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# How to Get on "Oprah"

*A. Write a novel about dead or missing children. B. Live in Wisconsin.*

**W**e're probably jinxing it for all of the aspiring local novelists dreaming of celebrity and riches, but we've got to ask: What is going on with Oprah's Book Club and local writers? They represent five out of the 37 novels she's picked – 18.5 percent.

Nothing is going on, say her PR people. It's just a coincidence.

Some coincidence. It's enough of a trend that when Delafield native Christina Schwarz, author of *Drowning Ruth*, was moderately celebrated last fall, this writer joked, "Next you'll be picked by Oprah."

"Ha-ha," she said. "Sure." Little did we know she'd already gotten the call and was keeping it a secret until Oprah announced it on the air.

Sure, we're claiming as our own both transplants to (Jacquelyn Mitchard and Jane Hamilton) and transplants from (A. Manette Ansay and Schwarz) Wisconsin. But all but one of their Oprah books are set in fictionalized versions of their dairy-

land homes (Hamilton's *The Book of Ruth* slides across the border into a northern Illinois farm town).

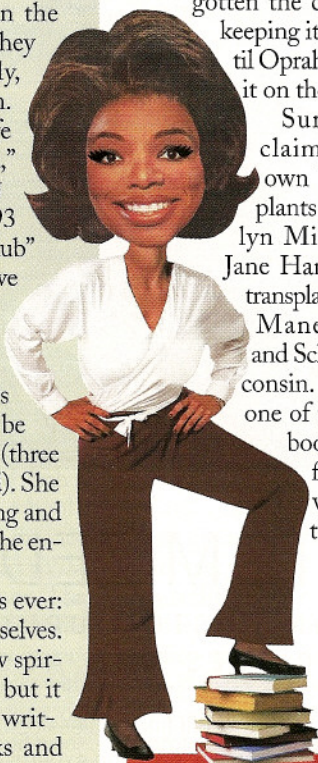
Are we making too much of nothing? "There is no conscious effort to pick the books by geography," says an Oprah spokesperson. "There's no story here."

But we wonder: Just what is it about her literary neighbors to the north that keeps catching her attention? Take the books' themes. Most of them might be described as gothics – small-town isolation, hints of dreadful violence, moody weather. All but one involve missing or dead children and mothers haunted by that threatening atmosphere.

Another coincidence is Oprah's ties to the area. She attended Nicolet High School for a while when she was a teenager and her mother lives on Pewaukee Lake. And did you know that Oprah's name is a clerical screwup of the name Orpah, who is a character in the Old Testament story from which Hamilton's *The Book of Ruth* gets its name?

There's nothing to it, insist the PR people. And she's not available for an interview. Let's hope we haven't made Oprah so self-conscious that no Wisconsinite is picked again.

– Robert McGuire



MINDY BENHAM

	DEAD OR MISSING CHILDREN	AUTHOR LIVES IN WISCONSIN	AUTHOR FROM WISCONSIN	BOOK SET IN WISCONSIN
<b>Christina Schwarz</b> <i>Drowning Ruth</i>	✓		✓	✓
<b>Jacquelyn Mitchard</b> <i>The Deep End of the Ocean</i>	✓	✓		✓
<b>Jane Hamilton</b> <i>A Map of the World</i> <i>The Book of Ruth</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>A. Manette Ansay</b> <i>Vinegar Hill</i>	✓		✓	✓