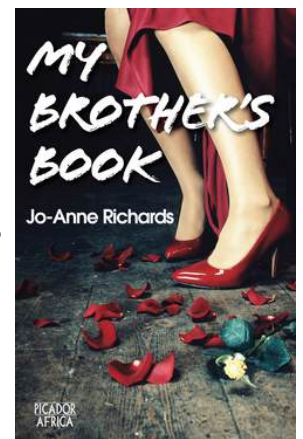


My Brother's Book Press Clippings



Acclaimed author heads home to launch new book

Khanyi Ndabeni
HERALD REPORTER

INTERNATIONALLY acclaimed author and former Weekend Post and Evening Post journalist Jo-Anne Richards has released her fifth book, *My Brother's Book*.

"It is a novel which tells a story of betrayal and atonement that spans the lives of two siblings from their nomadic childhood in the Eastern Cape in the 1960s to their adulthood in 2004 in Johannesburg," said Richards, who is to launch the book in Port Elizabeth next week.

"I'm very excited about launching this book in my hometown," she said.

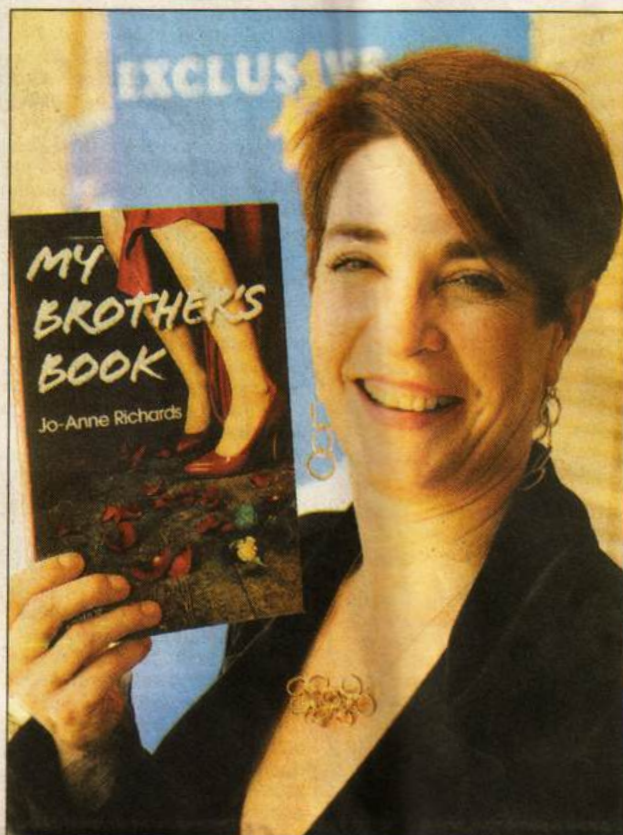
Born and bred in Mill Park, Port Elizabeth, Richards – who is the younger sister of Nelson Mandela Bay municipal manager Graham Richards – matriculated at Collegiate High School. She studied journalism at Rhodes University before joining the former Evening Post and Weekend Post as a journalist in the 1980s.

She became an author in the early 1990s. "All my books are novels and they tell true stories of South African people. Most of the books are set in the Eastern Cape even though I left in the late 80s," she said.

Her first novel, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, topped the South African bestseller list in 1996 in the first week it was released and remained there for 15 weeks. It was chosen as a Dillons' Debut Novel in Britain and showcased for a month as an "outstanding first novel". The book was also nominated for the international Impac Dublin Literary Award in 1996.

Richards is a journalism lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand.

My Brother's Book will be launched at Exclusive Books in Walmer Park on July 2.



WRITE ON ... Former Port Elizabeth journalist Jo-Anne Richards will launch her fifth book, *My Brothers Book*, in Port Elizabeth on July 2.

daarin, skitter. Maar dan soos wat sterre maar nog altyd doen.

Resensent: Charl-Pierre Naudé

BOEKE-INSIG SÊ: 'n Vermaarde vakman wat liefhebbers van konvensionele poësie nie sal teleurstel nie. Maar moenie soek vir aardskud-dende oorspronklikheid nie.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo



Stieg Larsson
Quercus (R179)

OPENINGSIN: "It happened every year, it was almost a ritual."

DIE STORIE: Henrik Vanger se kleinliggie Harriet het in 1966 verdwyn en hy stel

30 jaar later vir Mikael Blomkvist, 'n joernalis, aan om uit te vind wat van haar geword het. Blomkvist gaan woon vir 'n jaar op Hedeby, die eiland waar van die Vangers laer getrek het, onder die voorwendsel dat hy 'n biografie oor Henrik skryf. Halfpad deur die boek sluit Lisbeth Salander, 'n mishandelde jong meisie en 'n behendige kuberkraker, haar by Blomkvist aan en dié onpaar span saam.

MENING: Die oënskynlik lig-in-die-broek-storie word oor 533 bladsye ingekleur, uitgereken en lekker sappig opgedis – en in die proses skaar Stieg Larsson hom by die lys van Swede wat die wêreld telkens oorrumpel en die hoogspringlat 'n raps hoër stel.

Soos gesoute aanhangers van goeie speurverhale weet, lê die lekker van die lees dikwels nie in die raaisel nie, maar in die karakters. Larsson se Blomkvist is 'n effens wanaangespaste dog gere-spekteerde speurjoernalis by 'n finansiële tydskrif, en ons ontmoet hom wanneer hy teen die toue is: gedagvaar weens laster. Henrik Vanger oorreed hom om sy kleinliggie se verdwyning te ondersoek deur inligting oor die nyweraar wat hom dagvaar soos 'n wortel voor sy neus te hou. Die meisie met die tatoeëermerk is Lisbeth Salander: intens privaat, liggaamlik uitgebuit en met 'n meesleurende drang om selfbehoud. Lisbeth se band met Blomkvist herinner aan dié van 'n optelhomd met sy weldoener.

Die oorspronklike Sweedse, myns insiens sterker, titel van die boek is *Mans wat vroue gehaat het*, 'n verwysing na een van die temas van die boek en een van Larsson, 'n voormalige joernalis, se belangstellings: vrouemishandeling en slagoffers se wil om te oorleef.

Dat Larsson self 'n raaisel is – kort voordat dié eerste boek in die trilogie gepubliseer is, is hy aan 'n hartaanval dood – mag deels vir die sukses van dié roman verantwoordelik wees, maar ek gaan vir Blomkvist en sy afvlerk-spanmaat

mis soos ek vir John Rebus mis.

Resensent: Erla Rabe

BOEKE-INSIG SÊ: Ons tel die slapies totdat *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, die tweede boek in die reeks, hier uitgereik word.

The One That Got Away



Zoë Wicomb
Umuzi (R152)

OPENINGSIN: "Grant Fotheringay is at a loose end."

