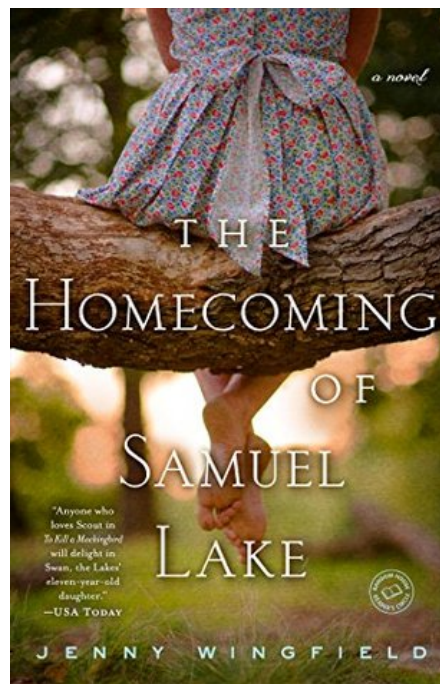




The Homecoming of Samuel Lake

Jenny Wingfield

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Every first Sunday in June, members of the Moses clan gather for an annual reunion at “the old home place,” a sprawling hundred-acre farm in Arkansas. And every year, Samuel Lake, a vibrant and committed young preacher, brings his beloved wife, Willadee Moses, and their three children back for the festivities. The children embrace the reunion as a welcome escape from the prying eyes of their father’s congregation; for Willadee it’s a precious opportunity to spend time with her mother and father, Calla and John. But just as the reunion is getting under way, tragedy strikes, jolting the family to their core: John’s untimely death and, soon after, the loss of Samuel’s parish, which set the stage for a summer of crisis and profound change.

In the midst of it all, Samuel and Willadee’s outspoken eleven-year-old daughter, Swan, is a bright light. Her high spirits and fearlessness have alternately seduced and bedeviled three generations of the family. But it is Blade Ballenger, a traumatized eight-year-old neighbor, who soon captures Swan’s undivided attention. Full of righteous anger, and innocent of the peril facing her and those she loves, Swan makes it her mission to keep the boy safe from his terrifying father.

With characters who spring to life as vividly as if they were members of one’s own family, and with the clear-eyed wisdom that illuminates the most tragic—and triumphant—aspects of human nature, Jenny Wingfield emerges as one of the most vital, engaging storytellers writing today. In *The Homecoming of Samuel Lake* she has created a memorable and lasting work of fiction.

The Homecoming of Samuel Lake Details

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From Reader Review The Homecoming of Samuel Lake for online ebook

Bette Crosby says

Awesome book...loved the story, the pacing, the language. Were it possible, this would be a six star for me.

Diane Barnes says

First, let me thank Cher for writing such a good review that I went straight to my library and checked this one out. I hadn't come across it before and it wasn't on my book radar at all. I opened it up to page 1 and fell in.

In 1956, Samuel Lake takes his wife, Willadee, and his 3 kids to her family reunion at the old home place in Arkansas. The Moses family is big, rambunctious, noisy and loving, with a lot of history, resentment, jealousies and tragedy and joy among them, just like most families. And there's more in store as this novel takes off and sends the reader in so many different directions that it's almost impossible to put it down. The best thing about this book was that everything was so real. The characters were REAL, their conversations were REAL, the kids were REAL. There was humor mixed in with the sadness, hope mixed in with the really bad things that happened. Southern cooking was very much a part of this family, as was all the golden southern phrases that I remember from my childhood.

This author brought these people to life and told a tale that had me spellbound for two days.

Most of this book is filtered through the eyes of Swan, who gets my vote for the best 11 year old girl in the book world, outside of Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She's sassy, honest, smart and brave, with a great big heart. No one stands a chance with her, once her mind is made up.

I hope you'll give this book a chance, it deserves a wide readership. As good as it is, it's just a first novel, so we hopefully have more to come from Jenny Wingfield.

Jen says

This was a gem of a book. Truly "a diamond in a turnip patch." This is a story of innocence ending when bad things happen to good people. A story of redemption, hope and faith. Of miracles happening when one least expects it, especially for Sam Lake, a preacher who is without a pulpit and his faith beginning to wane; and his daughter, Swan Lake, who captures the innocence and purity that only a child can have. Grab a tissue as this story will make you chuckle, cry and make your heart swell. 4.5 stars.

Cheri says

The Moses clan gathers annually on the old hundred acre family homestead, home now to Calla and John Moses. Annually, Samuel Lake and his wife, Willadee Moses, head from Louisiana to the family reunion in Arkansas with their three children in tow. Samuel Lake is a good and loving husband to Willadee, a loving father to his children Noble, Swan and Bienville, a passionate preacher to his congregation.

