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An Interview with Mary Morris, Author of this Fall's "On The Same Page" Community Read

On Sunday, November 17 at 11 AM, award-winning author Mary Morris will come to talk about her fascinating novel *Gateway to the Moon*. We invite everyone in the community to read this book. All are welcome to attend this free program. Light refreshments will be served.

In anticipation of Morris's visit, CJE program director, Debby Block spoke with the author. The following interview was lightly edited for length and clarity.

Debby Block: Novels about Sephardic Jews are rare and there is a paucity of books about Crypto-Jews (Hidden Jews). How did you get the inspiration to write *Gateway to the Moon*, which is about Crypto-Jews through many generations (1492-1992)?

Mary Morris: Sometimes a story just grabs you and, as an author, you just cannot walk away from it. This particular story, I stumbled upon when I lived in New Mexico. I don't want to give

too much away before I come to Charlotte, but I look forward to sharing more of the details.

Debby: Some of the most memorable and shocking parts of *Gateway to the Moon* are the portrayal of Christopher Columbus. How much research did you have to do to create such a rich depiction of history?

Mary Morris: In order to imagine what Christopher Columbus was really like as a person, I did a lot of background research. Believe it or not, I even read all of Columbus' ship logs. I was also able to secure a grant and traveled through Portugal, Spain, France, and New Mexico to do extensive research to insure accuracy for this book.

Debby: This novel is full of a variety of very diverse characters. Does an author typically have a favorite while writing a book? If so, who is your favorite character in *Gateway to the Moon* and why?

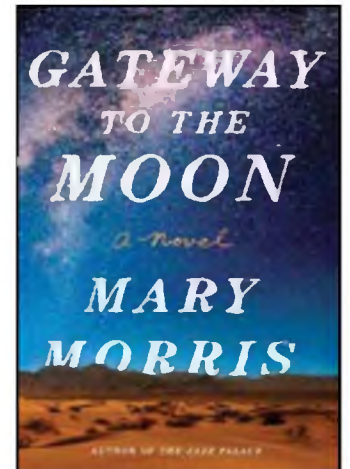
Mary Morris: Yes, it is com-

mon for a novelist to have a favorite character, one who — as many publishers say - "has legs." From his love of the stars to his evolution as a human being, Miguel is definitely my favorite character in *Gateway to the Moon*. I love to be surprised by my characters. Flannery O'Connor wrote that "if there are no surprises for the writer, how can there be any for the reader?" I didn't know what was going to happen to Rachel Rothstein. Elena also surprised me. Some characters come to life and evolve as the book is being written.

Debby: What would you like the readers to come away with after reading *Gateway to the Moon*?

Mary Morris: I have thought about that a lot. I would like readers to understand that the story of America is not all about the pilgrims. There are many other narratives to embrace as our own, as well.

Debby: What are some of



your favorite things to do, when you are not writing?

Mary Morris: I love to paint with watercolors. I truly enjoy swimming. I have three dogs and a parrot and, of course, I love to travel.

Mary Morris is a tenured writing professor at Sarah Lawrence College. Morris is the author of the award-winning *The Jazz Palace*. Born in Chicago, Morris currently resides in Brooklyn.

Books are currently for sale in the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library. ☆



JCRC Fall Lecture: Transforming Enemies into Partners: Creating Peace through Dialogue

November 14, 7 PM in the Sam Lerner Center for Cultural Arts

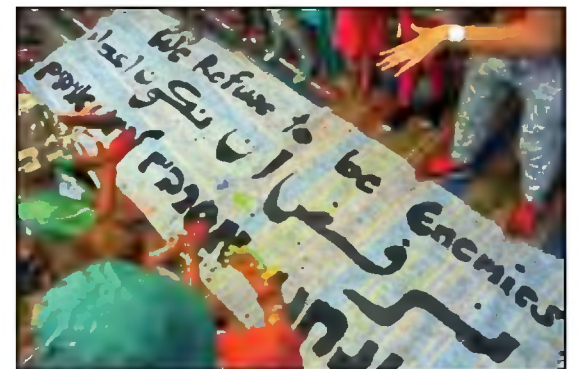
How do Palestinians and Israelis move beyond the cycle of violence that engulfs them?

Hanan Schlesinger, an Orthodox rabbi and passionate Zionist

settler, and Palestinian Shadi Abu Awwad, the architect and coordinator of the Roots youth movement, share their personal stories and how they are working together to build a better future for their people through Roots.



Shadi Abu Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger



At the summer camp run by Roots, Israeli and Palestinian children refuse to be enemies.

er to build a better future for their people through Roots.

Roots is a Palestinian-Israeli grassroots initiative fostering understanding, non-violence, and transformation. This organization facilitates unmediated get-togethers and deep conversations between Palestinians and Israelis living in the West Bank. Our speakers come with no peace plans in place, but with a strong conviction that human understanding and trust are the prerequisites for lasting justice, freedom and peace on the tiny sliver of

land they both call home

The event is free, but RSVP is requested, www.jewishcharlotte.org. ☆



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