

Books

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Arboretum testifies to Raulston's adventures

Detailed biography shares the story of the N.C. State horticulturist who founded a botanic treasure and popularized a wealth of new plants

BY AMBER VEVERKA
Correspondent

The winding paths of the J.C. Raulston Arboretum on the N.C. State University campus usher visitors through a leafy, scented paradise that was the dream of the late horticulturist and NCSU professor James Chester "J.C." Raulston.

The arboretum, with more than 5,000 different plants, is regarded as a national botanic treasure. Raulston, who died in 1996, filled much of it with plants he grew from cuttings and seeds collected on worldwide expeditions. But he left a legacy elsewhere: In many of our front yards.

In "Chlorophyll in His Veins: J.C. Raulston, Horticultural Ambassador," Raleigh author Bobby J. Ward details how Raulston changed the American urban and residential landscape. Leyland cypress, Oregon grape and showier versions of dogwood are just a few species Raulston helped popularize.

"When J.C. started, there were about 30 plants sold in every nursery in the country," said Mark Weathington, assistant director of the arboretum, pointing out some of its star species.

Among them: the Japanese crape myrtle "Fantasy," showier and more disease-resistant than other crape myrtles, and intensely scented "Emerald Pagoda" Japanese snowbell trees, which Raulston grew from cuttings taken on a remote island off the South Korean coast. "Chlorophyll in His Veins" recounts Raulston's dash up a hillside to gather the cuttings before his boat left — and the frustration of seeing all but one wither. But from the survivor, Ward writes, have come thousands of Emerald Pagoda trees that now grace U.S. landscapes.

The best parts of the biography read like an adventure tale: Raulston's journeys, often to East Asia, to discover rare plants, his crusade to get the nursery trade to market them, and his push to create a new teaching arboretum.

Ward paints pictures of a man passionate about teaching, first at Texas A&M and then NCSU, known for taking students on whirlwind tours of gardens at home and overseas. In a time when



1996 NEWS & OBSERVER FILE PHOTO

N.C. State professor J.C. Raulston, who died in 1996, left his legacy in the scenic arboretum that bears his name — and in many of our front yards.

professors rarely mingled with students, Raulston opened his home to them and even paid for some of their garden trips.

Ward, a member of the arboretum's board, relates how that enthusiasm hit obstacles when Raulston championed the idea of an NCSU arboretum in the mid-1970s. Some faculty worried that it would drain money, land and people from other projects. Ward focuses much of his narrative on the arboretum's creation. That story of struggle and triumph suffers, however, from being sandwiched between layers of minutiae. Readers get a meticulous accounting of Raulston's grades in his high school shop class, the plot of his senior class play, the towns he stopped in during

five months of flight lessons when he was 21.

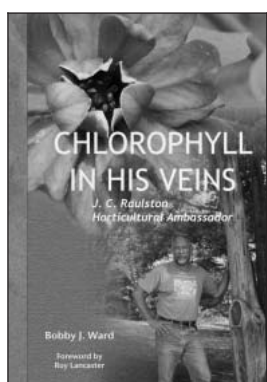
Sometimes, too, details are distractions never fully explained. Ward quotes Raulston as saying, "Gardening was my

safe place [as a child] because nobody else did it. Plants weren't threatening like people are." Readers waiting through the chapter on Raulston's Oklahoma childhood to learn what that meant will be disappointed.

Only in the appended "Life Philosophy," written by Raulston himself, do readers learn more about the joys and sorrows that drove him — his excitement over unusual plant forms, his troubled relationship with his father, his professional insecurities.

Still, the biography serves as a reminder of the horticultural debt owed to Raulston, who was killed in a car crash at age 56. Today, the arboretum that was Raulston's crowning achievement has grown to include a desert landscape, a Japanese Zen garden, a collection of conifers, and pathways lined with weeping-form trees. At the entrance grows a Japanese maple — the tree that is its symbol and on Raulston's list of "the great pleasures of life."

"Chlorophyll in His Veins" offers a gentle tribute to a man who fulfilled the phrase he always used to close his correspondence: "Plan and plant for a better world."



Nonfiction

CHLOROPHYLL IN HIS VEINS: J.C. RAULSTON, HORTICULTURAL AMBASSADOR
By Bobby J. Ward
Mayapple Press, 352 pages

Memoir of caretaking offers poignant tales and useful advice

BY JERRY HARKAVY
Associated Press

Decades after screen star Bette Davis famously declared that "growing old is not for sissies," Estelle Gross lamented that people live too long and die too slowly.

The day after helping cover 9-11 for The New York Times, an exhausted Jane Gross was finally able to drop by the nursing home near ground zero where her mother had just moved to what would be her final residence. "I wish those planes had hit this building," Estelle said in a furious maternal vent.

