

Cuddle up with a book for the Holidays

by Denise Rossi

Chatham County Partnership for Children encourages everyone to read to your children this Holiday Season. One of our newer programs, Raising a Reader, is a national nonprofit

Holiday books for young children

Look for these at your public library or local bookseller.

Happy Hanukkah, Corduroy
By Don Freeman

Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa
By Donna L. Washington

The Polar Express
By Chris Van Allsburg

Bear Stays Up for Christmas
By Karma Wilson

The Wild Christmas Reindeer
By Jan Brett

Dream Snow
By Eric Carle

Too Many Tamales
By Gary Soto

Daddy Christmas & Hanukkah Mama
By Selina Alko

The Elf on the Shelf
By Carol Aebersold & Chanda Bell

Yoon and the Christmas Mitten
By Helen Recorvits

evidence-based early literacy program that improves the reading readiness skills of children from birth to age 5. Raising a Reader in Chatham County is funded by Smart Start, United Way and local funding from Chatham County government. Chatham's Raising a Reader program partners with local child care sites and preschools to rotate bright red bags filled with award-winning books into children's homes on a weekly basis, exposing each child to approximately 100 books per year. Beyond the rotation of book bags, the Partnership works to help teachers and parents in learning interactive "read-aloud" techniques and

increase reading at home. This holiday season is a perfect time for "book cuddling" with young children. Here are a few tips to get your holiday reading started off right.

Read together every day: Make this a special time when you and your children can cuddle close.

Be interactive: Discuss what's happening in the book, point out things on the page, and ask questions.

Read it again and again: Children learn from repetition; so go ahead and read your child's favorite book for the 100th time!

For more tips about reading to children of all ages please visit <http://www.readingrockets.org>

Denise Rossi is the Raising A Reader coordinator in Chatham County. For more information about Raising A Reader or to make a donation, please visit www.chathamkids.org.

Book Review: *This River: An Epic Love Poem*

By Sharon D. Ewing

"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open."

—Muriel Rukeyser

The above quote was used as a T-shirt logo for the 1991 Women's Narrative Conference, "Tell Me a Story That's True," held at NCCU. In the preface to *This River: An Epic Love Poem*, Judy Hogan confesses her earlier reticence not in writing about taboo subjects but in publishing that writing. With the publication of this poem, she dares to share her experiences 20 years ago of acknowledging, accepting, and living with her unconsummated love for a married man and of her certainty that this love was returned. Living into this state was nurtured by her growing understanding of the Russian concept of soul (dusha). She also writes: "The love we felt and expressed covertly in letters was never consummated, but it became the fire that fueled our work together. We trusted each other. We argued and we adapted to each other's cultures as necessary...Perhaps it was the largest passion of my life, after my desire to write. It is the time, however to share this whole story."

This River is a series of 30 meditations written over a year and a half following the poet's return from her first visit to Russia, a visit of only five days, but days that changed her life. The meditations, evoked by regular visits to the Haw River, are the way she both nurtures and comes to terms with her life-changing meeting with her soul-mate and fellow writer, Mikhail, in the crumbling world of the Russian people as the USSR disintegrates. A life-long journal writer and close observer of nature, Hogan draws meaning and conveys it to the reader through metaphors that flow seamlessly from those observations. In a post-everything world, she is an unapologetic romantic: the natural world is alive with meaning for her, personification rises effortlessly, and she uses it unashamedly. Her opening line mentions a "resurrection fern... alive and well-watered" and we are launched. There will be death, but there will also be life. Immersion in the natural world both guides and consoles the poet.

The central image of the poem is a river, but it is in

many ways two rivers: the Haw River and the Volga River that runs past the beloved's home in Russia. Separated by thousands of miles, the rivers are joined by their eventual emptying into the ocean. Distance is overcome by metaphor. The river carries mud, but that mud nourishes the life along

its banks, and when light strikes it, the river is golden. As the poet struggles to acknowledge and then accept a love outside her previous boundaries, the green of August yields to the ripe reds and yellows of autumn; but months later a no-show at the airport brings the outer world of physical realities crashing into her inner life—the poet's understanding must grow, time and space take on new dimensions, work must fill the physical void. Shared work and love stretch into a broad horizon, darkness of winter descends, but the poet sees the red glow in the darkening winter sky and holds on to her belief in the mutuality of love.

The reader can revel in the rich imagery and language of this poem that reveals a complex inner life and know that the poet has faced herself honestly and overcome her earlier reticence. Her willingness to share that inner struggle with a personally taboo subject invites honesty from the reader and other writers. This poem ends, but the poem of her

life will spill forth as long as this poet can put pen to paper.

The cover of *This River*, from an oil painting, "A Study of Volga River, Kostroma, Russia," by Sergei Rummyantsev, a Kostroma painter and friend of the author, invites the reader to enter visually the world the poet presents through words. "Heart Leaves," an ink drawing by Mikhail Bazankov, who was a trained artist before he was a writer, hovers above each meditation and draws the reader through the emotional course of the poem. Wild Embers Press has added another rich book to its Watersongs imprint.

This River: An Epic Love Poem is available at Paperbacks Plus (Siler City), The Joyful Jewel and Circle City Books (Pittsboro). Judy will sign at Paperbacks Plus on January 10, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. She will read with Jaki S. Green at the Chatham Community Library, March 11, 7 p.m.

Sharon D. Ewing received an MFA in Creative Writing from George Mason University and has taught writing courses in the Northern Virginia area at community colleges and George Mason University. Her chapbook of poems, "Nocturnes for the Right Brain Alone", Union Street Press, appeared in 1990.



This River

an epic love poem
Judy Hogan



Wild Embers Press, Watersongs Imprint, 67 pp., \$14



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