



BOOKS

Just before 40, time to Start Writing

SWEET BRIAR AUTHOR PENS POST-WAR TALE

Writing five books in seven years is an incredible pace for anyone, but Carrie Brown accomplished this feat while rearing three children and teaching creative writing at Sweet Briar College. Somehow, Brown managed to prevent this high volume of work from interfering with the quality. She's won the Barnes & Noble Discover Award, the Library of Virginia Book Award, the Great Lakes Book Award and the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize. Most recently, she's been named a National Endowment for the Arts fellow. Short of coming from the planet Krypton, how was this all possible?

"I've taught mostly part-time over the last few years," Brown says, "so I've had some time for my own work. I worked as a journalist for a number of years and the average newsroom prepares you to be able to write out anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances, including in the relatively benign chaos of a house full of children. Also, I was a latecomer to the field of writing fiction; I was almost 40 when my first novel was published, and I'd had a long time to store up stories I wanted to tell. Maybe that explains why I've written so much relatively quickly."

It also helps that she's got her own live-in editor, her hus-

band, the novelist John Gregory Brown. "I'm lucky that my husband is a brilliant editor as well as a gifted writer," says Brown. "The two skills don't seem to be part of the same brain function, and not every writer is also a good editor. We talk about books and writing, but not as much you might think. We also talk about who's picking up the kids, and who failed to empty the dishwasher, and who last saw the cat."

Unlike the stories that percolated inside Brown's head for years, she brewed her latest novel, *Confinement*, out of a single image — a man in the backseat of a car being driven at night down a long snow-covered lane. "That was all I had at first," says Brown. "I don't know where the image came from, but it wouldn't go away. Then I had to find out who this man was, and where he was going, and where he'd come from."

Oddly enough, the more Brown thought about this man in the backseat, the less significant he became. The story focused instead on another man, the one driving the car. Arthur Henning is a Jew who left Austria for England at the outset of World War II. After having lost his home to the Nazis, he then loses his wife and daughter in one of the raids during the Battle of Britain. When the war ends, he immigrates to America with his surviving son and becomes the chauffeur.

Even after Henning starts a new life in America, he continues to suffer throughout the story, enduring all his hardships with stoic grace. He is a man of dignity and honor who expects little out of life, and gets exactly what he expects. Having experienced so much loss already, he now lives confined by the fear of losing anything else. Too scared to do anything but follow orders, he stands by passively while those he loves are harmed along with him.

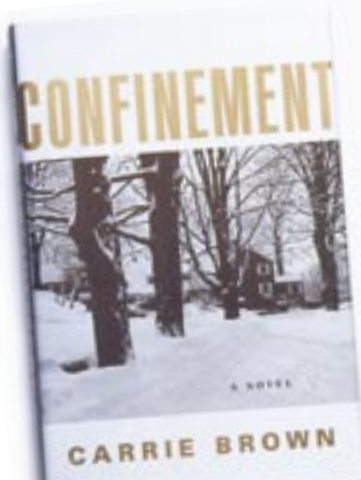
"Over the years, doing what the Duvalls told him to do had become inseparable from his own character, his own will. Too late, he understood that the obscure pain he had felt for so long was connected to this abdication Arthur believed himself broken, a man who had lost everything."

When Henning happens upon the grandson he allowed to be given up for adoption, he starts to question everything he's done or, more to the point, not done. He ponders his life in a series of flashbacks while working up the courage to make amends to those who have paid for his inaction. The reader is kept in suspense, not knowing whether or not Henning will dare to take a risk until the final few paragraphs.

In this wonderfully crafted book, Brown achieves the most difficult task of getting the reader to care for an indecisive hero. Making this doubly hard was the fact that she shared no biographical similarities to this character. As Brown says, "I am neither male, nor Jewish, nor was I alive during WWII."

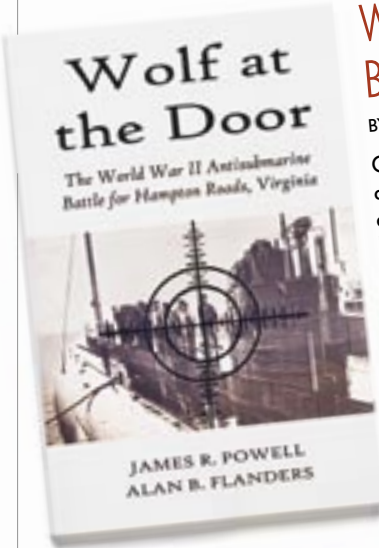
To understand Arthur Henning, Brown delved into the Austrian Holocaust and studied accounts of refugees in Great Britain and in the U.S. during and after WWII. She spent a week in Vienna, where she wandered the city streets and met with a curator at the city museum. The curator steered her toward a collection of historical photographs that provided Brown an authentic look into that lost era. "Such felicitous moments cannot be counted on during research," Brown says, "but it's lovely when they occur."

