

What readers are saying about "Primary Lessons"

Incredible Insight into a World Unknown to Me. By Michael Hansenon, April 2, 2015. "This book was absolutely wonderful! I have spent my whole life as a white male in the US trying to understand the African American experience. The contrasting experiences of life in the North vs life in the South are heart wrenching. Ms. White chronicles an incredibly tumultuous time in the U.S. and she does it in such a personal and moving way. Her writing style is concise yet filled with the emotions of her experiences. Although there are people who might be categorized as "bad guys" in the narrative, the author does not characterize anyone in a way that masks their humanity. The author has an amazing sense of memory and insight into her experiences that belie the fact that she was very young when she had the experiences. The book left me wanting to meet as many of its characters as possible. That's how human it is! Loved it!"

I found this message on a thread related to a post I made in a Sumter, SC FaceBook site. (It's from a woman I don't know, Phyllis Newman McDan who lives in Sumter.) It refers to "Lady Moore, -- a character I describe in "Primary Lessons" -- who rode around my hometown on a bicycle wearing a dress, full make-up and fancy jewelry, in all kinds of weather. "Sarah I read your fabulous book! It brought back memories of so many places in Sumter. I nearly dropped my dentures when you mentioned the Lady Hattie Moore. My Mom used to threaten me with Miss Hattie (that she was going to let her adopt me if I kept misbehaving). I have recommended your book ["Primary Lessons"] to everybody I know that is in our age group.

"1. "Her writing is crisp, fluid, and gorgeous. Her story will leave you breathless. Go order it. Do it now. You will undoubtedly love her writing as much as I do." Andi Rosenthal, Somers

2. "This is a memoir that grabs you, shakes you, and won't let go. If you ever wondered what it was like to grow up black in the Jim Crow South, Primary Lessons will take you there vividly through the eyes of author Sarah Bracey White. White shares difficult life lessons-- uprooted at age five from a beloved Aunt's comfortable Philadelphia home (her mother could not afford to care for a fourth child) to be taken back "home" to racially segregated Sumter, South Carolina. I could not put this book down, and was sad when it ended with Sarah, now 17, leaving for college--changed, but in many ways still that same, spirited five-year old. I want to know more. " Linda Simone, NYC

3. "A compelling story, told in a beautiful way!" JS

4. "You are going to absolutely love Sarah, and you are going to be wowed and captivated by her memoir "Primary Lessons. This book is exciting!" Daphne Mickle, Briarcliff

5. "I had the pleasure of meeting Sarah Bracey White recently and, let me tell you, she is an eloquent, vibrant, incredible spirit with a story that will speak to everyone who reads it. I HIGHLY recommend picking up a copy of Primary Lessons. She's simply inspiring." Lisa Marie DeSanto

6. "This flawless memoir is engaging, entertaining and ultimately heart wrenching. Masterfully crafted, it has a mesmerizing, cinematic quality and the voice of the narrator is compelling throughout. It is the story of a little girl who refuses to accept the constraints of the Jim Crow south and her mother's efforts to protect her within that system.

She takes us on a journey, which James Baldwin describes as "you're taught to pledge allegiance to a country and then about five or seven, you realize it's a country that has not pledged any allegiance to you." Like all great journeys, the hero has to find her way home--a complicated and hostile place both in the world and her own heart." Ann Cefola, Scarsdale

7. "Sarah Bracey White has written a memoir that is a page-turner, heart-wrencher and stunning witness to a sad period in American history. This is a first-person account of a young African American, first raised up north, then transplanted to the Jim Crow south where her mother must teach her to conform in order to survive. The problem: Little Sarah isn't about conformity--she clings to a tenacious sense of her own self-worth, which an oppressive racial environment cannot tamp out of her.

The voice of the narrator consistently appeals throughout, the plot is beautifully layered, and pacing perfect. This highly visual work places the reader vividly within its two locals--Philly and Sumter, South Carolina. The complex characters and hardships they face are achingly real. I could not put the book down. As a writer, I found the writing and story flawless from start to finish. This coming-of-age story crosses color lines--it is a search for home, self and the love that we all intuitively know we deserve."
Ann Cefola, Scarsdale

8. "I just finished reading an inspiring memoir by Sarah Bracey White called 'Primary Lessons,' a book that chronicles her struggle to establish her identity and to define love despite the family, social and cultural upheavals surrounding her. A book that spans from 1945 to 1963, "Primary Lessons" describes how Sarah, a precocious, free-thinking 5-year-old, is ripped from the only home she ever knew and loved – a nurturing, supportive, middle-class home she shared with her aunt – and transplanted to her mother's poverty stricken, dysfunctional home in the segregated south. Suddenly faced with new limitations due to her race and poverty, in addition to her single mother's constant attempts to curb her inquisitiveness and assertive nature, Sarah finds herself struggling with feelings of abandonment, alienation, frustration and confusion about her place in the world. Ultimately, Sarah's determination and unflinching sense of self are what pull her through a life filled with tragedy and obstacles at every turn.

