



The Sweet By and By

Todd Johnson

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“Gentle, sensitive...sometimes funny, occasionally sad, and ultimately life-affirming.”

—*Winston-Salem Journal*

The Sweet By and By is the story of five southern women of different ages and from very different backgrounds whose lives come together in a journey of courage, hope, and humor. First-time author Todd Johnson—who was a co-producer with Oprah Winfrey of Broadway’s *The Color Purple*—makes an indelible literary mark with a debut novel that bestselling author Adriana Trigiani (*Very Valentine*) calls, “heartfelt and stunning.” *People* magazine chose *The Sweet By and By* as one of its “Great Reads for Your Book Club,” saying, “*Steel Magnolias* fans will love this one.”

The Sweet By and By Details

Date : Published February 17th 2009 by HarperCollins e-books (first published February 6th 2009)

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Author : Todd Johnson

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From Reader Review The Sweet By and By for online ebook

Gina says

Four and a half stars- great story. I enjoyed the characters and the sweet story line.

Linda Day says

Oh, how I loved this book ! I know it is not meant for everyone, but if you have a fondness for the elderly, especially for Nursing Home elderly, you are gonna love it, too !

I laughed until the tears rolled down my cheeks; I cried until I couldn't see the page; I fell in love with the five main characters who tell their stories until they were so real I wondered what they are doing now.

I applaud you, Todd Johnson, for venturing into such a place as a Nursing Home where Margaret and Bernice live, and Lorraine and Rhonda work, and where April receives her second-hand blessings and making us forget the smell and the unpleasantness, and take in the understanding that if there is one thing that is certain, it is that we all are gonna get old.

How I loved this book !

Rachel says

I found this gem of a book at the Good Will store the other night and while I barely glanced at the blurb, I just thought I'd heard about it somewhere and picked it up.

I read it in one and half days. It's that delicious. It's exactly the kind of read I need right now while my Dad is in the nursing home. It really is a gem.

You would think the premise of the book would be depressing because no one likes to talk about growing old and becoming dependent on others and no one wants to admit that either. Death should not be a messy business. It should be quiet and peaceful and definitely to happen in the twilight years.

This book is about Lorraine, a LPN who takes care of the people in the nursing home. Then there's Margaret, a resident who lives there and her friend Bernice, who seems to be crazy. Then there's Rhonda, the local beautician who comes in once a week to do their hair. There's April, Lorraine's daughter who tells her side of the story as well. Their lives all intertwined through the days and while it is a bittersweet story, it really is about life affirming life and yes, death is part of the days, but the author presented it in a graceful way. It happens. It is going to happen and this story is just delightful.

Kasia says

This book was such a pleasant surprise, I had no idea the story takes place in a retirement home, not that it diminishes the enjoyment, I simply haven't read books with that background before even though I'm well familiar with such a place. My favorite character, really witty and hilarious Margaret made this book a real pleasure to read, I simply couldn't wait to get back into it, to see what she would reveal to me as her days pass by. Living in a place where holidays are depressing she befriends Bernice and watches over her friend while trying to deal with her own aging body and mind. The ladies get into all sorts of innocent trouble but all under a watchful eye of a nurse who has a heart of gold. When a hair dresser gets hired to help out with the overall feeling of happiness in the place, unusual bonds and friendships start up with people she thought she had very little in common with.

Bernice and Margaret's youth is revisited in stories and they realize that their future is shaped by their past. People whose parents are in the home remember meeting them when they were just kids and suddenly remember the old days gone by, sweet and little sorrowful the novel is heartwarming and actually really funny in parts, that just proves that good humor and wonderful story telling doesn't stop with books about your people, everyone has a story to tell and time only adds more flavor.

Carol says

What a journey!!! Todd Johnson draws you into Margret's life inside a retirement/nursing home. You are filled with laughter, sadness, and respect for each character. This is an insightful, easy paced book. I enjoyed it!!!

Sharon says

This is such a profound book on so many levels that everyone should read it. One astonishing fact is that the author is a male, writing about females with exquisite sensitivity and insight, and not just any females -- elderly females and a couple younger ones.

The book is written from the viewpoints of the 5 main characters: two aging women in a nursing home, their main caregiver, a hairdresser who works part time at the nursing home, and the daughter of the caregiver. No, this may not sound like exquisite reading but it is. Todd Johnson is a master of words. This story may change how you think about old age and other ages as well. It may change how you treat people and what you decide to do sometimes. The story is charming, funny, sad, upbeat, revealing, and profound. And it's oh so real.

I hope this author writes many more books.

Louise says

Wow, what a fantastic story of 5 women of different ages and from very different backgrounds whose lives come together in a journey of courage, hope, and humour.

You'll fall in love with the characters. Lorraine, a church-going, God-questioning nurse, befriends Margaret and Bernice in the old age home she works at. April, Lorraine's daughter struggles her way through medical

school. Rhonda, the beer drinking hairdresser comes in and does the ladies hair on her days off and has a sassy way of talking. And Bernice, who drags around her doll 'Mr. Benny' ends up with heartbreak when she loses him in a drastic fire in a bbq!!! LOL

If this was ever a "permanent collection" novel to be kept to be read and read again, then for me anyway, this is it!!! I haven't enjoyed a novel as much as this one in a loooong time!!!!

