

Beacon Press

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

December 17, 2007



To: UUA Board of Trustees
From: Helene Atwan, Director
Re: Beacon Press Board Report

Beacon Broadside, our blog, debuted in September, and the quality of material that has been sent in by our authors is truly a testament to the depth of Beacon's list: Among dozens of posts, a new one almost every weekday, **Mary Oliver** gave us her reflections on Edna St. Vincent Millay, **Meredith Hall** discussed the "rules of silence" around adoption, and **Stacy Mitchell** urged us to shop locally this holiday season. We also featured friends of the house, from **Lois Lowry** about Banned Books Week to **Pagan Kennedy** on animal rights.

Every week sees more readers logging on. A reviewer at popular publishing website *galleycat* praised the blog as "a site which uses the imprint's passion for social justice as a starting point for it's own engagement with readers...it's more than just an advertisement; it's an entirely new conversation." The site *Lean Left* noted that Beacon Broadside "should be a template for how publishers do blogs."

Our fall season has been a remarkable one in other ways as well:

Katherine Newman and **Victor Tan Chen's** *The Missing Class* has really taken off since my last report. The authors have made appearances on PBS's Bill Moyer's Journal, on WGBH-TV, on NPR's Marketplace, and on two popular nationally broadcast radio shows: The Tavis Smiley Show and The Leonard Lopate Show.

Mark Winne's *Closing the Food Gap* has been getting an abundance of media attention, including an appearance in December on ABC-TV's World News. "*Closing the Food Gap* reveals the chasm between the two food systems of America—the one for the poor and the one for everyone else. Mark Winne offers compelling solutions for making local, organic, and highly nutritious food available to everyone," in the words of Dr. Jane Goodall. Winne's November article in *The Washington Post* on the same topic spurred a storm of conversation with the author that continues well into December.

Philip Winslow's book on working in the West Bank with the United Nations Relief and Works agency, *Victory for Us Is to See You Suffer*, has been censored in Israel. A shipment of books ordered by the Educational Bookshop in East Jerusalem for a talk and book-signing given by Winslow at Al Quds University was confiscated by Israeli Customs on the grounds that the books were "incitement material." It took vigorous protest over almost two months to get the book released. The book has received very favorable reviews and the author has appeared on several radio shows, including NPR's Fresh Air with Terry Gross.



60 on Up: The Truth About Aging in America, written by **Lilian B. Rubin**, has been striking chords with baby boomers everywhere; the book was hailed by *O Magazine* as “a sharp, brazenly honest exposé” and was picked as a fall favorite by the *Boston Globe*. *USA Today* consulted the author for an article on “senior sex,” and Dr. Rubin was also interviewed by Leonard Lopate and Michael Krasney, as well as other public radio hosts.

Among our recent awards, ***The Earth Knows My Name*** by **Patricia Klindienst** has won the American Book Award for nonfiction from the Before Columbus Foundation. **Jennifer K. Harbury**, author of ***Truth, Torture, and the American Way***, has won the M. Shanara Gilbert Human Rights Award, given by the Society of American Law Teachers. And ***Without a Map***, by **Meredith Hall**, is a finalist for the first book category for Books for a Better Life. In addition, the Sundance Film Festival has chosen ***Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*** as one of its 16 documentaries. The film is a companion to **Thomas Norman DeWolf**’s just-released ***Inheriting the Trade***, a book about facing the legacy of the slave trade.

Among our recently acquired titles:

Carl Elliott’s ***White Coat, Black Hat*** will take readers on an insider tour of our modern medical system, in which fakery and deception are not just tolerated but rewarded. He will discuss professional guinea pigs, clinical researchers, drug industry reps, and ghostwriters for prestigious journals, observing them all with fascination and telling the story of the commoditization of medicine while exploring the larger philosophical issues surrounding medical consumerism.

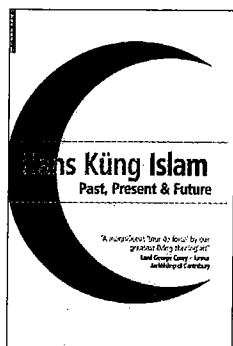
Patricia Harman, a nurse-midwife who runs a private practice with her physician husband in West Virginia, has written a debut memoir that chronicles her own trials and triumphs while also telling the intimate tales of her patients, providing a behind-the-scenes look at the challenges of running a medical practice and of caring for women facing major health problems—including the author’s own cancer—as well as abuse, STDs, unwanted pregnancy, and even female-to-male transitioning.

