

POST impressions

By VALERIE WINN
Arts Editor

When I met Daisy Karam-Read in August of 2004, I liked her immediately.

She had just become the director of public affairs and marketing for the Walter Anderson Museum of Art and was filled with enthusiasm for her work.

She still is. But this time, her work is a warm-hearted and positive book about how moving to Mississippi changed her life.

When I interviewed her three years ago about her position at WAMA, she told me then of her love for the area and how she found such unexpected joys in getting to know the people of the magnolia state. As I asked her more questions, I was engrossed in hearing about her past life in New York and Europe, a life enriched by art, music, travel and the theater. When I asked her if she missed all of it, she said, "Of course." She told me that she loved New York and that it is a great city, but that she also loved Ocean Springs for what it is.

She knew about Walter Anderson and was learning more. Her goal was to promote him nationally. With a background of writing and conducting research for the National Gallery of Art and the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, both in Washington, D.C., she was well on her way to doing what she could to make him a household name.

Unfortunately, that next summer Hurricane Katrina devastated the Mississippi Gulf Coast, destroying the home of Daisy and her husband, Jerry. They had to leave the area for several months before they were able to make a new home in Gulfport. Her leaving the museum was a great loss.

But through the publication of her book of essays, "From Manhattan to Mississippi, A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South," Daisy is back. Everyone I'd talked to who has read her book just loves it. I love it also. She has done an exceptional job of capturing the spirit and character of those who are "the South."

From the title, we know that Daisy once lived in New York. She doesn't tell much about her life there in her book, for it is, after all, about her coming to Mississippi. But what an amazing life she has led.

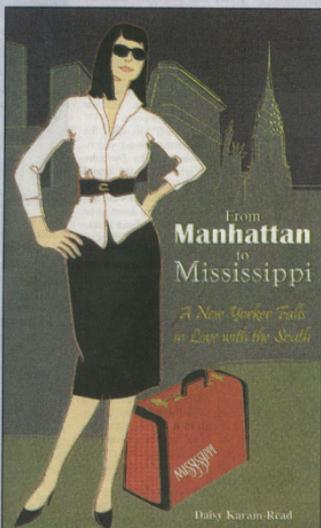
She spent her first six years in Europe where she

From Manhattan to Mississippi



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AUTHOR



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Light-hearted book reveals love of people and place

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When Daisy Karam-Read moved to Mississippi from New York nine years ago, she didn't just fall in love with the state, she became part of it.

Having embraced its cuisine, culture and hospitality, she is also among those who have experienced its wrath, namely Hurricane Katrina. She and her husband, Jerry, lost their home in the storm, recovered and have decided to stay.

Karam-Read's is a transformation that she shares through her book, "From Manhattan to Mississippi, A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South."

Published in September by Quail Ridge Press, the idea for the book actually began to take shape in the aftermath of the storm when Karam-Read realized that she had lost all of her journals, accounts of her southern life that she was hoping to transform into a newspaper column.

"I went to the Sun Herald wanting to do a column," said Karam-Read, who was then working as director of public affairs and marketing for the Walter Anderson Museum of Art. They liked the idea and they liked my writing samples. Then came the storm."

With no home in Ocean Springs, she and her husband lived for a short while in Mobile before moving to Fairhope.

Frequent trips to Ocean Springs where she searched for photographs and bits of memories yielded nothing. Her dream was also put on hold.

"I really wanted to write a column," she said, "I realized that I would never be able to do that."

Then a friend suggested that the material she had penned for the columns would also suffice as a book. Eventually Karam-Read returned to Mississippi — this time, to Gulfport.

In May of 2006 she began to write again.

"The biggest challenge was trying to be 100 percent accurate about events that occurred because I didn't have my journals anymore," she said. "Thank God I have a good memory. So many people made an impression on me."

Instead of relying on exact dates, she relied on seasonal changes for her orientation.

"Did something happen in early summer or late spring?" she said. "Was it when the crepe myrtles were blooming?"

As she rewrote her experiences and perceptions, a book of essays began to take shape.

"It was May of 2006 when I started the book," she said. "I finished in June and then edited it for a year."

So far, reactions to the 112-page volume have been positive.

Divided into 14 separate essays, the book encompasses topics such as "Southern Attraction," "Simple Kindness," "Good Friends and Friendly People" and "Little Known Assets." In these passages, Karam-Read uncovers many truths about an often misunderstood region.

"These are the words I hear over and over: the book is charming, the book is delightful. It's so interesting to see an outsider's impressions that are positive."

That was part of Karam-Read's intent.

"The impression of Mississippi

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She also had ideas about how she wanted the book to be perceived. And much of that depended on the cover.

"I wanted it to look like chick lit, even though it's not chick lit. It's essay writing," she said. During a discussion over cover art with her publisher, someone suggested the image of a girl, a suitcase and Manhattan in the background.

Karam-Read visited the artist who took a photograph of her wearing her white blouse and black skirt. That likeness later became the cover, except for one thing.

"I wanted sunglasses," she said. "The minute you see sunglasses, you see drama."

In the end, she loved the cover. During some of her book signing appearances she has dressed to fit that image.

"It's called branding," she said,

adding that it has been a fun part of connecting with her readers. "I'm a novice at this. I've had marketing experience, but I've never had a book published before."

She is already planning another book, but won't say much about it. "My whole focus is this book," she said. "It has to succeed. I want to put all my energy behind it."

Karam-Read will be at the 29th Annual Peter Anderson Memorial Arts, Crafts and Food Festival, Nov. 3 and 4, and will be signing copies of her books. H

er books, which sell for \$12 are also available locally at Favorite's Book Nook inside Gina's on Washington Avenue.

As she continues to write journal entries daily, Karam-Read also continues to develop the friendships that have meant so much to her.

"I could never be grateful enough for the friendships I've found in Mississippi," she said. "Mississippians are warm, welcoming and courteous in the deepest sense of the word."