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From New York to new view

*Falling in love
with the South,
its earthiness,
its quirky names*

By JEAN PRESCOTT

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How often is an intelligent adult human being likely to reassess her position and then trumpet that reassessment to all who will read the book she's written about her new perspective?

Not very, in our experience, but we have "met" such a person. Her name is Daisy, and the jacket of her book, "From Manhattan to Mississippi," declares her "a New Yorker (who) falls in love with the South."

According to Daisy — maiden name Karam, married name Read, hyphenated for convenience — her Deep South adventures "have been humbling, sometimes startling and always affecting."

This multilingual woman has multiple degrees, experience as an actress — in New York, Los Angeles and Munich — and more than a passing interest in art (one of her degrees is in art history) and classical music. And in the first chapter of her book, she reveals she once shared the views of friends and acquaintances who were aghast when she told them she was moving to Mississippi.

"Those in my entire circle in New York and L.A. were in shock," Daisy writes.

She would make that move for love, for romance, but with prolonged exposure to the South and Southerners, she has come to respect it and them and to love this place almost as much as she loves her husband, Jerry Read.

She and he met when a business associate and friend in Houston gave him her telephone number. Daisy likes to refer to it as a life-changing moment. Prior to it, she had seen the South as her East and West Coast friends' did, a place "benightedly entrenched in the values of the antebellum South."

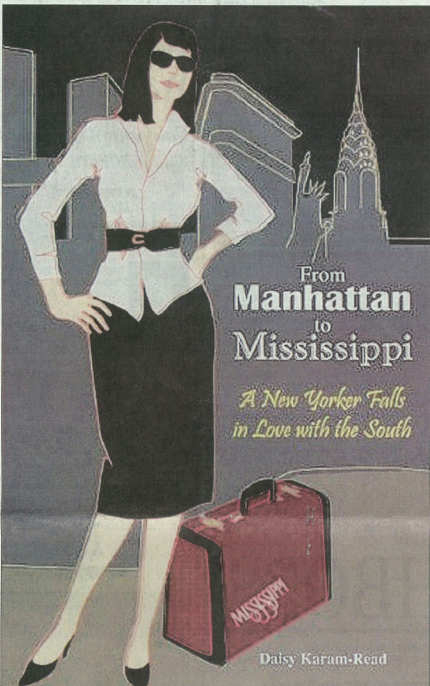
"Living in Mississippi... yields a truer understanding," she writes. "It's a state of enormous complexity in which contradictions and ironies abound."

Lest some born and bred Mississippian read that and take umbrage, be assured Daisy loves us, too, though she admits her comments are "obviously subjective and impressionistic." And she does understand the dangers of "painting with a broad brush," but her book is a personal collection of observations and recollections. It is neither sociology text nor treatise on achieving loftier personal values, but it does help us see that with an open mind and heart and sufficient exposure, we can change our opinions even of things we thought we understood.

Among the things about the South, Mississippi in particular, that Daisy loves is the beauty of it, even after Katrina. She loves our "earthy qualities," our quirky names (she mentions Fofó and Bootsie, among others) and our lack of pretense.

She has been captivated by our enduring graciousness, by our kindnesses and by our ramrod backbones in the face of adversity including every sort of natural disaster.

Where *kvetching* is an art to be mastered in New York and L.A., Daisy has observed in the South it is generally thought to be bad manners



Karam-Read

To get the book

What: "From Manhattan to Mississippi: a New Yorker Falls in Love With the South"

By: Daisy Karam-Read
Published by: Quail Ridge Press

Retail price: \$12, less from online booksellers, or go to quailridge.com to order.

friends in Biloxi, the Reads' Gulfport home having been destroyed by Katrina. Daisy likens their ability to pull off a proper holiday feast to Scarlett O'Hara's elegant gown fashioned from green-velvet drapes. Southerners will use whatever resources are at hand — fresh lemons and flowers, candles — to create elegance in the midst of devastation.

Anyone in the market for a values-realignment model could do no better than to take a look at Daisy's book, which is also a giant boost for Mississippi egos.

Get to know Daisy

Daisy Karam-Read reveals a lot about her relationship with the South but little about herself personally in "From Manhattan to Mississippi," so we put to her 10 questions not unlike those in

She recalls in particular Thanksgiving 2005.

Manhattan

Continued from B-1

the Proust questionnaire that appears on the last page of every issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine.

Here are the questions and her answers:

1. What do you feel is your most marked characteristic?

Independent thought and my annoyance with people who refuse to think for themselves.

2. What is the quality you most admire in a man?

Integrity.

3. The quality you most admire in a woman?

Integrity.

4. What do you value most in your friends?

Loyalty.

5. What is your favorite indulgence, your favorite "guilty pleasure," if you will? (And I'm talking about a Burger King Whopper or watching "American Idol"; nothing deep or dark.)

Chocolate ice cream cones.

6. What natural gift would you like to have that you don't already possess?

An instinctive understanding of computers and all things technological.

7. What trait do you find least attractive in people?

Vulgarity.

8. How do you get creative juices flowing when they have dried up?

I pace around the room to get the blood circulating and sit back down and type whatever comes to mind, not worrying about the quality until later.

9. What three things would you absolutely never leave behind were you dashing from a burning house (or fleeing a hurricane)?

My father's symphonic score; my mother's memoirs; the signed guest book of my aunt's painting exhibit in Paris.

10. What is your idea of complete bliss?

An absolutely clear conscience; knowing that one has done one's duty, whatever it may be.