



Southern Discomfort: A Memoir

Tena Clark

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For readers of beloved memoirs like *Educated* and *The Glass Castle*, a riveting and profoundly moving memoir set in rural Mississippi during the Civil Rights era about a white girl coming of age in a repressive society and the woman who gave her the strength to forge her own path—the black nanny who cared for her.

Tena Clark was born in 1953 in a tiny Mississippi town close to the Alabama border, where the legacy of slavery and racial injustice still permeated every aspect of life. On the outside, Tena's childhood looked like a fairytale. Her father was one of the richest men in the state; her mother was a regal beauty. The family lived on a sprawling farm and had the only swimming pool in town; Tena was given her first car—a royal blue Camaro—at twelve.

But behind closed doors, Tena's life was deeply lonely, and chaotic. By the time she was three, her parents' marriage had dissolved into a swamp of alcohol, rampant infidelity, and guns. Adding to the turmoil, Tena understood from a very young age that she was different from her three older sisters, all of whom had been beauty queens and majorettes. Tena knew she didn't want to be a majorette—she wanted to marry one.

On Tena's tenth birthday, her mother, emboldened by alcoholism and enraged by her husband's incessant cheating, walked out for good, instantly becoming an outcast in society. Tena was left in the care of her black nanny, Virgie, who became Tena's surrogate mother and confidante—even though she was raising nine of her own children and was not allowed to eat from the family's plates or use their bathroom. It was Virgie's acceptance and unconditional love that gave Tena the courage to stand up to her domineering father, the faith to believe in her mother's love, and the strength to be her true self.

Combining the spirit of poignant coming-of-age memoirs such as *The Glass Castle* and vivid, evocative Southern fiction like *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Southern Discomfort* is about the people and places that shape who we are—and is destined to become a new classic.

Southern Discomfort: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review *Southern Discomfort: A Memoir* for online ebook

Kelsey says

If this was submitted as a novel it would be rejected on the grounds of being too out-there to be believable. Tena's family is one for the ages.

Betty says

Tena Clark grew up in rural Mississippi during the Civil Rights era, living in a small town that had deep racial divides and no interest in changing things because "that's just the way it is." As one of the daughters of the wealthiest man in town, she was expected to live her life a certain way, but she rebelled against it, determined to live her life the way *she* chose, no matter what.

Southern Discomfort takes the reader back a time when men were the breadwinners while women were meant to stay home and raise babies, a time when the Jim Crow laws enforced segregation and the KKK terrorized people of color. Clark tells it like it was, whether she's writing about racial issues of the time or about her dysfunctional family.

Her deep love for Virgie—the black nanny who raised her after her mother left in a drunken rage—made her painfully aware of the racial injustices that permeated her hometown. Not content to let it go, she fought against it when the opportunity to do so presented itself, despite the very real possibility of putting herself and those she cared for in danger.

The memories she shares are raw, often uncomfortable, and sometimes powerful as recounts the events of her life. Clark sugarcoats nothing, instead leaving readers with the full impact of all things ugly, heartbreaking, and sorrowful. There is also joy, however, as she learns to embrace her sexuality and live the life she wanted as an award-winning songwriter and producer, rather than the life her parents expected her to have.

If you enjoy reading Southern memoirs, I definitely recommend this one. It put me through the wringer, emotionally, but overall it was a very enjoyable book.

I received an advance reading copy of this book courtesy of Touchstone via Netgalley.

Eileen Campbell says

This is a beautiful memoir of growing up in the Deep South in perhaps its most tumultuous period other than the Civil War. Tena Clark takes us into her home and life in a way that allows us to experience all the beauty and pathos that she grew up with. Highly recommended read!

Julianne Godoy says

Would give this 3.5 for the writing if possible. A really great read though, and an incredible story. Felt like *The Help* meets *The Glass Castle* meets *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Would recommend to those who enjoyed the previous books listed!

Sandy Reilly says

"It's like *The Help*, but with more guns and alcohol." The only thing I would add to this pitch from Tena Clark's agent is to throw in a bit of *Steel Magnolias*, some *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, and a smidge of *Go Set a Watchman*. Yes, it's **that** dramatic.

Clark's true account of growing up in the South with a filthy rich philanderer for a father and a fiercely outlandish alcoholic for a mother would make such a perfect movie that readers will be torn being sympathetic for all she went through and being jealous of all the action-packed drama.

