HoldStill SallyMann



COLOR PAGES INSIDE

SAMPLE FINAL PAGES FROM SALLY MANN'S STUNNING NEW MEMOIR

A Memoir with Photographs

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Sally Mann

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY NEW YORK BOSTON LONDON

On the weekends I would head off with my date in his Chevelle or El Camino, my hair rat's-nested and lacquered into ringlets atop my heavily made-up face, eyelashes curled and matted with mascara, heavy black lines drawn across and well past my eyelid in a Cher-like Cleopatra imitation, lips shiny with cheap lipstick, Jungle Gardenia flowering at my throat, on my wrists, and between my A-cup breasts, which did their best to swell out of a padded bra.



I would generally heave in pretty close to my absolute curfew so as not to enrage my punctilious father unduly and find my parents serenely sitting on the couch in the living room. My mother, with her stockinged legs tucked beneath her, would be wreathed in blue cigarette smoke, deep in



Halfway there, the car blew a head gasket and died, so we rented a much newer car. In it, as we pulled up to White Cottage, my new dorm, I unknowingly enjoyed the last moment of personal confidence that I was to feel for a long time.

The first week, I raised my hand in Hepper Caldwell's history class and asked what a Jew was. Hepper (we were allowed to call our teachers by their first names), though startled, refrained from making fun of me, but no such luck from the rest of the class, many of whom were Jews. I was the most ridiculed minority of all: a dumb cracker, with a trunk full of very uncool reversible wrap-around skirts my mother had sewn herself, Clarks desert boots with crepe soles from Talbots, and variably sized pink foam hair rollers. Nobody at Putney had hydrogen peroxide blond hair teased into a beehive, nobody at Putney wore makeup, and nobody at Putney listened to the Righteous Brothers or wore her boyfriend's letter sweater and heavy class ring, its band wrapped with dirty adhesive tape.

In fact, hardly anybody at Putney even had boyfriends and girlfriends. I was suddenly living in another country where my currency was worthless,

and my brothers and parents were relieved.



I had set the course for what proved to be the rest of my life.

Writing came first. I was frequently the poet on duty when the Muse of Verse, likely distracted by other errands, released some of her weaker lines, but that didn't stop my passion for it. Beginning in that first year at Putney, I could be found, way after lights-out, crouched in the closet earnestly composing long, verbally dense poetic meditations, almost always in some way relating to the South.

These are the last lands: My blood and heritage.

The seasons, the sky and the soil are within me...

I have asked of the sky

And it gives me the reply of the cyclic ages—

Blistering sun and the cool blink of nightfall...

It offers its knowledge on the flat palm of morning,

For what has not been drawn into its black fist at nighttime?

Sts motthatyou waste time because you don't, but rather that you fuss too much over a work. Everyday is a crisis of some sort. I expect the problem lies in priconceiving the final result to perfection. In short, you've too rigid.

You art history work however was excellent. The best in the class.

Macronius Maphies Mas Bill Gent Modent Modent four created some fine prints, but they could have been betty experious as you work. You get easily four trated if things don't go as you explor.

So, so true, Bill.

And then came photography.

Here is a paragraph from the sprawling, excited letter I wrote to my parents from Putney in April 1969 after I developed my first roll of film, which had been shot on spring break in Rockbridge County with an old Leica III my father had given me.

I have just returned triumphant from the darkroom. The best photographer in the school helped me develop my film and both he and I

the camera out of the car, or just raising the camera to your face, believing, by those actions, that whatever you find before you, whatever you find there, is going to be good.

And, when you get whatever you get, even if it's a fluky product of that slipping-glimpser vision that de Kooning celebrated, you have made *some*thing. Maybe you've made something mediocre—there's plenty of that in any artist's cabinets—but something mediocre is better than nothing, and often the near-misses, as I call them, are the beckoning hands that bring you to perfection just around the blind corner.

So, there I was, age seventeen, holding my dripping negatives to the lightbulb, and voicing to my parents in exuberant prose my roiled-up feelings. Maybe I didn't know it at the time, but I had found the twin artistic passions that were to consume my life. And, in characteristic fashion, I threw myself into them with a fervor that, from this remove, seems almost comical. I existed in a welter of creativity—sleepless, anxious, self-doubting, pressing for both perfection and impiety, like some ungodly cross between a hummingbird and a bulldozer.

Not so different, really, from the way I am now.

My writing instructor, Ray Goodlatte (the same admissions officer who allowed me to squeak into Putney in the first place), prophesied greatness for me in a nearly illegible Putney report:

You are launched on a lifetime writer's project. I feel privileged to have seen your work in progress. Your splendid critical intelligence qualifies you, as maker, to receive a high order of gift. . . . You are a person by whom language will live. I shall look forward to reading you.

It would seem that having discovered my True Calling(s), writing and photography, and enjoying some academic success, I might tone down the cussedness and rebellious behavior that had defined my life thus far.

But no, not really.

I smoked, I drank, I skipped classes, I snuck out, I took drugs, I stole quarts of ice cream for my dorm by breaking into the kitchen storerooms,