Gross was a feisty octogenarian with chronic conditions that for nearly three years forced her to rely on others to

carry out the simplest daily activities. Her cognitive abilities, however, remained sharp until the end.

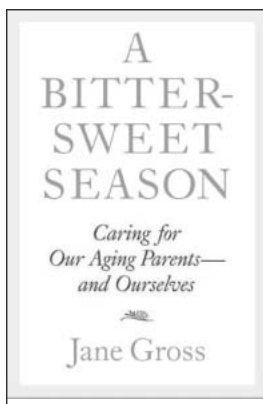
In "A Bittersweet Season: Caring for Our Aging Parents — and Ourselves," Gross recounts her own experiences in shepherding her mother through the intricacies and indignities of long-term care.

The narrative begins in 2000 with Estelle Gross' move from Florida to New York, a "reverse migration" that is becoming more common for parents needing chronic care. It ends in 2003, when she dies at 88 after a decline that left her paralyzed, incontinent, unable to speak and unable to eat on her own.

An incisive reporter with a fine eye for detail, Gross laces

her account of her mother's decline and its impact on her own life with warnings for other caregivers: Avoid the chaos of hospital emergency rooms, assume that costs associated with long-term care are not reimbursable by Medicare, find a family doctor, internist or geriatrician to manage the inevitable cascade of medical problems.

"A Bittersweet Season" is sure to become required reading for anyone with an elderly parent who depends on long-term care. It's also a worthwhile read for anyone who is interested in America's health care system as it braces for the demands posed by demographic changes that include a sharp rise in the group now termed the "old old."



Nonfiction

A BITTERSWEET SEASON: CARING FOR OUR AGING PARENTS — AND OURSELVES
By Jane Gross
Knopf, 368 pages

An assassin, the really rich, a touch of Holmes

"THE INFORMANT," BY THOMAS PERRY. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT. 336 PAGES.

Thomas Perry junkies, time for your fix!

It's a new Butcher's Boy novel. Once again the preternaturally adroit assassin is slaughtering Mafiosi in all kinds of fun and different ways. And as always, it's all pure self-defense, because they started it.

The Butcher's Boy covertly allies himself with Justice Department offi-

MYSTERIES



SALEM MACKNEE

cial Elizabeth Waring (a returning character from the first book), and makes her very unpopular at work in the process.

If it feels a bit retro for him to be taking on classic Italian Mafiosi, that in no way diminishes the joy of watching him outsmart bad guys and even good guys when it serves his purpose.

"THE RICH AND THE DEAD," EDITED BY NELSON DEMILLE. GRAND CENTRAL. 384 PAGES.

As rumblings grow about the gap between "the Haves and the Have-Yachts," as Twist Phelan puts it in her story "Happine\$\$," this collection features tales where victim or perpetrator, or both, are part of the monied class.

There are excellent stories here from well-known names, including Michael Connelly, whose tale is a transcript of an interview by his series detective Harry Bosch with the widow of a man who bilked investors of millions; Harley Jane Kozak, with a story of two mommies; Nelson Demille, lampooning the publishing profession; and S.J. Rozan, writing about a bored software tycoon. One of the best-crafted stories is by newcomer Carolyn Muller, a period piece with a nice kicker.

The beauty of a short-story collec-

tion is that there's something for fans of every genre and style.

"THE BROTHERS OF BAKER STREET," BY MICHAEL ROBERTSON. MINOTAUR. 274 PAGES.

This is the second in a series about brothers whose modern-day law firm operates from Sherlock Holmes' supposed address, 221B Baker St. in London. As part of the lease agreement, they must answer every letter that arrives addressed to Holmes.

In this situation, you'd want to be wary of any letter signed "Moriarty," but sure enough there's a crank of the un-harmless variety whose letters lie unnoticed for too long.

Not being Sherlock Holmes, older brother Reggie Heath does not stay several jumps ahead of his Moriarty and ends up behind bars while a scheme involving crimes against taxi-

cab passengers plays out. The plot feels Holmes-ish; there's a whiff of the lurid "penny dreadful" underlying the 21st-century setting and technology.

Michael Robertson keeps the tone light and gives clues for the savvy reader who enjoys solving the puzzle. A thumbs-up to this new series.

Find me on Facebook

If you're on Facebook, "like" my new ObserverMysteries page to join in the fun as we talk about what we're reading, both new releases and old favorites. I've given away copies of Julia Spencer-Fleming's "One Was a Soldier," C.J. Sansom's "Heartstone" and Thomas Perry's "The Informant," and will be giving away lots more in ObserverMysteries contests. Y'all come!

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Short takes

Fiction

THE SIXTH MAN

By David Baldacci, Grand Central, 432 pages

Private investigator Sean King receives a call from an old colleague, Ted Bergin, asking him to help investigate a federal case in Maine. When King and colleague Michelle Maxwell arrive, they're shocked to find Bergin's body in his car on the side of the road. They immediately become suspects in his murder.

