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The true story of a young man whose life and family were torn apart by a decision no mother should have to make.

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From Reader Review The Color of Love: A Mother's Choice in the Jim Crow South for online ebook

Jan says

Listening via audiobook. I heard Gene Cheek's story on This American Life quite some time ago, so I was glad to see it fleshed out into a book. I seem to be on a summer theme of racial prejudice and inequality having just finished "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" (from Kate) and now reading "The Warmth of Other Suns" (from Daisy) and listening to Gene's story. Damn, I hate haters.

All that said, listening to the conversations Gene recalls, he may be attributing to himself a bit too much maturity for a kid that age. Sounds too glib.

Honoré says

I just finished reading "The Color of Love" by Gene Cheek. It was very well written and was a very powerful book. "The Color of Love" is the story of Gene Cheek. It takes place in the early 1960's in Winston-Salem. Gene was raised mostly by his loving mother. His father struggled with his alcohol addiction. Eventually Gene's mom kicks Gene's father out of the house because she feels that his alcohol addiction is hurting the family.

One night Gene's mom tells Gene that she has been having an affair with an African American man, his name is Cornelius Tucker. She tells Gene that "He thinks we should stop seeing each other. He's worried that you won't approve, and he doesn't want to hurt you." Gene tells his mom, "If you love this man and he loves you, then the color of his skin doesn't matter."

Gene and his mom begin to visit Mr. Tucker. Eventually Gene's mom becomes pregnant with Mr. Tucker's son. When Gene's mom gives birth to a half African American baby, everyone in the Cheek family finds out. The Cheek family turns against Gene and his mom. They go to court testifying that Sally (Gene's mom) "is an unfit mother." The Judge asks Sally to choose between her children. Gene volunteers to be separated from his mother to save his mother from having to make that decision.

Gene began living in a foster home and eventually moved to a boys' home. He was still able to visit his mom on special occasions, but their relationship was not the same...how could it be?

By reading this book I realized how racist and cruel some societies were. It was really astonishing to me that a society would tear a son from his mother because his mom loved an African American man.

This is a truly wonderful book. I really enjoyed reading it. I would recommend it to people of all ages.

Sara Phelps says

Mediocre writing, but a powerful story.

Nandi Crawford says

I was sort of drawn to this book by some folks giving it the thumbs up on Shelfari, and imagine my surprise today at the library that I come to find the very book that I didn't think I would find it at our library. But I took that book home and couldn't stop reading it until last night. I feel the author in his own way wanted to put his unique story to paper after dealing with his past, he tries to make peace with it by writing about it. I was already feeling a bit raw behind Tears of the Desert, then to turn around and read this book just made me want to go somewhere and bawl. I almost did and believe me when I tell you, I don't do that. To recap the book, Gene Cheek was the son of an alcoholic father and loving mother. When the mother took as much as she could take from the father, she left him. She moved in with her mother and brother, but when her mother passed, she moved out. Quietly, she began to have a relationship with a African American man, Cornelius Tucker, who was everything her first husband wasn't. She got pregnant and had another son, Randy. Here is when the trouble start. The first husband got mad, and started making trouble for the mother and had a hearing to get his son away from the mother. Although the author said he loved his mother, preferred to be with his mother, and they wanted her to get rid of the baby she just had, The author sacrificed himself instead. he was taken away by the courts into foster care. Despite of the difficulties, he had no ill will against his mother or Tuck, though he had some against his father, fraternal grandmother, who claims she couldn't take him in, aunt, uncle(both of whom later asked for forgiveness), he did grow up well, went into the Navy, married, had children, worked, and later divorced. He never forgot his mother, he forgave his father(who wouldn't acknowledge or even speak on what he did at the end of his own life)and he spoke very well of his siblings. Matter of fact, Tuck to me, was a better father figure for him, and he spoke glowingly of him. If you want to read about a young man's choice to love, keep some kleenex handy.

AnnaClaire says

This book is about how the Jim Crow laws affected a white boy in the 1950s. When his mother had fallen in love with a black man and had a mixed-race baby, the world as he knew came to an end. Because of this new baby, his mother was deemed an unfit parent and the author was put into a foster home and eventually a Boys Home.

All of this was very interesting to me; why the two stars though? The story really didnt until close to 2/3 to the end of the book. The long set up was about his earlier childhood of living with an alcoholic father, and frankly, that story has been done so many times before by much better authors. There was nothing original or shocking about it, and it dragged on.

