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Vanity Fair's Marie Brenner visits Charlotte

April 2nd, 2009 by [Mary C. Curtis](#) in [Mary Curtis](#)

Marie Brenner has traveled the world, with a recent stop in India, where she was reporting on the human stories — and acts of courage — in last November's terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Next stop, Charlotte?

The award-winning journalist — writer-at-large for *Vanity Fair* — spoke at the [Charlotte Museum of History](#) today, about Great Dames, sibling reconciliation and Bernie Madoff. She asked the audience for examples of unsung volunteerism, and had nice things to say about yours truly, though neither of us had the solution to troubles in the news business.

Quick takes:

- Brenner shared choice anecdotes about *Great Dames: What I Learned from Older Women*, her 2000 book. After a day trailing then-New York City arts czarina Kitty Carlisle Hart from Brooklyn to the Bronx — in a snow storm — a breathless Brenner asked the lady her secret. "Discipline," said Hart, 88, who dropped to the floor and executed 40 perfect leg lifts. Brenner's greatest of dames was her own mother, whose wisdom she has come to appreciate: "After 45, you put your hand into your sleeve and your mother's arm comes out." Future great dames? Michelle Obama would have to be at the top of the list, said Brenner.
- In her newest book, *Apples and Oranges, My Brother and Me, Lost and Found*, Brenner tells of growing up in San Antonio and in constant conflict with an older brother who was her opposite in every way. A crisis brought them together several years ago, which led her to the book and her advice that particularly in times of uncertainty, it's "so crucial that families pull together."
- For *Vanity Fair*, Brenner explored the touchy issues of class and religion in the Bernard Madoff scandal. When asked about how he got away with it for so long, Brenner said, he "moved like a shark, under the radar." In court, when he was taken away, a "strange smirk played on and off his lips," Brenner said. It's "like you were seeing a true sociopath."