Summary

Running the Rift follows Jean Patrick Nkuba, a gifted Rwandan boy, from the day he knows that running will be his life to the moment he must run to save his life, a ten-year span in which his country is undone by the Hutu-Tutsi tensions. Born a Tutsi, he is thrust into a world where it's impossible to stay apolitical—where the man who used to sell you gifts for your family now spews hatred, where the girl who flirted with you in the lunchroom refuses to look at you, where your Hutu coach is secretly training the very soldiers who will hunt down your family. Yet in an environment increasingly restrictive for the Tutsi, he holds fast to his dream of becoming Rwanda's first Olympic medal contender in track, a feat he believes might deliver him and his people from this violence. When the killing begins, Jean Patrick is forced to flee, leaving behind the woman, the family, and the country he loves. Finding them again is the race of his life.

Editorial Reviews:

Amazon Best Books of the Month, January 2012: No wonder Barbara Kingsolver awarded her 2010 Bellwether Prize, given biennially to an unpublished novel that confronts social issues, to Naomi Benaron's Running the Rift. In her coming-of-age story of young Tutsi Jean Patrick Nkuba, whose extraordinary gift for distance running lands him on the path to become his country's first medalist in track, one of history's most inconceivable chapters--the Rwandan genocide--becomes intensely personal. Out of a childhood marked by loss and overshadowed by mounting Hutu-Tutsi tensions, Jean Patrick draws the strength for grueling Olympic training and the courage to run his life's most crucial race--to save himself and his family. A vividly told tale with a memorable champion at its heart.
--Mari Malcolm

"In Naomi Benaron's Running the Rift, a novel full of unspeakable strife but also joy, humor, and love, "hope always [chases] close on the heels of despair," thanks to a writer who knows when to keep a steady pace and when to explode into an all-out sprint."
--O, The Oprah Magazine

"Running the Rift does not spare readers the horrors of the violence in Rwanda, but never loses sight of the beauty—the love and, yes, the hope—that persists even amid such a desperate situation."
--The Wichita Eagle

"This well written and well researched novel is an impressive debut."
--The Seattle Times

"An auspicious debut . . . Having worked extensively with genocide survivor groups in Rwanda, Benaron clearly acquired a very lucid sense of her characters' lives and of the horrors they endured. Her story tells, with compelling clarity, of Rwandan Tutsi youth, Jean Patrick Nkuba--who dreams of becoming Rwanda's first Olympic medalist. It's a dream he must postpone for more than a decade as the internecine savagery, Hutu vs. Tutsi, slaughters millions and derails the lives of countless others. While it would be counterintuitive to pronounce this a winning, feel-good story, there is something to be said for hope restored. And Naomi Benaron's characters say it well."
--The Daily Beast

"This debut novel set against the backdrop of Rwanda's ethnic conflict is a powerful coming-of-age story that highlights the best and worst of human nature."
--Christian Science Monitor

"This debut novel won the Bellwether Prize, created and funded by author Barbara Kingsolver to promote fiction that addresses issues of social justice. A more fitting choice would be hard to find."
--Shelf Awareness

"In a finely crafted story of dreams, illusions, hard reality, and reaching the other side of fear, Benaron has bestowed upon the world a story that illuminates events on a national scale by showing their effects at the personal level."

--ForeWord Reviews

"Benaron accomplishes the improbable feat of wringing genuine loveliness from unspeakable horror . . . It is a testament to Benaron's skill that a novel about genocide . . . conveys so profoundly the joys of family, friendship, and community."
--Publishers Weekly, starred review

“Awarded the prestigious Bellwether Prize for its treatment of compelling social issues, Benaron’s first novel is a gripping, frequently distressing portrait of destruction and ultimate redemption... Benaron sheds a crystalline beacon on an alarming episode in global history, and her charismatic protagonist leaves an indelible impression.”
--Booklist

"First novelist Benaron, who has actively worked with refugee groups, won the 2010 Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction for this unflinching and beautifully crafted account of a people and their survival. In addition, she compellingly details the growth and rigorous training of a young athlete. . . Highly recommended; readers who loved Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner will appreciate."
--Library Journal, starred review

"The politics will be familiar to those who have followed Africa’s crises (or seen Hotel Rwanda), but where Benaron shines is in her tender descriptions of Rwandan’s natural beauty and in her creation of Jean Patrick, a hero whose noble innocence and genuine human warmth are impossible not to love."
--Kirkus Reviews, starred review

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