copper River*, do references to events that took place in the previous book bother you? Do you think your experience reading *Copper River* would be richer if you read *Mercy Falls* first?
8. If you have read other Cork O'Connor novels, talk about your understanding of how the character has developed through the series. What do you find most interesting about Cork in *Copper River*?
9. Is the story effective in getting you to think more about society's abandoned and homeless children?
10. When you think about the elements that make a really good mystery, what are they, and to what extent are they woven into *Copper River*?

A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER:

Q. What inspired you to write *Copper River*?

Copper River is the sixth book in the Cork O'Connor series, but actually the second book in a two-part story, the first part of which is told in my previous novel, *Mercy Falls*. What inspired me to write a two-book story? I loved the idea of the challenge!

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

Copper River is set in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) of Michigan, so I did a lot of research in the U.P. Also, because a cougar is significant to the plot, I read a good deal about this interesting wild creature. As always, I talked to a lot of cops.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Because it's the second in a two-part story but still has a story of its own to tell, I was faced with the daunting task of referencing the holdover problems from the first book without slowing the pace of the events in *Copper River*. Also, a couple of teenagers are at the center of the story, and teenagers are always a challenge for me to write about.

Q. What do you hope your readers take away from reading this book?

There is an issue at the heart of *Copper River*: a concern over the children in our society whom we lose track of, turn our backs on, neglect. They're often lost to us forever. I hope readers think about this deeply when they close the book.

Q. What do you like most about *Copper River*?

I love the two kids, Ren and Charlie, around whom the story revolves. They were so much fun to create and spend time with. I also enjoyed using the U.P. as a setting. Because all my other books are set in northern Minnesota, this was a refreshing change of pace.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

My parents always read to me. As a result, I grew up loving stories and wanting to be one of the

storytellers. Although my first novel wasn't published until I was 48 years old, for 25 years before that I wrote every day, passionately, because I loved the process. I still do. I write in a coffee shop first thing every morning, and again every afternoon. That's my ritual and what it produces feels to me like magic.

ABOUT WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER:

William Kent Krueger was born in Torrington, Wyoming, the third of four children whose parents convinced them they had gypsy blood flowing through their veins. Before he graduated from high school, Krueger lived in eleven different houses, in eight different cities, in six different states. For more than 20 years Krueger has made his home in Saint Paul, Minnesota with his wife and two children. He spends his mornings writing at a neighborhood café. Krueger has won several awards for his writing, and *Copper River* is his eighth published novel. His other recent books include:

Thunder Bay, 2007

Mercy Falls, 2005

Blood Hollow, 2004

The Devil's Bed, 2003

For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.williamkentkrueger.com.



Photo by Meghan Calzaretta



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A Reading and Discussion Guide

General Nonfiction Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

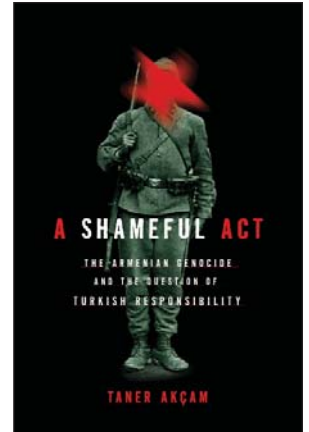
***A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* by Taner Akçam**

Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

Beginning in 1915, under cover of a World War, some one million Armenians were killed through starvation, forced marches, forced exile, and mass acts of slaughter. Although Armenians, history, and world opinion have held the Ottoman powers responsible, Turkey has – for the past 90 years – rejected any claim of genocide. In his pioneering work, *A Shameful Act*, Taner Akçam has made extensive and unprecedented use of Ottoman and other sources, as well as earlier studies by Armenian researchers, to produce a thorough account of Ottoman culpability.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your understanding of the Armenian genocide before reading *A Shameful Act*? How does the book enhance or change your understanding of this history?
2. Does the book provide all the background information you need to follow and understand the documented sequence of events?
3. Talk about the extent to which sources are documented in the book. In what ways and to what extent was this documentation helpful?
4. A goal of the author and his editor was to give *A Shameful Act* broad appeal beyond academia. Are they successful in accomplishing this goal? How do you think the book would have been written or organized differently if it had been intended for an academic audience only?
5. What specific events documented in *A Shameful Act* do you find most fascinating and/or horrific?
6. What past and current situations in other countries does the Armenian genocide parallel?
7. The Turkish government continues to reject any claim of genocide. What makes it possible for the country's modern day government to continue the denial?
8. The author has experienced many social injustices as a result of his writing, including imprisonment and torture in Turkey as a young man and receiving death threats in response to *A Shameful Act*. Why do you think the author chooses to write from a purely historical perspective, and does this approach surprise you at all given his personal experiences?
9. What impact do you think and hope *A Shameful Act* might have?
10. If you were going to spend several months or years researching and writing about an event or series of historical events, what event(s) would you choose, and why?