DIE STORIES: 'n Bundel kortverhale waarin verskillende karakters hulle in kultureel verbysterende

situasies bevind.

Die stories speel meestal in die Kaap en in Glasgow af, met Suid-Afrikaners en Skotte wat saam in verwarrende tonele beland, die teelaarde vir misverstande.

Die karakters – huiswerkers en ander werkersklasfigure, akademici en kunstenaars – skaaf in hierdie wrywingsituasies aan hulle kulturele grense en besin dan daaroor.

So, byvoorbeeld, is daar die Skotte akademikus wat in Kaapstad woon en met die tuinier se nuuskierige boekwurm-seun vriende maak. En, in 'n storie wat my aan Ivan Vladislavic se *Missing Persons* laat dink, is daar mev. Pringle wat self ook 'n bietjie wegraak en dan saam met die huishulp die huispolitiek omtower. Daar is ook die ouer, plattelandse Deborah Kleinhans wat stad toe reis om 'n jong kleinliggie met wie sy lank nie kontak gehad het nie, te ontmoet. **MENING:** Wicomb se tematiese fokus is heel interessant. In die algemeen is dit verhale waarin die karakters sukkel om alledaagse kulturele raaisels op te los. Telkens laat dié hulle verbouereerd, maar die karakters verstaan dikwels dat hierdie toestand 'n gevolg is van die botsing tussen enersyds hul eie vooroordele en insig, en andersyds verskille in kultuurnorme.

My gunsteling is "Another Story", oor Kleinhans en haar kleinliggie. Met haar gewone, plattelandse perspektief en insig bied Kleinhans 'n soms snaakse maar te alle tye vreemdende blik op alles om haar, en hier vind ek Wicomb op haar beste: die doodgewoonste karakters wat die gesofistikeerdste sekerhede katswink kan slaan.

Maar ek is onseker oor die oneweg gehalte van die verhale. Dikwels het ek in vertelraaisels verdwaal – ek moes terugblaai om tydswisselings te vind, om dubbelsinnige voornaamwoord-gebruik op te klaar, of om te wonder of dié los drade in verhale deel is van 'n postmodernistiese oop slot of nie.

Die boek sou ook kon baat by 'n noukeuriger proeflees.

Resensent: Rustum Kozain

BOEKE-INSIG SÊ: Op haar beste bly Wicomb 'n groot plesier, maar hier is sy nie altyd op haar stukke nie.

My Brother's Book



Jo-Anne Richards
Picador Africa (R164)

OPENINGSINNE: "I was born on page 23 of my brother's book. On page 52, before the whole world, I betrayed him."

DIE STORIE: Dis die Oos-Kaap van die vroeë 1970's

waarin twee jong kinders, Tom en Lily, deur Pop, hul lewensgenieter-pa met die verantwoordelike van 'n klein hondjie van die een dorp na 'n volgende gesleep word. Die kinders word groot in goedkoop dorpsotelletjies, waar Pop sy aande in die kroeg deurbring en van waar hulle middernagtelik vlug sodra dinge vir hom te warm word. Vanweë sy gluipe reputasie bly die kinders buitebeentjies in elke nuwe gemeenskap waar hulle oornag uitdop, nooit "goed genoeg" vir die wit kinders van die dorp nie, maar "dareem" vir die bruins. Lily, die jongste, beleef hierdie lewe as groot avontuur, maar Tom bou 'n bitter woede op wat hy later as anti-apartheidsaktivis uitleef en wat hy nóg later in 'n outobiografie/memoir uitstort. Lily lees dit en tree via die leser met Tom in gesprek. 'n Ou kalwerliefde van Tom, Miranda, gee ook haar perspektief op die verlede soos uitgebeeld in Tom se boek. Tussen die drie se vertellings ontvou 'n verhaal van liefde en verlies, politieke verset en verraad en 'n lewenslange soeke na versoening, boetedoening en geborgenheid.

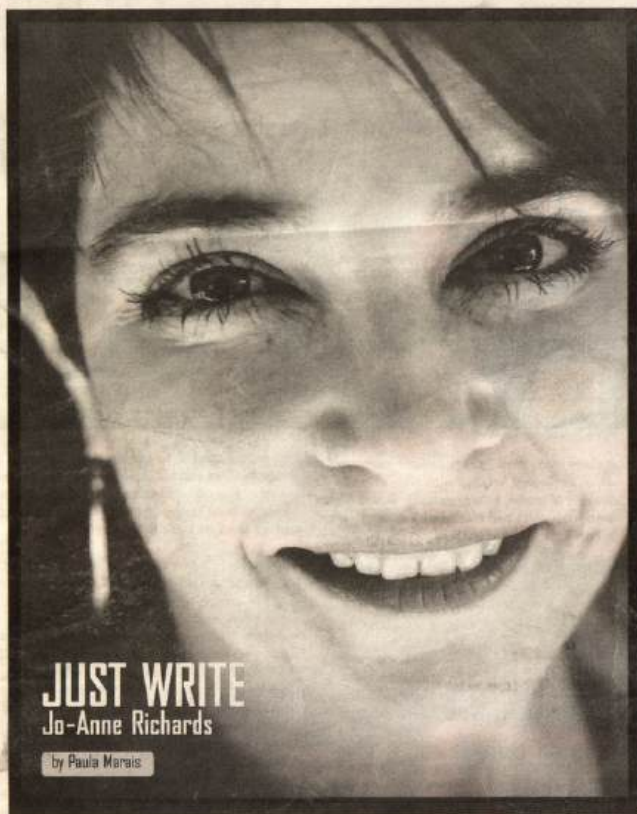
MENING: 'n Komplekse maar hoogse genotvolle verhaal oor die belewenis van waarheid binne gesins- en politieke verband. Net 'n soutpilaar sal nie aangegryp word deur Lily se hipnotiserende openingsin en haar oorrumpelende weergawe van hul verlede nie. Richards se uitstekende landskap-beskrywings en vernuftige vasvang van 'n tydsdroom spreek van 'n gedugte talent. So ook haar vermoë om 'n verhaal uit drie verskillende monde en tussen die hede en die verre verlede só oortuigend en spanningsvol te laat vlot. Enigste flenter kritiek is teen Tom se deel van die boek – veral sy verhouding met sy "broer" en mede-aktivis Melvin wat soms onoortuigend voorkom.

Resensent: Karin Brynard

BOEKE-INSIG SÊ: Skaf aan. Jy gaan nie spyt wees nie.

BOOKS

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JUST WRITE
Jo-Anne Richards

by Paula Marais

Jo-Anne Richards, the author of the highly acclaimed *Innocence of Roast Chicken*, tells Paula Marais about her latest work, *My Brother's Book*, and about how the turbulent nature of life in South Africa offers a goldmine of inspiration for writers.