Denise says

Loved this book! It is autobiographical, but reads like a novel. A real page turner. Actually a memoir of a young white boy in rural NC, who is wrenched from his loving mother by the courts because she loved a black man. Wish the story wasn't true, but it is. We have a lot to learn from people like Gene Cheek. Thank goodness he has the courage to write about his experience.

amanda says

this memoir has a touching and raw quality. While Gene Cheek is certainly no Shakespeare, his writing is so honest and genuine. His story is astonishingly upsetting, yet like the photo on the cover, his version is tender and beautiful.

Kimberlie says

Gene Cheek's devastating memoir of loss growing up in a poor family that suffered under untreated alcoholism and institutionalized racism and his lifelong pursuit of healing and forgiveness.

Gene's first loss is the emotional loss of his father, Jesse, to alcoholism. Jesse starts drinking soon after Gene is born and except for brief periods of sobriety (up to three months) and periodic attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, Jesse drinks himself to an early death at age 60, but not before he inflicts horrible physical and emotional violence and revenge against Gene and Gene's mother, Sallie (Jesse's wife of 11 years).

Gene's second loss is the loss of his mother to institutionalized racism and the anti-miscegenation laws of 1960s North Carolina.

When Sallie falls in love with a black man and has a child by him, Gene is thrilled to have a baby brother. Jesse, on the other hand, enacts revenge against his son and former wife by claiming her love for a black man makes her an unfit mother for Gene. Jesse doesn't want to raise Gene himself but initiates a custody battle as his defense against paying child support and the battle lands Gene in a foster home and then a school for boys where he learns to hide his vulnerability and express his fears through violence.

I burst into tears three times during the book from the pain and injustice that racism, personal prejudice and untreated alcoholism caused Gene, his mother and Tucker, the gentle man she fell in love with and married and lived with until his death. Tucker was a loving stepfather to Gene and Gene is close to his two half-brothers and their families.

Gene's relationship with his mother remained close throughout his life but it was forever altered that day in the courtroom and the guilt and shame Gene and his mother each had to deal with from that day forward is a heart-wrenching story.

I wish the young Gene and his mother had found Al-Anon for the alcoholism in their family. As for the institutionalized racism of the day, Gene, Sallie and Tucker had to live through it one painful day at a time and were uplifted by Rev. Martin Luther King's leadership and the Civil Rights Movement and were uplifted by President John F. Kennedy.

In the epilogue, Gene writes, "This book started as an act of vengeance. I wanted revenge on those -- long since gone -- who brought pain to my family and me. It changed from revenge to understanding and then finally to forgiveness. I can't pinpoint the exact time because it moved over me like the changing of a season, slow and deliberate. It wasn't until this process was near the end that I even noticed it, but I am grateful for it.

"I am often asked by those who know me if I can lay this down and move on with my life. It would be nice if I could answer yes, but once again that would be a lie. The truth lies somewhere else. While writing this book, I did gain understanding, and with it came forgiveness, but I have not forgotten. The facts are this will remain a part of my life, as long as there is life. I'm not sure if complete healing is attainable. I don't think that I will ever forget, and I'm not sure that I should."

Julie says

It's been a few years since I read this book, but the current interest in the movie about Mildred and Richard Loving's historic interracial love bring this book to mind. (The Lovings successfully sued the state of Virginia, and their interracial marriage was finally recognized.)

This book is told by son of a white woman who loved a black man in Winston Salem, NC. The prose is unsophisticated, which adds to the authenticity for me. Gene Cheek's life was hard from the start, his alcoholic father intimidated the family in his early years. Then Gene's mom found love with a gentle black man named Tuck. The birth of their mixed race child caused an uproar that culminated in Gene's placement in foster care due to his mother being "unfit". It is a testament to Gene Cheek that he did not drown in the bitterness of his past, and that he grew to respect the love between his mother and Tuck, which lasted until they died. I think the author is successful in describing a place and time from the past, with a context for institutional racism that is, sadly, still with us today.

Holly says

i don't even know where to start about this book. we all know that things were different racially way back when. but i didn't realize that a white woman having a child with a black man was something that both could be jailed for; a felony. the things that gene and his mother went through were sad and wrong in so many ways. it was a really touching story and i really enjoyed reading it. i'm really glad that things have changed from the way they used to be. however, i still think we have a long way to go.

