

BY KAREN LYON

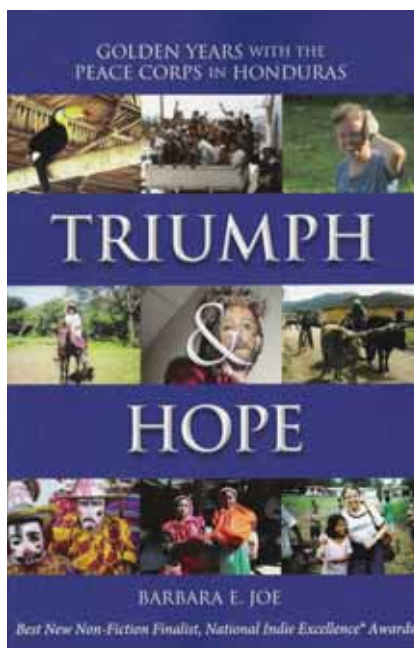
'Triumph and Hope'

"If your idea of a good time is to hop into your climate controlled car, call ahead on your cell phone for Chinese take-out, and pick up your meal steaming hot after paying by credit card," writes Barbara E. Joe, "Peace Corps service is not for you." But if you want to make a meaningful contribution before "retiring to the golf links" – and you're willing to use a latrine, share your bed with scorpions, and shower by pouring a bucket of water over your head – it might just be the toughest job you'll ever love.

On her 60th birthday, Joe declared to her three grown children that she was going to fulfill her longtime dream of joining the Peace Corps. Despite naysayers, including a friend who predicted she'd be home by Christmas, she made it through the strict application process and began her training two years later.

At 62, she was the oldest volunteer in her group, but clearly no sissy. She endured not only the training and requisite two years of service, but ended up extending her stay by another year. "Triumph and Hope: Golden Years with the Peace Corps in Honduras" is her story.

In short, lively vignettes, Joe describes her time in the two villages to which she was assigned: El Triunfo (The Triumph) and La Esperanza (The Hope). Her primary mission was health education, giving charlas (talks) to local people on sanitation, nutrition and AIDS prevention, but she ended up pitching in at everything from overseeing the installation of wells to assisting at childbirth. Interlaced with personal episodes are informative sections on crime, cor-



ruption, religion, prejudice, illegal immigration – in short, every facet of life in her newly-adopted country.

During the course of her experience, Joe also came to terms with the tragic deaths of her son and foster son several years earlier. "Now I see their lives and deaths more fully woven in the universal tapestry of joy and pain," she writes. "No sudden epiphanies arose from my Peace Corps service, but I've acquired more inner peace."

When she's not off volunteering, Barbara Joe lives on Capitol Hill, works as a Spanish interpreter and translator, and keeps a blog at honduraspeacecorps.blogspot.com. "Triumph and Hope," her first book, was named Best Peace Corps Memoir of 2009; copies are available online and at Riverby Books, 417 East Capitol St. SE. Barbara Joe will be reading from her book at Riverby Books on May 26, 7 p.m., during the monthly "A Space Inside" series.

Alexie Dances Off With Prize

These days it seems you need a vampire or two to make a splash in the jaded world of publishing. But Sherman Alexie has managed to wow both readers and critics alike with stories about families and racial conflict, love and betrayal, sex and death. His eclectic collection of short stories and poems, "War Dances," was recently declared the winner of the 2010 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.

In making the selection, judge Al Young called "War Dances" a "rollicking, bittersweet gem of a book [that taps] every vein and nerve, every tissue, every issue that quickens the current blood-pulse." Reviewers have praised Alexie's writing for being "wry and subversive," "messy and in-your-face," and for making "you suck your breath or ... realize you are crying."

The title story finds a son searching the hospital corridors for a blanket to warm his father, the victim of "decades of poor health and worse decisions." By

the conclusion, the son has come face to face with his Native American heritage – as well as with his own mortality. "War Dances" is funny, profane, angry and touching, and it could only have been written by Sherman Alexie.

The other finalists for this year's PEN/Faulkner Award are Barbara Kingsolver for "The Lacuna," Lorraine M. López for "Homicide Survivors Picnic and Other Stories," Lorrie Moore for "A Gate at the Stairs," and Colson Whitehead for "Sag Harbor." Alexie and all the finalists will be lauded at the 30th anniversary PEN/Faulkner Award Ceremony at the Folger Shakespeare Library (201 East Capitol St. SE), May 8, 7 p.m. Tickets (\$100) are available through the box office at 202-544-7077 or online at www.folger.edu/penfaulkneraward.

