



Small Moments: A Child's Memories of the Civil Rights Movement

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Jim Crow. Segregation. Separate but equal. At the dawn of the Civil Rights movement, these words mean little to Mary, an eleven-year-old Southern transplant in New Jersey. Forced to grow up in a place so unlike her old home, Mary clings onto one thing she knows and loves: Amelia, her family's African American housemaid.

At once a stern caretaker and a tender mother-figure, Amelia's constant presence in Mary's life gradually exposes Mary to the rippling tide of unrest and inequality spreading through the nation, as well as the violent and heartbreaking ramifications of the Tuskegee experiment.

Based on a true story, "Small Moments" is a gripping and heartfelt tale of how one uneducated and underprivileged woman taught a young girl to see the world not in terms of color, but in terms of kindness, equality, and love.

Small Moments: A Child's Memories of the Civil Rights Movement Details

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Author : Mary M. Barrow

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From Reader Review Small Moments: A Child's Memories of the Civil Rights Movement for online ebook

SundayAtDusk says

Small Moments: A Child's Memories of the Civil Rights Movement is a work of “creative nonfiction”. In the “Author Q & A” at the end of the story, author Mary Barrows provides the following description of that genre: “The term ‘creative nonfiction’ means sticking to the truth as much as possible. The stories are true, the characters are real people, and the places are real. However, elements used in the craft of fiction are introduced to create cohesion and to introduce ideas.” Does this “creative nonfiction” story work? In some ways, yes. In other ways, no.

There are three major problems. One, the reader is left with a child protagonist, the author in the 1960s, who appears to be obsessing about the family’s black maid and racism, when she probably was doing no such thing. Two, the reader is left with a child protagonist who appears to have incredible insight about what is going on in her family and the country in the 1960s, when she definitely had no such thing. Three, it was totally inappropriate to have a deathbed scene where the maid’s thoughts were being described. There is no way the author knew what this woman, who was not a fictional character, was thinking when she was dying, and it was outrageous for Ms. Barrows to create such fictional thoughts for this book.

Hence, one is left feeling that this story is a bit of an odd duck. Yet, one is also left feeling deeply moved about the life of Amelia MacIntosh, the family’s maid. Amelia MacIntosh was born in 1902 in North Carolina, the last of 13 children. She grew up motherless, never learned to read or write, and her elderly father married her off at the age of 14, to a much older man who had a drinking problem. Her only beloved child, a son, died at the age of 12, from lack of medical care for what was possibly congenital syphilis. She herself died in 1964 from syphilis, gotten from her husband, who may have been part of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. When she died at the end of the story, I could not keep from crying, no matter how hard I tried. Thinking of Amelia MacIntosh’s life and death made the tears flow.

(Note: I received a free e-copy of this book from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.)

Maureen says

This was wonderful. In some ways, reminds me of Alice McDermott's "Someone", in that it is a story of an ordinary woman's life, and yet that life seems extraordinary. Amelia grew up black, the 13th child of a poor farmer, whose wife died in labor. She was married off to a man twice her age who was a drunk their whole marriage. Her only child died of strep or scarlet fever waiting, a death made all the worse because she had given her husband her stashed life savings to go get a doctor, but he went and drank it away at a bar! In the end, she dies of congestive heart failure, as a consequence of syphilis, which her husband may have been given deliberately at Tuskegee by the US government! Her story is told by Mary Barrow, who grew up with Amelia as their family's live-in housekeeper. Mary slowly becomes aware of racism and that Amelia is treated as a second class citizen. Amelia, quietly reveals her growing interest in the Civil Rights Movement and shares some thoughts privately with Mary, whose father is also a bigot and abuses his oldest son often, usually after too much alcohol.

Also liked it because some of it takes place on Block Island, where I had just been a month ago.

Rochelle says

what a great book something I will read again

Barb says

I received this book as a Goodreads First-Reads giveaway. This memoir explores the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s through the eyes of an 11-year old girl.

Mary's family relocates from Tennessee to New Jersey with their African-American maid, Amelia, at the start of the Civil Rights movement. The young girl has no conception of the turmoil building around her, she only registers the shifting relationship between her parents and Amelia. Southerners to the bone, Mary's father is openly scornful of the grievances of the black community. Her mother is more subtle in her prejudices, but she too takes it for granted that Amelia's life should revolve around the children she cares for with no room for her own personal needs.

Amelia herself is deeply conflicted: she loves the children, but is upset by her employers' lack of empathy for her need to be an individual and her grief over her own lost son and husband. When she becomes ill, Mary's father makes comments in front of his young children that are thoughtless and highly inappropriate. It is only in hindsight that the author gains some understanding of the terrible burden Amelia carried to the day she died.

