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Posted on 08 June 2017 By James McBride

## Free E-pub ? The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother

# ? Weplayit.co

This book is inspirational in tone. Against all odds the author's mother succeeded in raising twelve well-educated and remarkably successful children. This is something to applaud given her circumstances. Without money, without support from family and of a world that looked with disfavor on those who dare to beat their own drum, she succeeds. Racial identity, religious beliefs and an individual's strength of will are central themes. Here is a book that looks with depth at interracial marriages. The author tells his own story alongside his mother's. To understand himself he had first to understand his mother, Ruchel Dwajra Zylska, from a Jewish Polish immigrant family. The story switches back and forth between mother and son. Each tells their own story, reading as two first-person narratives. We see their experiences through their own eyes as the years pass from youth to adulthood. This allows us to feel intimately their disappointments as well as achievements, step by step as they mature. I chuckled at some of the author's childhood memories and the words used to describe them. I felt both the mother's struggles and her sense of determinedness. Her hatred of a father who sexually abused her and showed no regard for her disabled mother is poignantly portrayed. The negative side of constructing the story in this way, of flipping back and forth between son and mother, is that you must continually reframe who is being spoken of. The mother is one minute the author's and a chapter later his mother's mother. Keep in mind this is a large family and it can be difficult to keep track of exactly who is who. The mother remarried after the death of her first husband. There were eight children by the first husband and four by the second. Husbands and wives, long ago friends, cousins, aunts and uncles. Further, the telling becomes disjointed. While there is probably no one that could not admire the author's mother, that doesn't mean you have to love the book. These are two separate things. I liked the book as much as I did because I came to understand the author's mother. Her choices would not have been mine. I came to understand why she left Judaism and so fervently supported a Christian God. I have no faith, and yet I thoroughly understand hers. Who Ruchel Rachel became is a result of her particular personality and her life experiences. The book shows how she came to be who she was. She doesn't tell us of her views; instead we watch what she does. We are shown, we are not told. I don't feel one comes to know the author nearly as well as his mother. The author, when speaking of his mother, calls her Mommy throughout the entire book. While I understand this completely when he is speaking as a child, as an adult it sounds absolutely ridiculous. I don't understand the title, i.e. the words before the colon. The audiobook narration is fantastic. The voice of Rachel is spoken by Susan Denaker. J. D. Jackson reads James' lines. That there are two different narrators, one for the son and one for the mother, makes it much easier to listen to, much easier to immediately grasp who is speaking. Both read their lines with the appropriate humor, compassion and feeling. I who rarely appreciates dramatizations

enjoyed the performance Emotions are not exaggerated, just thoroughly real I have given the narration five stars. The mere fact that this woman raised 12 children, sent them all to college and watched them become successful professionals, with no money, with no help from her own family members, really with not much at all except her belief in God and incredible courage well, this qualifies her for sainthood in my book That she did this as a white woman married to black men, loved them both, watched both of them die, then struggled on alone, is a superhuman feat Throw in the fact that she was the daughter of a Rabbi who converted to Protestantism and you can see why this book has become a classic in just 20 years. James McBride is a pretty special guy himself The Good Lord Bird was one of my favorite books this year He is a writer and musician who seems to be very much at home in his own skin I saw him speak at the NC Literary Festival in April, and he is a good speaker as well, using a lot of humor and common sense to make his points It took me a while to get around to this book, but it was worth the wait. Free E-pub ? The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother ? Touches Readers Of All Colors As A Vivid Portrait Of Growing Up, A Haunting Meditation On Race And Identity, And A Lyrical Valentine To A Mother From Her Son Who Is Ruth McBride Jordan A Self Declared Light Skinned Woman Evasive About Her Ethnicity, Yet Steadfast In Her Love For Her Twelve Black Children James McBride, Journalist, Musician And Son, Explores His Mother S Past, As Well As His Own Upbringing And Heritage, In A Poignant And Powerful Debut, The Color Of Water A Black Man S Tribute To His White Mother The Son Of A Black Minister And A Woman Who Would Not Admit She Was White, James McBride Grew Up In Orchestrated Chaos With His Eleven Siblings In The Poor, All Black Projects Of Red Hook, Brooklyn Mommy, A Fiercely Protective Woman With Dark Eyes Full Of Pep And Fire, Herded Her Brood To Manhattan S Free Cultural Events, Sent Them Off On Buses To The Best And Mainly Jewish Schools, Demanded Good Grades And Commanded Respect As A Young Man, McBride Saw His Mother As A Source Of Embarrassment, Worry, And Confusion And Reached Thirty Before He Began To Discover The Truth About Her Early Life And Long Buried Pain In The Color Of Water, McBride Retraces His Mother S Footsteps And, Through Her Searing And Spirited Voice, Recreates Her Remarkable Story The Daughter Of A Failed Itinerant Orthodox Rabbi, She Was Born Rachel Shilsky Actually Ruchel Dwara Zylska In Poland On April , Fleeing Pogroms, Her Family Emigrated To America And Ultimately Settled In Suffolk, Virginia, A Small Town Where Anti Semitism And Racial Tensions Ran High With Candor And Immediacy, Ruth Describes Her Parents Loveless Marriage Her Fragile, Handicapped Mother Her Cruel, Sexually Abusive Father And The Rest Of The Family And Life She Abandoned At Seventeen, After Fleeing Virginia And Settling In New York City, Ruth Married A Black Minister And Founded The All Black New Brown Memorial Baptist Church In Her Red Hook Living Room God Is The Color Of Water, Ruth McBride Taught Her Children, Firmly Convinced That Life S Blessings And Life S Values Transcend Race Twice Widowed, And Continually Confronting Overwhelming