John Henry says

I liked this book a lot until the last, oh, ten or fifteen percent, say. Now I'm not sure about the work as a whole. It's well written. No question. But it is beginning heavy, spending too much time on too many details of his youth. It makes me feel the beginning tries to build too much evidence for a case I don't quite get. Then later, when he is grown and the REALLY important things begin to happen, we start rock skipping across time. Make no mistake. This is a story of a White man, a White boy, in the Jim Crow south, writing about his difficult life and how he dealt with (or, really, and rather obviously, did not deal with) his mother's choice to marry a Black man. This book is not about his mother, except indirectly.

I don't have a precise, objective case to make against Gene Cheek. Subjectively, I feel he missed the marrow of a greater, deeper story. My personal take is: what was it like to be left behind both by his mother and the KKK Jim Crow south? His father and Jim Crow south went one way, his mother and her new life and family went another, into the segregated Black community. Cheek didn't go either way, in his book, although he gives expositional support to his mother and to the closeness he has to his half brothers. But that's not the story. The book seems more a justification of why his mother loved a Black man and why Cheek doesn't deal with the deeper issues of Race and facing the truth of his feelings. He still contains, and will not face, residual racist attitudes, while accepting entirely his new siblings. It's his mother and his step-father and their children he accepts and embraces, not the revelation of how love transcends not only race, but every conceivable hindrance.

In the end, I felt cheated and betrayed by Cheek, and disappointed by his by what I see as cowardice.

San Frazier says

I am so happy that I stumbled across this book it was fantastic. It showed how during that time how so much hate can be spewed and how that hate can harm us all it was not just about the relationship between a white woman and a black man. It told the story of a woman who was just trying her best to keep her family together but at the price of herself worth and the worth of her son due to his very abusive father. The very forbidden relationship that came about with tuck (he was black) allowed to experience what it is like to have someone who loves you and your kids and treats you both with respect and kindness. It was wonderful> what are you waiting for go read it.

Rachel Wagner says

Even though the beginning of this book drags, the last third is so profound it makes it a 5 star. It is hard to believe that a little boy would have the courage to ask the judge to take him away from his mother. The fact that any mother would be given such a choice is horrific. I love when Gene talks about the difference between himself and the other delinquent boys- he had been loved by a family. That made all the difference. If you don't want to read the entire book download a This American Life episode called Parental Guidance Suggested. There you can hear Gene Cheek tell his amazing story.

Marie says

Not sure what I expected when I checked this out but I'm glad I read it. Some of the remembered conversations of a 9 year old boy were aged by wisdom and clarity, but it was only a little distracting. The story itself was touching and heartbreaking both for the boy and the man.

Robbin Melton says

Wow. This is the most powerful book I've read in a long time. This autobiography tells the story of a young white boy, Gene, in 1950s Winston-Salem whose mother, Sallie, falls in love with a black man, Tuck. Forced to choose between keeping her son or the infant son she has with Tuck, Gene, then-12, decides for her and is resigned to live 5 years in foster care until he reaches 18. Astoundingly, Sallie and Tuck stay together in the same town until Tuck's death, roughly 35 years later.

This painful story reveals how poorly Gene and Sallie were treated by whites, including their own family which turned their backs on them in a court of law. Ironically, it is the black community which embraced this "odd" family and took them in as their own.

As I also am in a multiracial family, I take this book to heart. My only wish is that it were longer. Almost half the book was spent on the author's childhood vs. what his mother/stepfather went through. Very little of the book actually touched on that, but perhaps it couldn't because the author didn't live at home for five years while life carried on back home.

But, it did reveal that while Gene still loved his mother, a permanent rift was forged between them when he was forced to live away from home. What I fail to understand is why didn't Tuck just grab Sallie and Gene and move up north? Why stay in the same town where the KKK and the police were indistinguishable? Why

would Sallie allow her 12-year-old son Gene to make such a huge decision when it was not his to make? Overall, Sallie could've and should've been a better parent, beginning with the first signs of abuse at the hands of Gene's father. Late in life, Sallie became something of an LPN, but why didn't she try to better herself while trying to raise Gene?

While I have many more questions, I still believe in the gist of this story written simply in one man's words. Every citizen of the world should read this.