Barrow provides us with a window into the day-to-day existence of African-Americans in a white, middle-class society where they are still considered just a step above property by their employers. She paints a clear picture of the love between the children and their caretaker that transcends the resentment and anger caused by the mistreatment of her parents.

A must read for anyone who wants a clearer understanding of what it was to be black in an all white world on the cusp of change.

McGuffy Morris says

Mary M. Barrow was born to a large Southern family in Tennessee. As was customary in the 1950s, the Barrow family employed Amelia. She served as both nanny and housekeeper.

Early in the 1960s, Mary's family relocated to New Jersey when her father found new employment there. Amelia moved with the family, leaving the south and life as she knew it behind. Times were changing for the Barrows, Amelia, and America. It was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.

Mary shares her experiences, as seen through the eyes of a child. Making it even more unique, she was a child from the south who moved to the north. This made her acutely aware of the differences in the treatment

of Amelia. She also learned the truths of Amelia's past. The trials of her life included extreme poverty, the consequences of alcoholism, abuse by a spouse, and the heartbreaking loss of a child.

Mary M. Barrow shares her memoir of a time and place in American history. However, this book is so much more. Her beautiful writing involved me from beginning to end. I will not forget the people of this very heartfelt and moving book.

David Duncan says

Small Moments by Mary M. Barrow is my seventy-third book that I have received and read from Goodreads. I think the story is a great read for all ages. It is a story of a young white girl, and a black woman who worked for her parents as a housekeeper and a nanny. Her name is Amelia MacIntosh, she played a big role in raising Mary, her brothers and sisters, and playing a big role in the Barrow household. Mary's family in the 1960's relocated from Tennessee, to New Jersey, when her father quit the family business and took employment in New Jersey. Amelia moved with the family, leaving the south and the way of life as she new it. Times were changing, it was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Amelia suffered a great deal in her life. Her biggest loss was her 12 year old son. The author does a great job of sharing the struggles that Amelia went through and the way she overcame them. The author Mary M. Barrow wrote a beautiful tribute to Amelia MacIntosh, and i would like to thank her for giving us the opportunity to learn about her family, and to get to know Amelia MacIntosh. I highly recommend this book for all ages.

Amy Quale says

I loved this book. Beautiful prose and characters. Small Moments reveals both subtle and stark ways that racism affects us--both now and then. Mary Barrow explores complex human experiences through the eyes of a child. A true coming-of-age story; the narrator is innocent, but exposed to deeply provocative and terrible truths about humanity.

Katherine says

Moving snapshots of author's life growing up with an African American "housekeeper/nanny/teacher." Though they come from very different worlds, the children and their nanny bond in many ways. They are unaware of all Amelia has been through in her own life, yet she offers them love, comfort, guidance, and security in their formative years.

Gerald Swick says

An exceptionally well-told story of a child—Mary—and her relationship with the black woman, Amelia (Mimi), who takes care of the house, the clothes, the cooking, and most of all the children in Mary's family. As the book begins the family is moving from Chattanooga to New Jersey because of Mary's father's new job. The father is leaving the South, but the South does not leave him: he clings to the white supremacy beliefs he probably learned in childhood and never questions, although he often exhibits a paternalistic

concern for Amelia's well-being. The Jersey neighbors aren't much more open-minded, if at all.

The book is indeed "small moments" from Mary's childhood: picking blackberries, playing with neighborhood children, playing with plastic pearl beads while sitting on Amelia's bed. But it is also small moments when she glimpses the inequalities in society and the separate cultures of white and black, though she does not grasp the implications at the time.

The book hooked me from page 1 and completely immersed me in its story and characters. It is a deeply emotional book. Some of those emotions are sadness over things that happen in the story and with the general attitudes of the times, but I also found great pleasure in the descriptions (and this book is highly descriptive) of things that took me back to my own childhood: the berry picking, metal casters on bedposts, etc.

It has won several awards. In my opinion, it deserves them all and deserves as wide a readership as possible. If you have any interest in this time period, or in the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement shown in microcosm, or if you just want an engrossing and unusual story that stays with you long after you've finished reading it, by all means check this book out.

Nancy Garbe says

A valuable perspective

Small Moments is a child's recollection of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, aided by her perspective as an adult years later. Ms Barrow has provided bits of information about the racial issues of the times with her recollections to help the reader begin to understand how Amelia felt as a black woman working as a servant for a white family. As a memoir this is a thoughtful tribute to the woman she loved as a child. Every honest attempt to understand another person's perspective is a step toward healing.

Chandra says

GENRE: Non-Fiction. Not a history book. A life as it was book.