Mainlinebooker says

Take one rural Mississippi town. Mix with a bigoted, wealthy, gun-toting, skirt-chasing, controlling father. Add in a stubborn, alcoholic, drug addicted mother. Blend with a warm effusive black housekeeper who is like a "second mamma". Fold in a gay lonely child with her three older beauty pageant sisters and you get *Southern Discomfort*. This compelling and engrossing novel kept me captivated for hours. The author, a Grammy award winning songwriter and producer, has created a novel full of warts and ugliness while managing to shine a light on a different way of showing love and forgiveness. Indeed her ability to find peace and compassion is truly magnanimous. This is a southern novel at its best; do not miss it.

Megan Bell says

At turns heartwarming, horrifying, comic, and eye-opening, this memoir, like the Southern family it chronicles, defies easy definition. Whether it's her mother's high-speed car shoot-out of her father and his mistress, the powerful mothering the family's black maid Vergie shows her, or Tena's coming out to this wild cast of characters, Tena Clark's memoir of growing up in Jim Crow Mississippi touches on issues of racism, sexuality, family, and the hair-pulling complexities of the South.

Lizy says

I'm utterly floored.

The back of the ARC - I haven't seen the finished book, so I don't know if it's the same - says this is like *The Help* but with more guns and alcohol, yet is even more touching. There's no better way to summarize this memoir. The prose is absolutely magnificent. I was completely sucked in to the story. Every scene is

perfectly vivid and expertly depicted. I Don't usually cry when reading books, let alone memoirs, but this had me weeping. Highly, highly recommend.

Holland says

Would do 3.5 if I could. Looking forward to discussing.

Paul Pessolano says

“Southern Discomfort” by Tena Clark, published by Touchstone.

Category – Memoir Publication Date – October 02, 2018.

Tena Clark grew up in rural Mississippi in the 1950's. Her mother was a town beauty who married a young man who had little to show for himself, except an uncanny sense of business. Her father literally owned the town and the Clark's were, by far, the wealthiest people in town. One would think that Tena would have lived a life of luxury and happiness; after all she was given a brand new Camaro at the age of twelve.

Tena may have lived a life of luxury but definitely not one of happiness. Her father paid little attention to the family and was a woman chaser of the first magnitude. This well have been what led her mother to become an alcoholic, attempted suicide, and threatened her husband with a gun several times.

When her mother finally left home, Tena was brought up by Virgie, her black nanny. She also had strong relations with Virgie's children which helped shape her perspective of segregation.

Tena also found herself in a quandary over her sexuality. She discovered that she had an eye for girls, not boys. This did not stand well with her upbringing in the Deep South.

A great read that is not only a memoir of Tena Clark but a historical perspective of race relations at this time in history.

Tracett says

This same story cast in a slightly different light could make a modern Southern Gothic memoir. I think many families are slightly bonkers, but Clark's family has that extra bonus of being monied, white, and Southern which gave them entree into being especially excessive, in a fact is stranger than fiction way. Clark's childhood views of racial inequality are poignant and sometimes bittersweet. (Note to book clubs - read this.) (Note to Hollywood - make a movie out of this please.)

Philip says

Yikes! Surviving in a generationally dysfunctional family but still have congenial relations. This is that story.

Tammy says

Clark grew up in the Jim Crow South with an alcoholic, largely absent mother and a cheating, pride-driven, successful father who is as mean as a snake. Add to this volatile mix, a daughter who does not fit the mold of Southern Belle and you might imagine what ignites. She loves ferociously and is guided through her childhood by a magnanimous and loving black housekeeper who provides stability for the frequently abandoned child. Clark tries, she really does, to be the person her family wishes her to be but it simply isn't who she is. Her keen sense of social injustice compels her to behave in ways that are potentially dangerous, specifically for those whom she feels have been mistreated. I don't read many memoirs but this is filled with heart wrenching scenes that I won't soon forget. I was moved. I was moved to tears.

Blue Cypress Books says

While this life story is definitely Ms. Clark's unique story, she brings all the best shades of Rick Bragg and Jeannette Walls to this most excellent memoir. Highly recommend.

Hannah Safer says

I loved this book! I got it for free from the leader of my local book club chapter, and I finished it in just 2 days! I was so deeply moved by her story. She endured so many hardships but she always kept her sense of humor and her kind spirit. I was so enthralled by the book. At certain parts, such as when she would grab the gun from her fighting parents, or when her dad accidentally crashed the car over the side of a bridge, I forgot this was actually a true story! This story was at times sad, at times funny, and at times scary and disturbing. It was a true slice of life. For full disclosure, I could definitely relate to her family background, although my upbringing did not involve guns. Also, while I grew up in NY, I went to college in Florida and I feel she captured the feelings I share of being somewhat in love with, and somewhat horrified by, the South. I will recommend this book to everyone I know!
