



# Books in bloom

## Best-selling author sheds light on the plight of immigrants during WWII

by James Robertson

**Henderson County** is a small tree with big roots. You might find yourself running into someone in random places across the country that has some sort of ties to our home here in East Texas. This is the case in the upcoming Books In Bloom event hosted by the Henderson County Clint W. Murchison Library.

The event, which is the biggest fundraiser of the year for the library, will feature best-selling author Jan Russell as she discusses her new book, "The Train to Crystal City," a dramatic and never-before-told story of a secret, FDR-approved American internment camp in Texas during World War II, where thousands of families, many U.S. citizens, were incarcerated.

Russell, a former Nieman fellow and contributing editor for Texas Monthly has also written for the New York Times, the San Antonio Express News, Slate, and other publications. Her sister lives in Athens.

"I've lived here for seven years and it seems like everyone is somehow connected in one way or another to our community here in Athens," said Emily McGraw, spokesperson for Books In Bloom. "I think it says a lot about this community that we are able to bring in these best-selling authors who have also contributed to major publications across the country."

During the war trains delivered civilians from the United States and Latin America to Crystal City, Texas, a small desert town at the southern tip of Texas. Japanese, German, Italian immigrants, and their children were carried to

the only family internment camp during the war.

Crystal City was the center of a government prisoner exchange program called "quiet passage." Under this program hundreds of prisoners in the internment camp, including their American-born children were exchanged for other "more important Americans," such as diplomats, businessmen, soldiers, physicians, and missionaries who were behind enemy lines in Japan and Germany.

Combining World War II history with the little known events that took place at Crystal City, the book reveals the war time hysteria against Japanese and German Americans, the secret tactics FDR used to rescue high profile prisoners of war, and how the definition of American citizenship was changed by the pressure of war.

The story focuses on two American born teenage girls who were interned at Crystal City. Russell uncovers the details of their years spent in the camp, the struggles of their fathers, their families' subsequent journeys to war torn Germany and Japan, and their year's long attempt to survive and return to the United States, transformed from incarcerated enemies to American loyalists. These stories of their day to day life at the camp, from the ten foot high security fences to the armed guards, daily roll call and censored mail, have never been told.

"I feel like it's very relevant to what is happening even now," said McGraw. "You know, so much can be said about the Syrian

refugee crisis and this fear of ISIS. I feel like history just repeats itself and we have to learn.”

A two day fundraiser, this is the fourth Books In Bloom event the library has held. The past three events have raised around \$60,000 for programs and other vital community outreach programs.

Donations from the event have funded programs such as overdrive e-books and audiobooks, Mango language learning software, story time crafts, family movie nights, volunteer appreciation lunches, website hosting, the Mayor's Reading Club, and improving specific collections including children's nonfiction and Spanish books.

Kicking off on March 31, 2016 from 6-8pm with a come and go event at Railway Café ticket holders will enjoy a meet and greet with the author, light appetizers, and wine. Tickets for this portion of the fundraiser are \$25 and can be purchased by emailing Emily McGraw at



[booksinbloom@suddenlink.net](mailto:booksinbloom@suddenlink.net). Only 100 tickets are available.

The second portion of the fundraising event takes place the next day on April 1 at the Cain Center. Tickets for this are \$40 per person. Table viewing begins at 11am followed by a luncheon and presentation at noon. Tickets can be reserved by calling 972-439-8273 or by emailing the same address listed above.

Reviews for “The Train to Crystal City” are raving. “Russell pulls no punches describing the cost of war and the conditions internees endured, a powerful piece,” said Publishers Weekly. “It is a story of heartbreaking dislocation, of lives smashed and ruined, and of almost unbelievable human endurance, resilience, and determination,” says S.C. Gwynne, New York Times best-selling author of Rebel Yell and Empire of the Summer Moon.

Our library is the heart beat of continued education for people of all ages in our community. This extremely important fundraiser keeps the life blood flowing through the heart of these services. Purchase your tickets for the Books in bloom event today and you'll be making a huge difference.

**It's amazing what a book can do.**