I had the absolute pleasure of befriending Sarah, recently. An exuberant woman who radiates warmth and positivity, this 67-year-old author hasn't allowed hardship to tarnish her view of the world or the people in it. In fact, it's done the opposite. It seems her relentless self-examination and tenacity have given her incredible wisdom and strength. The author, who says that she spent the majority of her life believing she never loved her mother, wrote "Primary Lessons" to make peace with the woman who died when Sarah was just 17. What she learned in the process of writing not only surprised her, it seems to have healed her. What she realized is that each event in her life contributed to the woman she is today –her strength, resilience, and her ability to view the world with an open mind and heart. She learned that both women that raised her, despite letting her down, also loved her. And while this story is about a young black girl during a time of racial inequality, its universal themes speak to the child in all of us, and to mothers and daughters of all backgrounds – everywhere.

Sarah, like so many children, didn't always receive what she wanted or needed from her caregivers. In Sarah's case, she only lived with her mother for 12 tumultuous years. In that time, despite their different views, despite Sarah never feeling the affection and joy that she needed, her mother taught her some valuable lessons she would need to survive in a harsh world. "What I wanted was a warm, loving mother," she says, "What I got was a loving mother's guide to life. It wasn't perfect, but it was enough." LisaMarie DeSanto, White Plains

It's a wonderful book that had me engaged from cover to cover. The author's ability to change her "voice" with each chapter as the character ages is especially endearing and captivating, as is her touching story of personal triumph. "

9. "Sarah Bracey White's Memoir, PRIMARY LESSONS, is a wonderful book, on many levels. It is the achingly candid story of a young girl who must give up a relatively luxurious life in Philadelphia, with a loving aunt and uncle, to return to her mother in Sumter, SC and a life of near poverty. In the early 50's,

life for blacks in Philadelphia was almost tolerable, where life in SC was stifling and intolerable. But Sarah's indefatigable spirit shines through, as she bides her time.

The book is a case study in Jim Crow living, which is mostly unknown to Northern whites. Ordinary pleasures, such as visiting the Public Library, are forbidden to Sarah, because she's Black. Subjugation to whites is expected of Blacks in the South. Personal property means nothing. But Sarah is smart and has an iron will. She waits for the time when she will be free.

Primary Lessons is also a study in hope and determination. Becoming an orphan at age 17, Sarah finds her way in the world. Her early life is filled with disappointment, yet she maintains a hopeful, positive outlook."

"The book reads easily, as the author pulls the reader through the episodes of her life. It is compelling, and is read so quickly that the reader is left hungry for more." Bob Gironda, Millwood

10. "Being a man of a certain age, I long ago stopped thinking of memoirs as "page turners." But Sarah White's *Primary Lessons* has shown that they still exist. We learn not just about the Jim Crow south, but also Philadelphia of the 1940's and 50's and how the train track between the south and north changed not just scenery, but loves and expectations. After five years in Philadelphia living with her cosmopolitan and financially astute Aunt Susie, Sarah is taken back by her very poor mother to live in Sumter, South Carolina with her three older sisters. It is through young Sarah's eyes, and her quick mind, that we see the inequalities and unfairness of racial prejudice and that it is not always the overt action that hurts the most, but rather the quiet glances in stores, the rudeness to a parent by a clerk or a child's inability to use a library. *Primary Lessons* is a fine book, written with grace and in the spirit of sharing one person's life experience which offers insights into an era many readers will know only by name. Now that we know about the first 17 years, I hope there is another book." Joseph Simone, NYC

11. I just finished reading Sarah's book and publishing a brief comment/review on Amazon. I am grateful for the privilege of knowing her, and also privileged to read her book fresh off the press. She is a talented lady, a wonderful writer and I hope to read more out of her pen (or nowadays word-processor, as the case may be.) John Szalkay

12. "Being a southern Black woman and knowing the author, I am sure it is a book that all of us who have had similar experiences or who have heard of these experiences from their grandparents, great aunts and uncles and cousins, will be able to relate to in so many ways. On the other hand if you do not know about these experiences, this book will open your eyes to a day and time that will help you to understand the "Black Experience" yesterday, today and in the future. Congratulations, Sarah and I hope you will write more books because you do have amazing talent. You've always have had this talent." Wendy Morgan

13. I just read Sarah [Bracey] White's essay [Summer of '63] and she is an amazing storyteller! I've got to buy her book ["Primary Lessons"]! Benilda Pacheco Beretta, Doetinchem, Netherlands