Adversity And Racism, Ruth S Determination, Drive And Discipline Saw Her Dozen Children Through College And Most Through Graduate School At Age , She Herself Received A Degree In Social Work From Temple University Interspersed Throughout His Mother S Compelling Narrative, McBride Shares Candid Recollections Of His Own Experiences As A Mixed Race Child Of Poverty, His Flirtations With Drugs And Violence, And His Eventual Self Realization And Professional Success The Color Of Water Touches Readers Of All Colors As A Vivid Portrait Of Growing Up, A Haunting Meditation On Race And Identity, And A Lyrical Valentine To A Mother From Her Son If Cheaper By the Dozen, by Frank Gilbraith Jr., and The Color Purple, by Alice Walker, ever somehow met and had an I like you as a friend, not a lover child, The Color of Water would be it race and a ridiculous amount of kids The concept is compelling, and I would recommend this book to anyone who was disappointed that Run, Ann Patchett s most recent book, didn t deal directly with race issues in a mixed race family Nominally, this book is a tribute to James McBride s mother, who was an unarguably interesting person McBride s personal issues with his mother clouded her story, however, and his inability to emotionally separate from her enough to treat her as a character left me feeling that he bit off than he could chew when he decided to write this tribute McBride reflects that his mother was not comfortable having her story told and preferred not to discuss her past with him, which leads me to ask whether tribute is an appropriate word to put in the title of this book It would have been a stronger narrative if McBride had openly written The Color of Water as his own story, not his mother s. Toward the end of the book, McBride admits that he experienced emotion hearing his mother s story than his mother did telling it This comes through awkwardly within the narrative For example, he names his mother Mommy , and that continues as the name of her character throughout the entire story Though he reminds his reader four or five times that Mommy s name changed from Ruchel Dwarja Zyjska in Poland to Rachel Deborah Shilsky in America to Ruth McBride Jordan after her marriages and renouncing of the Jewish faith , and though his sisters seem call her Ruth or Ruthie, he continues to refer to her as Mommy His character rebels, grows up, becomes a successful journalist, but still his mother s character is Mommy. At first, when I read The Color Purple, Mr s name was awkward to me I didn t know how I was supposed to say it I honestly wondered a little bit if Walker couldn t come up with a name for him, so she just left it out By the end of the novel, the genius of both robbing Mr of the right to a name, and calling him something that effectively gives him the potential to be Everyman deepens the novel Not so with Mommy McBride writes a specific woman, not a stock character Mommy waddles , likes her privacy, and doesn t like to do housework While with Mr I eventually hope that my last name never fills that blank, with Mommy I know it doesn t She s not my Mommy, so do I have to call her that Does McBride still think of her as he did when he was a small child McBride divides this book a la The Grapes of Wrath, with alternating chapters that are vignettes from Mommy s point of view and chapters that are a continuing story from his point of view His mother s

