

BOOKS

No Ease and Nothing Easy

Robin Romm goes raw with loss

THE MERCY PAPERS: A Memoir of Three Weeks by Robin Romm. Scribner, 2009. Hardcover, \$22.

The *Mercy Papers* is an exceptionally naked book. It's difficult to read, but not because of the writing, which is crystalline, brittle and clear with grief, nor because names and places will ring bells for Eugeneans. It's the sheer rawness lurking behind Robin Romm's sharp observations that makes the book so hard, and so effective. From the first page, it's clear that Romm's grown worn out with worry and fear and anger over the years her mother has been ill with cancer. In the book, her mother's hospice nurse is the first to step, unknowing, into the sights of this furious and hurting daughter. "The woman needs to be startled," Romm writes, describing the nurse. Later, she tells off a shop clerk, scathingly observes her grandfather's aging voice and dismissively notes the imperfect face of a dog trainer. It's uncomfortable and cruel, and it's absolutely believable: There is nothing like death to shake a person loose from the stays of politeness, to give her reason to find fault with everything, with everyone not dying, not scared, not guilty with helplessness.

But Romm, in the three weeks that her memoir specifically describes, does more than let the fury and pain of nine years — the years of her twenties — seep through

the pages. She gives us her Eugene, from Mount Pisgah to Fifth Street Market. She offers a vivid image of a family familiar to more than a few Eugeneans; her mother, Jackie, was a noted civil rights lawyer. Most broadly, most beautifully, she captures one kind of grief: angry, stricken, helpless, distant and immediate all at once. In the details of her mother's illness — the reactions of her mother's friends, the comfort of home, the love of a dog, the things remembered and the things forgotten — Romm finds no ease and nothing easy. Booklets on letting go make her angry; she tells her mother she cannot say it is OK for her to die: "The idea of losing her has been careening around me since I was nineteen like a maniac bird and I'm not stupid, I've paid attention. There is nothing okay about it." It's with this clear-eyed ferocity that Romm faces her mother's death, and while it doesn't make it any easier, when it comes — what could? — it does make her memoir such a sharp, striking work that it cheapens it to try to say whether it's good, or whether it might give solace to a grieving reader. It is feverish with loss, gorgeously written and far more than OK. - *Molly Templeton*

Robin Romm reads from The Mercy Papers at 2 pm Saturday, Feb. 7, at Barnes & Noble.



Who We Were, Who We Are

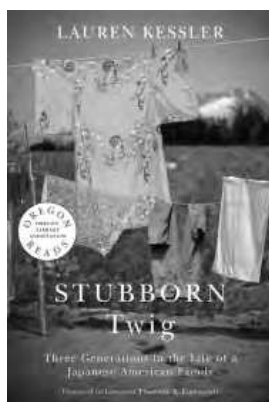
Oregon Reads *Stubborn Twig*

Good nonfiction can change lives, heal wounds, show us what a list of facts can never quite manage. When I taught writing and critical reading to first-year students at the University of Iowa. I liked to use well-researched books with strong narratives — including UO prof Lauren Kessler's *Stubborn Twig: Three Generations in the Life of a Japanese-American Family*. I'd receive reading journals that described how much the 18-year-olds resisted the tale at first. But soon they'd be deeply drawn into the tale of the Yasui family of Hood River. A photo caption revealed information that Kessler concealed until later in the narrative, and the students complained furiously: Midwestern farm kids and kids from the Chicago suburbs cared so much about this literary book, a story about a family long ago and far away, that they wanted to write the publisher and demand a fix. Some of them, like me, cried as we read portions of the end.

So it's no surprise that the selection for Oregon Reads 2009, the year of this state's sesquicentennial, is *Stubborn Twig* (now reprinted by OSU Press and available all over the state). Kessler's Oregon Book Award-winning reconstruction of the tale of successful and prosperous immigrants — and how their lives were nearly destroyed by Executive Order 9066 — is a superb choice, covering state history and national history in the tale of one complex, courageous family.

Oregon Read's two choices for younger readers are also fabulous: the moving and fascinating *Bat 6* by Oregon City's Virginia Euwer Wolff for tweens and younger teens, and Deborah Hopkinson's lively, smart *Apples to Oregon* for the kiddos. - *Suzi Steffen*

Lauren Kessler reads from Stubborn Twig at 6 pm Friday, Feb. 6, at the Eugene Public Library.



KLCC MICROBREW FESTIVAL

February 6 & 7
5-11 p.m.

Lane Events Center
796 West 13th, Eugene



\$15 ADMISSION
Includes souvenir glass & 2 beer tastes!
21 & OVER

♪ **Fri - Ashleigh Flynn**
♪ **Sat - The Essentials**

A benefit for KLCC

MUSIC SALE!
Used Records & CDs

Sponsored by
MARKET CHOICE
OREGON GROWN, OREGON OWNED

KLCC 89.7
www.klcc.org n p t

Phil's Clubhouse 3RD ANNIVERSARY PARTY!!

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 14TH • 5-7PM
COMPLIMENTARY BUFFET & CHAMPAGNE BAR

RAFFLES • GIVE AWAYS
GUEST STARS • SURPRISES
ALL DAY & ALL NIGHT

Phil thanks everyone for making the Clubhouse such a big success!

FUN, FOOD, FANTASY

1195 Main St., Springfield • 741-0402
Mon-Fri noon-2:30am • Sun 2pm-2:30am



Oregon's Valentine's Day HEADQUARTERS

Your secrets are safe with us...



SPRINGFIELD - 3270 GATEWAY ST - 541.988.9226
Sunday thru Wednesday 8am - 2am / Thursday thru Saturday Open 24 Hours
VISIT US AT: **WWW.CASTLEMEGASTORE.COM**

Image provided by *Dreamgirl*