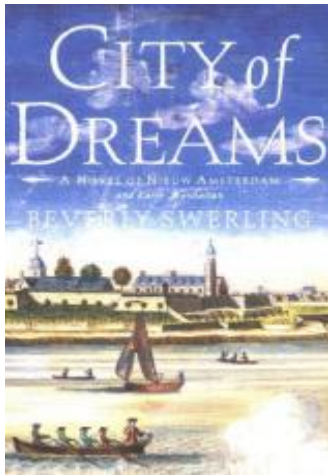


City of Dreams: a Novel of Early Manhattan

by Beverly Swerling



About the Book

In this sweeping epic of two families, one Dutch, one English, Beverly Swerling chronicles the history of New York, from the time New Amsterdam was a raw and rowdy settlement to the triumph of the Revolution. The novel begins in 1661 when Lucas Turner, a barber-surgeon, and his sister, Sally Turner, an apothecary, arrive in the Dutch settlement of Nieuw Amsterdam to start a new life. *City of Dreams* follows their lives and those of their descendants -- dedicated physicians and surgeons who will shape the future of medicine and the growing city. Rich in historical and medical detail, *City of Dreams* is an enthralling tale by a master storyteller, set against the panorama of a young country's struggle for freedom.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel spans more than 130 years of early American history. How does the author effectively blend together the leaps in time? Aside from family trees, what historical or social links unite each section? Which of the generations did you find most compelling? Why?
2. Lucas Turner sets the stage for the rest of the story when he promises his sister's hand in marriage to Jacob Van der Vries. What was Lucas' reason for doing this? Do you believe he thought it would benefit Sally, or was he acting purely out of self-interest? Considering what he had to gain and the social structure of the time, would you have made the same decision?
3. Many of the characters' decisions and actions have long-term, far-reaching ramifications. Aside from Lucas' agreement with Jacob Van der Vries, which turning point do you think had the most impact on the story and the characters' lives? Who made the decision or took the action? How did the consequences differ from what he or she intended, if at all? How might the story have changed if he or she had acted differently?

4. The story begins at a time when the practice of medicine is slowly evolving. Why are many patients and doctors unwilling to undergo surgical procedures? Is it the pain involved, or the fearful superstitions attached to them? Both? What factors play a role in the gradual acceptance of certain medical procedures? In what ways is medicine different at the close of the book than it is at the beginning? In what ways is it the same?
5. How does each generation pay for the feud initiated by Lucas and Sally Turner? How often do the successive generations question the reason for the feud, and how often is it taken for granted? Which characters had the best chance of overcoming the past bitterness and reconciling, and why?
6. Have you ever been involved in a long-standing personal or family rivalry? Did it affect people who were not directly responsible for its beginning? Did you ever do something you wouldn't ordinarily do because of that situation? What was the cause of the rivalry, and was it ever resolved? If so, how?
7. Put yourself in Morgan's shoes when he chooses to save Caleb instead of his Uncle Luke. What factors had made Morgan the type of person capable of making that decision? Would your choice have been the same? If not, why not?
8. Jennet believes that "Amba always managed to make it seem as if the white people were the slaves and she the owner." Do you think this is true, and if so, how does Amba manage to do that? How do the other slaves function in the story? What were some of the differences between the living conditions of slaves, and how did these differences come about? Characters exhibit various ways of treating, and relating to, slaves. How did the author use this issue to define her characters?
9. Women were forbidden from practicing certain skills, like surgery. Were you surprised by anything the women were allowed to do? What do the women in the book use as leverage for power? How effective are they? Among the women who wish to practice medicine, who is affected by the hurdles faced? Does the behavior of the story's women in any way foreshadow the eventual gains made by women in modern societies? If so, how?
10. Of all the factors that severely limited people in earlier history--gender, race, religion--which seemed to be the most restricting to these characters? What role did each factor play in the story? Think of at least one instance in which gender, race, or religion caused a character to do something they might not have done otherwise.
11. What grievances did the people of early New York have with the British? Several characters spent time in Europe being schooled, such as Andrew's experience at Edinburgh. Were those characters treated differently than others? With less respect? More?
12. With so many incidents and characters to choose from, discuss your favorite people and moments in the story. Which character made the most striking entrance? Who died the most dramatic death? Which historical detail of early New York most surprised you? Which character was the noblest? The most unethical? Which three scenes had you furthest on the edge of your seat?

Author Bio

Camron Wright attended Brigham Young University and received a B.A. in business management. *Letters For Emily*, his first novel, was inspired by the writings of his grandfather, who passed away in 1996. He lives with his wife and their four children in a small town near Salt Lake City. E-mail Camron at author@lettersforemily.com or visit his Web site: www.lettersforemily.com.

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