Fred Pearce’s new book, ***Confessions of an Eco-Sinner***, will look at the author’s own environmental footprint by examining the sources of everything in his life. Pearce will look at how interconnected the global economy is and at the often troubling but sometimes hopeful realities behind the fresh fish we order at a restaurant, the fair trade coffee we drink, and the garbage we discard.

Former Gallup pollster **David W. Moore**’s ***Manufacturing Public Opinion*** will take a critical look at what media polling has become: manipulative and misrepresentative of public opinion, sometimes with disastrous results. Moore will expose the inner-workings of pollsters and the cycle of bias that tends to promote the powerful and suppress dissent, just in time for the presidential election.

The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World and The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, as well as two translations of the Qur'an and a comprehensive concordance that is being made available for the first time electronically.

Meanwhile, print studies of the Qur'an also continue to flourish. Duke scholar Bruce Lawrence received rave reviews for his "biography" of the Qur'an with Atlantic Monthly Press, part of the house's Books that Changed the World series (Feb. 2007). And HarperOne is assembling a major new translation and commentary of the holy book, spearheaded by general editor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, to be published in late 2009.



A wide range: from weighty tomes (Beacon) to memoirs (OneWorld).

The New Muslim Memoir

It's impossible to focus just on Muslim history and theology, however, when what many readers want is a thoughtful explanation of how Islam functions politically and socially in the world today. And they often want that information delivered in the context of memoir, with personal stories and anecdotes eloquently reflecting the diversity of opinions within Islam.

One example is Eboo Patel's *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Beacon, July). "Eboo had this insight that religious extremists target young people," says Amy Caldwell, senior editor for Beacon. Caldwell encouraged Patel to weave his political ideas and the story of why he founded the Interfaith Youth Core to combat religious extremism with vignettes about his own life as a young Muslim in the U.S. "I thought his was a really interesting story. What is it like to be Muslim and to grow up in America in this day and age?" A personal story, Caldwell notes, is often the best way to get readers engaged in a topic or issue. Her strategy must be working: after an initial print run of 6,000 copies, Beacon

has gone back to press and now has 12,500 copies in print, a growth no doubt fueled by Patel's speaking engagements at universities and high schools. And the success is enough to get Beacon to do it again: it will publish *The Next Golden Age*, the family memoir of Pakistani-American journalist Ayesha Akram, sometime after 2009.

It takes time for readers to be ready for personal voices, says Farrar, Straus & Giroux senior editor Paul Elie. "Shortly after the World Trade Center was destroyed, we published *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story* by Tamim Ansary. I don't think the public was ready yet for the first-person Muslim narrative. We

raced to publish the book in about six months, and it was still a little too early. But now, that is one of our leading books for course adoption. A number of colleges have bought 2,000 copies at a time, and everybody reads it over the summer."

At HarperOne, former *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Asra Nomani chronicled her experiences of going on hajj as an unwed mother in *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. The book came out in 2005 in cloth and sold 25,000 copies, followed by a paperback release last year, which has sold an additional 12,000. The paperback edition removed the words "in Mecca" to reflect the universalism of Nomani's Muslim experience.

Sometimes personal voices are collected into a book of profiles or interviews, as is the case with Melody Moezzi's forthcoming *War on Error: Real Stories of American Muslims*, which offers personal interviews with a dozen young Muslims in the U.S. (Univ. of Arkansas, Dec. 10). The book has been excerpted in *Parabola* and will be promoted to Muslim student associations, in *Muslim World* and *Muslim Girl*, says Tom Lavoie, director

of marketing and sales for the press.

Another collection of profiles is FSG's *American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion* by journalist Paul Barrett. FSG's Elie reports that the book arose out of Barrett's *Wall Street Journal* profiles of American Muslims after 9/11, and took the author the better part of five years to put together. Far from being a flash-in-the-pan response to the tragedy, the book drew upon carefully cultivated relationships with the profile subjects. Elie notes that the author and the press resisted the temptation to release the book to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the WTC attacks last fall, "in part because it was a crowded season around the fifth anniversary, but in part because the American Muslim community is diverse and peaceful. It would have created a false association between the World Trade Center attack and American Islam."

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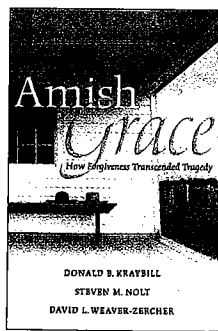
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Amish Tragedy

Mormons aren't the only religious group under the microscope. In October 2006, America watched in horror as a gunman killed five Amish schoolchildren before turning the weapon on himself. Then it watched in admiring fascination as the Amish people extended forgiveness to the shooter and his family, and capably tended their wounded survivors.