Jo-Anne Richards, the author of the highly acclaimed *Innocence of Roast Chicken*, is looking forward to the launch of her latest offering, *My Brother's Book* this month. Jo-Anne always knew she wanted to

be a writer, and says she gets her greatest ideas from the settings and people around her. Says Jo-Anne, "I write about

ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances – and that's just about the whole of South Africa. It's a gift for writers." Perhaps that's why one of her favourite words is load-shedding – an absurd attempt at obscuring reality rather than reflecting it.

Jo-Anne's reality is one with very little time for hobbies. She runs the Honours Course in Journalism at Wits and takes on extra paying work because she has two kids and, as she says, academia isn't renowned for being lucrative. She's also the national chairperson of a genetic support group and the vice chair of the South African Inherited Disorders Association (SAIDA). And because Jo-Anne's has to squeeze her writing time between all of these activities, she can't afford to be precious about inspiration.

She does, however, have one requirement – she has to wear the same pants when she writes. "If they're in the wash," Jo-Anne says, "I become hysterical. I have to change out of them before I'm allowed to check my e-mails. I'm not sure

if it's superstitious or an aid to discipline." But once she's dressed appropriately and made herself a cup of tea, she forces herself to type one word and then another...

Jo-Anne describes herself as the original Polyanna, with an irrational fear of having her eyes poked out – she's not even comfortable around cacti. She grew up on everything on her parents' bookshelf, including all the Georgette Heyer novels. By the time she was fifteen, she'd read them all. Says Jo-Anne, "Even now, if I feel depressed or insecure, I get a warm feeling from returning to my old collection. I suppose it's mainly an

emotional attachment – they make me feel happy." Though she may not have believed the news initially, another of her happiest

moments was when she secured a two-book deal with the sale of her first book. But for Jo-Anne, life is also about simple pleasures – walking along Tofu beach with her partner Fred or skinny-dipping in a Magaliesberg stream.

Jo-Anne's advice to other aspiring authors is: "Just write. You're not the only person who fears gazing at your first sentence and having to admit, 'Oh my God, you've got no talent!'" She recalls her mother's reaction to her own aspirations. "Don't be silly. Writing isn't a career. Do something sensible." Says Jo-Anne, "I'm sure she was right."

Jo-Anne lives in Greenside East, in walking distance of Zoo Lake. She believes there's something edgy, but warm about Johannesburg. "People leave, people arrive, and they're absorbed in the fabric of life here, which has an instant intimacy that many big cities lack."

My Brother's Book is available from Picador Africa in all good book shops for R155.

"I write about ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances – and that's just about the whole of South Africa"

Notes on a family

JO-ANNE RICHARDS, author of local bestseller, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, has just released her fourth novel, *My Brother's Book* (Picador Africa). This is an extract

I was born on page 23 of my brother's book. On page 52, before the whole world, I betrayed him.

There was so much in between though. So many days plumped by doves roasted on fires, and fruit straight off the tree. Dusty days, doused in heat, that we explored breathlessly and well. Yes, well, you bastard. How could you have crushed all that into fewer than 30 pages?

You don't mention it, but on page 62 I tried to make amends. And again on page 110. And twice more on 243 and 285. No reason you should, I suppose.

My brother hasn't spoken to me for 30 years.

We left Cathcart in the middle of the night. That's the part of my life I remember most clearly — which just shows how differently we turned out. No one told me why we were leaving, but somehow that didn't bother me. I was used to it.

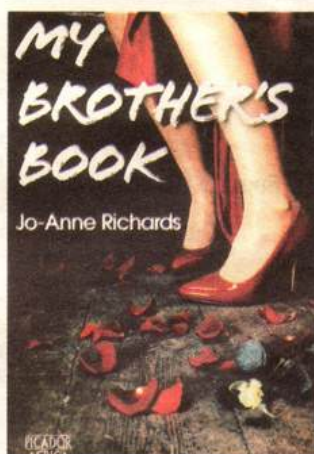
Tom woke me, shaking me with his left hand while he fought Pop over his right shoulder. Pop lifted his arms in the huge shrug he used when Tom nagged at him.

"But you never much cared for Cathcart, Tom-boy. I don't know why ..."

"That's not the point. At least we'd managed to stay here a while. We'd grown ... Lily was settling."

"It's just a village, Tom. A tiny outpost in a drought-ridden province of an old colony. The rest of the world is out there waiting for us."

Tom rubbed his arm across his face. It was all flared up with fury, especially around the pimples on his chin. He could never get rid of them,



no matter how he scrubbed at them 20 times a day.

I sat up and yawned. The boy I was crazy about was away in Port Elizabeth swimming in the provincial team. I loved him about as much as I loved Air Force Captain Borman, who was soon to orbit the moon in the riskiest space venture ever attempted.

I'd probably never know how it went now — the swimming, that is. Not that he'd have told me. But it would have filtered down from the older kids. Tom would have told me, for sure.

I did like Cathcart, although it was much more hoity-toity than Fort Beaufort. At least in Beaufort most of the kids spent their time trawling the Kat River for eel and mudfish. They ended up looking about as grubby and grazed as us.

I wonder if you still picture those small towns the way I do. Built by merchants and farmers, Cathcart was set in its ways, its solidity set in the stone of its churches. And yet, it had the whiff of something more. There was hope there, in the ethereal tracery of eaves and pediments. It whispered of a new start where life would be better, where children would grow in sturdiness and their respect of the world.

I wasn't that bothered about leaving though. There was an excitement to new starts, as the settlers of Cathcart had known. Like Pop, I was addicted

to beginnings, to the possibilities that floated like fairies in the veld. If ever you trapped one, grabbing it by the wings as it flew by, it always turned out to be a thistle seed. I still liked them, but they were better before you knew.

I'm fairly sure I was excited. I do remember that Pop gave another of his great shrugs. His shrugs had shaped in me a sense of patience with whatever fate tossed our way. I still believe it was Pop's way of saying we'd be okay, no matter what town we skipped at midnight, or new life we plunged into. He was wrong, of course. That's what you'd say. Yet I believed him.

You were always such an intense boy, your battle against teenage tears waged over dry cheeks and aching throat. I wonder why you took that move so hard. You never fitted in, in Cathcart. If you'd been a hotshot at rugby or cricket it might have been different. But your awkward lope never suited you to the heroic sports-manship of small-town life.

The night air was buttery, thick with spring, smeared with stars. Pop tucked a blanket around me as I slid across the bench seat.

"The bikes, Pop. I don't care about the other stuff. Please bring the bikes."

Pop placed a finger across his lips. He and Tom wheeled the rattly bikes almost noiselessly around the side of the Grosvenor. We'd spent the last year there among the travelling salesmen and the boarders who worked in the banks and the post office.

