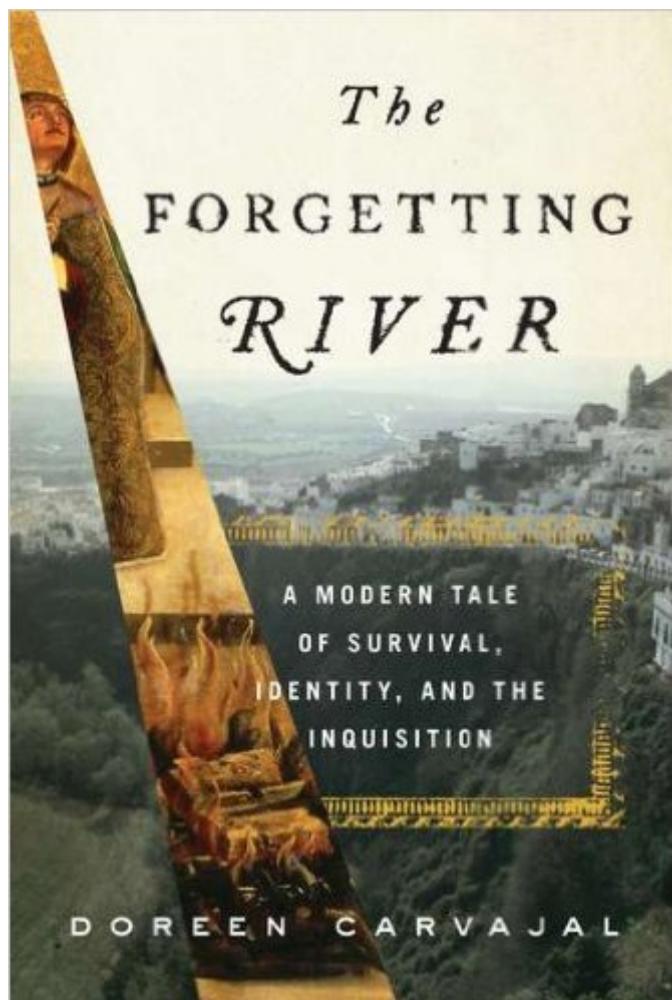


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The Forgetting River: A Modern Tale Of Survival, Identity, And The Inquisition



Synopsis

The unexpected and moving story of an American journalist who works to uncover her family's long-buried Jewish ancestry in Spain. Raised a Catholic in California, A New York Times journalist Doreen Carvajal is shocked when she discovers that her background may actually be connected to conversos in Inquisition-era Spain, Jews who were forced to renounce their faith and convert to Christianity or face torture and death. With vivid childhood memories of Sunday sermons, catechism, and the rosary, Carvajal travels to the south of Spain, to the centuries-old Andalucian town of Arcos de la Frontera, to investigate her lineage and recover her family's original religious heritage. In Arcos, Carvajal is struck by the white pueblo's ancient beauty and the difficulty she encounters in probing the town's own secret history of the Inquisition. She comes to realize that fear remains a legacy of the Inquisition along with the cryptic messages left by its victims. Back at her childhood home in California, Carvajal uncovers papers documenting a family of Carvajals who were burned at the stake in the 16th-century territory of Mexico. Could the author's family history be linked to the hidden history of Arcos? And could the unfortunate Carvajals have been her ancestors? As she strives to find proof that her family had been forced to convert to Christianity six-hundred years ago, Carvajal comes to understand that the past flows like a river through time "and that while the truth might be submerged, it is never truly lost."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Doreen Carvajal was raised Catholic, but like Madeleine Albright she began to suspect that her family used to be Jewish. In Albright's case this wasn't ancient history, her family's religious shift

happened during WWII, but Carvajal had reason to believe her ancestors may have been forced to convert during the Spanish Inquisition. Even more surprising to Carvajal, it wasn't until she was well into adulthood that she realized that while outwardly Catholic some older members of her family were quietly practicing aspects of Judaism or covertly honoring their Jewish heritage 500 years later. Long after the need for secrecy, this aspect of their lives still wasn't something anyone talked much about, and asking questions didn't always provide Carvajal with answers. The Forgetting River chronicles Carvajal's quest to find out the truth about her family's history. To do so, she spent time in and then moved with her husband and daughter to the centuries-old town of Arcos de la Frontera in the Andalusian part of Spain. This tiny settlement's culture, music, art and residents are still deeply influenced by the past, and Carvajal's richly descriptive account of her life there suggests an ambiance of sunny skies and ancient stones. While she was looking for clues to her family's history Carvajal found lingering traces of Spain's formerly substantial Jewish population and the Inquisition that tried to eliminate the practice of the Judaism within the country's borders. The chapters of The Forgetting River are a series of related articles that skip around in time but slowly build their case.

Beautiful, well-paced writing takes the reader on a curious journey to the town of Arcos de la Frontera in Spain where journalist Doreen Carvajal decides to live while researching what she suspects are the true roots of her family. Although raised Catholic, Carvajal, whose family ended up in California via ancestors who emigrated to Cuba and later, Costa Rica, suspects from talking to relatives and examining family genealogy that her background is most likely tied to Jews in Spain during the Inquisition era. Carvajal isn't the first Catholic writer to discover Jewish roots, but in other genealogical discoveries, the writers' families haven't been Catholic for more than a few decades. In Carvajal's case, she is looking at Jewish roots that go back to the 1400s in Spain. This is tough work, difficult genealogy to research, and so remote in time that Carvajal depends a lot on clues more subtle than birth certificates and religious documents. There is a definite spirituality to Carvajal's work. The first chapter of her book describes the bell ringing in Arcos de la Frontera in a quiet, poetic way that allows the reader to hear the bells in the rhythm of the words. Carvajal is easy to read; she makes history accessible, entertains the reader with pages that are delivered like a travelogue, and muses out loud on paper about her family and where they came from, how they got there, and how she can get back to the beginnings of her clan. Since Jews were expelled from Spain in the later 1400s and the Inquisition forced any remaining Jews or Muslims to convert to Christianity, Carvajal writes a great deal about people who led dual lives, secret lives, or lives forced upon them by others.

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