



# **First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood**

*Thrity Umrigar*

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## **First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood** Thrity Umrigar

A poignant and brave exploration of childhood's less lovely spaces, *First Darling* is a sensitive, vividly-relived memoir that captures the innocence and confusion of a small Indian girl struggling against the paradoxes that rock her life. Told with startling honesty, the memoir paints an unforgettable picture of middle-class life in contemporary Bombay.

## **First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood Details**

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# From Reader Review First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood for online ebook

## Histteach24 says

I enjoyed looking into the eyes of the author as I found it an insight to the themes of her books. I could see how *The Space Between Us* was born from her social and political beliefs. I also have never read a book that had pieces of Zoroastrian culture. I had a friend who was Zoroastrian, and it was interesting to hear him explain the religion, but so little is known about it around the world. Unfortunately, it is a dying population. Although the author does not write directly to us about the religion, the pieces of family ties, the uncle's funeral, how others see her skin color and the place in India of being Parsi are interwoven throughout the book. I also loved how real she made the generational, social and political gaps. Thought provoking and very educationally. I want to read more about Indira Gandhi. Look forward to reading *Midnight's Children*.

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## Manu says

Its difficult not to like a book that starts off with a reference to 'The Sound of Music'. After all, for a generation, there are so many memories attached to that movie. It serves as a good snapshot for what the book holds in store, a 'Wonder Years' kind of nostalgic trip, one that I could immediately identify with, and one that supplies many lump-in-the-throat moments. The book is billed as 'Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood' and has done an excellent job of it.

We are with the child when she discovers how the world has different rules for adults and children, when she thinks that she would never grow out of Enid Blyton, only to switch loyalties to Mills & Boon years later. We see her move on to Herman Hesse and becoming obsessed with Van Gogh. We are with her as she grows up and realises that the people around her existed long before her, and are part of stories she never knew.

Though the story is primarily about her growing up, the author manages to cover a lot of other ground and link it very well with her life. The story of a city that was united across classes by cricket, the story of a middle class that is mostly in denial of the poor that surround them, but also makes unwritten rules for transactions with them. The story of the various strings that pull us, some visible, some not so.

As she looks back on her life after finishing college and realises the paradoxical importance and unimportance of her relationships with the various people and things in her life - music, books, politics, parents, teachers, relatives and friends, and slowly tries to put them in perspective, I saw a story that could in many ways describe most of humankind and the lives we create for ourselves. And that perhaps would explain why I consider this a must-read.

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## Katie says

This memoir by Thrity Umrigar was a treat for me, since I've read almost all her books. I'm so glad I saved this one to read until now, after I'd already read most of them. It made reading about her life a lot more meaningful.

Umrigar's books share one common theme: culture blending and culture clash between India and America. This memoir explains so much about why she always tends to center on this topic (she came to America for graduate school and I believe never went back to India to live. The book ends with her first taking off for America). Umrigar was a voracious reader from a very young age, an aspiring writer always, and had a hungry intellectual mind. Yet she still experienced so many typical childhood rites, including being part of a clique, pretending to be dumber than she was for popularity's sake, and good old stubbornness and temper tantrums. I loved how forthright she was about what a brat she could be at times.

I also identified with her descriptions of her intellectual "awakening," via a friend who introduces her to music, art, and philosophical thought. I too had a friend who ultimately changed my life by challenging my world view at an impressionable age, and this part really spoke to me.

A very enjoyable read for fans of Thrity Umrigar, or for anyone who enjoys reading about what it's like to grow up in India.

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### **Aban (Aby) says**

Having read Umrigar's: "The Space Between Us" (excellent) and "If Today Be Sweet" (good), I was eager to read her memoirs and they are well worth reading. I thoroughly enjoyed them, in part because I was born in Bombay into a Parsi family, and also had some convent education, hence Umrigar's memoirs were particularly meaningful to me.

Umrigar's family are delightful, all except for her mother who alternated between loving and cruel behaviour. (I wonder at her family's reaction to her clear eyed account of her mother?) Umrigar, too, was a fascinating child: impulsive, a dreamer, a clown. (I'm sure she was ADHD!) She was/is highly intelligent and very determined. Her decision to leave her family and move to America was courageous, but necessary to allow her to emerge as a person in her own right.

One outcome of reading this book - resulting from Umrigar's delight in Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" - is that I am going to try to read it again. Perhaps (third time round) I might succeed!

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### **Mrsgaskell says**

Thrity Umrigar is the author of *The Space Between Us* which I enjoyed very much so I was interested to read this memoir of her early life in Bombay where she grew up in a Parsi household. She initially comes across as a spoilt child and I can't say I ever felt much affinity with her. However it was an interesting account of complex family dynamics and Bombay life in the 60s and 70s.

