

## Swimming With Horses by Oakland Ross

5 Stars

A MUST READ. It's a MUST READ because it is such a profound and beautifully written book.

*"Her departure merely confirmed what they had believed all along. That girl was trouble. And she was. I know she was. I know better than anyone."* This is Sam Mitchell's description of Hilary Anson, a South African girl in her late teens who arrives in the Summer of 1963 to work as a groom for Colonel Barker at his equitation yard in Kelso, known as horse country, northwest of Toronto.

Hilary is not like anyone young naïve Sam has ever met before. They strike up a friendship, based mainly around their love for horses. Sam is not a very good rider, but with Hilary's very free-spirited, sometimes reckless lessons in schooling horses, he starts to improve dramatically, even making the local competition team.

It's through these days out riding with Hilary that Sam gets some idea about the reason Hilary is in Canada. They spend hours during that summer swimming with their horses.

Hilary Anson is the daughter of Daniel Anson, an influential businessman and Member of Parliament (National Security) in HF Verwoerd's very conservative apartheid government. She first meets Muletsi Dadla, a groom working on her father's horse stud, situated near Mooi River when he comes to her defence against her father's farm manager, Jack Tanner.

Muletsi Dadla has a degree in English Literature from the University of Fort Hare. The only university where black students could study during the apartheid regime. He is working undercover for the ANC to find out as much as possible about Daniel Anson's activities, and report on the various visitors he receives.

Jack Tanner had repeatedly been raping Hilary for years, and when Muletsi sees him trying to attack her (yet again), he intervenes and injures the man. For someone who hates black people (always referring to them as Kaffirs) this is like a red rag to a bull, and Jack Tanner sets out to destroy not just Muletsi, but also Hilary.

This is one of the most powerful, realistic novels I've ever read about South Africa. 1962/3 were hugely important years in my life (yes, I'm admitting I was around then!). It saw my last two years at school. Closeted from the real horrors that were being committed in South Africa by the reprehensible Verwoerd government. Oakland Ross, who is NOT South African, has managed to capture the very essence of what it must have been like for both Hilary and Muletsi meeting and falling in love at that very critical time.

I have an affinity and connection to horses, so the riding, swimming and competitive side of this storyline had me enthralled. (Especially as I read the book while watching my daughter school horses in South Africa).

I must salute Oakland Ross, not a South African, but Canadian, for taking the time and effort to ensure that this book is totally authentic. His portrayal of Hilary's life, her family, the trauma she suffered at the hands of Jack Tanner, and her subsequent escape to Canada, was outstanding. His use of South African slang and the term "kaffir" to describe how Blacks were referred to during this period, was particularly pleasing to me. Few authors go to this amount of trouble when writing a book about a country they are not that familiar with.

Oakland Ross has written a book I'd love everyone to read. The storyline is easy to follow, and the characters are so unique and so real. I could "see" them and follow their journey. The ending was particularly poignant. It reminded me of the horrors that the South African Government was prepared to go to, to destroy their enemies.

Treebeard

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.