Meanwhile, a man named Peter Bunting has created a state-of-the-art intelligence-gathering strategy that could revolutionize the methods used by the CIA and other agencies. Unfortunately, others want this program and are willing to frame innocent people and kill to achieve their goals. King and Maxwell collide with Bunting, and no one will ever be the same.

The puzzle at first appears to be straightforward. But David Baldacci takes this seemingly obvious plot and slowly unravels the multiple intertwining layers. By the last page, it's not at all what the reader was expecting.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE MEDUSA AMULET

By Robert Masello, Bantam, 464 pages

David Franco has successfully restored a vintage version of Dante's "Inferno" to academic acclaim. After a lecture, Kathryn Van Owen offers him \$1 million to track down a legendary piece of 16th-century art created by Benvenuto Cellini. This amulet depicts Medusa on one side and a mirror on the other. Rumors suggest it has the power to grant immortality to its owner. A refreshing take on books like "The Da Vinci Code," "The Medusa Amulet" guarantees an exhilarating journey. Readers won't be disappointed.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

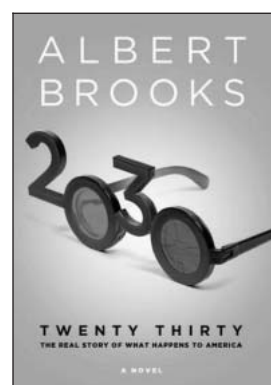
THE DEVIL'S LIGHT

By Richard North Patterson, Scribner, 342 pages

"The Devil's Light," scrupulously researched and maybe the best thriller Richard North Patterson has written, opens with al-Qaida detonating a nuclear bomb over a major city. We follow the machinations of the al-Qaida operative, whose dream this is, and the intense intelligence work of a CIA operative and his colleagues (one of whom turns out to be the great love of his life).

The suspense is broad, as is the route the bomb travels, beginning in Pakistan and extending through South Asia and by ship to the Middle East. The time frame is fairly narrow, from August 2011 to the 10th anniversary of 9-11. Fortunately, Patterson is a serious student of human psychology and world politics; he slows the pace just enough to help us understand who and what are at stake as we worry about where we might be if and when that rogue bomb explodes.

— SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE



Arriving in Stores

2030, by Albert Brooks. The actor-director's debut novel envisions our world in the near future.

BURIED PREY, by John Sandford. After two bodies are found, Lucas Davenport takes on a cold case.

A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF, by Lawrence Sanders. PI Matthew Scudder returns in a mystery based in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Literary Notes

TUESDAY

SIGNING: Diane Chamberlain ("Midwife's Confession"), 6 p.m., Park Road Books, 4139 Park Road. 704-525-9239; www.parkroad.indiebound.com.

WEDNESDAY

SIGNING: Katie Crouch ("The Magnolia League"), 7 p.m., Park Road Books.

FRIDAY

SIGNING: Therese Fowler ("Exposure"), 7 p.m., Park Road Books.

SATURDAY

SIGNING: Steve Lang ("In the Company of Wolves"), 2 p.m., Park Road Books.

— LAURA NOETHIGER

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Calendar at least two weeks in advance to

litcal@charlottobserver.com.

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- Additional events and reviews at charlotteobserver.com/books
- Read Pam Kelley's blog at <http://readinglifeobs.blogspot.com>

Best-sellers

Fiction

1. **THE SIXTH MAN**, by David Baldacci
2. **THE LAND OF PAINTED CAVES**, by Jean M. Auel
3. **THE FIFTH WITNESS**, by Michael Connelly
4. **CHASING FIRE**, by Nora Roberts
5. **I'LL WALK ALONE**, by Mary Higgins Clark
6. **QUICKSILVER**, by Amanda Quick
7. **EVE**, by Iris Johansen
8. **SAVE ME**, by Lisa Scottoline
9. **THE PRIEST'S GRAVEYARD**, by Ted Dekker
10. **THE GIRL WHO KICKED THE HORNET'S NEST**, by Stieg Larsson

Nonfiction

1. **BOSSYPANTS**, by Tina Fey
2. **UNBROKEN**, by Laura Hillenbrand
3. **LIBERTY DEFINED**, by Ron Paul
4. **SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY**, by Caroline Kennedy
5. **I'M OVER ALL THAT**, by Shirley MacLaine
6. **63 DOCUMENTS THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T WANT YOU TO READ**, by Jesse Ventura with Dick Russell
7. **THE SOCIAL ANIMAL**, by David Brooks
8. **ALL THAT IS BITTER AND SWEET**, by Ashley Judd with Maryanne Vollers
9. **ONWARD**, by Howard Schultz with Joanne Gordon
10. **IDEA MAN**, by Paul Allen

— NEW YORK TIMES