

**07-05-10: Abraham Verghese Will Not Be 'Cutting for Stone'**



**Stories of Spirit and Words  
of Comfort**

**"Literature has a wonderful  
ability to restore your  
imagination for the suffering of  
others."**

— Abraham Verghese

*Books — and authors — come to us from a variety of directions. If I were the destiny type, I'd say that destiny intervened to put me in Abraham Verghese's office in the summer of 2010. It all sounds so futuristic now. But, perhaps appropriately, the threads that led me there came from a variety of sources.*

*As a host for my own show on KUSP, I arrive while the previous host is still on-air. The hosts for KUSP's It Takes All Kinds — Jeff Grubb and Bruce Larsen — are both well aware that I interview authors. A few months back, as I prepared and Jeff Grubb packed up, he asked if I'd ever read a book called 'Cutting for Stone.' At the time, I hadn't, though I knew about the book, by title only, and that it had received good notices. I filed the name away in the to-be-read list, and went about my duties.*

*The next notice came when I was interviewing Blake Charlton at SF in SF. He mentioned that he was being mentored in Med School by Verghese, the author of two non-fiction works and a novel titled 'Cutting for Stone.' I added another star to the to-be-read entry, and notched the book further up the queue.*

*When Tamera, the events coordinator at Capitola Book Café asked if I could do an interview with this guy named Abraham Verghese, author of 'Cutting for Stone,' in advance of his appearance there, I jumped at the chance. Now I had two stars and an excuse to speak to Verghese. Now, the fun part began, and I ordered up the book. It's an exciting, immersive novel to read and lose yourself in, something I managed to do in short order. And fortunately, Stanford is closer than San Francisco. More fortunately, Verghese's colleagues were able to easily help me navigate my way to a payable parking place, just a short schlep from his office. And finally, there were enough books in the office (including some highly-desirable first editions of 'Cutting for Stone'), to ensure great sound. Verghese's just as talented in conversation as he is in his writing; for enough proof to send you out in*

search of your own first edition of 'Cutting for Stone,' [you can follow this link to the MP3 file of our conversation.](#)

### Review:

Abraham Verghese doesn't waste any time. In the first sentence of 'Cutting for Stone,' he lets us know we're in for an epic story that starts with the birth of twins — by a nun. Obviously, we're not in for an ordinary epic.

Stone, the twin who tells the story, speaks with authority, humility and a sense of the absurd. Born in Addis Ababa in 1954, the twins will become aqnd for readers, something more. 'Cutting for Stone' is a grand, engaging that will enters readers' lives by offering them memories of a lives that are own. This is how we make this small world bigger than life.

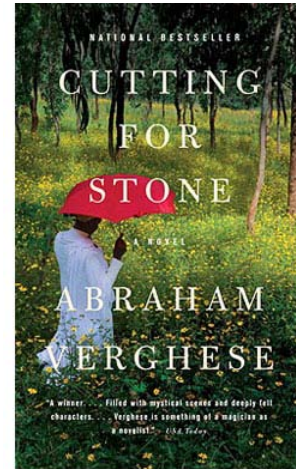
Verghese (vur-geese) manages to bring these wildly extravagant lives into reader's world with a powerful balance of great prose, intricate details, characters that are big enough to move from page to memory, plotting that organic and carefully orchestrated, and a unique vision that tempers surgery with spiritual nourishment. Obviously, he needed an epic just get everything in, and happily he succeeds at crafting a novel that unfolds, and satisfies our need for life — more life, lived well.

There's a definite danger when a writer ventures into this territory. The thin between great drama and melodrama is easily crossed, and it takes a talent to steer the right course. Verghese starts off with the superb prose voice of Marion Stone, and never makes a wrong decision with regards to tone. He has a great way of slyly undercutting the seriousness of events by viewing them with a very understated sense of humor and absurdity. We're introduced to Marion and Shiva as infants born to a doctor and nun. The novel is written from a very practical medical perspective. Marion understands that we humans are made of not just the glistening viscera upon which the doctors operate, but of some ineffable spirit as well. He doubts his worth, but the reader does not. It's a great way to keep us engaged and immersed in Marion's life. Verghese gets a prose voice that catches us from the very beginning and holds us to the very end.

Verghese offers us, via Marion, all of life's rich pageant, with enough plot twists, grand successes and stunning failures to keep the reading lively, but never so much as to overwhelm. The plot is not confined to the events, the moves from one country to another, the deaths, the lives of these twins, each of whom becomes a different sort of doctor. Verghese moves the plot by developing his characters, keeping the reader riveted at two levels. The big themes and events of the past century; war, mass emigration, the unequal distribution of wealth between continents and countries, are mirrored in the richly described cast of characters.

Readers will quickly find that Verghese, himself a surgeon, offers an epic with a lot more medicine and surgery than the average grand saga. But this speaks directly to his particular vision of what exactly medicine can be versus what it is in practice. As Marion moves from war-torn Ethiopia to New York City, Verghese explores how culture affects the practice of medicine for good or for ill. There's no cut-and-dried conclusions to be reached, but the dialogue between technology and spirituality is deftly handled. Moreover, it is mirrored in the characters of Marion and Shiva Stone, and in the plot itself as their lives are recombined with expertly designed literary DNA.

'Cutting for Stone' offers readers an imaginative, immersive story, with just a touch of the fantastic around the edges. There's a glimmering sense of the ineffable at work here in the lives of Marion and Shiva Stone, even as they literally plunge their hands into the bowels of their fellow humans. Curing and healing are not the same, Verghese suggests, and if medicine may cure us, it is words, and the spirit found in creations like 'Cutting for Stone,' that will ultimately heal us.



Marion delicate doctors, novel not their the seems internal unpacks line strong