

Cocktail hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness

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Alexandra Fuller writes beautifully about Africa. This is her second memoir set there.

Both Cocktail Hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness and Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight also give homage to her parents, particularly her mother, Nicola, or Nicola of Central Africa, as her mom playfully nicknamed herself.

Nicola loves books and reading and wanted her first daughter to become a writer but Vanessa held firm about spurning books and taking up art. So Alexandra became the writer in the family, but not one that her mother could not control. For Nicola, Alexandra's career as a writer is a mixed blessing. She constantly calls her daughter's first memoir that "awful book" probably because Alexandra tells the truth in it about her Mom's drinking.

Despite the title, Cocktail Hour centers more on Nicole's childhood in Africa. Woven among these interesting stories are contemporary travels or visits of the author with her parents, sister, and other relatives, including the Scottish side of her family in Clanranald.

As a child, Nicole was quite gutsy; she rode horses competitively and suffered many falls on poorly trained horses until a local man noticing her talent and lent her the tall and beautiful *Violet*. Together, they won race after race.

When she was sixteen, the Mau Mau or war of independence in Kenya began and Nicole and her family were forced to move out in the country away from the fighting. In fact, there are several wars in this memoir because during the last half of the 20th century when this book was set, the map of Africa changed dramatically and native peoples fought against colonialism. It was a difficult time to be British citizens during this fighting.

It's also the story of her parents' meeting each other and falling in love and their joys and difficulties setting up homes in Kenya, Rhodesia, Zambia and even for a small time in England. But it's Africa itself-- its kind and interesting people, it's beautiful light, and the land itself that so much blood has been spilled over that both Nicole and Alexandra love. This book is a celebration of Africa and a unique family that has deep roots there.

For earlier books about Africa check out Dinesen's Out of Africa and Beryl Markham's West with the Night.

Posted by Dory L. on March 7, 2012

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