In some ways Umrigar's life seemed a lonely one, although the household included her parents, as well as her father's brother, his wife, and daughter, and her father's sister. Umrigar's mother was sometimes loving, sometimes cruel, and she frequently blamed her daughter for her unhappy marriage. In addition to this there was a tug-of-war for Umrigar's affection between her mother and her aunt. The Umrigars were a middle-class family, relatively privileged and educated, and the contrast between this and the great poverty surrounding them had a profound effect on the author. As well, there was a disconnect between the world she read about in books, very English - she was a fan of Enid Blyton - and the actual India she lived in. Her early

writings in school never featured Indian characters. By the age of twenty, Umrigar was determined to attend grad school in America, in large part to feel free to live her own life away from her family. In spite of her desire to escape she was torn because she did love them, particularly her father. I would be interested to learn more about her arrival and adaptation to life in the U.S.

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## **Marcy says**

This is the personal memoir of Thrity Umrigar, one of the finest Indian authors. *First Darling of the Morning* is a coming of age story. Thrity grew up in Bombay with an abusive mother, a loving father and uncle, the uncle's daughter, and the most wonderful grandmother who doted on her granddaughter, aware of the humiliation that Thrity suffered due to her mom's "absolute" meanness. (Thrity's grandmother also suffered her daughter-in-law's abuse).

When Thrity is young, she has a hidden desire to have the Ovaltine woman as her own mother. Thrity and her dad have a very special and close relationship. They often go on car rides and sit at a beach, talking about their lives. Thrity finds out that her dad has a desire for an Ovaltine wife as well. "And we will both forever be seeking our way out of the greyness of drab reality - he out of the cobwebs of a ruined marriage, I out of the entrapment of the mythologies of motherhood - and we will spend our lives looking for our way back to the shining celluloid fantasy of the Ovaltine lady."

Thrity is concerned throughout the story about India's poverty. She discovers from an older friend that Indhira Gandhi is not the hero she once thought, and leaves her friends heading to a movie by jumping off the bus to join a protest against Gandhi's kind of "democracy." Thrity rebels as she takes dares with her friends in and after school. She smokes cigarettes, listens to loud American and English music, and drinks, but when she comes home, she is the protector and caretaker of her grandmother and father as the abuse at home continues. Even during Thrity's college years, the yelling and screaming of Thrity's mom, and even the "claw scratching," cannot be quelled.

Thrity decides to escape and finish her college years in America. "As long as I am unmarried, I know that economics and social convention will dictate that I continue to live at home and that if I do that much longer, I will end up in a crazy asylum. Because I just can't deal with the shit at home any more. My nerves are shot."

"I'm twenty years old and I'm tired." Thrity is tired of being the peacemaker at home, of being the carrier of other people's grief, not to mention her own. "All the things that I thought would save me - music, books, politics - have befriended me for a while but ultimately, I've had to come back and face myself."

I am anxious to read more of Thrity's novels to identify her childhood experiences within her well written stories.

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## Cindy says

I've been a fan of Thrity Umrigar for several years. Her fiction is masterful. She is a professor at CWRU, and I've wanted to read her memoir ever since I heard her speak at a book signing.

It starts out in a rather depressing fashion, with descriptions of Thrity's raging mother who likes to beat her only child with switches, and even gets a glimmer of enjoyment in her eye when she beats the children she tutors. She is cruel and manipulative. No doubt a victim of her own untold sorrows and disappointments.

Thrity feels like a misfit, and while clearly brilliant, is spoiled and always getting into trouble. She can be fierce, fighting to understand herself and her place in a changing culture.

Then I hit chapter 18, where the author's beloved Uncle Babu dies. Thrity's description of the complex emotions and her responses to this unfathomable, life altering event is incredible. I was stunned into tears in a way that I have not been since reading Allende's Paola.

Paola is a striking homage to death's spirituality, whereas Umrigar records the abject, soulless feelings (she is only 15 years old) she must deal with. The book comes to an abrupt end when Thrity sets foot on an airplane to America. I must search if she's written the sequel.

I just read an interesting on line article entitled **Why Readers, Scientifically, Are The Best People To Fall In Love With** I will share some excerpts as it seems to fit this book quite nicely.

