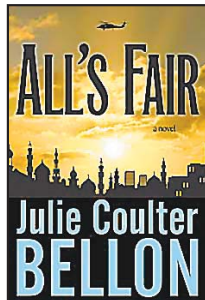


Books

A finely crafted book of politics, war, love

"All's Fair"

by Julie Coulter Bellon
(Covenant, 2008, \$14.95)



JULIE COULTER
Bellon's novel is one I'd probably pass over at the library or bookstore.

A story about a captured prisoner in Iraq and a political campaign would not be appealing to me because of the inevitable exaggeration of the American good guys versus the Muslim bad guys. However, Bellon has managed to treat all of her characters fairly, and both the story and characters are believable.

She turned to Cpl. Matthew Blair — "a soldier who has served two tours of duty in Iraq as security for military convoys ... to add authenticity" — to her combat scenes. I obviously have never been in combat myself; nonetheless, the military aspects of the book rang true and added to the enjoyment of the story.

Kristen Shepherd, a seasoned political campaign manager, has a history of running from her personal problems. Estranged from her authoritarian father, she has plunged herself into her demanding job and hasn't been home in

years. When she falls in love with one of her co-workers, she decides to come home for her wedding, expecting to finally put to rest her feelings of inadequacy and prove to her father, once and for all, that she is a capable adult.

But when a mysterious and puzzling phone call comes just moments before walking down the aisle, she once again finds herself taking flight. "Her father's words were a refrain in her mind ... his voice echoed over and over, making her clutch the steering wheel until her knuckles were white. She needed to concentrate on negotiating the small mountain road through pouring rain, but her thoughts were spinning in every direction.

Regional Reads

By Charlene Hirschi



Michael's deception and her father's statement made her feel like the backward teen she'd tried to leave behind so many years ago — the girl who seemed incapable of making good decisions. Why? Why hadn't she seen this coming before now?"

When her car careens off the road and refuses to start she finds herself, wedding dress and all, rain-soaked and attempting to navigate the muddy road in satin slippers that were never meant for

such punishment. Her wedding dress gets caught as she tries to climb the fence that will provide her a shortcut to her destination, and she "lands in a heap on the other side ... 'Why?' she yelled, pounding her fist into the oozing, watery trap." When help comes in the form of a childhood friend and former sweetheart, she is less than thrilled as she rolls her eyes heavenward: "I specifically recall asking you not to let this day get any worse."

Not only the day, but her life in general seems on an uncontrollable, downward spiral as the family learns that her brother, Dr. Brandon Shepherd, has been taken as a prisoner of war by Iraqi militants and her fiancé is actually involved with the group that holds her brother captive — in fact, he has been funneling money to them. When the plot reveals Michael's involvement and Kristen confronts him with the evidence, he is unrepentant. "He just stared at her, his eyes flashing angrily, his mouth a hard line. 'You will lose your career and everything you love, Kristen. Mark my words. You should have married me when

you had the chance. ... If I go down, you go down.'"

Bellon proves herself a capable writer as she spins a story that takes Kristen, her father and her childhood friend to Iraq to attempt to find Brandon. At no time does the reader feel Bellon is in over her head, even though the characters are. She demonstrates a flair for both comedy and tragedy as she weaves a political campaign, the Iraqi war, two love stories and the mending of torn relationships into a finely crafted book that keeps the reader intrigued and believing throughout. As far as I can tell, this is a first book for Bellon, but if this novel is any example of her talent, I predict we will be hearing a lot more from her.

Book critic Charlene Hirschi holds her master's in English from Utah State University. She is among a number of freelance writers whose columns appear in The Herald Journal as part of an effort to expose readers to a variety of community voices. She is not an employee of the newspaper. Authors, readers and editors can e-mail charlene_hirschi@yahoo.com about books they would like reviewed, or visit www.charlenehirschi.com.

USU, Cache Valley community invited to read memoir together

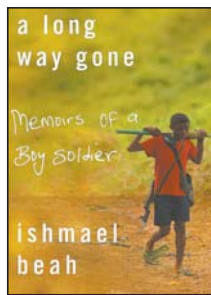
MEMBERS OF THE Cache Valley community are invited to participate in the Utah State University Connections program's summer literature experience by reading "A Long Way Gone" with President Stan L. Albrecht, USU faculty, staff and the 2008 incoming class enrolled in Connections.

New USU students come to campus a few days early and enroll in the Connections course, which is specifically designed to ease new students' transition to university life. The summer literature experience is part of the larger Connections program. Connections students are required to read the literature selection and write a short paper to begin

their academic career.

"The USU common literature book selections have given readers the opportunity to expand their knowledge beyond the borders of Cache Valley," said Flo Weir, a Mendon resident who has attended the past three convocations that highlight the year's featured selections. "Through literature, readers have explored the loss of civil rights and freedoms and have been made aware of cultures and philosophies that might differ from their own. 'A Long Way Gone' is yet another opportunity to explore other cultures."

Each year a committee of campus and community mem-



bers select a book that will challenge readers to think, ponder conflicting ideas and face a world different than their own. "A Long Way Gone" was selected because of its potential for stimulating thought and discussion about issues happening around the world. It is a memoir of Ishmael Beah, a

12-year-old boy from Sierra Leone, who fled attacking rebels and wandered a land unknown to him. By the age of 13, he was picked up by the Sierra Leone government army, indoctrinated and told to kill. At the age of 16 he was removed from the army by UNICEF and placed in a rehabilitation home in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

Noelle Call, director of USU's Retention and First-Year Experience office and Connections program director, is working with Tami Pyfer, a member of the Logan Municipal Council, to encourage community involvement. Pyfer said the Logan City Library has

received requests for the book from community members who are already actively involved in the experience. She hopes book clubs and families in the surrounding area will all pick up the book and read it.

The literature experience culminates for readers with an on-campus lecture by author Ishmael Beah on Saturday, Aug. 23, at 9:30 a.m. in the Kent Concert Hall of the Chase Fine Arts Center. Everyone is invited.

"A Long Way Gone" is available at the Utah State University Bookstore, Borders and Amazon.com. For more information on the literature experience or the Connections program, call 435-797-1194.