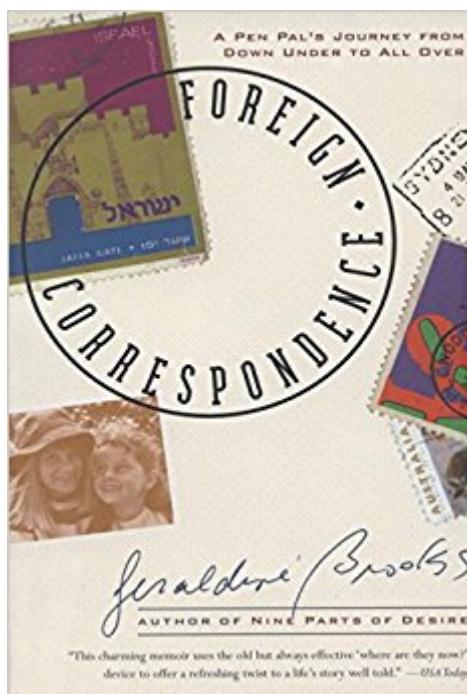


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# Foreign Correspondence: A Pen Pal's Journey From Down Under To All Over



## **Synopsis**

As a young girl in a working-class neighborhood of Sydney, Australia, Geraldine Brooks longed to discover the places where history happens and culture comes from, so she enlisted pen pals who offered her a window on adolescence in the Middle East, Europe, and America. Twenty years later Brooks, an award-winning foreign correspondent, embarked on a human treasure hunt to find her pen friends. She found men and women whose lives had been shaped by war and hatred, by fame and notoriety, and by the ravages of mental illness. Intimate, moving, and often humorous, *Foreign Correspondence* speaks to the unquiet heart of every girl who has ever yearned to become a woman of the world.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 217 pages

Publisher: Anchor; 1st Anchor Books Trade Pbk. Ed edition (January 19, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385483732

ISBN-13: 978-0385483735

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 73 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #456,508 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #54 in Books > Travel > Australia & South Pacific > Australia > General #74 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Australian #768 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists

## **Customer Reviews**

The leap between dreamy child living in a provincial Australian neighborhood and journalist hopscotching through war zones is massive. In *Foreign Correspondence*, Geraldine Brooks (*Nine Parts of Desire*) unravels the rope that pulled and tugged her toward adventure and away from "a very small world" where her family had no car and had never boarded a plane or placed an international phone call. "I'd never imagined myself as someone whose packing list would include a chador, much less a bulletproof vest," she says. Preserved in the cellar of her parents' home in Sydney were letters Brooks had received as a teenager from several international pen pals, around whom she spun a romantic view of the world. Wondering about the reality of their lives and the progression of her own, she tracks them down in France, Japan, the Middle East, and New York. En

route, Brooks delivers a wonderful meditation on childhood and adolescence lashed with rich details and quirky humor. Speaking of a current pen pal, she notes: "Raed, from the West Bank, stoned my car in 1987; now he writes to tell me how he's faring in college." --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

YA-Bored with her insular life in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, 11-year-old Geraldine Brooks turned to pen pals as an antidote. Her correspondence began across town with the daughter of a favorite journalist whose cosmopolitan life was a striking contrast to that of her own working-class family. Other pen pals included Joanie from New Jersey; Mishal, an Israeli Christian Arab; Cohen, an Israeli Jew; and Janine, a farmer's daughter who wrote from a tiny French village. Geraldine's global correspondence is enlightening, entertaining, myth shattering, and heartbreaking. In Joanie, she found a true and rare soulmate; however, the girl suffered a hidden anguish, hints of which were dismissed by her Australian friend. When Joanie died from anorexia, Geraldine's grief and regret moved her to greater knowledge and deeper compassion. The author grew up to become a foreign correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, living the life she sought vicariously from her pen pals. Her return home upon her father's death and the rediscovery of the letters prompted her to find out what happened to those individuals. Her efforts were met with enthusiasm by all except Mishal, and the subsequent meetings with the reluctant Israeli as well as with Joanie's mother provided satisfying closure. The last pages of the memoir find the mature adventurer coming full circle to an appreciation for the small-town life she had once so derided. The desire to explore the lives of others and to express one's individuality is strong in most young adults, who will readily identify with this intriguing memoir. Jackie Gropman, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA  
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I started reading Geraldine Brooks' books when another Author recommended "A Year of Wonders" - a fascinating look at the plague-village in the UK. Since then I have been addicted to her intelligent style of writing. My only disappointment is that this wonderfully skilled author hasn't written more. As this is a memoir rather than a historical novel, I didn't know what to expect. But as I grew up in the suburbs of Sydney, I found myself transported back to my childhood as the fine details of her early years are explored. As so often is the case, it is the small details that give these memoirs poignancy...and Geraldine Brooks is consistently accurate with the details. You can almost smell the home cooking and feel the excitement of exploring new things as a youngster as you read through the early pages. As her book progresses, lightly touching on her amazing career, I became more