*"According to both 2006 and 2009 studies, those who read fiction are capable of the most empathy and "theory of mind," which is the ability to hold opinions, beliefs and interests apart from their own.*

*They can entertain other ideas, without rejecting them and still retain their own. Having experienced someone else's life through abstract eyes, they've learned what it's like to leave their bodies and see the world through other frames of reference.*

*They have access to hundreds of souls, and the collected wisdom of all them. They have seen things you'll never understand and have experienced deaths of people you'll never know.*

*They've learned what it's like to be a woman, and a man. They know what it's like to watch someone suffer. They are wise beyond their years.*

*Because reading is something that molds you and adds to your character. Each triumph, lesson and pivotal moment of the protagonist becomes your own.*

*Every ache, pain and harsh truth becomes yours to bear. You've traveled with authors and experienced the pain, sorrow and anguish they suffered while writing through it. You've lived a thousand lives and come back to learn from each of them.*

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## **Carrie Bailey says**

I just finished reading this book last night and I loved it. It made me want to visit India more than ever. I was fascinated by the stories Thrity Umrigar told of her childhood in Bombay. I found the characters compelling and sympathetic especially her kind father, aunt, uncle, . . . in fact really her entire family with the exception of her cruel sadistic mother. She also did a wonderful job of guiding the reader through her progression from privileged Parsi youngster to political activist. The only thing that kept me from giving it five stars is that at the very end she brings up an issue and then does not satisfactorily resolve it. However, this is a minor quibble and I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who likes childhood Memoirs, India, or simply is looking for a good book to read.

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## **Vene says**

I will always list this book as one of my favourite books, forever. I love Thrity's writing - I like how she wrote something that is so abstract to be so concrete at the same time. For example: "We are a multi-limbed organism, all greedy hands and needy fingers, held together by history and memory and love".

For the fact that she showed her vulnerability by sharing her life story through this book is simply amazing. I am sure it took a lot of courage to do that. Her passion and empathy for the oppressed community, despite coming from a middle-class family did strike me hard. It feels so close to home; as if this book was written for me. Her struggles of wanting to leave her comfort zone forever and at the same time, valuing the rootedness of home feel so real to me.

And for that, I thank you, Thrity Umrigar. :)

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## **Sayantani Dasgupta says**

I should've read the title more carefully. It does say, "selective memories of an Indian childhood." "Childhood." Not "life." But "life" is what I read for reasons unknown. Which this book clearly isn't. It is mostly about the author's childhood when her life revolved around school and home, like nearly all other kids. The quality of her prose is masterful, as expected from Umrigar. She paints a charming and truthful portrait of life in Bombay in the 1960s and 70s. The secondary characters are engaging and multidimensional. The chapter after the death of a family member is stunning because of Umrigar's close attention to details. But her own worldview even when she is no longer a child is too idealistic and sentimental.

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## **Maya says**

First darling of the morning is a powerful and touching memoir of bestselling author, Thrity Umrigar. It is written as an apology to her troubled, but loving family, after she left them to finish her education in America. This memoir focuses on the childhood and adolescence of a young middle-class Parsi girl. Furthermore, it is set in Bombay, India during the 1960s and 1970s, despite being published in 2004. The novel mostly revolves around Thrity Umrigar's relationship with her family and friends, as well as her

coming of age. Thrity had an abusive mother and an absent father. Thus, she was closer to her selfless aunt, Mehroo, who loved her like her own child and her beloved uncle, Babu. Thrity was also a very compassionate child, who was sensitive to poverty. This novel creates a melancholy mood, since the reader lives Thrity's emotions and experiences. In conclusion, I would recommend this touching memoir to students, as well as adults, since it has the power to change minds and move hearts.

Thrity Umrigar is an honest, fragile, compassionate, and curious woman. From her early teenage years, the reader notices that Thrity tells the truth and is honest about her feelings. Furthermore, the reader can sense that the memoir is truthful and that Thrity is not a complicated and lying woman. She is also a fragile person, especially when she was a child. For example, when she would accompany her father to the market, the poor and the beggars surrounding her troubled her thoughts. In addition, Thrity is compassionate and enjoys helping those who are less fortunate than her. When she was younger, her aunt told her that she could invite a couple of her friends for food at her family's shop. Instead, Thrity invited her neighborhood's poor begging children for food. Lastly, Thrity Umrigar's curiosity made her experience several different aspects of life; smoking, becoming friends with various people, and getting lower grades. Furthermore, I appreciate Thrity Umrigar because she did not try to hide her feelings when she wrote this memoir, thus revealed the truth about her deepest emotions. Sometimes, authors who write autobiographies or memoirs can change the story to make themselves look like a role model. However, Thrity Umrigar wrote her memoir in an honest way and the reader was able to see her positive characteristics, as well as her negative ones. Lastly, I think that most of my friends would be interested in reading this novel, since it produces a melancholy mood in the reader and most of them like that. Also, it is a very interesting novel as it shows the reader the life of diverse people. Thus, I think that my friends would appreciate reading this novel.

