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## A Tokyo romance: a memoir, Ian Buruma (book review)

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# social sciences

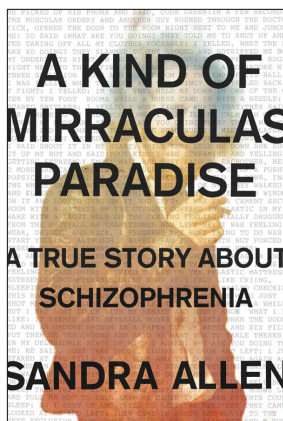
## BIOGRAPHY

★Allen, Sandra. **A Kind of Mirraculas Paradise**. Scribner. Jan. 2018. 288p.

ISBN 9781501134036. \$26;

ebk. ISBN 9781501134050. **BIOG**

In this compelling debut, former BuzzFeed editor Allen recounts the life of her Uncle Bob, whom she barely knew until he asked her to share his story. Since his childhood in 1960s Berkeley, CA, Bob meticulously recorded his transient life after his parent's divorce: a diagnosis of schizophrenia at 16, unexpected visits to hospitals and halfway houses, idolizing Jimi Hendrix, and playing guitar in short-lived bands in the Bay Area. Allen is a skillful writer, letting Bob's vivid memories (and occasionally offensive statements) speak for themselves. Especially candid are tales of family trips to Minnesota, which Bob refers to as a "mirraculas paradise," and his efforts to reclaim his faith.



Allen speaks candidly about family; new treatments for depression; a song of national identity

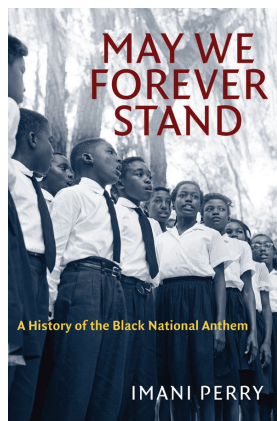
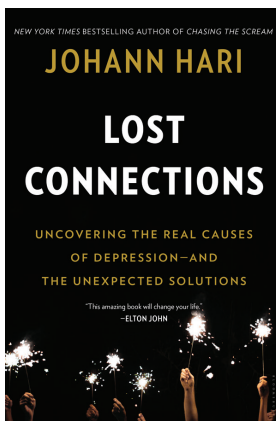
Remembrances from family and friends are interspersed with these recollections, offering differing viewpoints. Brief interviews with psychiatrists and geneticists lead Allen to realize that there is no simple definition of schizophrenia nor a consensus on proper treatment. **VERDICT** A page-turning biography and family history along the lines of Bryan Mealer's *The Kings of Big Spring*. Don't be put off by the subject—although Allen includes bits of medical history, this is a deeply personal story about an enigmatic person living the only way he knows how: by trial and error. In that, many can relate.—Stephanie Sendaula, *Library Journal*

Buruma, Ian. **A Tokyo Romance: A Memoir**. Penguin Pr. Mar. 2018. 256p.

ISBN 9781101981412. \$26;

ebk. ISBN 9781101981429. **MEMOIR**

By his own admission, Buruma longed from childhood to escape the dull security of his middle-class upbringing in Holland. Drawn to Japan by a chance encounter with the plays of poet and filmmaker Shuji Terayama, Buruma decamped to Tokyo in 1975, where he studied cinema and photography and formed connections with people such as author and film critic Donald Richie and avant-garde actor/director/playwright Kara Juro. He also experienced both the pleasures and despairs that come with being a cultural outsider. This book draws from the well of those encounters, mingling the author's attempts at self-transformation with observations on the art, culture, and society of a Japan that was in the midst of radical change. **VERDICT** Buruma's meditations on his place as a foreigner in Japanese society



achieve some depth, but the descriptions of the various personalities and the lurid slices of 1970s Tokyo's underground scene are this memoir's strongest feature. Readers interested in 20th-century Japanese cinema and avant-garde theater will find a particular appeal in Buruma's anecdotes.—Kathleen McCallister, *Tulane Univ., New Orleans*

Irving, Apricot. **The Gospel of Trees**. S. & S. Mar. 2018. 384p. ISBN 9781451690453. \$26; ebk. ISBN 9781451690477. **MEMOIR**

Writer and journalist Irving (*This American Life*) presents a reflective memoir focused on her childhood in Haiti with her Baptist missionary parents. Between the ages of six to 15, Irving mainly lived in a missionary compound in Limbe, northern Haiti,

near the busy Good Samaritan Hospital. Irving's father was an idealistic agronomist, whose ambitious plans to help reforest Haiti, improve the soil, and reduce erosion often ended in terrible frustration, despite his dedication. Struggling with the challenges of missionary life and occasional Haitian political instability, Irving navigated a bumpy adolescence marked by episodes of family discord. Yet, the author was buoyed by adventure, beauty, resilience, and social connections found amid the missionary group and Haitian friends. Irving's work also sheds light on the underlying causes and consequences of Haiti's poverty and poor access to medical care. While providing a useful view of the inherent ethical and moral ambiguities of well-meaning but sometimes ineffective charitable interventions in Haiti, Irving's meandering autobiography often feels unfocused and circuitous. **VERDICT** Best suited to serious readers interested in Haiti or the lives of missionary children and families.—Ingrid Levin, *Salve Regina Univ. Lib., Newport, RI*

Mikhail, Dunya. **The Beekeeper: Saving the Stolen Women of Iraq**. New Directions.

Mar. 2018. 240p. tr. from Arabic by Max Weiss. ISBN 9780811226127. \$16.95;

ebk. ISBN 9780811226134. **BIOG**

Mikhail, a native of Iraq, returns to her home country from New York to tell the harrowing stories of Yazidi women living under the control of Daesh, known to Westerners as ISIS. A painful, wrenching read, these chronicles expose tremendous horrors of brutal rape, kidnapping, sex slavery, and incomprehensible domination as these women desperately search for some semblance of peace and escape—mental, physical, and emotional. Mikhail's poetic background lends a unique voice to these women in a narrative style that can be difficult to grasp and follow at times. **VERDICT** These women need to be heard, making this an important, commendable work. However, the atypical narrative format, which switches gears often and includes granular retellings of phone conversations, subjectively affects the reading experience.—Erin Entrada Kelly, *Philadelphia*

Petrowskaja, Katja. **Maybe Esther: A Family Story**. Harper. Jan. 2018. 272p.

tr. from German by Shelley Frisch. illus.

ISBN 9780062337542. \$25.99;

ebk. ISBN 9780062337580. **BIOG**

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