I watched him carry out the precious transistor. He went back one more time for Tom's pellet gun and my dictionary and scrapbook. That was okay. Now I was happy. I didn't care much for all the other stuff.

We'd become rich when we left Fort Beaufort to come here. Pop had arrived piled with gifts. He'd been away, as usual. But this time he'd come back with bikes and toys, bell-bottoms for Tom and a daisy-covered handbag for me. All that stuff, pouring down on us like a thunderstorm in summer. And now Pop free-wheeled the bakkie down the hill, leaving it all behind us.

Dynamic authors showcase their passion at Writer's Forum

Beryl Govender said, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed on and digested." That is

what the Writer's Forum produced on March 27, 2008, at the Chatsworth Education Centre. The Centre in association with The Centre for Creative Arts (UKZN), Chatsworth Circuit Office, Chatsworth Youth Centre and Chatsworth Writer's Circle held The Community Writer's Forum which was an outreach project which is part of the Time of the Writer Festival. The programme encouraged members of the community to engage in reading and writing. An invitation to the event was extended to teachers and pupils and other members of the community. Those who were present were afforded the opportunity to participate in the activities which allowed for interaction to take place. They also gained insight into the creative process and perspectives which contribute to the author's style of writing.



Ananda Devi captivates the minds of those who were present.



Mr Sam Pillay, Ananda Devi, Dayo Forster, Jo-Anne Richards, Asha Singh and Mr AJ Mottian.

Ananda Devi, Dayo Forster and Jo-Anne Richards were the three dynamic authors who were hosted. Devi, born in Mauritius in 1957, made her mark in Mauritian literature, after winning a prize in a short story competition. Her story was broadcasted on French radio and was published in an anthology. This was when her career began and now she is seen as one of the major Francophone writers from Mauritius and the Indian Ocean. She is also the author of nine novels. Forster was born in

Banjul which is the capital of Gambia. However she left home at the age of 18 to study. After the completion of her doctorate she moved to Kenya. Her background in research and science influences the way she writes. Her first novel was entitled "Reading the Ceiling, Simon and Schuster, 2007," which examines the role of chance in a young woman's life.

Richards is currently an academic coordinator in Journalism and Media Studies at Wits University. She is the author of the book entitled, "The Innocence of Roast Chicken," which topped the South African best seller list for 15 weeks.

"Each time I sit down to write, I fear that I may not be able to do it. I fear that, whatever ability I may have had, has dissipated during the night. Then, anything seems preferable to facing that fear, even tidying the linen closet, but once the words begin to flow, when they fly, I experience a sense of euphoria that would be hard to beat. Perhaps, that's why I do it. All I know is that, when I'm not writing, I lose all sense of serenity. I lose my centre," said Richards.

"A well composed book is a magic carpet on which we are wafted to a world that we cannot enter in any other way," - Caroline Gordon. Engage in the culture of reading and allow your mind to be captivated.



Close enough

Novelist and journalist Jo-Anne Richards is one of the many writers speaking at the Time of the Writer Festival which opens on Tuesday. Ingrid Shevlin asks the questions

JO-ANNE RICHARDS HIT THE jackpot with her first novel, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*. Not only did it top the South African bestseller list for 15 weeks, it was also short-listed for the M-Net Book Prize, and nominated for the Impac International Dublin Literary Award. Film rights to it have since been sold to a British production company.

Richards, who is now the convener of the Honours course in Journalism and Media studies at Wits University, earned her journalism stripes at the *Star*, the now defunct *Sunday Express* and the *Cape Times*. She has also written for such prestigious publications as *Vanity Fair* (US) and the *Guardian* (UK).

Since her first novel she has written three more. The latest, *My Brother's Book*, will be launched at the Time of the Writer Festival.

On a personal front, she grew up in Port Elizabeth, and now lives in Johannesburg with her two children, and partner, Fred de Vries, a Dutch writer and journalist.

"Luckily he writes non-fiction so we don't compete," she says, wryly.

Are you happy to be launching *My Brother's Book* at the Time of the Writer Festival?

Yes, I'm thrilled to be launching at such a prestigious festival. This is, I hope, my best book. This is how it begins:

"I was born on Page 23 of my brother's book. On Page 53, before the whole world, I betrayed him."

It's a story of betrayal and atonement – and of course, family, with all the fraught love and loss that often accompanies our closest relationships.

It follows the lives of two siblings from their nomadic East Cape childhood to their adulthood in 2004 in Johannesburg. As Lily struggles with her guilt over her careless betrayal of her brother, Tom, he writes a memoir. Both Lily and Tom's former lover take issue with the way his book remembers their pasts. The two women begin to unravel "the way it really was".

Then, as they begin unpicking, Lily uncovers a secret... I'll have to leave you there, I'm afraid.

I assume from your previous books that they are all based on your experience of living in South Africa during apartheid. I've heard this genre described as fictional autobiography or literary memoirs. Is this how you would describe your books?

No. My books are novels. Perhaps it's because I try to climb inside my characters and sometimes (but not always) write in the first person, people are always asking whether my books are memoirs.

Although I did grow up in the apartheid years, that period, and those that have followed, are just such a gift for story-tellers. I've always been fascinated by the idea of "ordinary" people, living in extraordinary circumstances. In some way, that sums up all my books.

Every writer takes a little from life, but in my books it's often the incidentals – the feel of a time, the atmosphere at a rally, the smell of coal smoke, life on a particular street.



It's not about my life, insists author Jo-Anne Richards about her writing, but 'the incidentals – the feel of a time, the atmosphere at a rally, the smell of coal smoke...'

I need to know a time, place or character inside out before I can begin to write

Sometimes I include something I've heard or seen, for example, the denouement in my first book I took from a court case I covered as a journalist for the *Cape Times*.

All my books are thoroughly researched. I need to know a time, place or character inside out before I can begin to write, otherwise I feel really constricted. I have to "climb inside them", almost become them – writing's like acting, in this way.

Even *Touching the Lighthouse*, which feels intensely real?

I take that as a compliment, though I have to say, there's nothing much personal about it at all. As I said, some of the incidentals were real. The feel of a street in Obs, the closeness of a coming-of-age

friendship... oh, and a series of letters from the young accused in a political trial... but the plot and the things that happened to them are made up and carefully researched.

Since I'm always being asked if I draw from life, I've considered planting people in Jo'burg coffee bars to whisper randomly, "How do you feel about being so thinly disguised in *My Brother's Book*?" That should sell a good few copies.

Many white South

Africans feel the shame of benefiting from apartheid. Do you – and if you do, is it cathartic to write about it?

I'm not sure. As I said, my books aren't personal, but I suppose any book is cathartic in some way. Writing should always be a "seeking to understand", rather than a way of grabbing people by the collar and forcing them to understand what you think you already know. In some way I need to explore how we came to create the society we did – and how that society in turn has affected who we are.

