

Author tells story of journalist kidnapping

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Journalists often take pride in knowing that some of the most successful writers of fiction started out as newspaper reporters.

Small town reporters with dreams of something greater can take heart know-

Review

ing that Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who started out hustling for stories for a sensational newspaper in Columbia, later went on to write "100 Years of Solitude," one of a handful of novels from this century likely to be remembered in the next.

And one of Garcia Marquez's least recognized books, written before his novels brought him fame and a Nobel prize, is a work of excellent journalism — the true story of a shipwrecked sailor who floated at sea for several weeks and then walked into the young writer's newsroom and offered him an exclusive.

Garcia Marquez has returned to jour-

nalism again, this time with a story about journalists, in a book just released in English translation, "News of a Kidnapping." It's the story of several print and broadcast reporters who were kidnapped in 1991 by the Escobar drug trafficking organization in Columbia and the political intrigue surrounding their release.

The story shows Columbia to be more complicated than many U.S. news accounts have suggested. News stories of that period portrayed the Colombian government as eager to roll over for drug traffickers who menace the States. They suggested Columbia protected Pablo Escobar, leader of the drug trafficking organization, from justice and even housed him in a country club instead of prison after his surrender.

Garcia Marquez's insider account; however, shows a conflicted nation with a factionalized government pressured by citizens tired of terrorism in their cities. The government reluctantly negotiates with a drug industry, which they consider a far greater menace to their country than ours.

The narrative intertwines the details of that negotiation with the recollections of the journalists and their imprisonment, making the story something of a political

pot boiler.

Fans of "100 Years of Solitude" and the author's other very successful novel, "Love in the Time of Cholera," may be disappointed by "News of a Kidnapping." The story isn't as suspenseful as other non-fiction political thrillers, and the startling and delightful way Garcia Marquez delivers fantastic and outlandish stories only surfaces occasionally here.

But like the old saw about a bad day fishing being better than any day of work, fans may also feel that Garcia Marquez, on a mediocre day, is better than no Garcia Marquez at all. It's hard to judge a book of his as good or bad because almost anything would suffer by comparison to his earlier work.

"News of a Kidnapping" isn't as good as we might hope or as good as we have come to expect, but Garcia Marquez wouldn't write anything bad. He's a journalist after all, and he knows how to get a story told effectively and clearly.

Wait for the paperback if you prefer, but don't miss it. Garcia Marquez is too good a writer to overlook even his least compelling stories.

"News of a Kidnapping" is published by Alfred A. Knopf; Cost is \$25; 291 pages.