Sandy says

How can a male author create such authentic female characters? Of the five female voices that tell this story, four of them specifically stole my heart right from the beginning. Bernice and Margaret have the most heartwarming relationship in a North Carolina nursing home where Lorraine works as a nurse's aide. Rhonda, reluctantly at first, spends one day a week with the residents as their hairdresser, and comes to lose her heart to Bernice and Margaret. I laughed out loud at the antics of the country-music loving Bernice who seems to not be quite with the real world and the proper Southern lady Margaret. But know that there will be tears before you finish this wonderfully engaging novel. I unfalteringly love southern novels, but I think this one deserves my love.

Jen Donnelly says

I loved this book! It's so beautifully written...from the perspective of several different characters. Characters I completely fell in love with! I think it might have had special meaning to me because it's based around a North Carolina nursing home...one that sounded so much like where my Nanny & Poppy spent their last years. I highly recommend you read this very sweet story!

Carole says

4.5 stars This is a first time author, a man who knows how to write women's characters. I loved the 5 women of this story, especially Lorraine, the care giver at a nursing home. I enjoyed her spunk, admired her faith, and the closeness she had both to God, & the dear ladies she deeply cared for. This a fun novel, but also touches on the aging process, and it taught me more about compassion. I would recommend this if you like women's fiction, and have a Grandma you miss.

Marlo says

Slow-moving, some language, and not a worldview I subscribe to, but there are some gems in here about growing older and the benefits of intergenerational relationships. My favorite thought, "Watching them, I could believe in life, and God, seeing in them that age could be fashioned into a gold crown in the hands of love. And I could be assured that my mother's wonder had rooted itself in me, so deeply that I would feel her presence always, in the dignity she bestowed as carelessly as rainwater or falling stars."

The characters are likeable and their stories believable. My biggest complaint is the often abrupt changes in time that were difficult to follow, and the story sometimes was a bit sluggish, but when examining relationships and thoughts, that is often the case.

Charlotte Guzman says

I was in tears towards the end of this book. So many memories of my grandmother and mother towards the end of their lives.

A story that says all lives are important and to be cherished.

I loved all these women in the story and admire their courage and steadfastness.

Oh, and that a man would write this with such emotion.

Highly recommended!

John Zenoni says

I absolutely loved this book! You can tell that the author loved the developing of the characters and their stories and lives. This book has got some of the best oneliners I have read in a long time and I will soon not forget. I cannot tell you the last time I have laughed out loud at a book like this one. The timing of my reading this book is also significant based on personal things going on in my life. This book is a true keeper and one that is highly recommended. Thank you to the author for a wonderful book and to my book club friend for selecting it.

Nikki says

If I could give 3.5 stars, I would. I can't, so I'm defaulting to 3. I will say that the writing in this book was exquisite. There were some incredibly poignant lines of prose in this book, and Todd Johnson is undoubtedly to be commended for that. Beautiful!

That being said, I just didn't come away from this book feeling as connected to these women as I had thought. The book initially drew me in (another kudos to the amazing prose), but it never brought me further. There was suggestion of strong and meaningful relationships between these women, but it was mostly a suggestion. The story jumped forward in time so rapidly for me that I never felt the connection build.

I'll use Rhonda as an example. She talks about the amazing love and friendship that she has built with Margaret and Bernice and how it allows her to open herself to excepting love, but you never really "see" it, or I didn't. I saw a couple of scenes of her doing their hair, then BAM she's married. I expected a bigger building of the relationships, her slowly unfolding in the light of their interest in her (as a foil to her own grandmother's lack of love and interest), and a progression of her relationship with Mike as she begins to open her heart up. Instead, all of this was very rapidly implied.

This tended to be the way most of the storyline worked. Instead of drawing the story out, it was implied in favor of character vignettes. With the exception of Lorraine and Margaret's relationship, I felt like I was just being asked to assume the women had grown close.

Based on the stellar ratings that everyone else gives this book, I'm probably very alone out there, but I just felt like this was a little disjointed for me. Beautiful writing though...beautiful.

Nancy Carty Lepri says

This is a "must read" book. Debut novel by Todd Johnson is not to be missed. It tells the tale of five southern women and how their separate lives mesh together. Characters include: Margaret Clayton, feisty, sharp-as-a-tack, ninety-year-old woman in a nursing home; Bernice Stokes, short on memory due to grief and old age and befriended by Margaret; LPN African American Lorraine who cares for the residents of the nursing home and has suffered a hard life but is a God-fearing woman who believes anyone at any age and stage of illness deserves respect; April, Lorraine's highly intelligent daughter, who is working hard at becoming a physician; and finally, Rhonda, the hair dresser who comes to the nursing home once a week and who has never had love or acceptance in her life. These five women share an unlikely bond that will have you laughing, crying and shaking your head. Though old age and death are main topics, Mr. Johnson has handled them with aplomb and dignity. The characters are vividly depicted, NC vernacular right on the mark and topic wonderfully addressed. This story will stay with you long after you have turned the last page. I definitely keep it!
