



Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir

By Mark Gevisser

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An inner life of Johannesburg that turns on the author's fascination with maps, boundaries, and transgressions

Lost and Found in Johannesburg begins with a transgression—the armed invasion of a private home in the South African city of Mark Gevisser's birth. But far more than the riveting account of a break-in, this is a daring exploration of place and the boundaries upon which identities are mapped.

As a child growing up in apartheid South Africa, Gevisser becomes obsessed with a street guide called *Holmden's Register of Johannesburg*, which literally erases entire black townships. Johannesburg, he realizes, is full of divisions between black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight; a place that "draws its energy precisely from its atomization and its edge, its stacking of boundaries against one another." Here, Gevisser embarks on a quest to understand the inner life of his city.

Gevisser uses maps, family photographs, shards of memory, newspaper clippings, and courtroom testimony to chart his intimate history of Johannesburg. He begins by tracing his family's journey from the Orthodox world of a Lithuanian shtetl to the white suburban neighborhoods where separate servants' quarters were legally required at every house. Gevisser, who eventually marries a black man, tells stories of others who have learned to define themselves "within, and across, and against," the city's boundaries. He recalls the double lives of gay men like Phil and Edgar, the ever-present housekeepers and gardeners, and the private swimming pools where blacks and whites could be discreetly intimate, even though the laws of apartheid strictly prohibited sex between people of different races. And he explores physical barriers like The Wilds, a large park that divides Johannesburg's affluent Northern Suburbs from two of its poorest neighborhoods. It is this park that the three men who held Gevisser at gunpoint crossed the night of their crime.

An ode to both the marked and unmarked landscape of Gevisser's past, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* is an existential guide to one of the most complex cities on earth. As Gevisser writes, "Maps would have no purchase on us, no currency at all, if we were not in danger of running aground, of getting lost, of dislocation and even death without them. All maps awaken in me a desire to be lost and to be found . . . [They force] me to remember something I must never allow myself to

forget: Johannesburg, my hometown, is not the city I think I know."

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Editorial Review

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Two searing contemporary dramas—one violent, one quiet—frame this gripping memoir by eminent South African journalist Gevisser. Born in Johannesburg in 1964, the year Mandela was jailed for life, Gevisser remembers his privileged childhood in a walled white world. Then, in the mid-1990s, visiting Johannesburg (after years at Yale and then in Paris with his gay Hindi partner), Gevisser is held hostage at gunpoint, bound and gagged with two women friends when three brutal robbers break into their home. Is his assailant a prisoner from the apartheid war? The honest blend of sympathy and fury drives the story: his guilt now about his privilege, but also relief and sadness. Just as intense is his quiet meeting as an adult with Honey, the daughter of his beloved childhood nanny, Betty: while Betty lived in the servant quarters and raised him, she had to leave Honey behind. With lots of photos that show the people and places, including the mountains of yellow mine dumps from Jo'burg's gold, this is a must for those who want to experience the personal reality of apartheid and its aftermath. --Hazel Rochman

Review

"[Mark Gevisser] is unflinching in his account of the complex contradictions that still haunt his country."
?Andrea Denhoed, *The New Yorker*

"Gevisser . . . is acutely aware of the historical ironies in his story. . . . Part memoir, part psychogeography, his book is concerned with life as it's lived in these liminal spaces, which, in Gevisser's fine handling, take on both physical and symbolic dimensions." ?Emma Brockes, *The Guardian*

"Mark Gevisser asks profound questions--about race, sexuality, faith, and politics--while examining both his own history and that of his beloved Johannesburg. The result, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, is unlike any other book I know. It is illuminating, unsettling, engrossing, often funny, and, in a word, brilliant." ?Claire Messud, author of *The Woman Upstairs*

"Outstanding. A genuinely strange, marvelous, and complex account of a self and a city. Mark Gevisser does for Johannesburg what Orhan Pamuk did for Istanbul. Gevisser is as intimate and sophisticated a guide as one would wish for to this great, troubled metropolis." ?Teju Cole, author of *Open City*

"Mark Gevisser brilliantly maps out multiple worlds fractured by race, class, and history in a story as complex and beautiful as any memoir I've ever read." ?Dinaw Mengestu, author of *All Our Names*

"Apartheid is a phenomenal teacher, and Mark Gevisser has converted its untold lessons about geography and gender into a fascinating memoir about the making of a cosmopolitan." ?Diane McWhorter, *Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*

About the Author

Mark Gevisser is the author of the prizewinning *A Legacy of Liberation: Thabo Mbeki and the Future of the South African Dream* and *Portraits of Power: Profiles in a Changing South Africa*. He is the coeditor of *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. His journalism has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Granta*, and other publications. He is the writer of the award-winning documentary film *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*. Born in Johannesburg in 1964, he lives in France and South Africa.

Gevisser was a Writing Fellow at the University of Pretoria from 2009 to 2012 and an Open Society Fellow from 2012 to 2013.

Users Review

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Dora Campfield:

This Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir book is not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you obtain by reading this book is actually information inside this guide incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. That Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir without we comprehend teach the one who reading it become critical in imagining and analyzing. Don't be worry Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir can bring when you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' become full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even telephone. This Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir having good arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

Colleen Harman:

People live in this new time of lifestyle always attempt to and must have the spare time or they will get wide range of stress from both everyday life and work. So , when we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not just a robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to you actually of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading guides. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is usually Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir.

Dwight Bailey:

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