In conclusion, I would recommend this touching memoir to students, as well as adults, since it has the power to change minds and move hearts. The language in this particular novel is lyrical and can be challenging for students who begin English or do not understand higher and sophisticated vocabulary words. However, students and adults who speak English fluently will be able to read this memoir and enjoy it. I would also recommend it to people who like being touched by novels, since this novel can be emotionally moving. On the other hand, I would not recommend this novel to students who like action or futuristic books, such as *The Hunger Games* or *The Maze Runner*, since this memoir contains a different kind of action. Lastly, I would recommend this memoir to everyone, because I appreciated it and thought that readers can learn a lesson from the protagonist's experiences.

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### **Arundhati says**

Thrity Umrigar just weaves magic with her words and has the power to create stories that are poignant and characters who stay with you after you finish the book. This was the second book I'd read of hers and my admiration for her rose to an altogether new level once I started reading this book. It takes tremendous courage to overcome one's own demons to write something so candid and brutally honest. And to make it a book that simply tugs your heart strings, nothing less than magic.

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### **Joan Eisenstodt says**



A friend told me about Thrity Umrigar's books. I don't know that there is any 'order' in which you read. In fact, reading later novels and then reading "First Darling of the Morning" made more sense for me - I had a better idea of her writing style and now, knowing her story (tho' I'd like more of it .. the 'after coming to America' part and how she went from where she was when she left her family and got on the plane with .. not much .. to come to the US to amazing teaching positions and writing and an entirely new life) now informs more of what I have and will read.

What this showed me is how universal a childhood can be - the angst, the relationship with a parent or a special family member; the hopes and dreams informed by other cultures seen only in books or movies or hear in music. And the courage (with which I identified tho' my journey at 31 was shorter than hers at 21)) of leaving the only place you've ever lived to a whole new life it takes to do so.

Thrity Umrigar really writes of the human experience in voices informed by so many experiences as a person born in India; as a journalist who delved into so much of others' lives unlike her own; of observations.

I see a new book on the horizon for later this year ('18) and will not wait for paperback.. I only read in print so the hardcover it will be. (Oh dear Thrity, please do not do electronic only ever .. it will not allow those of us who love holding books to do so.)

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## **Rama Ramaswamy says**

This is the first book by this author that I have read and it happened to be a memoir, rather than a novel. I found the writing really good and I will surely look for other books by her, especially after I saw glowing praise for her other works on Goodreads and Amazon.

The book, at the very beginning, resonates within you because of just one reason - BOMBAY! Everything is familiar, the language, the people, the sights, the places, the books and music, the parents and neighbours - everything! It is a very easy read owing to this reason and not bad at all. Thrity talks about a semi-abusive mum and a contrasting patient, loving and emotional dad and living with an extended family with uncles, aunts and cousins in a middle-class neighbourhood in Bombay. She is spoiled crazy by everyone and speaks about all the people who have impacted her life in some way or the other. The most beautiful chapter is the one where she writes about coping with the death of her uncle, Babu when she was 15 years old. It is a marvellous piece of writing. And the last chapters where she speaks about the thrill of going to America and at the same time the guilt and agony of leaving everyone she loves back home is also described beautifully and written in such a lucid, heart warming tone as if it happened yesterday.

The book made me think acutely about the fact that kids remember so much from their childhood! There are vivid memories, etched into a corner of your heart that you can pull out at will and refer to the feelings, the lessons that were learnt so long ago. It feels so fragile, the whole framework of parenting and bringing up children.. what is it that we are doing as parents so that they remember the lessons just the way we would like for them to learn? Because, obviously, they are learning more about life by just watching us, and not by listening intently to our sermons or rants.

This book is a beautiful reminder of the unconditional love that only parents are capable of offering. Thrity Umrigar has paid a humble but fitting tribute to her family who stood through her when she was fighting to find herself and hold her own, and believed in and supported her with a come-what-may attitude when she decided that going to America is the only way that she could do that. Indeed, blessed are those who have a

loving family that is there for them through thick and thin.

It is a likeable book, not too much to be expected from it.

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### **Em\*bedded-in-books\* says**

This autobiography by Thrity Umrigar dealt with her childhood years spent in Bombay, India. It shows us glimpses from the first 2 decades of her life, upto the day she left for USA as a journalism student. This was a very intense and involving book. I was sympathetic to the various family trials faced by her in her tender years. I got a glimpse of how it is to grow up in the 60's and 70's - how your ideals are shaped, and what are your influences (personal as well as political). The characters I liked most were her father, Babu, her uncle and her loyal unmarried aunt Mehroo. I loved the first part more than the second, which was grimmer and slightly depressing.

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