

9439 Brett Lane
Columbia, MD 21045
July 18, 1980

Grace Halsell
2401 Calvert N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Miss Halsell,

Yes, this is a fan letter, I admit. I hope you do not mind.

I have been reading Bessie Yellowhair, and the more I read of it, the more I wanted to talk to you. One of your entries was datelined Washington, D.C., so with a little luck and a telephone directory, I found your address.

I was surprised to find you so nearby, since you have lived and traveled around the world.

I also have read Soul Sister. Both books impressed me with your writing, your subject matter, and your message.

I am a junior in journalism at the University of Maryland, and periodically I question my choice of major. It's exciting, but is it useful? Important? Productive?

Yes, it can be. Yours is an excellent example. In order to accept Bessie Yellowhair and her world, you try to understand it. To understand it you must submerge yourself in it. Journalists are sometimes accused of being shallow-minded, ignorant of their subjects. No one could accuse you of this.

Beside my interest in writing, I have been interested in racism, sexism, etc. The culture which nurtured me as a white girl would have tried to denature and disinfect me if I were black or Indian.

I felt a vague sense of guilt or debt for chancing to be white. I was fascinated to learn that you are the daughter of an "Indian fighter." Do you think yours and your brother's concern for Indians was influenced by your upbringing?

Sincerely,
Dora J. Schuman

I used to daydream about being a Native American; it was my favorite subject for a Halloween costume. You not only imagined it, you did it.

Your book seems to me a strong defense for the "primitive" and "uncivilized"^{people} that lived on this continent for centuries without destroying it.

Regarding Soul Sister, the only other book of yours which I have read thus far:

Last summer, while working at a sort of summer school for Maryland's "intellectually gifted and talented high school students," I read the book on the recommendation of one of the students. She was very impressed by it.

Apparently, Susan (for that was her name) had a black boyfriend whom her well-to-do white family disliked for his blackness. Your book reassured her in her convictions that color is only color.

One day, Sue took me to downtown Frederick^{Maryland} and introduced me to an interracial couple and their children. The preceding summer Sue had done a brief study of interracial marriages and had interviewed some people. She proudly introduced me to one of the sons--she had adopted him, she said.

Her interest, like yours, was genuine and not at all condescending.

I wonder whether you might have any advice for an aspiring writer? How and what should one write? Is financial independence requisite to unbiased writing? (I am thinking of Virginia Woolf's essay, "A Room of One's Own," in which she asserts that money is essential.) Are there any special obstacles to a female writer? If so, how does one overcome them?

Finally, I wonder--and here I may reveal my ignorance--do you write for a particular newspaper or magazine? I would like to watch for your articles.

Thank you for your time. I have enjoyed your books and look forward to reading more of them.

Sincerely,

Clara J. Schwan