LOOKING AT HER AFRICAN AMERICAN MAID THRU A SMALL WHITE GIRL'S EYES.

SETTING: 1959 – 1964; Segregation in America to Civil Rights era

Amelia MacIntosh aka "Mimi"; a maid for over 12 year. Mary; as she saw Mimi thru her eyes during this period in history.

SYNOPSIS: Amelia MacIntosh moved from Tennessee to New Jersey with the family that she cared for. She loved this family but did they understand her love for them. Did they love her just the same?

WHAT I LIKED: The little talks in the attic. Each chapter provided a brief glimpse of history followed by life in an actual family's life.

WHAT I DID NOT LIKE: "nothing". This book is reality and a MUST READ, MUST MUST READ for

“everyone”

I give this book (FIVE) stars because this book is reality. Growing up in Washington, D.C., I never realized what was going on in the rest of the country. My life was so different. I went to public schools. I went with my mother to see “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” and never heard of a movie peanut gallery. Visited my father at work for the Department of Labor. And, I am African American having lived during an era of “Segregation in American to the Civil Rights era”.

?

Dorcas says

"Small Moments " is a collection of one child's memories growing up during the civil rights movement in New jersey. Close to her heart and a huge part of her life was her African American nanny, Amelia.

I found the book absorbing reading. Ms. Barrow is a master storyteller and you could feel the heart that went into the writing. There's an honesty that at times must have been difficult to put down on paper. Remembrances of her father's racism and lack of familial affection, her own youthful escapades, even the impatience and jealousy common to caregivers that later plagues them; she spares nothing in giving the reader an accurate portrayal of growing up in the changing tide that marked the early 60s and her own love for the woman who raised her from infancy.

I recommend this book wholeheartedly to anyone who has a heart.

CONTENT :

SEX : None

VIOLENCE : Mild

PROFANITY : Brief spurts of moderately strong language (B, S, D, H, N)

DRUG USE /ALCOHOL : Adults smoke. Kids sneak cigarettes. Drinking and its consequences mentioned.

PARANORMAL ELEMENTS : A bit of "ghost talk ".

MY RATING :PG -PG13 (For profanity and thematic elements)

*I received a free copy of "Small Moments " in exchange for my honest opinion. I do not know the author.

Amanda says

This is a fantastic collection of memories about growing up just before and during the civil rights movement. The author describes her childhood with her brothers and sisters in NJ with their Nanny Amelia. This is a book about race but it's also about family and childhood and understanding the world. At the back of the book there are book group discussion questions and the very last one asks "are race relations better today? If so, how? If not, what can be done? Considering what happened this week in the US, I'm going to say no they aren't better and we really need to figure out what can be done.

Full disclosure: the author is a member of my in person book group and I can't wait to discuss this with her next month.

Sandy says

Sometimes when I am reading, I feel as if I am no longer reading the words on the page but I have become a part of the novel. I felt this way while reading this novel which occurs at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. The words flowed smoothly and time gently moved along. Amelia had nothing left but this family, her attachment to this world, and the children were her anchor. The connection with her husband and son were gone, their stories were full of heartache and yet her heart loved these children whom she has cared for, for years.

Coming from the South, the family has just moved to NJ and these neighborhoods are not used to having coloreds among them. There is a bridge that separates these individuals and as the new neighbors relay this information to the family, Amelia doesn't take too kindly to their remarks. Amelia has cared for this family for years and this is her livelihood. Mother listens to the women's remarks, just letting it slide off her shoulder but their harsh way of speaking tells me that father will fit right in with this neighborhood. It angered me whenever father opened his mouth. His hatred sprang forth to all areas of his world and there was not much that pleased him. His voice was loud and intense and his children's ears were open, their young, vulnerable ears were listening and I feared their opinions would be affected by the man whose voice rang the loudest.

Amelia's heart was heavy, her life had not been easy and these children who she cared for were the bright spot of her day. As her life moves forward, her days grow long and her walk slowed down. The children have been exposed to both sides of life during this period of time and times are changing in their big world. The ending was fantastic as I finally put the book down. The cover on the front is an excellent description of the characters and dispositions that I embraced inside this novel. I stared at this cover, it was true, this image captures the true essence of Amelia.

I received a copy of this novel from NetGalley and Wise Ink Creative Publishing in exchange for an honest review.

Hannah Kositzke says

I loved how Barrow weaves her childhood with the events that were happening during the time setting, major events that 10-year-old Mary would have been oblivious to, or at least partly oblivious to. Her retrospective analysis on her childhood is brilliant. The story is about Amelia who was the hired caretaker, someone she regarded as family and hardly knew. Beautifully constructed. Amazing story.