vignettes are at times very lovely, but at some point his chapters started repeating hers as though the stories had not been told already. This was not in an artistic, Rashomon way, but rather seemed like bad editing or, worse, some kind of psychological disassociation with his mother's story that needed to be dealt with before writing the book. At first, Mommy's story is supplemental to his memories of her from when he is a child. Later, however, one chapter tells a story from her point of view, and then the next, from James McBride's point of view, repeats the same story by recalling the circumstances of her telling that story to him. That's not necessary. Also, who is his sister Jack? I officially do not understand what her relation to the family is if she is not literally his sister. I will be sad if I find out he explained that and I missed it, when I didn't miss the many times he described his mother's name change and who her childhood best friend was. Unfortunately, while *The Color of Water* has the potential to be a truly great American story, it does not live up to that potential. McBride's ambivalence as to whether to tell his story or his mother's story sabotaged it and left me feeling uncomfortable like neither he nor his mother were well represented. I read this for a book club, and many of the people in the club were not distracted by the way McBride told the story. To them, the fascinating life his mother led and his psychological journey in learning about her were not conflicting storylines that distracted from each other, both stories were part of a larger journey of him learning to forgive his mother. I think they could stay with the story because they were rooting for the mother-son relationship. I, on the other hand, am interested in being entertained than other people's psycho health. It's shallow, but true. Basically, McBride failed me as an entertainer. I am so thankful this book exists. As a child of a black father and a white mother, I was immensely drawn into the narrative of James MacBride's life. My story is not one as connected to the racism he encountered, but it nonetheless moved me considerably. He paints a tender, endearing, nuanced portrait of his mother and her life and times, and manages to take a deep and conflicting life story and not sink into maudlin recollection or saccharine moralism. An amazing tale. I found this book to be very relevant to my life. My husband is black and he was raised by his white mother. He has spoken about the conflict that he felt between his white and black side, especially when he was in the Army. To white to hang out with the black guys, to black to hang out with the white guys. He felt very strongly for a long time that it was his duty to marry a black woman because he didn't want his children to feel the same conflict. Of course, that isn't what happened, because I am about as white as a person can get without needing to avoid sunlight, garlic and crosses although I do often avoid sunlight. I heard many of the same things that my husband has expressed to me about his upbringing echoed in James McBride's story. It was like a window into the life that in many ways my husband shared. What astounded me though, was that my husband was raised by his white mother in an all white suburb and still his experiences were very similar. It must have been very difficult to be a mixed child when mixing was still something new. I hope very much that my daughter doesn't feel the same racial disconnect. She calls herself either black or tan.

and when people ask her about it she tells them that her dad is sweet like brown sugar and her mom is sweet like powdered sugar, which makes her sweet like light brown sugar. Which I think is very apt. We all have our own texture and flavor, but in the end, we're all still sugar. Yet another book that I wanted desperately to love like everyone else I just couldn't though. While the rest of America seemed to be inspired, I just found it mildly depressing. I hate it when that happens.

Synopsis in a nutshell: Mean, stingy rabbi beats his crippled wife, makes his family miserable, and repeatedly molests his daughter. Daughter white gets pregnant by a man black and has an abortion circa 1940s. Both actions highly illegal. Jewish family falls apart in an irredeemably depressing manner. Everyone hates everyone else. This does not change, or in any way get better. Everyone dies lonely and sick, after disowning everyone else. Daughter white runs off and marries another man black and fathers 12 children who practically starve as they grow up. Father dies and mother is too busy to raise them properly. They live in squalor and poverty. Not the inspiring kind. Graphic descriptions of dog poop all over the floors. All children grow up with serious baggage about their white/black parentage and the fact that, somehow, God is the Color of Water, and society does not accept them. Children, after much drug use, many love children, and various run-ins with the Law, all go on to earn advanced degrees and shine in their chosen fields. YAY! Mad applause.

