



Transcript



Arts, Literature and Music

A Good Read - 04

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Staff from the Salisbury Library Service, preparing for their contributions to A Good Read. Wendy Abraham is at the left of this photograph.

I decided to read “The Marsh Birds” by Eva Sallis for three very good reasons. Firstly, it is the title chosen for this years “One Book One Salisbury” program, a Salisbury Library Service initiative. “One Book One Salisbury” is like a city wide book club where every resident is encouraged to read the same book during the months of June through to August. Talking about books with friends, family and neighbours makes for an interesting reading experience and is something that I enjoy.

The program aims to encourage people to read, increase their sense of community by creating a common topic of conversation and to create opportunities to engage people in reading and discussion about a variety of topics. A “Meet the author” event will be held on Fri.29th August in the John Harvey Gallery, 12 James Street, Salisbury from 1.30-2.30pm. Everyone is encouraged to attend and find out what inspires Eva Sallis as an author and how she writes. Bookings can be made by ringing the library on 84068237.

Secondly, I was fascinated to find out that Eva Sallis, who was born in Bendigo, is currently the writer in residence at the University of Adelaide.

Even though this is her fifth book and was written a couple of years ago, this title addresses many issues which are very relevant today. The Marsh Birds won the Asher Literary Award in 2005 and was short-listed for several other literary awards.

Being a great supporter of local authors, I did some research only to find that she was one of nine children raised on a farm in the Adelaide Hills, isolated from the community and schools, taught by her mother. She was encouraged to surround herself with music, art and books something which I also have a passion for. It was during this time that she taught herself the Arabic script and now has the ability to speak classic Arabic fluently.

Thirdly, I was particularly interested in her writing concerning migrant experience and in particular the mysteries and beauty of Arabic culture.

It is the story of Dhurgham, a twelve year- old Iraqi boy who has lost everything. He is the youngest child in a middle-class Baghdad family. He finds himself at the Great Mosque in Damascus in Syria, unaware of what has happened to his parents and sister who fled Baghdad with him. The story follows Dhurgham’s journey after he realises his family won’t be coming, through

many countries such as Iraq, Syria, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. It is also his journey from boyhood to adulthood, as he builds a new life for himself with no homeland, family or hope for the future.

The Marsh Birds is written in three parts, the first describing how he survives in Damascus after being picked up by a middle-aged man who exploits him under the guise of protection and love. The second describes how Dhurgham makes it to Australia on a boat and ends up in a detention centre as a failed asylum seeker. The third part is when he makes it to New Zealand as a refugee from Australia's detention system and spends some time with a New Zealand family.

The author's themes of separation, journeys and unbearable injustice, questions, illuminates and humanizes important moral and social issues. She writes powerfully and with knowledge and great insight about the bleak refugee detention camp in the Australian desert where Dhurgham is sent and spends several years.

Eva Sallis allows us to see the plight of modern-day asylum seekers which is an important contemporary issue. I, like many Australians, was intrigued to hear and see what went on in the refugee camps and the plight of the refugees, especially the women and children. Many of us can still picture the men we saw on the news or in the paper who sewed their lips together and went on hunger strikes in order to draw attention to their desperate situation.

Through her story she shows us what it is like to be caught in a web of laws, regulations and bureaucracy and how this can turn into anger. The future of Dhurgham depends on his capacity to face and resolve his bitter past.

What I liked about this book, although confronting, political and bleak at times is her ability to write a powerful story without sentimentality but thoroughly thought provoking. I recommend it as a great read, "A novel that gives a human face to the experiences of exile and migration." A novel that will appeal to both young adults and adults alike.

The Marsh Birds, by Eva Sallis, published by Allen and Unwin