

When Sugar Tastes Like Salt

By

Jacquelyne Snowden Harvey

Synopsis

Born in 1951, JACQUELINE “RHETT” SNOWDEN was born the fourth child of seven in a predominantly Black community in West Monroe, Louisiana where civil rights are NOT the issue of the day. As a child, Rhett is driven by an innate belief that she’d be “the first” to do something great in her segregated town. Rhett is also a gifted child who asks too many questions and lacks patience, making her early education years difficult and sometimes traumatic.

But being “the first” would take fifteen long years, as Rhett is at the mercy of her over-protective, disciplinarian mother, MA DEAR, who spares no rod. Rhett learns that she and Ma Dear are as different night and day and Ma Dear has no room for Rhett’s precociousness. Rhett finds some relief in being a daddy’s girl with her father, JOE SNOWDEN, who instills in her that “...*the only good white people are dead white people.*”

Growing up in a segregated community filled with everything from board certified schizophrenics to geniuses, Rhett finds comfort in the home of the woman across the street; AUNT BELL. It’s through Aunt Bell that Rhett can discuss Civil Rights, and why the town of West Monroe is “separate but unequal. This gives Rhett more faith in her belief that she’ll indeed be, “the first” to challenge this law.

During Freedom Summer, 1964, Rhett gets her chance when she forges her parents’ names on a Freedom of Choice form sent to their home. When Ma Dear finds out, she is devastated and blames Joe for putting such notions in the mind of their daughter. They argue and ultimately, Ma Dear takes a vow of silence and distances herself emotionally from her daughter.

Rhett enters West Monroe High during her sophomore year of school and is met daily with aggression, taunts, and physical harm. She is the only Black female at her school in 1966 – “the first” black Rebel

During her senior year in 1968, Rhett experience the deaths of three key people: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ma Dear, and Aunt Bell. Adding insult to injury, Joe Snowden begins seeing another woman weeks from Ma Dear’s death. This leaves Rhett guilt-ridden, hopeless, faithless, and puts her on a path of club-hopping and not attending school.

However, with prayer and support from the community, Rhett does graduate in 1969 and moves forward to higher education at Bishop College, an HBCU in Dallas, Texas. Out of shame, she keeps this story hidden until 2018.

When Sugar Tastes Like Salt is a moving tale of audacity against all odds and a testament to one child’s determination to make a difference, but paying the ultimate cost in the end.

www.jonesharvey.com