In conjunction with the first anniversary of this horrible event, Jossey-Bass released *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* by Donald Kraybill, Steven Nolt and David Weaver-Zercher (Sept.). "The authors are among the foremost experts on the Amish," says Sheryl Fullerton, executive editor. "When the tragic shooting happened at Nickel Mines, they were the people the media went to. The question reporters had over and over again was how the Amish could have forgiven the shooter so soon and so completely. So Don and his colleagues came up with the idea for this book. From the beginning, we wanted to make it not exploitative or sensational, but to describe who the Amish are."

Kelly Hughes, president of DeChant-Hughes Public Relations in Chicago, arranged interviews for the authors on *Anderson Cooper 360*, *Bill Moyers Journal*, in the *Christian Science Monitor* and on *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, among others. Hughes says public interest is high because the Amish "represent an ideal of a bucolic, idyllic, simple existence, free from the problems of the world. The intrusion of evil into their quiet world was especially shocking." To help combat such evil, the authors are donating all



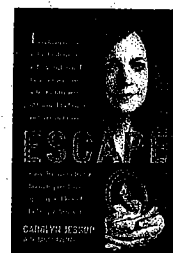
Illuminating a people in crisis (Jossey-Bass) and in daily life (Beacon).



The More, the Merrier? New Polygamy Memoirs

Call it the *Big Love* effect: the ex-polygamist memoir has gained an ascendancy not seen since the late 19th century, when exposés such as *Wife Number Nineteen* scandalized Victorians. Two books making a splash this fall offer an inside view of polygamous life. On August 22, Center Street published *Shattered Dreams: My Life as a Polygamist's Wife* by Irene Spencer. Bolstered by a 4-star review the following week in *People* magazine and an author appearance on *Anderson Cooper 360*, the book spent several weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover nonfiction bestseller list, peaking at #10. "The polygamist way of life is fascinating and people are just naturally curious," says Lori Quinn, associate publisher/marketing for Hachette Book Group.

Spencer's memoir has just been joined by the literary equivalent of a sister wife: on October 16, Broadway released Carolyn Jessop's tell-all *Escape*, which chronicles how and why she fled Warren Jeffs' polygamist cult in 2003 with her eight children and just \$20 to her name. The book's publication coincides nicely with the accused leader's high-profile court trial this fall, and Jessop will be in the national spotlight as she testifies against him. Associate director of publicity Joanna Pinsker reports that "strong early enthusiasm from accounts" caused Broadway to go back for a second printing before publication, bringing the total in print to 57,000 copies. At press time, *Good Morning America* was confirmed for a two-part interview, and interviews were also scheduled for CNN and several national magazines. Pinsker doesn't think that the success of *Shattered Dreams* will negatively affect sales of *Escape*. "While there are similarities between the two books, Carolyn Jessop's first-hand account of her experience in a polygamist community is more contemporary than that depicted in *Shattered Dreams*," Pinsker says. —J.R.



proceeds from the book to the Mennonite Central Committee to benefit children suffering around the world from poverty, war and disaster.

Amish Grace isn't the only book about the school shootings. John L. Ruth's *Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickel Mines Amish School* came out in May from Mennonite-affiliated Herald Press. Sales also spiked for a spring 2006 title from Farrar, Straus & Giroux, *Rumspringa*, Tom Shachtman's entertaining analysis of the "running-around period" for Amish teens. The book "definitely had an increase" after the shootings, according to senior editor Paul Elie. It has sold 15,000 copies in cloth and 10,000 in paper.

For timeless behind-the-scenes glimpses of Amish life, few can match the close views afforded by Ohio writer Joe Mackall's memoir *Plain Secrets: An Outsider*

Among the Amish (Beacon, June). Mackall has forged a years-long friendship with a neighboring Amish family and writes respectfully of their traditions and beliefs. "We wanted to acknowledge the fascination people have about the Amish without romanticizing them," says Beacon senior editor Amy Caldwell. Sales of the book "have been pretty nice, and we've gone back to press twice. It got a couple of great NPR interviews, and was widely reviewed in the *L.A. Times*, *Boston Globe* and *Cleveland Plain Dealer*."

Caldwell has her eyes open for other books that investigate the "nooks and crannies" of sectarian religious experience in the United States. Books about religions outside the mainstream, she says, "shed light on different ways to think, and that informs the choices the rest of us might want to make."