Samuel and Willadee's daughter, eleven year old Swan (yes, Swan Lake) is a spirited little girl, not afraid of

much, and with a strong sense of right and wrong. Others have compared her to Scout Finch (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), and while this is a lovely and charming book with similar themes of justice, set in a small southern town, this book stands on its own merits. Swan really captured me, although each of the characters gets a fairly equal part in this story that centers around Swan's intention to save a young neighbor boy from his father's ways.

Set in 1950's Arkansas with a cast of characters that in other hands might end up being too trite, Jenny Wingfield keeps each character from being overly predictable. "The Homecoming of Samuel Lake" is Wingfield's debut novel.

"I was picking them for that man," he said softly, nodding toward the house. "That uncle."
Calla tipped back her head and sucked air in through her nose, the way a person does when a feeling gets to be too much to handle. When was the last time anyone did anything special for Toy..."
...After a second, she said, "Did you know flowers bloom better if you pick them?"
He shook his head solemnly.
"Well, they do. It's like you gave them a compliment, and all of a sudden they start doing everything they can to get another one."

Melissa Crytzer Fry says

This novel will have you thinking about faith and miracles in a whole different light. Debut novelist Jenny Wingfield conjures a cast of characters fresh and imaginative – all set against the lush backdrop of a rural Arkansas farming landscape in the '50s.

"I think maybe miracles are something everybody has to find out about for themselves." This astute knowledge comes from one of the key characters, a likable, resilient pre-teen Swan, and gets to the heart of this story that focuses on the family struggles of an out-of-work preacher.

Wingfield's narrative style – using an observant, omniscient point of view – allows the reader to explore a number of dark topics: manipulation, abuse, dishonesty, infidelity, animal cruelty. They are, however, tempered with countless laugh-out-loud moments, including (among others) the name of the grandfather's bar, "Moses Never Closes." And of course, there is hope and love peppered throughout this story that follows the lives of four incredible, children, their parents, and aunts/uncles. And no story would be a good story without a villain; Wingfield delivers just that, a character named Ras, who is so despicable and abhorrent that he still gives me the shivers. (Warning: not an easy read for some).

Perhaps I was drawn also by Wingfield's portrayal of religion; the revival scenes and even the thoughts of the preacher, Samuel, were reminiscent of the stories my mom tells of revivals in the '50s in her hometown of Pennsylvania. (For anyone shy of religion, this is not a book with a religious agenda. In fact, often the religion takes a back seat to other pivotal plot threads.)

Even though this story has heartbreaking, heartbreaking elements, I think Wingfield expertly wove reality and hope into the story. The ending was not a "perfect" and "wrapped in a bow," "tidy" ending (I personally love endings that aren't perfectly wrapped). But in so many ways it was a peaceful ending – a reminder that each of us must come to peace with our circumstances, whether they are good or bad.

I'm looking forward to more of Wingfield's work!

Cathrine ?? says

DNF

I made it a third of the way. I do not want to read books that contain animal and child abuse.

Angela M says

From the title you might assume this is just about Samuel Lake , the minister who loses his congregations and moves from church to church but the precocious, kind hearted , eleven year old Swan Lake and the little boy named Blade that she tries desperately to protect were for me the center of the story.

From the title you might assume that it's just about Samuel Lake but it is about so much more - good and evil , darkness and joy , love and infidelity , caring and abuse , horrific deeds , and the loss of innocence of young children who witness evil before their very eyes and suffer at the hands of it.

But yes , it is ultimately about Samuel Lake and how he discovers that he can "tend to God's business " as well as his family . It's also about a good man named Toy Moses , Samuel's brother in law , and my other favorite character in the novel whose actions reflect the true meaning of family .

You can read the description or other reviews that tell more about the story. I'll just say that is one that I'm glad I didn't miss . It's gripping, heartbreaking but yet so hopeful. Highly recommended but not for the faint of heart . Swan Lake will remain for me one those unforgettable characters .

Laura says

This book started out as a 5-star read. Then the villains became overly villainous and one-dimensional, the writing was just ok, and when it wasn't predictable it stretched believability beyond belief. There are a couple of characters who are interesting, but not worth reading the book for. My advice? Don't waste your time. Oh, and if you have issues with domestic violence, child abuse and animal abuse, then you have three more reasons to skip this one.

Karen says

4.5 stars

This book is just so good, touched on every emotion, I loved the Moses clan and especially the children.

Cher says

4.5 stars - Incredible. I really loved it.

I blew through this one in 2 days and loved it from the first paragraph. It's southern lit set in Arkansas in the 1950's, which does not have a romance-centric plot and does not focus on the overdone racial tropes. Can we please, please get more of these??

