

Search

The Times



- News
- Sport
- Careers
- BUSINESS@times
- Entertainment
- Columnists
- Multimedia
- Sunday Times
- Property
- Contact

Home | Special Reports | Document Vault | Breaking News Blog | Books |

Site last Updated: **Jun 17 2008 7:16AM**

[Get Home Delivery](#)

You are not currently logged in

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."

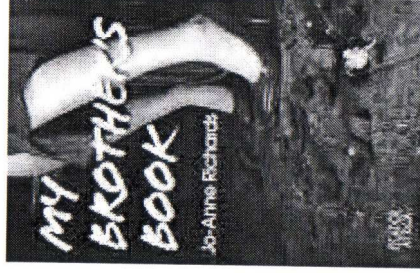
When Richards began to imagine the world behind such an introduction, what she saw was a novel about family and forgiveness, a novel peopled by characters that loved too hard and expected too much and didn't speak to one another for 30 years. Her protagonists, a brother and sister, were intended as devices 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



Audio

- 16 Jun 2008
Fan's Corner: The Beast's debut
- 16 Jun 2008
Youth League on Zuma
- 16 Jun 2008
SACP spokesman Malesela Maleka on "the letter"
- 16 Jun 2008
The press never forgot us

Videos

Blogs

Sponsored links

- Cars online
- Property
- Compare Insurance Quotes
- Play International Lotteries
- Car Insurance
- Life insurance
- Insurance for women

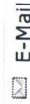
Available RSS Feeds

- Africa News
- Breaking News
- Business and Markets
- Celebrity News
- Entertainment News
- Soccer News
- Sport News
- World News

Article Tools



Print



E-Mail

Save and Share



BOOKMARK

