FLORENCE AUBENAS

DATES

Biography

Florence Aubenas is a French journalist born on February 6, 1961, in Brussels. A 1984 graduate of the French school of journalism Centre de formation des journalistes, she has widely covered events throughout the world (Rwanda, Kosovo, Algeria, Afghanistan and Iraq among others) as well as several high profile trials in France.

Aubenas, who has spent most of her career working as an international reporter for the daily Libération, was abducted in Bagdad on January 5, 2005, along with her interpreter, Hussein Hanoun al-Saadi, while reporting on Falloujah’s refugees. They were held captive for five months (157 days) and were freed on June 12, 2005.

Shortly after her return to France in 2006, she left Liberation and started working for the weekly Le Nouvel Observateur.

From February to July 2009, Aubenas took a leave of absence. Rumor had it that she was writing a novel in Morocco. In fact, she had moved to Caen, registered for unemployment at the French National agency “Pôle Emploi” and started to look for a job. Thus she conducted an undercover investigation on France’s workers, without job security, who survive on a salary inferior to France’s minimum wage—research similar to Günter Wallraff’s in Germany in the 60’s when he pretended to be Turkish and Elsa Fayner’s in France in the 2000’s. After doing a few odd jobs, she embarked as a cleaning lady on a ferry on the Ouistreham piers and later wrote a book on this experience Le Quai de Ouistreham, published in February 2010 (120 000 copies sold in France as of April 2010). Its translation is scheduled to be released in March 2011. (Polity Press)

Aubenas was elected on July 2, 2009, as Head of the Observatoire international des prisons (International Observatory on Prisons), which, as part of its mission, monitors prison conditions and acts as a whistle blower when human rights are trampled.

If you would like to invite this author, please fill out the application form and email it to:
Anne-Sophie Hermil, Tel: 212 439 1467 | anne-sophie.hermil@diplomatie.gouv.fr
selected bibliography

In English (To be published)
• The Night Cleaner, Polity Press, 2011

In French
• La fabrication de l’information. Les journalistes et l’idéologie de la communication., with Miguel Benasayag, La Découverte, 1999.
• Résister, c’est créer, with Miguel Benasayag, La Découverte, 2002.
• La méprise - L’Affaire d’Outreau, Editions du Seuil, 2005.
• Grand reporter, Editions Bayard, 2009.

lectures offered

To be announced

about the book

The Night Cleaner
Polity Press, 2011

The idea was simple: pack a suitcase, go to another city where you have no connections and try to find a job, anonymously. That was the idea that took Florence Aubenas – one of France’s most accomplished undercover journalists – on a journey into the worst recession since the Great Depression.

Day after day she searched for work, one unemployed worker among others, with no special skills or qualifications. She immersed herself in the crowd of job seekers, going from one employment office to another, eventually managing to cobble together a few hours working as a night cleaner on a ferry that crossed the English Channel.

For many people the global financial crisis seems real enough but remote from their daily lives. They have little sense of what it really means to be unemployed in the midst of a recession. Florence Aubenas was determined to find out. This book is the story of her journey.

The Night Cleaner became an instant number one bestseller in France and has subsequently become a bestseller in many countries throughout the world. Better than any academic treatise on the topic, this book shows what recession means today.