A CONVERSATION WITH TANER AKÇAM:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

My firm belief in justice for all people was instilled in me early on in life. Human rights for all is a very important moral principle which I take very seriously. What ultimately inspires me to do the research and writing that I do is my commitment to uncovering and telling the truth in order to help bring about positive change in the world.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *A Shameful Act*?

One of the challenges in writing a book of this nature is that the research must be exhaustive. I love that challenge as I am passionate about confirming facts from multiple sources and helping to solve an important question or puzzle. Writing *A Shameful Act* was challenging in that my publisher and I wanted the book to have broad appeal beyond the audience of academia for which I've typically written.

Q. What rewards and challenges have resulted from the publishing of your book?

I am very grateful that my book has received the positive national and international attention that it has. To receive major media attention and to have one's book reviewed in publications such as *The New Yorker* and *Publishers Weekly* is very unusual for a scholarly writer like me, and truly an honor. To be recognized in the state where I live through winning a Minnesota Book Award was a real surprise and also a great honor.

On the flip side, writing on the topic of Armenian genocide was a dangerous undertaking. I have been harassed and persecuted by Turkish authorities and Turkish American groups – even received death threats. The positive response that my book has received from other sources has helped validate and affirm that *A Shameful Act* is a very important work and that I have done something valuable in writing it.

Q. How did you decide to become a writer?

I didn't intentionally set out to be a researcher and writer – it just evolved. I was born in Turkey in 1953 on the Russian border, and my dream as a young boy was to become a medical doctor. However, at the time I entered university, economics was a hot topic, and that's what I ended up studying. At the age of 22, I was sent to prison for my involvement in producing a student journal focused on Turkey's treatment of the Kurdish minority. After several months of being imprisoned, I was able to escape to Germany.

Once in Germany, I began working as a research scientist at Hamburg Institute and eventually received my PhD from Hanover University with a dissertation entitled

Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide: On the Background of the Military Tribunals in Istanbul between 1919 and 1922. My work as a published writer actually grew out of my work on my PhD.

Q. What do you like most about living in Minnesota?

This is a warm and welcoming community. Although I enjoyed my time in Germany, I never felt like I quite belonged. In Minnesota I don't feel like an outsider, I feel at home. I've lived in Minnesota since 2002.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not researching and writing?

I love listening to jazz, attending Minnesota Orchestra concerts, and hiking – particularly in mountainous areas. One wonderful thing I've come to know and love in the United States is the study and drinking of wine.

ABOUT TANER AKÇAM:

Taner Akçam, a sociologist and historian, was born in Ardahan province, Turkey, in 1953. He was granted political asylum in Germany after receiving a ten-year prison sentence in Turkey for his involvement with a student journal, which resulted in his adoption in 1976 by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota and is a professor at the University of Minnesota. Akçam is the author of ten scholarly works of history and sociology, as well as numerous articles in Turkish, German and English. Recent books by the author include:

From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide, 2004

Dialogue Across an International Divide: Essays Towards a Turkish-Armenian Dialogue, 2001



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This reading guide was made possible through a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Novel & Short Story Winner, 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

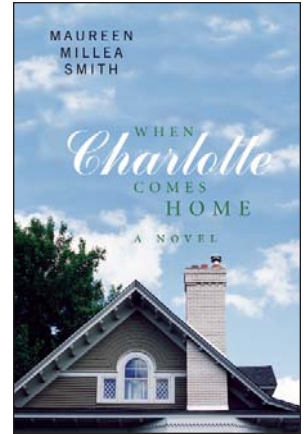
***When Charlotte Comes Home* by Maureen Millea Smith**

