

From Manhattan to Mississippi: a Local Author's Journey



Mississippi Gulf Coast—Daisy Karam knew the rumors about the south in general and Mississippi in particular. She had heard that all deep southerners are entrenched in antebellum values and that race relations are terribly strained. She knew of the ignorant prejudice that hangs like a nameplate over our region.

Raised in Austria, she moved to the United States at age six. She acknowledged that she did not hold as tightly to these preconceived notions as possibly other northerners due to being raised by open-minded parents who were careful to provide her with a wealth of experiences. As an adult she has lived in many cities from Manhattan to Los Angeles.

So, when she was introduced to the south, it could have been an affirmation to those stereotypical notions. It could have been a visit to a sequestered area which was dwelling in the past. It could have been a grave disappointment. It was none of the above.

Ms. Karam was working as a training manager for a major cosmetic line. She was traveling extensively but spent one week a month working in the Houston area.

While there she would frequently have lunch with a friend and on one such visit her friend confided that she had a gentleman

she would like for Daisy to meet. She trusted this friend's judgment and therefore gave her permission to pass her info along.

For the following eleven weeks, Mr. Jerry Read called, reached her voice mail and left phone messages. Due to Daisy's busy schedule, none were returned. On New Year's Eve 1998 she answered the phone and heard a southern charming drawl. Over the following weeks they spoke more frequently.

Next, the southern lawyer visited NYC and they had "three terrific dates". After that, the phone conversations were daily. [author's note: Daisy's eyes sparkle as she recounts this. This, in and of itself, gives hope to those of us still seeking romance.]

Mr. Read invited Ms. Karam for a pilgrimage to the south. Before this she had ventured only as far south as Washington. She arrived in New Orleans during the annual Tennessee Williams Festival. Mr. Read took her to Bayona, Napoleon House, and Galatoire's, of course. She was mesmerized by the city; intrigued by the culture.

They then drove to Ocean Springs where she had her first glimpse of our coastal views.

Mary Mahoney's was the first stop for lunch and she fell in love with the architecture, the food, and the people. She fondly remembers

that first drive over the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge; she affectionately remembers those first glimpses of our coastline.

The phone calls were now incessant, the next visit was planned, and the proposal was made and accepted. Daisy found herself packing for a June wedding.

In ten years of this new environment, Daisy Karam-Read has yet to witness a cruel act. Her biggest surprise was how easily black and whites work together. She credits this to centuries of working side by side; an ease of familiarity.

She began the project of this book post-Katrina. She took one month and relegated herself to writing daily. She took the next year to edit and then searched for and found a publisher. It was published in October 1997.

Though her heroes in literature are Sinclair Lewis, Tolstoy, and Tennessee Williams, she does not see herself as a writer of fiction. Her next project is to be another work of non-fiction but, her lips are firmly sealed on the subject matter.

And for the record, she is not a foreigner and not a transplant; she is amongst her own.

Charlene Woodham Peace
charlene@coastobserver.com