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# YJCC Book Club Welcomes Author of Historical Novel

Y sees great turnout at bimonthly book club meeting

By Arielle From | January 26, 2011

Historical novelist and poet Michelle Cameron attended the Bergen County YJCC's bimonthly book club Tuesday night to discuss her novel *The Fruit of Her Hands: the Story of Shira of Ashkenaz*.

*The Fruit of Her Hands*, published by Pocket Books in September 2009, is a novel about the life of Meir ben Baruch of Rothenberg through his wife, Shira's perspective. Rabbi Meir is a renowned Jewish scholar of medieval Europe and his wife is a rebellious yet religious woman who values family. The novel takes place during a rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, seen through Shira's eyes.

But Rabbi Meir is not only historically important, he's also Cameron's ancestor. Her cousin began researching the family history and caught Cameron's interest.

"I was looking through my family tree and right at the beginning was an article about Meir of Rothenberg," she said. "My mother said that we could trace our roots back to the 1200s but she never told me who we were tracing it to."

Cameron found this information intriguing and began researching Meir and his time period further.

"I enjoyed learning about a period of time I



Historical novelist and poet Michelle Cameron with copies of *The Fruit of Her Hands*. Credit Arielle From



Copies of *The Fruit of Her Hands*. Credit Arielle From

knew nothing about,” she said. “It would have been the last thing on my mind—to write a book during the Middle Ages—and I just discovered so much.”

Sharry Friedberg, vice president of outreach at the YJCC, invited Cameron to the book club meeting because of this research.

“It was about 13th century in Europe, an era that I didn’t know anything about, and she kind of intertwined rituals and the story and history all together,” Friedberg said. “And I knew it was partially based on fact because she had done some research and she found that her great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather was this major rabbi.”

Friedberg was at another book club in Bergen County when she came across Cameron and *The Fruit of Her Hands*.

“I loved the book, and I’m not particularly a lover of just reading Jewish books, sometimes you OD on it,” she said. “But it kind of got me.”

Friedberg took this opportunity to invite Cameron to her book club at the Y.

“We don’t always have the author come in,” she said. “It was a no-brainer.”

Jayne Petak, a regular book club attendee, said she appreciated having the author at the meeting.

“Having the author always makes it interesting.” Petak said. “I can imagine what she means and someone else may say, ‘No, I think she means this,’ but now we really have someone who knows what she meant.”

Petak said although she was not sure if she would enjoy the book, it took her into a new



The Book Club gathers in the YJCC before the meeting starts. Credit Arielle From



Vice President of Outreach Sharry Friedberg introduces historical novelist and poet Michelle Cameron. Credit Arielle From



The group continues the Q & A period. Credit Arielle From

unexplored era and lifestyle.

“My favorite thing about the book was the devotion to family,” she said. “It’s one of those themes that sort of comes through in any book about Jewish women—family being the center of their lives.”

After introducing Cameron, Friedberg gave a brief summary of the novel and opened the floor for questions. The 21 attendees, along with Friedberg and Cameron, held an hour-long discussion, which touched on themes in the novel as well as Cameron’s writing style and research methods.

“I thought it was interesting how she had family connections to the character and how she felt about it and how her imagination took her back there,” Petak said.



The discussion continues. Credit Arielle From



Michelle Cameron signs copies of *The Fruit of Her Hands* at the Bergen County YJCC Tuesday. Credit Arielle From