Alyson Books, 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

When Charlotte Comes Home is the story of Fred Holly, the oldest of four children, set in Omaha, Nebraska in the 1960s and '70s. During his senior year in high school, Fred works part-time at the Omaha art museum where, surrounded by beauty, he escapes his father's worries about the Vietnam War and the draft. As fall progresses, Fred becomes jealous when his best friend starts spending most of his time with his male debate coach, and then Fred's precocious eleven-year-old sister, Charlotte is admitted to the hospital with kidney problems. As Charlotte's condition worsens, great sadness descends upon the Holly household. The story follows Fred into adulthood where he continues to search for self-discovery and to understand his family's loss.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the significance of Fred starting his life story with, "It began with the colic. Charlotte was born with the colic"?
2. Describe Fred and Charlotte's relationship. Do you think Fred would have experienced the loss of Charlotte differently if their relationship had been less conflicted?
3. Why do the children call their father Morgan instead of Dad?
4. What role does the sixties play in the novel?
5. In what ways is Laurence special? Describe his relationship with Charlotte, Fred and Morgan.
6. Describe Charlotte and Hetty's relationship. In what ways is their relationship a typical childhood relationship? What strikes you as unusual about their relationship?
7. The book touches on many losses besides the loss of Charlotte's life. What are some of those losses, and how do they impact the lives of Fred and other family members?
8. What role does Fred's homosexuality play in the novel?
9. In what ways does the museum provide an escape for Fred, and from what is he escaping? Describe other ways in which Fred finds escape.
10. When the author was ten years old, she experienced the death of her sister who was older by one year. She explains that the book grew stronger when she diverged from the facts of her own life. Why do you think this was the case?
11. What is the significance of the book's title? Describe your understanding of Charlotte coming home.
12. Does the ending bring closure to the story, and how?

A CONVERSATION WITH MAUREEN MILLEA SMITH:

Q. What inspired you to write *When Charlotte Comes Home*?

The death of my older sister in 1968 inspired the novel. She was eleven years old and I was ten years old. Her death changed the storyline of my family's life. In my grief, I became a passionate reader. I began to understand life through stories.

Q. How long did it take you to write the book?

I began writing about these characters in 1996. One draft was my thesis in 2000. I completely rewrote the book after two revisions. It was a solid manuscript in 2003. Altogether the book took seven years.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *When Charlotte Comes Home*?

The book grew stronger when I diverged from the facts of my life. It became "truer" as it developed into a more fully realized universe of fiction.

Q. What do you like most about the book?

I like the setting, which is the setting of my childhood. I was fascinated with the sixties. I was a child when it happened, but I remember how turbulent and sad and dramatic and romantic it was. That I remember so much attests to the fact that I was merely a child observing adults, watching with awe and shock the evening news and reading the front page of *The Omaha World Herald*.

Q. Please share some of your journey in becoming a writer.

Writing was something that I enjoyed as a teenager. It was one of the few things that two of my teachers in college affirmed. My writing voice and speaking voice have nothing to do with one another. They are as different as night and day. I did an M.F.A. at Hamline University to learn the craft of fiction and to establish the habit of writing. It is like learning a sport. It takes discipline.

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

I talk to my husband and daughter, clean house, take walks, and read the *New York Times* and *Minneapolis Star Tribune* over my morning coffee every day before going to work at the Edina Library. I pray for peace for everyone every day. I talk to our cat. I fall behind in emails. I check in with family and friends, and read before bed.

ABOUT MAUREEN MILLEA SMITH:

Maureen Millea Smith is a native of Omaha, Nebraska. A graduate of the University of Wyoming in Laramie, she received her M.A. in Library Science from the University of Iowa. Smith's first published book, *When Charlotte Comes Home*, began as her thesis project for her M.F.A., which she received from Hamline University. She is a librarian with the Hennepin County system and lives in Edina, Minnesota with her husband and daughter.