Most white South Africans want to forget about apartheid. So what reaction has there been to your books and your raking over the coals of the past, so to say?

I try to deal with the kinds of feelings and reactions that many of us have experienced. So, most people's reactions have tended to be positive: that they felt "exactly like" this character or that, or identified with their feelings.

What set you to writing novels? Most journalists dream of making a fortune by selling film rights, as you did with *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, but mostly it's just dreaming.

That's the trouble. It's easy to dream of it without doing it – and that was me for years. While a book remains in your head, it's always the Great South African novel. It's only when you begin that it mocks you for your tragic lack of talent. (Or so it seems when you're starting to write.)

I always, always wanted to write. But I was completely paralysed by the fear that I might look at the first word I'd written, and think: uh oh,

there goes your life's dream. You have no talent.

One day a friend of mine said, "Are you intending to carve this book in stone, or has your computer lost its delete button?" And that was it. I decided to begin, but not to judge myself on it.

What does the process of writing mean to you? Apart from the pain involved.

I don't feel quite right in the head when I'm not writing. I feel edgy and irritable. But you're right. It is painful. Every day that I sit down to write, I fear that I

won't be able to do it. I have to force myself. Some days it plods. But some days it flies, and I feel quite euphoric.

Are young people still reading? I think books and reading will survive. But the nature of "the book" may change.

We're in a state of extraordinary flux. The young people I'm in contact with do read, but their patterns have changed. We do need to encourage reading. It's incredibly important. A society that doesn't read quickly becomes insular and ignorant of everything outside of itself.

• See Time of the Writer programme on Page 5.

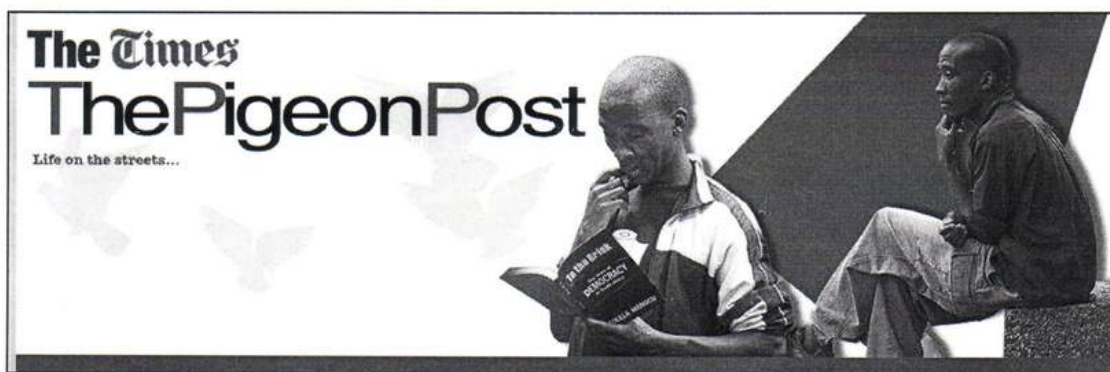
Richards's books

The Innocence of Roast Chicken: Set in an idyllic South African childhood and also a generation later, the story confronts the reality of apartheid in its death throes, while deftly evoking the beauty of the South African landscape.

Touching the Lighthouse: Looks at the intense friendships young women coming of age can form. Normal, universal experiences, but lived out under apartheid, they change the course of their lives.

Sad at the Edges: Her third book dealt with the way one's past can creep in and damage one's present if it's not faced down, and the different ways people have been affected by changes within the new society.





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A hobo at Jo-Ann Richards book launch

10 April 2008, 11:25 GMT + 2

After having been subjected to an unremittingly grim view of the country in the media, last night I felt like I needed some form of diversion. So off to the Exclusive books, which has become my favourite haunt, I went. Now this place is the antidote of my boredom and my evenings cannot be complete without it. I always sneak in here to browse through books. But even as a habitue' of this place, last night I got more than what I bargained for. I rocked up there to find that they were having a book launch without my knowledge. Look I am not complaining but as a denizen of this place I consider myself an honorary member and feel entitled to be informed about events like these.

Now it was one of those launches which are exclusive in a subtle way, where you would look at your image and automatically feel like a proverbial square-peg-in-a-round-hole without anybody saying so. No one was denied access but the forbidding eyes of the securities were so repellent. But with all the freebies that I saw, for me this was like a heaven-sent and I was not going to pass up the opportunity for anything in the world. So the Pigeon man got in posing like some black worthy. I wanted to start by socialising but, my freeloader side, prompted me to go straight to the grub and drinks. And here I was spoiled for choice in terms of food, so I picked anything which took my fancy. There was food for every palate, I mean whatever floats your boat. Aping other people I also took my glass of red wine and started mixing with the countries creme-de-la-creme.

The event was the launch of the popular Jo-ann Richards new book, My brothers book, which promises to take the literary stakes by storm. Now the launch was a subdued and low-keyed event, but I was more fascinated by the guest list that this launch boasted. All the Literati's, Chatterati's and Diggerati's were there. All the grandees and worthies in one place. But the man who really caught my eyes was Prof. Anton Harber. This man is in my little black book, and I felt like approaching him just to pick his brains as he seems to be having all the answers of the media industry. He cut out the image of coolness and I would really like to be as erudite as him when I grow up. I could not get access to the man so I went on socialising with other towering figures I did not know.

I even spotted some Avusa guys but they could not see me as I was now stuck on the freebie's trough. I was eating to my heart's content and knocking back stuff only booze reviewers would know. All these were like foreign objects to my system as I haven't had life's finer things for like ages. I was so worried about gastric-disorders which might affect me later, maybe my gut would give me a problem I thought. But the more this idea came up the more I took the munchies, until I became full as a tick. Well finally the book launch ended and I left feeling replete and replenished, needless to say the launch was a gas. I cannot wait for another book launch.....

Tags: [ANTON HARBER](#), [DENIZEN](#), [EXCLUSIVE BOOKS](#), [GAS](#), [GASTRIC DISORDERS](#), [GRIM VIEW](#), [HABITUE](#), [HEAVEN SENT](#), [HONARARY MEMBER](#), [LITERATIS](#), [REPLENISH](#), [REPLETE](#), [ROCK UP](#)

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1. [Dinx](#) on April 10th, 2008

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LOL @ Alfred! I'm so glad you managed to get food and drink and the bonus was mixing with the various groups of "ratis"! Sorry I missed it. Your writing is brilliant ... so relaxed and descriptive.
Have a good day.
Peace
D

2. [Beverly Phillips](#) on May 4th, 2008

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EIGHTEEN writers from 10 countries touch down in Durban for a swirling week of books, words, ideas, and talk at the 11th *Time of the Writer*, International Writers' Festival, which takes place from March 25 to 30.

Hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts (University of KwaZulu-Natal), the festival enters its second decade with its customary extensive week-long programme of activities. Aside from Australian guest John Pilger, whose acclaimed journalistic commentary is astutely global, the festival features an exclusively South African and African presence this year, with a diverse gathering of novelists, short story writers, investigative journalists, publishers and political commentators, presenting their ideas in the public arena.

The eclectic mix includes the considered and provoking words of celebrated South African writer, poet, painter and essayist, Breyten Breytenbach. Breytenbach, who was instrumental in initiating the festival 11 years ago, will also deliver the festival's keynote address on opening night - Tuesday, March 25.

Scholar, activist and writer, Mbulelo Mzamane (South Africa), whose fiction and poetry was banned by the apartheid government and whose academic scholarship is widely acclaimed, adds his experienced voice. Mzamane was described by Nelson Mandela as a "visionary leader, (and) one of South Africa's greatest intellectuals". Other South African voices include Angelina Sithabe, a geologist by training, whose dreamy, disturbing debut, *Holy Hill*, has been receiving critical praise. Kopano Mathwa, winner of the EU Literary Award for 2006/07, is a young South African writer whose debut novel, *Cocunut*, is part of a new wave of post-apartheid fiction.

Joining her is Jo-Anne Richards, author of the immensely popular *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, which topped the South African bestseller list for 15 weeks. Richards, who launches her fourth novel, *My Brother's Book*, during the festival, is one of three participants launching books. Another is Durbanite Michael Green, who launches his much-awaited and impeccably researched new novel *For the Sake of Silence*, a work of historical fiction which examines with impressive insight the nineteenth-century Trappist endeavour in nineteenth-century South Africa.

David Evans, who was banned and imprisoned by the apartheid state, is the author of an oeuvre of novels, short stories, and plays whose narratives are remarkably engaging. Another brave voice is Max du Preez, perhaps the best known investigative journalist and political commentator in South Africa.

The writer's time



CLOCKWISE (from above left): Dayo Forster; Jo-Anne Richards; Max du Preez; Angelina Sithabe; Breyten Breytenbach; John Pilger and Shailja Patel.

Africa is well represented at the festival with a particularly strong Kenyan and Zimbabwean presence. This comes at a time when Kenya is undergoing perhaps one of its most politically volatile periods in recent memory, and with Zimbabwean elections taking place during the festival period.

In a Writers Speak Out slot, Kenyan poet Shailja Patel, last in the country for Poetry Africa 2007, will present a special Kenyan Bulletin, which will articulate the crisis facing her country. Dayo Forster, though Gambian by birth, is now a resident in Kenya and she too will no doubt add insight.

A scientist by training, Forster's debut novel *Reading the Ceiling* is a structurally daring exploration of the role of chance in a young woman's life. Kenyan publisher, writer, and scholar Henry Chakava is perhaps the most famous African publisher of his generation. Among other achievements, he led the successful acquisition of Heinemann in East Africa by a group of

Kenyans, localising it and was also the only publisher to give a voice to the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mauritian writer, poet, essayist, and screenwriter Ananda Devi, author of nine acclaimed novels, is recognised as one of the major Francophone writers from Mauritius and the Indian Ocean.



Fellow francophone novelist and playwright Emmanuel Dongala was forced to flee his home country of Congo (Brazzaville) after the civil war.

Part of a trio of writers with scientific backgrounds at this year's festival, Dongala, who has a PhD in Organic Chemistry, is a giant of contemporary African fiction.

His latest novel, *Johnny Mad Dog*, explores with remarkable depth the child soldiers of Sierra Leone. Angolan

born Simao Kikamba's riveting debut novel, *Going Home*, winner of the Herman Charles Bosman award for English fiction in 2006, is based on his experiences as a political refugee from Angola and his subsequent life as a black immigrant in South Africa.

The world acclaimed investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker John Pilger (Australia) brings this year's festival to a close with a Sunday evening of rousing discussion with *Mail & Guardian* editor Ferial Haffajee and UKZN academic and writer Patrick Bond. Presented as a Centre for Civil Society Harold Wolpe lecture entitled *Truth, Propaganda and Power*, the evening is prefaced with a sneak peak at Pilger's new film *The War on Democracy* and will end with an audience Q&A session.

Pilger will receive an honorary doctorate from Rhodes University in Grahamstown on March 28. A festival of documentaries by John Pilger, with post-screening discussions facilitated by the Centre for Civil Society, begins on March 3.

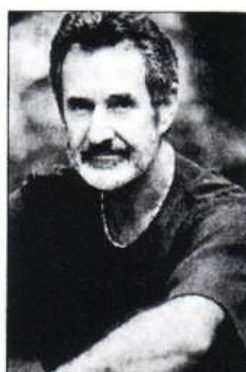
A unique experiment at this year's festival is the "Writers Parliament - Notes Towards a Cultural Policy for Durban" session on Friday, March 28, at the council chambers of the Durban City Hall. Attended by all the festival writers, and open to the public, the parliament will, in a quick-fire morning session, attempt to hammer out a basic architecture required for an effective cultural policy for Durban. *Time of the Writer* hopes also, through this experiment, to reinvigorate the idea of parliament as a site of debate and speaking out, not just for politicians but for everyone.

Readings, discussions and book launches will take place nightly at the Elizabeth Sneedon Theatre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A broad range of day activities in the form of workshops, a day-long forum on publishing issues, and a prison writing programme, are formulated to promote a culture of reading, writing and creative expression.

With this wide-ranging programme of activities and culturally diverse line-up of writers, *Time of the Writer* 2008 is set to deliver a lively literary platform for dialogue and exchange on wide-ranging subjects from historical and social issues to political and personal affairs, offering insights into the motivations and processes that inform the complex art of writing.

Tickets: R25 for evening sessions, R10 for students, through Computicket or at the door one hour before the event. Workshops and seminars are free.

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like, "Okay, okay, Tom. You've been well and truly vindicated. You were right, weren't you?" But the conceit works, and by the time we reach the second half of the novel, narrated by Thomas, his "book" has become another character; one through which the myriad perspectives on loyalty and betrayal are refracted.

Keeping such a plot readable, as Richards effortlessly does, is a feat in itself. And yet below these entanglements is another layer, one that reaches to the core of a country at odds with itself. Perhaps this is best cast as a question: set against the backdrop of the Eastern Cape in the 1960s, the radical student politics of the 1980s, and the Johannesburg of today, how could *My Brother's Book* not end up being a novel about race?

Richards admits to the inevitability of it. "I suppose that's true," she says. "I would hope it's not overtly about race. I would hope it's about love and about people. But yes, you set out to write about love, and it [race] comes through. It's part of our make-up."

