

What happens when ultimate urbanite moves down South?

'From Manhattan to Mississippi' tells the tale

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What happens when the ultimate urbanite moves to a small town in Mississippi? She falls in love with the town, the state and the people. Daisy Karam-Read tells her story in the recently released book, "From Manhattan to Mississippi," published by Quail Ridge Press.

It's a slim volume of essays describing her impressions on a wide range of topics, including Southern manners, food, décor and expressions. Written in a flowing, conversational tone, the book is an easy read, and takes readers through the author's nine years of living in the state.

Before her marriage to attorney Jerry



Daisy Karam-Read

Read, she had never been to Mississippi. The announcement of her impending marriage and move was met with skepticism from friends who believed she wouldn't

last a day. "You're moving where?" was asked of her more than once.

"My parents taught me to have an open mind, so I always go to a place with an open heart and mind, willing to be objective," she says. "I was going to a place in the same country with the same language and where there's no one shooting at me. That's not brave."

She adds with a warm smile, "Besides, I could get on a plane and go home."

'Mississippi stacks up'

A cosmopolitan woman through and through, Karam-Read was born in Austria to Austrian and Armenian parents. Most of her life has been spent in

New York, Los Angeles, Munich and other large cities.

"I've lived in a lot of places and Mississippi stacks up," she states positively. "My biggest surprise is the compassion of the people. They are genuinely kind. We live in the poorest state in the union and give the most to charity. The incredible generosity and goodness of the people make it special."

The author hopes her book will help readers open their minds and re-evaluate their opinions of the state. "I hope it sheds new light on Mississippi. If I can do that, it will be a positive thing," she says. "I'm not from here, so I have credibility."

To get that message out, she would like to see the book have a wide audience through corporate gifts and distribution through mayors, senators and congressmen.

Karam-Read has also discovered that Southern manners run deep and are real. That, along with the Southern way of cooking and entertaining, has been a pleasant truth uncovered. Without a restaurant on every corner, state residents most often cook at home.

"I almost passed out when I learned that Southerners save bacon grease in a jar or coffee can and use it in vegetables," she says. "It tastes good. I've discovered it—I eat it and I love it."

However, manages to keep her chic, slim figure through genetics and regular trips to the gym.

Mississippi homes, she's learned, are the centers of entertainment and are well decorated. "Southern women seem to be born with the design gene," she says. "Interior design is an expression of personality—a form of self expression, and all Southern women seem to have it."

She admires the way Mississippians maintain a sense of privacy without regaling listeners with what's wrong in their lives or news from their latest session with a therapist. "In the Deep South, people wear their troubles gracefully," she writes in the book. "This hearkens back to a time in our country when you



like was your own business, and sharing personal information was what my husband calls self-gossip."

'Sense of place'

Karam-Read has many nice things to say about Southern women in her book. Although she notes they are as involved with all types of careers and professions as women in other places, they don't appear to be tense and exhausted.

"They seem naturally to understand that hyperactivity creates frazzled people. They don't pull out their Palm Pilots and complain about their busy schedules as many in the North tend to do," she writes. "Be assured: the Southern belle has not disappeared. She, as much as anyone, has helped Mississippi retain a sense of place."

A graduate of Queens College with a bachelor's degree in communication arts, Karam-Read met her husband through friends in Houston where she was going once a month on business in 1998. They actually "met" and courted via telephone conversations.

"Before I met him in person, I told my mother, if this man is as nice as he is on the

phone—and there's no reason he wouldn't be—I'm going to marry him," she recalls. "You can really get to know someone through long phone conversations. There are no distractions, and the intellect and soul of that person comes through."

After a whirlwind courtship, the two were married at Green Oaks Bed and Breakfast in Biloxi June 20, 1998. Sadly, the beautiful old home that was built in the early 1800s without the use of a single nail was totally destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

The monster storm also took the Read's lovely Gulf Hills home in Ocean Springs. After months of bouncing from place to place, they bought a home in a charming neighborhood in Gulfport. The saddest losses are photos of her beloved parents and violins that belonged to her father, a concert violinist.

Since moving to Mississippi, Karam-Read has earned a master's degree in cultural management from Tulane University, and has worked for the Walter Anderson Museum of Art and the Gulf Coast Tourism Commission.

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