The author delicately balances the power of hope against a realistic portrayal of the cruelty in our world. Her characters are memorable and there are some great humorous moments. There are several characters that are incredibly endearing, another that you will absolutely love to hate (cough, homewrecker, cough), and another that is so cruel he will give you the heebie jeebies.

Be forewarned that there is animal cruelty in this one, particularly towards horses and cats, but it was not so graphic that my tender heart could not stomach it. This is an easy novel to recommend, and I look forward to reading the author's next novel.

Favorite Quote: They'd have people out looking for her, and nothing makes grown-ups quite so mad as finding a child safe when they'd been scared silly that they might find that child dead.

First Sentence: John Moses couldn't have chosen a worse day, or a worse way to die, if he'd planned it for a lifetime.

Dem says

Jenny Wingfield's debut novel The Homecoming of Samuel Lake is a real gem !

Set in rural south Arkansas in the 1950s this story is about the Moses family and when good and evil cross paths and its consequences, but above all else it is about the love courage and struggle of a family and rural live.

I loved the title of this Novel and was intrigued to see where this story was going and Jenny Winfield's tale really flows from the opening line . (I really love a novel with a good opening line).

“ John Moses couldn't have chosen a worse day, or a worse way to die, if he planned it for a lifetime”

Samuel Lake is a preacher who has lost his ministry and goes to live with his wife's family in rural Arkansas with their 3 children and the story unfolds from here and we spend the summer with the Moses family and go through happy sad and some cruel times with them.

This is a character driven story and I loved watching those characters develop and come alive, I could feel their emotions throughout the read and I fell in love with Swan, I loved her courage and how she took Blade under her wing, I enjoyed the character of Willadee, such a good person and so quiet and yet so strong. I loved Toy for the way he watched out for the kids and the family and I could go on and on about all the wonderful (and not so wonderful) characters in this book but think I will leave that for a bookclub

discussion.

This is one of those books that made me exclaim out loud, there is a lot of happy times and a lot of sad times throughout this story. Some people may even find this a tough read but it is a terrific story and a real page turner. Jenny Wingfield does not spend time on long descriptive passages she has a story to tell and she just gets on and tells it and what a great story it is.

There is also wit in this Novel and I found myself underlining sentences as I was reading as they had me laughing out loud.

I loved every single thing about The Homecoming of Samuel Lake, from the sweet Southern charm to the likable and dislikeable characters to the sense of time and place.

This is certainly one for my favourites list.

Florence (Lefty) MacIntosh says

There's a lot of well deserved buzz about this debut novel. Circa 1950's Southern lit with terrific characters, clever dialog and a story that hooks from page one. If you're into realistic fiction and looking for some **great escapism** you've found it. In a nutshell it's the story of Samuel Lake, a flockless Methodist minister forced to return to his roots, the home of his wife's family on a backwoods farm in Arkansas, a tight knit clan with a whole heap of problems of their own.

The author strikes a nice balance, a decidedly tragic story of abuse, murder & infidelity lightened by gentle humour, a mix of angst and absurdity. For instance, the farm boasts a 24 hour booze bar in the basement called "Moses Never Closes" which doesn't stop Samuel from setting up a holy-roller Revival Tent on the property as well. What with wives dragging their husbands out of the bar over to the revival tent for a shot of religion and the faithful heading for the bar after a hard day of praying for a shot of whisky – a mutually beneficial spinoff trade is developed.

Worth reading alone for the sheer pleasure of the main character, 11 year old Swan Lake. I swear she's as spunky, sassy & full of innocent wisdom as Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird. The other characters are wonderful as well, each with their own strengths & weaknesses, their own ways of coping with whatever life throws at them, and believe me a whole lot get's thrown at them in this novel.

Negative: The dastardly Ras Ballenger an abuser extraordinaire who pushes all your emotional buttons. Problem was he was so cookie-cutter EVIL it leaned towards manipulative. If Wingfield had written the villain with some depth, I'm thinking Norman Bates character in Psycho, this could have been brilliant instead of just great. All is forgiven though, offset by a satisfyingly realistic conclusion – I liked the ending – a lot.

Content warning (view spoiler)

For the blended genre's of Southern Lit with realistic fiction: **4 ½ stars rounded up to 5**

"If You are love, he roared, then love ain't much to crow about."

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

The Lake family heads home to the Moses clan every year for the yearly reunion. Samuel Lake usually leaves his wife Willadee and three children there while he runs to see what congregation he will be assigned to preach at for the coming year. This year Willadee's father dies and they find out that Sam has no flock to

preach at. So they move in at the Willadee's mom's home. That happens to be a store and all night bar.

The Lakes youngest child Swan is mostly the main character, but you come to know this whole family over the course of this book. Swan totally steals the show for me though, she is spunky and just the most perfect character.