Once home, she camped out with heaps of books piled on the floor and maps of Vienna spread out around her. "I tried, through research, to understand both the emotional implications of being a survivor and a refugee," says Brown, "as well as the practical issues such a character would face. It was in many ways a humbling experience." — BILL GLOSE



recent releases

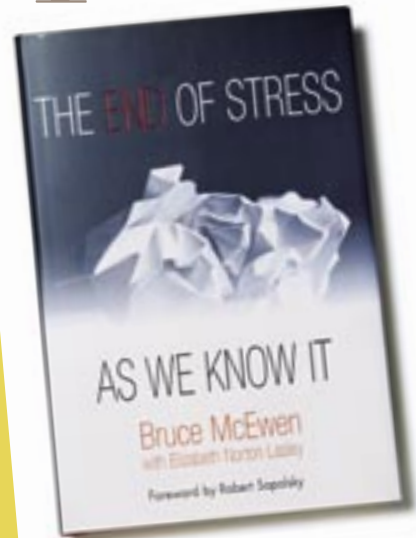
UpFront



Wolf at the Door: The World War II Antisubmarine Battle for Hampton Roads, Virginia

BY JAMES R. POWELL AND ALAN B. FLANDERS | BrandyLane Press, \$16.95

Co-authored by two Portsmouth residents, this book details the development of the U.S. Antisubmarine Warfare Program in World War II, highlighting the defeat of German U-Boats in the struggle for Hampton Roads. Powell and Flanders examine personal stories of former U-Boat officers, newspaper accounts and accepted historical facts to argue against the popular opinion that the Navy was negligent in its defense. Also included are tables detailing battles in the U.S. Fifth Naval District and numerous photographs of the people and ships involved.



The End of Stress as We Know It

BY BRUCE MCEWEN | Joseph Henry Press, \$27.95

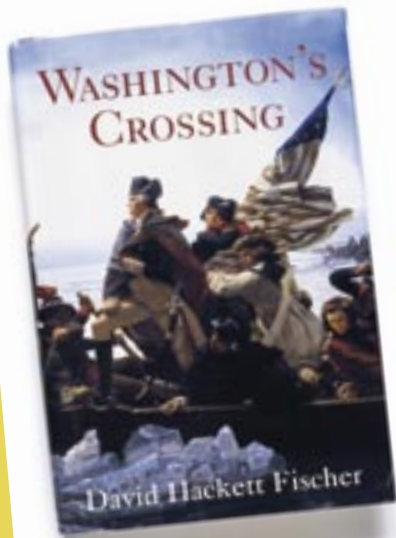
Stress is a necessary component in everyone's life; it is nature's way of allowing us to combat difficult situations. However, it is also a leading contributor to many illnesses, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and ulcers. Although some stress is inevitable, being stressed out isn't. In this book, Dr. Bruce McEwen shows us how to live in a way that will limit the damage stress can cause to the body and brain, and how to re-channel the powerful stress activators in our lives to make us more resilient.



The Dew Breaker

BY EDWIDGE DANTICAT | Knopf, \$22.00

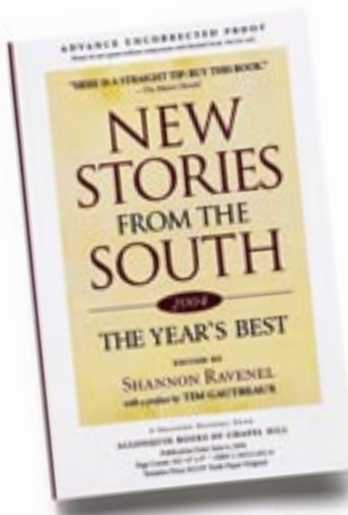
Borrowing from her Haitian heritage, Edwidge Danticat pens a powerful story about a torturer who reinvents himself by escaping to America. He becomes a barber in New York City, where he tries to lead a peaceful life, but his past won't remain buried. He was called a dew breaker because he would break into people's homes during the early morning hours and take them off to prison just as the dew was settling on the leaves. Those who survived his encounters will never forget his face. As one woman, whom he kidnapped and beat for refusing to dance with him, says, "You never look at anyone the way you do someone like this. ... No one will ever have that much of your attention."



Washington's Crossing

BY DAVID HACKETT FISCHER | Oxford University Press, \$35.00

In the early stages of the Revolutionary War, a powerful British force routed the Americans at New York, occupied three colonies and advanced within sight of Philadelphia. Just as things seemed at their worst, Washington led his men across the river and attacked the Hessian garrison at Trenton, killing or capturing a thousand men. When Cornwallis counterattacked, Washington maneuvered behind the enemy and struck again, turning the course of the war. In *Washington's Crossing*, Fischer details how these events unfolded and provides an insightful look into the minds of the key players.



New Stories from the South: 2004, The Year's Best

EDITED BY SHANNON RAVENEL | Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, \$13.95

Year in and year out, series editor Shannon Ravenel successfully sorts through thousands of stories to pick out those that best typify the Southern experience. This year's collection is the 19th installment in the series and features a bevy of noted literary figures, including Edward P. Jones, Rick Bass and Jill McCorkle. From a woman who surrenders her most prized possession just to make a young girl happy to a divorced womanizer who still lives with his wife, these stories revel in all the joys and pains that make living in the South so unique. Of all the "Year's Best" anthologies out there, this is the one you should rush out to buy.



Wedding Song: Memoirs of an Iranian Jewish Woman

BY FARIDEH GOLDIN | University Press of New England, \$24.95

Written by Farideh Goldin, a graduate of Old Dominion University's Creative Writing Program, this memoir tells the story of life in pre-Revolutionary Iran. Goldin gives a passionate and painful account of her childhood in a poor Jewish household and her emigration to the United States in 1975. As she recalls trips to the market and the mikvah, she conveys not just the personal trauma of growing up in a family fraught with discord but also the tragic human costs of religious dogmatism.



Shenandoah: Views of Our National Park

BY HULLIHEN WILLIAMS MOORE | UVA Press, \$22.95

Through 51 black-and-white duotone photographic prints, Moore reveals the quiet beauty of Shenandoah National Park and shares its history through accompanying essays. This handsome book documents Moore's fascination with this uniquely beautiful region in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Moore has been visiting the Shenandoah National Park for 40 years, but he didn't start seriously photographing the park until he studied with Ansel Adams in 1979.