

oir



that it is dangerous to walk the countryside.

whites in South Africa this way — ignorant and in many of these were recent migrants from Europe and the Kingdom.

were a last wave of colonial migrants, except for those who now make money in books and movies of those times.

Who should take responsibility for accuracy and honesty in these memoirs? When Ecott's mother is arrested for trading lion skins (yes, she did that too, very collectable) and taken to John Vorster, he writes: "The police was notorious for the torturer suspects, several had been thrown from its windows".

o much to ask that an editor who would amend this so tortured are not thought of "Christ", and who would check the city of "several of whom had own ...".

o easy, too glib, too inaccurate renderings of Afrikaner are simply ludicrous — but could know any better in the market of Ecott's publisher? o would care so long as rolls in. The colonies are endurable.

om "hilarious" it strikes me as a very unsavoury book. Its most interesting aspect is Ecott's address with his mother and rocky battle to surface after from the grace of "luxury".

at memoir" out of Africa it

AUTHOR'S NOTES

On the Other Side of Shame (Macmillan) began as a novel, became a hybrid of fiction and non-fiction and finally turned into memoir. Its author **JOANNE JOWELL** explains

Describe yourself in a sentence.

I am a mother of two, wife of one, author of two and friend of many who is cautious, loving, loyal and sometimes just the teeniest bit neurotic.

Describe your ideal reader.

My late mother, who thought everything I wrote was a masterpiece. If not her, then a discerning lover of books with an eye for detail who is happy to accept that authors can successfully experiment with multiple voices or styles without pigeon-holing their writing.

What was the originating idea for the book?

My hairdresser played matchmaker and put me, the writer, in touch with his client, who had an amazing life experience which deserved to be written.

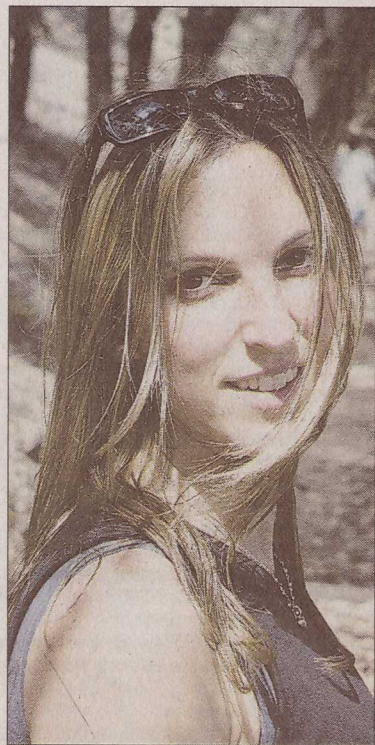
That client was Lynette Langman and her story became the foundation for *On the Other Side of Shame*. In the 1960s Lynette was 17 years old and was forced to give up a baby for adoption. Only a handful of people knew about it. Forty years later that child decided to search for his biological parents and discovered an incredible truth. They were reunited in a story replete with the most astounding twists and turns, which I felt would make for remarkable telling as a memoir or biography. I set about researching the full story and interviewing all the relevant players. The result is a book that I rewrote the book a number of times,

first as a novel, then as a hybrid between fiction and non-fiction and finally as pure non-fiction [memoir]. Sometimes you simply just can't beat the truth. I conducted hours of interviews with all those involved in the story and spent many dusty afternoons at the archives searching for newspaper records and old photographs. The entire research and writing process took almost four years and included completing an MA in creative writing at the University of Cape Town. The manuscript was picked up by Macmillan publishers late last year and, under its superb hand, was launched at the Cape Town Book Fair in June.

Name some writers who have inspired you and tell us briefly why or how.

My favourite non-fiction author is Alexandra Fuller (*Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight; Scribbling the Cat*). She has a wonderful, playful way with words even when describing a difficult situation. She encouraged my view of non-fiction as an extremely creative form of writing with added relevance and impact. I also love the work of Studs Terkel, whose style informed that of *On the Other Side of Shame*. His work turns even the most mundane subject into an artistic endeavour. The writing of Gabriel Garcia Marquez is infused with sheer magic. He segues effortlessly between stories: in a single page, a reader can get a feel for a character's past, present and future without even realising that the storyline has shifted.

I have been inspired by all these



writers, and many more, and humbly try to apply a philosophy here or a technique there if I think it can work in my own writing.

What are you reading at the moment?

Since I'm a mother of young kids, I'd have to say *Where the Wild Things Are* and anything by Julia Donaldson. I can rattle off *The Smartest Giant in Town* for you in a second. As for the three minutes a week during which I can indulge in my own reading, I currently have *People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks and *Algeria's Way* by Alex Smith on my bedside table.

Non-fiction is the gateway for the wonder, agony and lessons of an individual's true life to a wider audience. Its general purpose is to create a circle of solidarity among readers who can relate.

Memoir encapsulates the telling of a life journey with the knowledge that the human experience is simultaneously unique and common.

How do you see the future of South African literature?

Commercial fiction is on the way up. For obvious and important reasons South African writers have been fixated on stories that are largely political in nature. But, while South African writers are South African, with the strongly political persuasion of that identity, they are also writers, with all the creativity and flair of that identity. So we are seeing great crime fiction coming through — perhaps also a reflection of our society? — fantasy, "chick-lit" and so on ... The political voice will always be a strong one in this country, but it is not the only one and I think the future of South African literature holds more diversity and entertainment on its bookshelves.

Is there anything you wish to add?

The reading population of this country is a small one. For an author publishing in South Africa, there is only a limited number of people who can actually read one's work, let alone afford to buy it. I think we have a professional duty to

tackle illiteracy, realising that reading is the vanguard of progress.