To the extent that her characters are rich and full on the page, Richards restricts her polemics to the sidelines. Race in *My Brother's Book* is not something that the reader is beaten across the brow with. There is instead a slow and steady seeping, a lingering at the edges. The theme is present in social interactions and attitudes, a low-level hum that rises imperceptibly in pitch until the shock of the ending — where everything that came before is thrown into stark relief.

Still, whether it's done overtly or not, race may be the most difficult subject a white South African author ever confronts. It's not just the subtlety of the characterisation that saves *My Brother's Book* from cliché (or worse). Neither is it just that Richards is the antithesis of the didactic writer; that, having done this thing for a while, she knows her strengths and limitations. "Writing for me is exploration, not exposition," she says. "I hold no grand placards airing my views."

Above these attributes, what makes *My Brother's Book* a worthy addition to the canon of contemporary race-involved, white-authored fiction (championed, perhaps, by Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*) is the novel's strong and visceral sense of "place" — its rootedness in the finely wrought detail of a certain scene at a certain time.

For South Africans of all castes, there is much that is familiar in *My Brother's Book*. If you grew up in suburbia before the 1990s you'll recognise the language: spaz, tit, jeez, kiff. If you've been to a rural town in the Eastern Cape you'll recognise the smells: jasmine, suurbessie, peach blossom, droog my kiel. And if you've been to the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens on a crisp morning in September you'll recognise just about everything:

"I parked outside the east gate, breathing more easily. Before us lay the parkland, breaking into the mauves and whites of early spring. Yellow veld stretched as far as the Melville Koppies. Two hadedas, startled by a border collie, rose shrieking over the Braamfontein spruit, nearly empty now from lack of rain."

Passages like these abound in the book, and owe a lot to Richards's influences. When she was growing up she was drawn to the great

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Coloured by the past

Published: Jun 14, 2008

Maybe every honest book ever written about South Africa is somehow about race. Maybe our serious novelists, even when they successfully invoke alternative truths, are bound by history and circumstance to this one inescapable theme.

Maybe that's just the way it is.

My Brother's Book makes a persuasive case for the theory. The idea that spawned the novel, Richards's fourth, was based neither in politics nor racial polemics: it was based in a parlour game Richards likes to play with her novelist friend in England. The objective of the game is to write a killer opening line, and Richards's on that particular day (a little over four years ago) was: "I was born on page X of my brother's book."

In the event, the opening passage of *My Brother's Book* became: "I was born on page 23 of my brother's book. On page 52, before the whole world, I betrayed him."

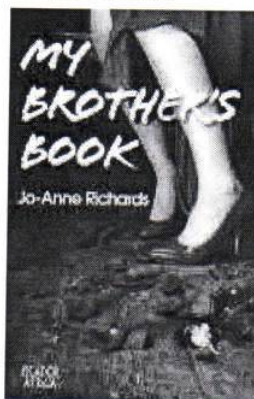
When Richards began to imagine the world behind such an introduction, what she saw was a novel about family and forgiveness, a novel peopled by characters that loved too hard and expected too much and didn't speak to one another for 30 years. Her protagonists, a brother and sister, were intended as devices through which the reader could explore the possibility that two people with exactly the same upbringing might have completely divergent memories.

The plot of *My Brother's Book* is not straightforward. In later life the brother figure, Thomas, writes a critically acclaimed memoir. On reading the book his estranged sister, Lily, is deeply wounded by the expurgated portrait she finds there. Lily narrates the first half of *My Brother's Book*, and as she does so, giving us her own version of her childhood, she directly addresses Thomas and his book- within-the-book.

Lily slips every so often into the second person, and says things



Jo-Anne Richards



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Truth is a question of who you speak to

July 27, 2008 Edition 1

Karina Magdalena Szczurek

My Brother's Book

by Jo-Anne Richards RRRiiicccchhaaarrddss

(Picador Africa) R159

Review by Karina Magdalena Szczurek

Best known for her bestselling debut novel, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (1996), Jo-Anne Richards is also the author of *Touching the Lighthouse* (1997), *Sad at the Edges* (2003) and most recently, *My Brother's Book*. This opens with the intriguing line "I was born on page 23 of my brother's book. On page 52, before the whole world, I betrayed him." The rest of the book is an exploration of this betrayal and its consequences for the lives of Tom, his sister Lily and the people around them.

My Brother's Book has a bit of a schizophrenic feel about it. It is divided into three parts, of which the first two are equally long and span most of the novel while the third comprises only a few pages. Each part has a different narrator and operates on different time levels, switching between the period when Lily and Tom were kids in the 1960s to the years when they were young adults and to the recent present. Mostly this disjointed storytelling works well and the various perspectives illuminate the plot in a way that a straightforward single point of view wouldn't have, but there are moments, especially in Lily's piece, when the multitude of narrative angles becomes taxing.

Lily's story forms the first part of *My Brother's Book* and is mostly a reaction to the publication of her brother's titular book, a memoir. She desperately wants to preserve the memories of their childhood in a more positive light than the one which transpires from her brother's descriptions, which are often referred to but never quoted directly: "I don't care what you wrote, Tom. That's how it really was."

Burdened by the early unexplained disappearance of their mother and stuck with a father who means well but is not exactly suited to being a parent, the children struggle along mostly on their own. The responsibility for their wellbeing comes to rest on Tom's much too young shoulders. The broken family moves around a lot in the Eastern Cape, with the father - an ex-boxing champion, a raconteur, a gambler, even a lay preacher and miracle healer - trying to make a living somehow.

Whereas Lily sees their life as an adventure and admires their struggling father, Tom is angry at their situation, swearing that he would never become like Pop. But, proverbially, the apple never falls far from the tree: the irony of how much he has inherited from his father is one of the things that Tom has to come to terms with in his adult life, and one that Lily does not fail to point out to him.

Always the more irrational and wild of the two siblings, Lily never understood the oppressiveness of the responsibility thrust on her brother. Self-absorbed and focused on her own ordeal, she even manages to blame him for her own failings: "But sometimes I think it



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writers of the American south, writers like Styron and Faulkner, who took a place and made it wholly their own. More recently, Richards says, she has become enamoured with the writing of Michael Chabon — “I am envious of the way I read his images.”

The truly extraordinary part of the genesis of Richards the writer, however, is that she was once branded a child with learning disabilities. School for her was torture. She hid in the library, had no friends, cried all the time. In Grade 1 the teachers told her mother she was retarded. They wanted to put her in a home. “Who is going to look after you when your mother is gone?” they asked.

Today Richards laughs with sympathy and affection for the girl she used to be — the teachers are remembered less fondly — but back then her immediate defence was to construct a fantasy life for herself.

