

Good morning! This is Sue Mauger.

You're listening to "Reading between the Lines" brought to you by the Friends of the Homer Public Library.

In the months following the hurricane, Ronald's teacher read a poem to the class by Langston Hughes. She began:

"I've known rivers.

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like rivers."

Ronald, startled to hear something that spoke to him in the classroom, thought –

"I've known rivers! I've known rivers come and cover my house."

The year is 1965 – the Hurricane is Betsy. And the main character of Dan Baum's biography: *Nine Lives* is New Orleans.

A place infamous for its poverty and violence and yet heralded for its music and food, New Orleans can best be understood by exploring the full breadth of its gradations of black to white, rich to poor, male to female. Dan Baum shines his spotlight on New Orleans by giving 9 lives - 9 very different lives- center stage.

These lives, bracketed by Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina, bring the glory and the disappointment that is New Orleans into focus. There's Ronald, who grew up

fighting the day-to-day inequities facing a poor black man, Billy an uptown rich white kid who ascends to the king of mardi gras; John who blossoms into JoAnn a transsexual bar owner, Anthony a down trodden drug user, Frank the jazz playing parish coroner, Joyce - wife of Tootie Montana who brought peace and the pursuit of pretty to the mardi gras Indians, Tim a New Orleans police officer who drives around with a dead woman in his car during Katrina looking for a place to put her, Wil a childless high school band director who saves the lives of countless kids by caring, and Belinda a Ninth Ward girl who dreams of a white picket-fenced future like she saw on the Brady Bunch. For most, the hurricanes are just part of a series of setbacks; not defining events. Dan Baum lets these people tell their stories without judgment, excuses or applause.

Like any good biography, *Nine Lives* left me feeling like I understand what makes the main character tick – and New Orleans with its jazzy cadence where time, money and personal ambition have no place – seems to thrive by consuming the present. These 9 lives, no matter how challenging, will continue to be rich, full of the music, food and family ties that makes New Orleans both one of the most authentic and troubled cities in our country.

If *Nine Lives* by Dan Baum peaks your interest, there are many other books about the Gulf Coast region available at the library. *The Great Deluge – Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* by Douglas

Brinkley explores the engineering, governmental, political and person failures that led to and followed this historic storm. And for some lighter reading try *Atchafalaya Houseboat* by Gwen Roland – the story of 2 idealistic souls in search of a simpler way of life out in the Louisiana Swamp. Take away the heat and the snakes and this could be a story set in Kachemak Bay.

So come transport yourself to the bayou by visiting your Homer Public Library.

The Library hours are

Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

and Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Tune in next Sunday morning at this same time for “Reading between the Lines” right here on KBBI 890, Homer!