

FROM MANHATTAN

A New "Read" On Mississippi

story by A.F. Williams photos courtesy Daisy Karam-Read

“What surprised me is how heartfelt it is. It’s not just good manners. It comes from a deep commitment to other people.”

The love of a good man brings her to South Mississippi, but now Daisy Karam-Read has even more reasons to call the Magnolia State “home.” She outlines what she loves about the culture and people in her new book *From Manhattan to Mississippi: A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South*.

Read is originally from Salzburg, Austria. She grew up in Queens, New York. As an adult she has lived in Los Angeles and Washington D.C., but her true love for the longest time was Manhattan. (Read said that affords her the opportunity to portray Mississippi with an unbiased view.) She moved here nine years ago after falling in love with a “Southern gentleman.”

Read has always had a love of writing. About two weeks prior to Katrina, she approached a local newspaper to discuss the idea of a weekly column about a Yankee in Mississippi. Every week she would discuss an aspect of the South she really liked. Unfortunately that idea did not come to fruition and Katrina came barreling into town. The storm came as a shock to Read... much like the rest of us. Her house, reinforced with concrete and steel, was destroyed like so many others on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. She spent days digging for remnants of her life, and miraculously found pieces of her mother’s jewelry buried in the mud where her home once stood. When she found out some residents were rebuilding for the third time Read said, “You’re what!!!! One of these was enough for me.

TO MISSISSIPPI

...I was so devastated. I can’t live on the water again.” Having lived here for seven years, she had no doubt people would stick together. Read was impressed with how people rolled up their sleeves, started building back, and never complained. “All I heard was I’m so grateful to be alive and for the volunteers.” The author touts the efforts of faith-based organizations in rebuilding and recovery efforts. When Read talks to her friends in other cities and states she says many are surprised to learn recovery is an ongoing process in South Mississippi, with much of the media focused on New Orleans. She did mention CNN Anchor Anderson Cooper, who has Mississippi roots, putting the spotlight on our area several times.

Read found herself relocated to Mobile, Alabama in a post-Katrina world. It was there that a friend suggested she expand her weekly column idea a little further and turn it into a book. So the budding author got to work detailing things about Mississippi that surprised her when she was a newcomer. One topic is Southern women and interior design. She was stunned to learn women in the Deep South have an incredible eye for interior design. Read said even when they don’t use a decorator they just seem to have something ingrained in their DNA that enables them to understand color and line and design. She said the knack for decorating is not exclusive to the wealthy either. Read also discusses the Southern man’s voice... how the tones are different. ☺



PEOPLE a new "Read" on Mississippi



"I'm not talking about the drawl, which we all love. I'm talking about the vocal tones, a pitch that you don't hear in the rest of the country. I don't know where it comes from, but it's fabulous." Friendliness is another topic the author touches on, not just Southern hospitality. "What surprised me is how heartfelt it is. It's not just good manners. It comes from a deep commitment to other people." Read also recounts her first visit to Beauvoir and learning about Jefferson Davis. "Forgetting for one moment about the indefensibility of slavery, he's not

a caricature... he should be studied in schools as the first and only president of the Confederacy." She said when you consider Davis' achievements, setting aside the slavery issue; he was a man to be reckoned with. "He was honorable and incorruptible... and was never afraid to take a position."

When asked about stereotypes or predispositions outsiders might have, Read said there is still this "terrible" stereotype that all Mississippians are racist. "I have not found that to be the case at all. I'm not saying racism doesn't still exist here. I'm not saying there hasn't been an ugly past. But I can say in nine years of living here I've never seen it." Read said she has never heard an unkind comment spoken among white people about a black person, and she has never seen an unkind action towards a black person. "I think the races coexist in a peaceful way you wouldn't expect if you aren't from here."

She cited Gwen Henderson, who died earlier this year, as an example. "As a teacher of home economics she was such a force in the black community — but that extended to the white community too." Read said the teacher was especially careful with students who had more difficulty and had a high standard. She pointed out that hundreds attended the woman's funeral... black and white mourned the loss together.

"Until you've been here you just think Mississippians are being defensive or lying about the [race] issue. That perception changes when you meet the people."

With the newly released book *From Manhattan to Mississippi: A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South*, Read hopes people will take a second look at the Magnolia State.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book will go towards Katrina relief. There will be a book signing at the Peter Anderson Arts Festival November 3rd and 4th in Oceans Springs, and one at the Beau Rivage on Saturday November 17th.

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