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A Reading and Discussion Guide

Young Adult Literature Winner – 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

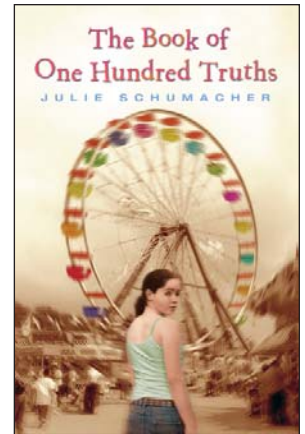
***The Book of One Hundred Truths* by Julie Schumacher**

Delacorte Press, 2006

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Made possible by a grant from the Office of State Library Services – Minnesota Department of Education.

SUMMARY:

At the end of chapter one, *The Book of One Hundred Truths*' young protagonist reveals an important truth: "I should probably mention something right now, before this story goes any further: my name is Theodora Grumman, and I am a liar." Thea's mother gives her a notebook and instructs her to write four truths in it each day, something which is hard to do, especially when her grandparents' house on the Jersey Shore where she's visiting for the summer is even more packed with relatives than usual. To top it off, Thea's seven-year-old nosy cousin, Jocelyn keeps trying to figure out what's in the notebook. The summer gets even more interesting when Thea discovers that she isn't the only family member who doesn't always tell the truth.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways is Thea a typical child? What strikes you as unusual about Thea?
 2. Which of the characters in the novel should the reader trust, and why?
 3. How and why does spending time with Jocelyn change Thea?
 4. Discuss Thea's relationship with each of these family members: her mother, father, grandmother, aunts Ellen and Celia, and cousins Liam and Austin. In what ways do these relationships present conflict, and what positive impact do they have on Thea?
 5. How and when does Thea's maturity show, and when is she the naïve or immature child?
 6. In what ways is Thea, an only child, changed by her reaction to the chaos of her extended family?
 7. What impact has Thea's relationship with Gwen had on her, and what is significant about the way in which the author reveals the nature of the relationship?
 8. How would you describe Thea's summer?
 9. What is the significance of the author introducing other liars into the story?
 10. What benefits does Thea receive from her practice of writing down truths? Is Thea likely to write more than 100 truths?
 11. What, ultimately, is the author's message about the practice of lying?
-

A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE SCHUMACHER:

Q. What inspired you to write *The Book of One Hundred Truths*?

I write books for younger readers in just the same way that I write for adults: I don't begin by asking, "What should my readers learn?" but by asking, "What am I interested in?" As C.S. Lewis wrote, "We can be sure that what does not concern us deeply will not deeply interest our readers, whatever their age." In the case of *The Book of One Hundred Truths*, I was interested in liars and the various reasons that people tell lies.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

I rode a bicycle on the boardwalk in Ocean City, New Jersey. Like my protagonist Thea, I grew up in a family of eccentrics and told a lot of tall tales as a child.

Q. How long did it take you to write the book?

I spent about six months writing *The Book of One Hundred Truths* and a year and a half on revisions.

Q. What do you like most about the book?

I love boardwalks and I love the ocean, so I enjoyed writing about them. I also became very fond of the characters, particularly Jocelyn. I'm always drawn to books because of the lives of the characters within them. When I write, I become attached to my own characters in a very similar way.

Q. How and when did you decide to become a writer?

I've always written things down in order to better understand them. Writing is my way of fully experiencing the things I'm thinking and doing. When something bothers me, makes me curious, or sticks in my craw – I write it down.

Q. What are you currently writing?

I'm working on two novels for older teenagers. Both are a bit "darker" and more intimidating than my other books for younger readers.

ABOUT JULIE SCHUMACHER:

Julie Schumacher was born in Wilmington, Delaware, the fifth of five daughters. Before becoming a writer, she worked as an ice cream store clerk (she was fired for not knowing how to make a banana split), a legal secretary, and an associate editor for medical magazines.

Schumacher's first published story, "Reunion," was included in *The Best American Short Stories 1983*. Since then, she has published several short stories and books and writes for both adult and younger audiences.

Schumacher is an associate professor of English at the University of Minnesota. She lives in Saint Paul with her husband and their two daughters. Prior to *The Book of One Hundred Truths*, Schumacher published these books for younger readers:



The Chain Letter, 2005

Grass Angel, 2004

For additional information about the author and her work, visit www.julieschumacher.com.



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