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AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

Jacqueline Woodson's New Novel For Adults Has Its Roots In Adolescence

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Heard on All Things Considered



LYNN NEARY

Jacqueline Woodson has been writing books for children and young adults for most of her career. After winning the National Book Award for her memoir, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, she decided she wanted to do something she hadn't done in 20 years — write a book for adults. Her new novel, *Another Brooklyn*, is about friendship and memory and coming to terms with death.

Brown Girl Dreaming is a young adult memoir in verse, but Woodson says writing for grown-ups allowed her to experiment even more than usual. Her new novel has both a poetic and a musical feel; she says it's important for her words to sound and look a certain way.

"I love playing with form, I love playing with sounds ..." Woodson says. "I love music and I love writing that has a musicality to it. ... The book does have this kind of jazzy feel to me."

Timing is also important here — Woodson says books for children and young adults usually take place within a short period of time. She wanted this story to roam more freely through time because so much of it is about memory.

"*Another Brooklyn* came to me in this kind of dreamlike series of vignettes ..." Woodson explains. Set in a time and place that no longer exist, the story is meant to replicate that "fuzzy haze of memory."

The memories belong to August who was born in Tennessee but moved to Brooklyn after her mother died, a fact she refuses to accept. We first meet August as an adult who has returned to Brooklyn to bury her father.

A chance encounter with an old friend triggers a flood of feelings about her childhood and the friends she grew up with. As she looks back on that time, she keeps reminding the reader "this is memory," which makes one wonder if her version of the story is true.



Jacqueline Woodson is also the author of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, *Miracle's Boys*, *Show Way and Feathers*.
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Jacqueline Woodson's 'Brooklyn' Is Full Of Dreams And Danger

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But August's memory can't be questioned, Woodson says. "It belongs to her. ... It's not something that you are going to change a person's mind about. ... She is saying: This is mine, this is what I own."

The young August first sees the three girls who will become her best friends from the window of her apartment. She watches them for a long time before finally meeting them. They become her anchor, seeing her through the thrill and confusion of adolescence and the excitement and dangers of the neighborhood where they live. Woodson writes:

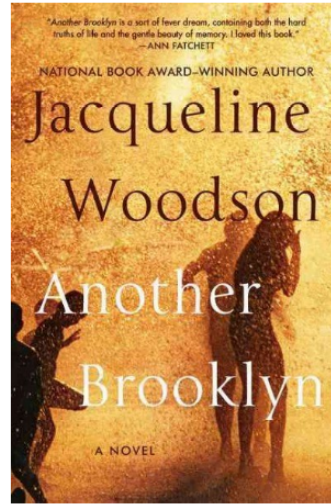
Somehow, my brother and I grew up motherless yet halfway whole. My brother had the faith my father brought him to, and for a long time, I had Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, the four of us sharing the weight of growing up *Girl* in Brooklyn, as though it was a bag of stones we passed among ourselves saying, *Here. Help me carry this.*

"The bag of stones they had to carry is the weight of that world they were living in," Woodson explains. "Even as they loved it, there was all of this stuff going on that they couldn't control. There were the people coming back from Vietnam, there were their parents — there were all of these things that were a part of Brooklyn that was a weight to them, even as they were being nurtured by this place."

From the very beginning we know that the friends betrayed each other. As August's memories unfold we learn more about how, and why and to what effect. Woodson says writing about lost friendship was hard for her.

"Friendship is such an important thing to me and I feel like the people who I love and help keep me whole — I can't imagine a life without them," she says. "In writing *Another Brooklyn* I had to imagine what happens when friendships dissolve."

Though her novel is written for adults, it is a story drawn from childhood and adolescence. After all, Woodson says, those complex years have a profound effect on the rest of our lives.



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