aware of just what a person with a vision can achieve. When she explores what happened to some of her friends from those years, and how their lives diverged it left me wondering about the things which shape our lives, for better or for worse. I personally found that this book took me on a journey that was thought-provoking, sometimes sad, and at other times inspirational - but always interesting.

I have read all Geraldine Brooks's books. This time Geraldine tracks pen friends she has written to as a young person growing up in Australia. She sets out to find them in adulthood and the results give the reader the sense of the author learning a lot about herself in the process. There is sadness in the discovery of her friends as well as poignant rediscovery of her own journeying. I loved this book because as always it is extremely well written but also because of the reaching out we do as adolescents in the form of letter writing, now a lost art. Her honesty and wonderful prose make this a great read.

I have read most of Geraldine Brooks' fiction books and loved every one, so was anxious to see how I would get on with nonfiction. It was a pleasure from beginning to end, told in her inimitable style that always makes me feel as though I can see and hear the people she is talking about. This is a timeless book about people and the places they live as well as the circumstances that have shaped them, as all of us are shaped by our experiences in life.

I have always enjoyed Geraldine Brooks' stories an writing. This story was unique because it was her biography of her very active life as a journalist and reporter for the Wall Street Journal and others. She traveled all over the world to cover war stories and other important stories. She had a very unique family life lived mostly in Australia. She had pen-pals in various places around the world, because of her worldly curiosity as a child, and followed up later by visiting all the pen-pals about twenty years later. A good read!

liked her other books better

In addition to the fact that Geraldine Brooks can write like a dream, this is such a great story (a non-fiction story) of growing up -- she chases down 5 of the penpals she'd had as a kid in Australia. Her travels take her to rural France, to a Palestinian home in Israel (people are oppressed, but joyful), to an Israeli home in Israel (people are paranoid and scared), and to a couple other places. Anyone who has had penpals or who is interested in an inside-out sort of understanding of the world

would enjoy this. It made a great book for my wild-women-talk-about-books circle.

Brooks is always a go to author for excellent writing that is both absorbing and just a pleasure to read. This book was autobiographical, giving insights into what has made her such an outstanding writer and her personal background. Unlike her other books, this one is really a series of stories about her life through the influences of her experiences with her pen pals both as a child and meeting them later in life. As such, it does not absorb you as deeply as her historical fiction novels, but does truly show parts of her.

Australian born Geraldine Brooks spent many years as a foreign correspondent covering the Middle East. I loved her book, "Nine Parts of Desire" which was about Muslim women, and I have followed her life somewhat as she is often mentioned by her husband, Tony Horwitz, in his books "Confederates in the Attic", "Baghdad Without a Map," and "One for the Road." I find her an excellent reporter and in this memoir, "Foreign Correspondence," she turns the spotlight on herself. As a child growing up in a lower middle class neighborhood on a street actually called "Bland Street", she yearned for a larger world. And so she developed pen pals. There was a girl from New Jersey, another one from France, and even one from an upper class neighborhood just a few towns away. And then there were two Israeli boys, one an Arab and one a Jew. As an adult, she found these old letters in her father's basement and, now more than twenty years later, she decided to look up each of these people. What follows is the result of her quest and some wonderful insights into world events from a personal one-on-one perspective. It was fascinating. As a teenager in the early seventies she was aware of the new consciousness developing, even reaching her in her protective Catholic school. She had an active imagination and the gift of using words well. It's not surprising that she developed pen pals and that they influenced her life so much. Her gift of words certainly reached me too. I shared her sense of wonder and enthusiasm as she looked forward to each letter. I felt her straining to break the bonds of her loving but restrictive world. I felt her hopes and dreams and frustrations. And then, later, I shared her discoveries as she searched out the people who had meant so much to her early life. She writes with a clear voice, painting a picture with details, taking me on her quest to discover the world and eventually to discover herself. The book is short, a mere 210 pages but she sure does pack a lot into it. It's a wonderful read. Highly recommended.

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