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2014 Common Book Convocation: Naomi Benaron, author of "Running the Rift."

Naomi Benaron

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Benaron, Naomi, "2014 Common Book Convocation: Naomi Benaron, author of "Running the Rift."" (2014). *Common Book Program*. 3.

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THOMAS ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SERIES

The Thomas Academic Excellence Series is a program established by alumna and loyal supporter of Otterbein, Mary B. Thomas '28 (1907-1999). Her endowment was presented in honor of her parents, Fred N. and Emma B. Thomas.

The Thomas Academic Excellence Series is intended to create intellectual excitement and strengthen bonds on campus by providing a shared academic experience for many. The Series starts with summer orientation and New Student Week and continues with First Year Seminar courses and programs throughout the year. All these events create a conversation about the year's academic theme.

Mary B. Thomas graduated "cum laude" from Otterbein University in 1928 and had a lasting love of literature. An English major, Miss Thomas won the Bames Short Story Award and several other literary prizes. She entered Otterbein after spending one year at Denison University. She studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin and received her master's degree in English literature from The Ohio State University in 1933.

While an undergraduate at Otterbein Miss Thomas belonged to the Philalethean Literary Society, Sigma Alpha Tau sorority and Quiz and Quill.

She was a member of the Church of the Master, Phi Delta Gamma and the New Century Club. She served as an officer at the local, state and regional levels of the American Association of University Women, was a life member of the National Federation of Music Clubs and was a member of the Westerville Memorial Library Board. Her service to the library board included holding the offices of treasurer, vice-president and president.

Formerly employed in the treasurer's office of the University, Miss Thomas was an active member of the Otterbein Board of Trustees from 1960-1979. During that time, she served as secretary of the board and as a member of the Executive Committee. In 1979, the Board passed a resolution citing her leadership and the generosity, diversity and magnitude of her service. The resolution also named her an Honorary Trustee.

In 1977, Miss Thomas was named the Westerville Otterbein Women's Club "Woman of the Year." The award was presented to her in recognition of her "unselfish dedication and loyalty to Otterbein."

Miss Thomas was a donor to the University from the formation of the Development Board in 1948 until her death in November 1999. A member of the President's Club, she participated in many capital campaigns over the years. She donated her house to Otterbein when she moved to Friendship Village in 1979.

Her hobbies included photography, stamp collecting and travel; she visited five continents. She also owned an impressive collection of postcards depicting scenes of Westerville and Otterbein.

The Thomas Academic Excellence Series *presents*

Naomi
Benaron

author of the
2014 Common Book,
Running the Rift



Tuesday, October 21 • 3 p.m.
Fritsche Theatre at Cowan Hall

About Naomi Benaron

Author of *Running the Rift*

Naomi Benaron earned an MFA from Antioch University and an MS in earth sciences from Scripps Institution of Oceanography. She teaches creative writing through UCLA Writers Extension and is a writing mentor for the Afghan Women's Writing Project. An advocate for African refugees in her home community of Tucson, Ariz., she has also worked with genocide survivor groups in Rwanda. She won the G. S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction for her collection, *Love Letters from a Fat Man*. She is a marathon runner and an Ironman triathlete.

Past Common Books

1995

Fires in the Mirror
Anna Deavere Smith

1996

China Boy
Gus Lee

1997

The Paradise of Bombs
Scott Russell Sanders

1998

She Walks These Hills
Sharyn McCrumb

1999

There Are No Children Here
Alex Kotlowitz

2000

After Long Silence
Helen Fremont

2001

The Sparrow
Mary Doria Russell

2002

My Year of Meats
Ruth Ozeki

2003

Bombingham
Anthony Grooms

2004

The Eagle's Shadow
Mark Hertsgaard

2005

Mountains Beyond Mountains
Tracy Kidder

2006

The Inextinguishable Symphony
Martin Goldsmith

2007

Under the Feet of Jesus
Helena María Viramontes

2008

A Long Way Gone: Memories of a Boy Soldier
Ishmael Beah

2009

Strange as this Weather has Been
Ann Pancake

2010

Outcasts United
Warren St. John

2011

City of Refuge
Tom Piazza

2012

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks
Rebecca Skloot

2013

Little Princes
Conor Grennan

The Thomas Academic Excellence Series presents

Naomi Benaron

Welcome Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz

Recognition of Miss Mary B. Thomas, Class of '28..... Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz

Introduction of Ms. Benaron..... Adriann Ricketts

Keynote Address.....Ms. Naomi Benaron

Concluding Remarks Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz

A complimentary reception and book signing will be held following the lecture in Roush Hall, Fisher Gallery.

The reception is sponsored by the common book committee on behalf of the Thomas Academic Excellence Series.

The taking of photographs during the lecture is strictly prohibited.

Convocation Etiquette

- Silence your cell phone and refrain from any cell phone use (web surfing, text messaging, etc).
- Do not talk or whisper during the program.
- Stay until the end of the program. (If you absolutely must leave, wait until a break in the program, or a time when everyone is standing to minimize the disruption.)