

Featured Artist:

Daisy Karam-Read

When Daisy Karam-Read met her fiancé, Jerry Read, in 1998 and moved from the life she had known as a struggling actress in New York City to Ocean Springs, she didn't know what was in store for her. She was pleasantly surprised as one after another she debunked her pre-conceived notions regarding South Mississippi. Her first book, "From Manhattan to Mississippi: A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South," is an observational journal of her discovery of the Coast and the people who live here.



KARAM-READ

Your book is only a few weeks old, but what kind of feedback have you received from lifelong Mississippians?

Well, I'll tell you, last night we went to a wonderful signing at the Walter Anderson Museum for "Katrina: Mississippi Women Remember," and several people came over to me and said they were so happy to hear a New Yorker saying such wonderful things about Mississippi, and that they felt the Deep South and Mississippi in general has been maligned enough. To find someone with a fresh point of view made them very happy. I was very gratified by that response. I'm getting the response I had hoped to get.

Marriage led you to move to Mississippi. Was there ever a point that you objected to the move?

No. I never objected, never once.

You say you were surprised by many of the things you found here. What was most surprising?

I'm glad you asked that question. Most people know that Southerners have exceptional manners, but I think what surprised me the most was the depth of the courtesy. Mississippi manners are not just about which fork to use, to me, from everything I've seen in nine years, they are a profound expression of an exceptional society.

Sadly, last July a friend of ours' mother died, and as we were driving to Mrs. Cochran's funeral all the vehicles in the opposite lanes stopped their cars and pulled over and put on their lights as a sign of respect and compassion. In New York if you are driving by a police officer he will salute you, but you never see someone stop what they're doing to acknowledge someone's loss.

Arts were a big part of your lifestyle in New York. What have you found to be most pleasing about the Mississippi coast's art scene?

I have to say the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra. When I moved her the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra really pleased me by their extent of its professionalism. I think Maestro (John) Strickler really knows how to put a program together. He balances very well the Beethoven pieces with something less well known. Last Saturday

they played "Tchaikovsky's 3rd Symphony." While most everyone has heard of Tchaikovsky, they haven't heard his "3rd Symphony."

You paint some colorful portraits with your words in this book about some well-known figures on the coast. Have you had any feedback from those individuals on their inclusion?

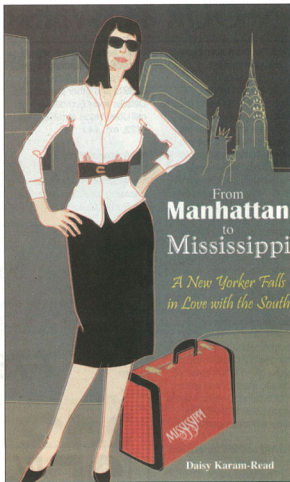
I think that Ellis Branch is too modest to say anything to me. He just called me to say, 'I

"From Manhattan to Mississippi: A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South," by Daisy Karam-Read is available at Pass Christian Books; Gina's Art & Antiques and Walter Anderson Museum of Art, both in Ocean Springs; and will be available at Barnes & Noble in October. Upcoming book signings include Oct. 6, 2-4 p.m., at Bay Books in Bay St. Louis; Oct. 11 at Barnes & Noble in Gulfport; and Nov. 3 and 4 at the Peter Anderson Festival in Ocean Springs.

love your book,' and being the southern gentleman that he is he never referred to himself in that book. He is too discreet to do that, and of course the late Will Denton is no longer with us, but when I showed Lucy Denton the rough manuscript she said she was very touched by it. She said I was an ambassador for Mississippi and I think that she's giving me entirely too much credit. There are others who haven't read it yet.

Your bio mentions that you did some acting in New York. Tell me more about that.

I was an actress for 17 years; a struggling actress to be precise. I did a lot of Off-Broadway theater. I never made it to Broadway, which is very hard to crack. I did theater in Los Angeles and television and I did my swan song, the last thing I did before giving up acting — a small part in a television show in Munich when I briefly lived in Germany in 1989.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Daisy Karam-Read's first book.

Why did you give it up?

I got so tired of being poor. I loved it passionately but in the end I realized no matter how talented you are... I was told by so many people from directors to actors to friends that I had a lot of stage presence, but it

closeness of acting troupe that can't be compared to anything else. Now that I'm older I love solitary work and the independence of writing.

Did any or all of this book come from a daily journal?

Yes, I kept a daily journal. Sadly, since we lost our house in the hurricane, I lost my journal, too. So, everything that I wrote in this book was from memory. Now I keep it again and if it's not daily it's every other day.

This is your first book. What was the toughest thing about writing it?

I don't think it was difficult for me to write because, as you know, it's a very simple book. It's a modest book. It's an accounting of things I've noticed. So, it wasn't as if I had to come up with characters or a plot line. The only thing I found difficult was the last chapter where I would talk about Katrina, and I would cry. But as you know it's not a Katrina book, it's about my experiences here and the people I met and how my eyes have been opened up about South Mississippi and Mississippi in general.

What will be the topic of your next book?

Somebody just asked me that, and I'm not telling anybody.

OK, will it be fact or fiction? It will be fact. Absolutely fact.

Interview conducted by Gene Coleman