

Jo-Anne Richards

----- Original Message -----

From: Di Caelers <dic@ctn.independent.co.za>

To: <pamelawood@metroweb.co.za>

Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2003 12:56 PM

Subject: book crit

- > Sad at the Edges
- > Jo-Anne Richards
- > Stephan Phillips
- > Review: Di Caelers
- >
- > I SPENT an afternoon in the police cells at Caledon Square in 1989,
- > definitely nothing close to an experience that would give me any struggle
- > credentials, but it was scary enough to decide me that an incredible level
- > of courage was necessary to stand up to the apartheid police.
- > So it didn't surprise me at all that Francesca, lefty turned suburban mum
- > in this wonderful novel by Jo-Anne Richards, grappled with her experiences
- > with the security police and solitary confinement way into adulthood.
- > A colleague handed me the book, after starting it and deciding she
- > couldn't
- > stomach the "trendy lefty" prose, and in the first couple of chapters I
- > was
- > tempted to follow her lead.
- > But I persevered, and found instead a fascinating emotional rollercoaster
- > ride, frankly and brutally written, that gives a voice to the people who
- > have fallen by the wayside in the aftermath of South Africa's struggle
- > against apartheid.
- > The white "trendy lefties", mostly university students and often from
- > well-off homes, may well have started out doing the politically correct
- > thing, but many fought a bitter battle in which their courage and
- > resilience was tested to the ultimate limits - abused, tortured and
- > dismissed by too many of their fellow white South Africans.
- > Richards steps into the minds and hearts of these people as life goes on
- > in
- > the "new" South Africa, their past experiences still firmly embedded in
- > their minds, shaping their futures in a way that is not always pleasant.
- > Francesca has a successful husband, a nice home and a book club, all part
- > of her "cover" as she goes about life as a suburban Johannesburg mum to
- > little Daniel, her child with mild cerebral palsy.
- > But none of it is enough to successfully pretend that her detention, her
- > solitary confinement, and what she believes to be her ultimate lapse in
- > courage, never happened.
- > She feels separated, a "has been" who doesn't particularly fit in anywhere
- > in this "new" South Africa, this new Joburg in particular, where
- > youngsters
- > of all races mix easily in a glitzy, glamorous city that's a world away
- > from hippy skirts and arms full of jangling bangles.
- > The two other important characters in this novel, Francesca's cousin Megan
- > and the security policeman who interrogated her in an East London prison
- > all those years ago, are vital cameos, and ultimately operate together to
- > help Francesca forgive herself for being a very young, very frightened
- > girl.
- > No doubt there are plenty of "Francescas", men and women, out there in the
- > suburbs of South African cities, and Richards acknowledges a wide range of
- > people, some familiar names in the world of journalism, who obviously
- > offered a wide pool of real-life experience from which to draw.
- > It's a part of the apartheid struggle that hasn't been examined much in
- > literature, and Richards does these men and women excellent justice in Sad
- > at the Edges.
- > It's not a cheerful novel, but it's so hopeful that you can only read the
- > final page grateful for the many, many courageous people of all races who
- > contributed to a new order in South Africa.
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