

# Sunday Sundowners

LYN STEYN

Head Librarian, Fish Hoek Library

*In our quest to keep readers up to date with what's hot on the bookshelves (see News, page 8) we, at the same time, decided to go in search of librarians' favourite (or not so favourite) reads. This was our brief: 'We would like to do a series on what librarians' top reads are in every two month period ... We thought it would be great if somebody could coordinate the project and choose a selection of librarians to participate. Would you be interested to put together a list of people/librarians and to coordinate the project for the year.' However, we met with the most amazing response: 'Librarians don't read!' Well, we couldn't let that go - the result is Lyn Steyn's contribution to our challenge.*

*Meet our Sunday Sundowner's group who will entertain, criticise, slate or praise their favourites.*

Mostly we meet monthly, the venue alternating amongst the homes of the group. It's informal and its composition varies depending on family crises, weddings, grandchildren visiting and the reluctant yielding to other social commitments.

The only strict rule is no talking about work problems – anything else is fair game. Politics, religion, relatives – all get aired and dissected. Naturally since we all love books and reading, much of the conversation centres on books we've read recently, books we've heard about, books that trigger a childhood memory, books that disappointed and books that thrilled. Sometimes there's so much to talk about, the competition for 'air time' is fierce. You

either listen to the most interesting account or the most dominant voice.

Mike Nicol's new book **Monkey business: the murder of Anni Dewani** (Umuzi, 2011) revisits this sensational case. The daily news reports were unpleasant reading at the time: a 'soap opera' murder mystery playing out on our doorstep. Nicol has compiled a digest of media reports, court records, blogs and articles from other sources. His easy style makes for a quick read and the retelling

of the bizarre story is compelling. There are so many unanswered questions and puzzles. Nicol does not provide answers but explores them and all the inconsistencies in depth. What will the next instalment of the real life case bring to light?

One of my favourite local writers is David Biggs, whose daily column *Tavern of the Seas* in the *Cape Argus*, keeps me sane no matter what the world throws my way. His irreverent humour strikes a chord. In person, as guest speaker at our literary teas, his amusing descriptions of people,

places and events let us recognise ourselves and our neighbours without offence. His latest publication is **In reasonable taste** (Moonshine Media, 2011), a compilation of columns published in *Good Taste* magazine over the past 10 years. His aim is to 'prick the bubble of pretentiousness' that so often surrounds wine and wine connoisseurs. His interpretation of *terroir* targets one of many sacred cows: for the connoisseur it is place of origin; for the consumer it is about being in the right company and the right place



at the right time. I'll leave you to enjoy how he develops this theme with your own glass of sherry (or grape juice).

We are a mixed bunch and refreshments always make provision for halaal and vegetarian guests. 'Listen to me! Listen to me! I've found out why you Border people speak so funny.' The insistent voice rises above the cacophony of chatter, urgent to tease me about my Eastern Cape accent and vocabulary. Best Friend Forever (BFF) has found a brilliant book that she knows I will not be able to resist, and it has given her ammunition for many jokes at my expense. **Eish, but is it English?: celebrating the South African variety** by Rajend Mesthrie with Jeanne Hromnik (Zebra P, 2011) is fascinating, amusing, and extremely well researched. I must confess that even though I have an apostrophe fetish, I found Lynne Truss' **Eats, shoots & leaves** (Profile Bks., 2003) somewhat tedious after the first few chapters. Spurred on by friendly insults, I've started reading **Eish** and it is marvellous. It combines language with history, with speculation, with quirky pleasure and lets me amble through our

uniquely SA sayings, taking pride in my roots and that they are distinctive (distinctive, not distinguished). Mary Ann raised hoots of laughter when she confessed that she picked up **The darkest room** by Johan Theorin (Doubleday, 2009) because of its attractive cover. Yet another Swedish crime writer, Theorin presents a murder mystery with atmosphere, lots of bad weather and a few angst-induced ghosts. The story involves a drowning in a remote part of Sweden and a persistent young police officer who believes the death was not accidental, and then solves the case. Translated from the Swedish, the novel conveys the author's deep understanding of human vulnerability and grief, but without becoming morbid. Readers who enjoy Henning Mankell will probably also enjoy Theorin, which is handy to know with all the Larsson readers looking for more gems from the cold north. Graphic novels are such a popular genre, but not always appreciated by older generations, so I was interested to hear Mary Ann's thoughts on **The tale of one bad rat** (Dark Horse Comics, 2010) by Bryan Talbot. 'I often borrow graphic novels from the library, but to be honest, I seldom read them; my interest lies more in the art than the stories. But this one I did read. It deals with a runaway in London who loves Beatrix Potter books and follows her footsteps to the English countryside, where she takes strength from Potter's difficult childhood, to come to terms with her own abused childhood. This one is not for your typical graphic novel fans, but seems more substantial

because it deals with real issues.' The art is also excellent and complements the storyline.

A hilarious game of 30 Seconds did not stop Anthea from asking what books she could send her two grandchildren in the UK, a four year old and a seven year old. She's worried that they will grow up too British and lose touch with their country of birth. A unanimous chorus of 'John Bush' from the other two grandmothers present and a foray into my spare room produced six of his titles – **The fish who could wish** (Oxford U.P., 1991), **The cross-with-us rhinoceros** (Red Fox, 1991), **The bungle in the jungle** (Red Fox, 1999), **The warthog's tail** (Storytime Africa, 2005), **The giraffe who got in a knot** (Red Fox, 1999) and **The baboon who went to the moon** (Storytime Africa, 2006) – each with a read-along CD (Storytime Africa, various dates). The kids love the stories and love being able to identify the places in the books when they come visiting. Their parents love the CDs that keep the kids enthralled on long journeys. In like vein are the stories told by two Kommetjie writers Linda Fellowes and Theresa Acker such as **Eric – it's a piece of cake**, a story about a real baboon here in the South Peninsula (now sadly deceased) and **Peter, Pamela and Percy in the big spill**, the true story of the three penguins who were tagged after being cleaned and released near Port Elizabeth, and their epic swim back to the Cape (Linda Fellowes, 2009 and 2005).

The adrenaline rush of 30 Seconds is followed by a ruthless local version of Scrabble. You can use any word provided your motivation receives an 80% majority vote. You will not believe the flights of fancy and devious cunning of someone trying to get 'zprxtc' accepted on the board. I'm sure there's a market for a small self-published volume of 'new' Scrabble words.

Lyn Steyn – active librarian

Anthea Hopley – retired librarian

Mary Ann Hodges – former PAWC librarian and active cataloguer

Ann Onymous – booklover

