

Salem Recognizes Black History Month

Editors' Note: In recognition of Black History Month *The Salemite* will be spotlighting special minority women. The women we have chosen for this issue are Maya Angelon, a poet, and Linda Brown Bragg, an author.

Other important black historians include: Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Charles Drew, and Mary McLeod Bethune.

During this month we hope you will learn more about black history and those dedicated individuals who risked their lives to seek freedom and educate themselves. Not only has their struggle been difficult, but also inspirational.

Local Author Details Metamorphosis

by Karen Lewis

Rainbow Roun Mah Shoulder is a novel about spiritual growth and the search for self, about isolation and friendship and undeniable triumph. Its author is Linda Brown Bragg, a black professor at Guilford College in Greensboro. Its heroine is Rebecca Florice, a strong and gifted black woman. Its time is our time, the twentieth century, with its racism and sexism and change. But this novel is not just about racism and sexism and change, although the characters encounter them. It is about a remarkable woman with an extraordinary destiny and how she fights to deserve and accept her birthright. It is about the never-ending struggle to understand light's power.

Rebecca Florice has the gift of healing, of using her hands and her faith to make the human body well. In her youth she struggles with this gift, because it makes her different in a time when black women should not be different. The ignorance of her fellow blacks causes her alienation even within church walls. Such misunderstanding makes her fear the coming of the sick and weary who need her help, but she answers their pleas graciously and lovingly. We see her aid the survivors of a mob lynching and rape, heal a man with dangerously advanced syphilis, and save a abortion. Throughout, she questions the God who has blessed her with such power, because it is often a curse as well; in order to fulfill her destiny as God's healing agent she must sacrifice her marriage, her one true love, and her privacy. When tragedy strikes her own life she must overcome the desire to use her gift for self-destruction. She must search for truth and hope in a thoroughly disillusioned and skeptical world.

Rebecca Florice's struggle to accept her delicate gift is paralleled to a butterfly's struggle to survive. Her growing awareness of God's purpose for her is compared to the gradual metamorphosis of a caterpillar. We follow the progress of each life-stage as Rebecca Florice and the caterpillar mature. Rebecca Florice experiences sacrifice, loneliness, and suffering but emerges victorious to find herself transformed as if into a beautiful butterfly. We see Florice's gift passed on to the goddaughter whose life her magic saved, and we know that her vision will live on.

One of the most spiritually provocative elements of the novel is her attraction to ministers and priests, as if she believes that through them she will be able to know God. She soon learns, however, that romance is not the way to true faith, and she sets out on the difficult journey alone.

It is a magical tale, mysterious and powerful. Florice is a truly memorable heroine, and Linda Brown Bragg is remarkable writer. Her gentle but precise prose makes the reading enjoyable; her characters are warm and real. There is little of the hatred and violence that is prominent in so many books by and about blacks of the twentieth century; in Rainbow's theme the love and healing is refreshing. Moreover, its spiritual quality is moving yet unobtrusive, allowing the reader, to appreciate Florice's faith without feeling morally challenged.

Rainbow Roun Mah Shoulders was published in 1984 and is available in paperback from Ballantine books.

Poetry by Maya Angelon

To A Freedom Fighter

You drink a bitter draught.
I sip the tears your eyes fight to hold
A cup of lees,
of henbane steeped in chaff.

Your breast is hot,
You anger black and cold,
Thought evening's rest, you dream
I hear the moans,
you die a thousands' death.

When cane straps flog your body
dark and lean, you feel the blow,
I hear it in your breath.

My Guilt

My guilt is "slavery's chains," too long
the clang of iron falls down the years.
This brother's sold, This sister's gone
is bitter wax, living my ears.
My guilt made music with tears.

My crime is "heroes, dead and gone"
dead Vesey, Turner, Gabriel,
dead Malcolm, Marcus, Martin King,
They fought too hard, loved too well
My crime is I'm alive to tell.

My sin is "hanging from a tree"
I do not scream, it makes me proud.
I take to dying like a man,
I do it to impress the crowd,
My sin lies in not screaming loud.

Africa

Thus she had lain
sugar cane sweet
deserts her hair
golden her feet
mountain her breasts
two Niles her tears
Thus she has lain
Black through the years.

Over the white seas
run white and cold
ungentled
icicle bold
took her young daughters

sold her strong sons
churched her with Jesus
bled her with guns
Thus she has lain.

Now she is rising
remember her pain
remember the losses
her screams loud and vain
remember her riches
her history slain
now she is striding
although she had lain.

America

The gold of her promise
has never been mined

Her borders of justice
not clearly defined

Her crops abundance
the fruit and the grain

Have not fed the hungry
nor eased that deep pain

Her proud declarations
are leaves on wind

Her southern exposure
black death did befriend

Discover this country
dead centuries cry

Erect noble tablets
where none can decry

"She kills her bright future
and rapes for a son

Then entraps her children
with legends in turn"

I beg you

Discover this country.