A Lesson in Reading and Justice

The Big Read is once again encouraging all Washingtonians to pick up the same book. "[We want] every-



one in the city to read 'A Lesson Before Dying,'" says Joy Ford Austin, executive director of the Humanities Council of Washington, DC, co-sponsor with the DC Public Libraries of The Big Read, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts.

The award-winning novel by Ernest Gaines deals with the themes of race, oppression and injustice in 1940s Louisiana, where a young man is sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. "A Lesson Before Dying' is the perfect book to launch discussions about juvenile justice, our school system, what it means to grow as a community and, ultimately, how to live," says Austin.

As in previous years, activities include exhibitions, book clubs and talks, but the 2010 Big Read offers some distinctly new twists. Online enhancements, for example, enable participants to join live book chats hosted by the "Washington Post" (May 3 and May 10) and to use the council's website to share their own stories.

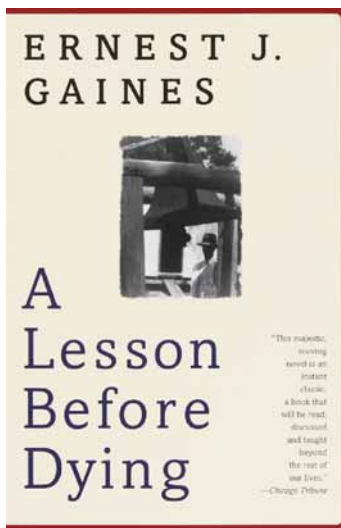
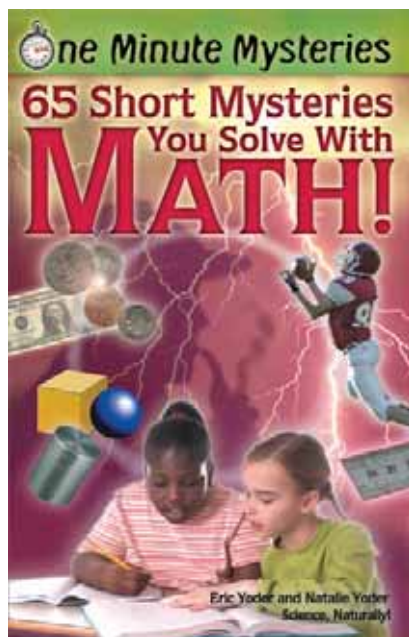
Other offerings include a special panel discussion with R. Dwayne Betts, author of a 2009 memoir about coming of age in prison, at the Academy for Educational Development (AED) Globe Theater (1927 Florida Ave. NW), May 6, 7 p.m.; and screenings of films, including the 1999 HBO production of "A Lesson Before Dying" starring Don

Cheadle and Cicely Tyson (at various branches of the DCPL), and "Crips and Bloods: Made in America" at the AED Globe Theatre on May 5 at 7 p.m.

For more information, visit www.dclibrary.org/bigread.

Mysterious No More

A new book by Hill publisher Science, Naturally! aims to take the mystery out of math. If your 10- to 14-year-olds groan at the thought of those dreaded story problems, then this is the book for them. Written by the father-daughter team of Eric and Natalie Yoder, "One Minute Mysteries: 65 Short Mysteries You Solve With Math!" uses real-life examples from sports, cooking, camping and school fundraising to walk you through the hoariest of mathematical conundrums all the way to their clear and logical solutions. "One Minute Mysteries" and other educational math and sciences titles are available from www.ScienceNaturally.com or toll-free at 1-866-SCI-9876. ★



a space inside

Nonfiction Reading

Wednesday,
May 26
at
7 p.m.

Barbara
Joe

author most recently of
*Triumph & Hope:
Golden Years with
the Peace Corps
in Honduras*

A Space Inside is just that—a place where developing writers, lesser known voices, and the work writers create between books can be heard. It alternates monthly between poetry and prose.

For more information
email [Monica F. Jacobe](mailto:Monica.F.Jacobe@usa.net)
at monicafjacobe@usa.net



RIVERBY BOOKS
417 East Capitol St. SE