In 1996, with the publication of her first novel *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, her well-honed fluency in the codes of the imagination paid big dividends. The novel sold 27000 copies, was nominated for an Impac International Dublin Literary Award, was chosen as a Dillon’s Debut in the UK, and was short-listed for an M-Net Book Prize. It wasn’t without its detractors, though — Ronald Suresh Roberts in a review for the *Sunday Independent* said it “glorified white naïveté” — but it was representative of a new South African fiction that shunned the prescriptive bent of apartheid-era writing and celebrated the power of descriptive prose.

My Brother’s Book is a much better novel. It travels a lot further along the path that Richards mapped in 1996. The metaphors are more mature, it is expertly edited, the political allusions are subtler. There is in both books the sense that South Africa is a country doomed by its racial history to vacillate between the extremes of hope and despair; in the latest novel, though, Richards says much more about race by having her characters talk about it much less. — Kevin Bloom

■ *My Brother’s Book* by Jo-Anne Richards, is published by Picador Africa, R155

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was the nature of our relationship that I should always disappoint you. You expected it, and so it came to be."

Her story changes from addressing him in the second person, mostly accusingly, to a third-person narrative in which she remembers the past from a child's point of view. The effect of these juxtapositions is mostly striking, but at times it jars and irritates.

Lily has always wanted to atone for her betrayal of Tom. They haven't spoken in 30 years. His memoir opens many wounds and exposes a sense of unfinished business for others which he has not bargained for. To his distress, a confrontation with the people intertwined in his story becomes inevitable.

The second part is told by Tom himself, now a successful director of an NGO, who has put the past behind him, or so he thinks. After years in the struggle, he has forgiven Lily's betrayal and the resulting 12 years in prison, and he wants to move on. He enters into a relationship with Louise, a trauma counsellor, who too often treats him like one of her patients, not only confusing Tom but sometimes exasperating the reader.

Tom's memoir also attracts the attention of one of his former lovers, Miranda. Lily and Tom's narrations are interspersed with letters written by Lily to Miranda and by Miranda to both siblings. In the end, Tom has to face all the women in his life, each demanding something of him in her own way. Confronted with fatherhood, impending loss of his position because of affirmative action and a devastating revelation from the past, the anger he has kept at bay for such a long time threatens to consume him again.

My Brother's Book is a richly told story which manages to keep it secrets well hidden until the very last. Above all, it can be read as a meditation on truth, its unstable and highly individualised nature. The last part of the novel, told from Pop's perspective, offers a consolatory glimpse into the future of his fractured family and leaves one with a sense of hope and closure.

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Creative calling

Poet, dancer, doctor: Dawn Garisch slips through the cracks between labels and finds that at 50 she has more energy and time to be all things she can be.

As Dawn Garisch's fifth manuscript was accepted for publication, she heard that her successful fourth novel, *Once, Tivo Islands* would be published in the United Kingdom by Myrmidon Books, who were submitting it to the Man Booker Prize panel for consideration for the prestigious literary award.

And so, this Kalk Bay GP further consolidates her successful parallel career as a writer. She's already a widely published poet and has also written several short films and documentaries for television.

All of which seems enough work for someone with just one career, but Garisch enjoys doctoring too much to give up her practice. Besides which, it pays the bills.

She became a doctor because that was what was expected of her.

She's never regretted it but has never been happier than since she was able to incorporate writing into her daily doings. In fact, she feels strongly that all women should have some creative outlet, regardless of their career.

'I suspect we are all born creative beings; that creativity, libido, life force, desire, sexuality, *joie de vivre* and *raison d'être* are all linked on some continuum. Following these passions requires a certain curiosity and ego that is discouraged among women in our culture. Women are encouraged to be of service to others but not to their own creative urges. This is bad for mental and physical health. We become afraid to make a mark on a piece of paper, make a movement on a dance floor, sing a note or write a sentence in case it is not good enough or somehow 'wrong'. We censor our creative lives and go shopping or

to the movies instead. Courageous creativity is the start of a journey of liberation to a place where you might even find out who you are and what you like.' – Karin Schimke

MORE ABOUT DAWN...

I keep fit and healthy by finding the things my body loves to do: creative movement, mountain walks and swimming in tidal pools. I no longer work too hard, so I'm rarely rushed or stressed. I prefer to spend less than earn more.

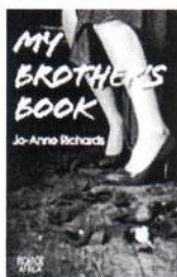
The best thing about being over 40 is being able to see my patterns over the years. I like myself more. I can differentiate better between what I can change and what I must accept. I know each day is precious and must be fully lived. I realise that I am a small part in a big story, but that I must play my part well. I am more grateful, less critical.

READS

A MUST FOR ALL BOOK LOVERS

The Cape Town Book Fair returns to the Cape Town International Convention Centre from 14 to 17 June. It showcases a wide variety of the latest fiction and non-fiction, as well as an extensive programme of events and talks by local and international authors, including Alexander McCall Smith and Marina Lewycka. Visit capetownbookfair.com for full details.

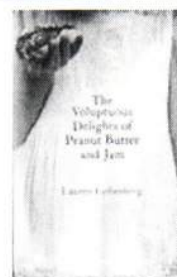
❖ **WIN Femina** is giving away 20 pairs of tickets to the Cape Town Book Fair. To enter, SMS 'book', followed by your name and city, to 34424 by 7 June. Each SMS costs R2.



MY BROTHER'S BOOK by Jo-Anne Richards Lily is not happy about her brother Tom's newly published memoir. His depiction of their nomadic childhood does not do justice to her memories. Nor does his description of the betrayal that tore their relationship apart. Much of the first part of this novel consists of Lily's riposte to her writer-brother. It combines the unputdownable element of the best thrillers with themes such as contested memory, betrayal and identity. A brilliant read. (Picador Africa, R158) – Mervyn Sloman ★★★★★



A PARTISAN'S DAUGHTER by Louis de Bernières The new novel from the author of *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* is the 1970s love story of Chris and Roza, who he picks up on a London street corner. What follows is an unlikely friendship between the lonely middle-class salesman and the vulnerable but provocative Yugoslav immigrant. It ends in a cruel twist of fate that exposes the weaknesses of both characters, which left me a little disappointed. But perhaps I'm just a sucker for happy endings. (Random House, R212) – Anne Duncan ★★★★★



THE VOLUPTUOUS DELIGHTS OF PEANUT BUTTER AND JAM by Lauren Liebenberg Nyree and Cia are growing up on a farm during the Rhodesian War. Their father is away fighting the 'Ters', while they spend their days hunting fairies and organising millipede races. Then their lives are disturbed by the arrival of Ronin, a mysterious cousin. His politeness masks a cruel, vindictive streak and his dark presence brings a tragic end to their innocence. An impressive debut. (Virago, R170) – Lynda Ingham-Brown ★★★★★