Plus, Swan knows that her uncle Toy is going to be her new best friend. He just doesn't know it yet. Toy is one of those haunted characters, he lost a leg during service, came home found out his wife was sleeping around, murdered her lover...you know..just an average guy. Don't think badly of him though. I adored him. His wife Bernice was Sam Lake's previous fiancé before he met Willadee. She knows that she could have Sam back just like that so her planning starts.

Then you have the evil man who lives next door. Ras Ballenger, who abuses his wife, son (Blade)and animals with gleeful abandon. (Be warned that there are some scenes that aren't pretty)

You know throughout the book that some kind of evil is lurking but I wasn't sure if Bernice would bring it or that turd Ras. (Ras is that bad guy that will have you squeezing your book pages in your hands to keep from wanting to punch him in the face.)

I'm totally crapping the bed on this review trying to get my point across so I'm just going to share a couple of the quotes. I totally loved this book.

Preachers' kids are the worst kind.

Nobody ever said the worst kind of what, but the implication was that all preachers' kids had illicit adventures, and Swan could never feel close to anyone who looked down on her for things she hadn't had a chance to do yet.

The hard part about this plan was going to be coming up with a good enough lie to explain why she'd been where she'd been, but Swan had tremendous confidence in her lying ability. And if worst came to worst, she could always tell the truth.

Booksources: library

My friend Cher's review did much better than I did on getting her feelings across for this little gem of a book.

Sheree says

I'm not ready to leave, it can't be over ... this is hands down, without a doubt, my favourite read this year and I can't thank my friend Staci enough for recommending it. You know when you come across a treasure that is too good not to share, a book that you want everyone to read and love just as much as you do. This is that book. To borrow words from The Homecoming of Samuel Lake ... it's "*enough to make your heart fill up and burst*"

Jenny Wingfield's writing is pure bliss ... it's all warmth and honesty, it filled me with joy, tugged at my heart strings, made my face ache from smiling, it made me sigh and giggle and cry.

The Moses/Lake family; Samuel, Willadee, Calla, Toy, "Moses Never Closes" "Moses honesty" and the irrepressible, sassy, brave Swan ... they marched straight into my heart. I love these people, I don't even want to call them characters, I feel comfortable with them, like I'm home.

just some of my favourite quotes:

Her parents certainly loved God. Swan did, too, she was sure, even though she bent His rules with some degree of regularity, and prayed only When It Was Important. She'd never been one to wear God out with small talk.

Swan said, "This means we're really poor, right?"

"Not really poor. Really poor people don't have enough to eat, and can't afford to go to the doctor when they get sick. There's a difference between being poor and being prudent."

Swan sighed. "I don't suppose there's any way to know how long we'll be prudent is there? Because I'd sure hate to be prudent at Christmas."

from Toy

"It's hard to believe, but there are people in this world who are low enough" - he paused for emphasis - "sorry enough" - he paused again - "pure pig shit worthless enough to maliciously harm a child."

from Calla

"Did you know flowers bloom better if you pick them?"

He shook his head solemnly.

"Well, they do. It's like you gave them a compliment, and all of a sudden they start doing everything they can to get another."

Jenny Wingfield doesn't shy away from addressing dark, heartbreaking issues but it's tempered with humour and a charming ambiance. Family, love, faith, hope, miracles and pearls of homespun wisdom that just gladden your heart (as corny as that sounds I swear it's true.) Ok time for me to stop gushing before I give anything away, the delight in this book is experiencing it all, yourself.

The Homecoming Of Samuel Lake has earned a special place in my heart

... keeping illustrious company with the likes of The Help, Best Kept Secret, The Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society, Saving CeeCeeHoneycutt & Eternal On The Water.

Crystal Craig says

Recommended Reading

The Homecoming of Samuel Lake is just one of those books you must read. My attention grabbed as soon as I read the first sentence.

"John Moses couldn't have chosen a worse day, or a worse way to die if he'd planned it for a lifetime."

The story takes place in the backwoods of Arkansas. The characters, especially the children are fun. As I read, I found myself laughing out loud several times.

"Here I've been, dogging your tracks like you were some kind of hero, when all you really are is an old, one-legged bootlegger. I bet you never saved anybody's life. You prob'ly lost your leg running away from a fight. And as for Yam Ferguson, he must have been one punny sombuck if he let himself get done in by the likes of you. I wouldn't be scared of you in a graveyard on a dark night."

If I could ask the Jenny Wingfield one question, it would be, why the odd character names? They didn't take away from the story, but with each new character introduced, I did a double-take; really? That's their name?

Odd names aside, this was a beautifully told story, a great first novel. I look forward to the author's future works.
