

[ BOOKS ]

## Elephant In the Room

In her new novel, *Leaving Time*, author **JODI PICOULT** takes readers on a journey of grief, mystery and love.

**T**HE OLD SAYING “AN ELEPHANT NEVER forgets” seems simple enough, but it really is a much more complex concept and one that is touchingly entwined with the human experience in Jodi Picoult’s latest book, *Leaving Time: A Novel*, out this month (Ballantine Books/Random House, \$28). The book follows Jenna Metcalf, a teen wise beyond her years, as she doggedly searches for her mother, Alice, a scientist specializing in elephant grief. Although Alice disappeared a decade earlier after a tragic accident at the family’s elephant sanctuary, Jenna remains convinced she is still alive. To find her, she solicits the help of psychic Serenity Jones and investigator Virgil Stanhope, both of whom are looking for answers in their own lives.

Picoult writes *Leaving Time* in her signature multiple-narrative weave — in this case from the rotating perspectives of Jenna, Serenity and Virgil in the present and from Alice in the past. She explores the fierce mother-child bond, enduring memories of family and deep grief over lost loved ones felt by humans and elephants alike. While a story about familial relationships and grief had been simmering with Picoult, the elephant tie-in was quite fortuitous.

“In the middle of all this swirling around inside my head, I came across a very interesting fact, which was that in elephant herds in Africa, a mother and a daughter will stay together their entire lives until one of them dies,” says Picoult, who was then preparing for her daughter to leave for college. “I thought that was really a beautiful thing and a perfect metaphor for what I was trying to write in this book. Jenna’s biggest fear [as a child] is that she is going to close her eyes and when she wakes up, her mother won’t be there. And of course, that’s exactly what happens.”

Picoult’s research for *Leaving Time* took her to Botswana, where she observed elephants in the wild and talked to researchers about their behavior. She also received dispensation to visit The Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tenn., a “retirement home” for circus and zoo elephants.

“The way elephants grieve is something we can learn from,” says Picoult, who hopes her readers will enjoy this page-turner with a twist and fall in love with elephants as much as she has. “They keep coming back to a spot where an elephant died that was important to them, but then they move on, and they don’t seem to carry around the baggage that we do.” —JULIE JACOBS

### In Short:



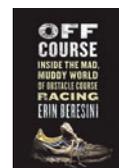
**Give Me Liberty: Speakers and Speeches That Have Shaped America**

By Christopher L. Webber

(Pegasus Books, \$29)

“Give me liberty or give me death.” “I have a dream.” “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Why do great speeches about freedom — those were delivered by Patrick Henry, Martin Luther King Jr. and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, respectively — resonate with us? In his new book, Webber groups 14 famous American discourses by subject, then provides historical context and measures their psychological impact to answer that question. For example, the chapter on King’s speech offers a close comparison of two versions, one delivered in Detroit and the now-famous March on Washington speech. A thought-provoking foreword and intelligent epilogue bookend this examination of the stirring power of the spoken word.

—NATALIE DANFORD



**Off Course: Inside the Mad, Muddy World of Obstacle Course Racing**

By Erin Beresini  
(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$25)

Obstacle course racing, possibly the fastest-growing endurance sport in the United States, is a daredevil’s dream. While dodging electrically charged wires and blasts of arctic water, participants can also indulge in wiggling across muddy trenches beneath barbed wire, scaling 10-foot soapy walls and crawling across rope bridges. As Erin Beresini reports in her funny, fast-paced book, the sport attracts a colorful community, from hard-core jarheads to weekend warriors to obsessed misfits. Even though Beresini is a world-champion triathlete, she faces the breaking point of her physical and mental capabilities when competing in the unforgiving Spartan Ultra Beast. —STEPHEN J. LYONS