Curtain down. The thing is, this book is supposed to be a tribute to McBride's mother. But the mother is constantly portrayed as this unstable, barely holding it together basket case who raises 12 kids in filth. I kept wishing someone would bring along some birth control. She never really DOES anything inspirational. In fact, she refuses to talk to her kids about any important issues, and repeatedly tells them not to think too hard or their brains will dry out like prunes. McBride claims she put them all through college, but then lets on that they all put themselves through college with the help of grants, loans, and the rest. Perhaps I'm too harsh. This would be better portrayed as a tribute to the kids themselves, for rising above their barren, neglectful upbringing. What a beautiful and poignant read. This is McBride's tribute to his white mother. His story touches upon issues of racism, socioeconomics, identity, and religion. From a young age, McBride struggled to find where he fit into this world as a black man with a white mother. At an early age, trying to find answers, he asked his mother what colour is God. Her response, He is the color of water. The story is juxtaposed along with his mother's, with the challenges they both faced defining themselves. What she impressed upon all 12 children as being most important were education and getting religioned. Despite the circumstances, she ensured this success in her children as she saw all 12 graduate from University. A great read. 4 stars.

I read so many books, that very few actually stick with me, even 8 years after the fact. I cannot recommend this book enough. McBride writes from two different points of view: himself, and his mother. He parallels his growing up in poverty to his mother's story of moving to Harlem, before the civil rights movement. It is amazing I had the opportunity to meet the author at a writer's conference right after we read this for bookclub, and he is a gentle soul who has the

most respect for his mother It is eye opening, inspirational, and an amazing read 4.5 stars Such beautiful writing Some books grab me right away just as some do not This one grabbed me right away This book was a tribute to the Author s mother who raised him and his 11 siblings How she raised them and sent them all to school college, etc Through the telling of his Mother s life story we also learn the Author s story as well I enjoyed how he mixed in his Mother s history with his upbringing I thought his writing was candid, matter of fact, and frank His mother never discussed the fact that she was White or Jewish instead telling him she was colorless and the color of water We got a glimpse of what it was like for her to have a mixed marriage, to endure prejudice, hate, racism and misunderstanding We also see what it was like for the author to be a mixed race child He shared how he at times feared for his mother s safety, and at times was embarrassed by her He was also confused His mother never talked about her life, her past, her color, or her family While shopping he heard her speak Yiddish to store owners haggling for a better deal but never knew what she was saying or why she knew Yiddish Ruth McBride Jordan was born Racehl Shilsky, the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi and his handicapped wife She endured a lonely, isolated upbringing in the south She was ostracized by most of her peers because she was Jewish and was sexually molested by her father She moved to NYC, found a home in Harlem, married a black man the author s father , became, converted to Christianity, started a church with her first husband and began a family All through this she suffers hardships and despair yet manages to keep her head up, stand by her principles, and raise her children to work hard in school She remarries after the death of her first husband and has children with him Throughout her life she showed resiliency, resourcefulness, determination, devotion, strength and grace Which is why I think her children did so well in life They may have had bumps along the way but they all made their way utilizing the life skills they learned from their Mother. This book was very, very good Highly recommend. See of my reviews at [www.openbookpost.com](http://www.openbookpost.com)

**OVER TWO YEARS ON  
THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER LIST**

"As lively as a novel, a well-written, thoughtful  
contribution to the literature on race."

—*The Washington Post Book World*

The  
Color of  
Water

A  
Black  
Man's  
Tribute to  
His  
White  
Mother

"[A] triumph."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

**JAMES MCBRIDE**

author of *Miracle at St. Anna*

## New Post

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The Horse and His Boy

Water for Elephants

Misty of Chincoteague

The Trumpet of the Swan

The Last Unicorn

Beneath the Surface: Killer Whales, SeaWorld, and the Truth Beyond Blackfish

All Things Wise and Wonderful

Death at SeaWorld: Shamu and the Dark Side of Killer Whales in Captivity

Julie of the Wolves

Shiloh

Into the Wild

The Story of Ferdinand

Listening to Whales: What the Orcas Have Taught Us

## Recent Post

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Watership Down

Animal Farm

Black Beauty

Where the Red Fern Grows

The Call of the Wild

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

The Tale of Peter Rabbit

The Velveteen Rabbit

White Fang

Marley and Me: Life and Love With the World's Worst Dog

The Wind in the Willows

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World

All Things Bright and Beautiful

Born Free: A Lioness of Two Worlds

All Creatures Great and Small

The Incredible Journey

Because of Winn-Dixie

The Black Stallion

The Art of Racing in the Rain

Winnie-the-Pooh

Stuart Little

Make Way for Ducklings

The Jungle Books

Old Yeller

Redwall