



Peachtree Road

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Tenth anniversary edition! Set amidst the grandeur of Old Southern aristocracy, here is a novel that chronicles the turbulent changes of a great city--Atlanta--and tells the story of love and hate between a man and a woman. When Lucy comes to live with her cousin, Sheppard, and his family in the great house on Peachtree Road, she is an only child, never expecting that her reclusive young cousin will become her lifelong confidant and the source of her greatest passion and most terrible need.

Peachtree Road Details

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Author : Anne Rivers Siddons

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From Reader Review Peachtree Road for online ebook

deLille says

For anyone who lives or has ever lived in Atlanta, this book is fascinating for its historical references alone. It describes what people tend to refer to as the "old money" in Atlanta, although Shep, the main character, is quick to note that no money in Atlanta is truly "old".

When evaluating a book I like to think about what my biggest take away is... what did I learn? This book made me, a fiscal conservative and lifelong Republican, realize that estate taxes are absolutely necessary to ensure the long-term stability of society. I kept thinking to myself that Shep would have taken a different turn in life, pulled himself out of his decades-long funk, if only he had needed to get a job! To be awash in trust-fund money allowed him to live in an other-worldly state, ensconced in his summerhouse, never doing much of anything except making coffee and writing another family's history.

That being said, Siddons is masterful at creating characters that are truly differentiated and not one-dimensional. The only character I did find to be bit flat and hard to believe was Sarah, but even the character Lucy commented on that aspect of Sarah's "facade". Siddons also makes the generation of my parents come alive -- she has way of making you feel like you are right there. (Suddenly, things my mother has told me about growing up in Charleston, SC in the 1950s feel more relevant when I find myself transported to that time and place.) She also does a great job at showing how Buckhead was transformed from a bucolic paradise to a hustling skyscraper city over the last 50 years.

Admittedly, the first 75 pages of this book sound a bit like listening to an old lady prattle on about the times back in her day... I was bored. But then the book started to pick up speed and the pace during the second half got faster and faster with more and more OMG moments until I began to think "What more calamities can one woman pack in one book?" And then she did it.

Wow. Read the book. You'll see. This is a great summer read.

Dorothy says

Yes, I have to agree with The Baltimore Sun's report that Peachtree Road was a love story, a historical novel, a mystery, and a tragedy all wrapped into one. The love/hate relationship which existed between the two main characters, Shep and Lucy, can be compared to a plot found in a Shakespearean tragedy, because in the end they not only destroy themselves but almost everyone else who knew them. However, I do not agree that the book could be seen as another Gone With the Wind!

The love/hate relationship between these main characters begins when the book opens as spunky, little Lucy makes her grand entrance into the Bondurant household. "Something stinks, she says." These two little words turn seven year old Shep's innocent, pampered world upside down. Within seconds after that five year old Lucy reveals to him that his family is rich, where babies come from, and that he is too old not to have a room of his own!

He had never experienced such God awful honesty in his life before. This cousin of his was fearless, bright, independent, and willful. She was everything that he was not! It's no wonder that he was instantaneously caught under her spell. Yes, Shep was caught under that old Black Magic called, Love. Hearing her say words like Titty, Shitty, and the F--- word were second nature to her. This is how she enticed, denigrated,

and controlled not only her audience, but him.

Shep said that Lucy had a dark side. He knew it, and yet he could not, for the most part, keep from being drawn into her danger zone.

Throughout the book, she takes him and others on a series of dangerous escapades that ultimately made me hate her. "What?" I asked myself would I have done if I had a child like her?" Shoot myself? Tear my hair out? Tear her hair out? Send her off to a nunnery? You, the reader, can try to solve the problem of this kid gone wrong in your own way!

When all is said and done, Ms. Siddons waits until the very end of the book to reveal the underlying cause of Lucy's outrageous behavior.

Ah! And therein lies the mystery. A mystery that can only be solved by reading this 816 page book.

This book afforded me insight into the tenor of the times, the lifestyle of the rich of Atlanta, a better understanding of what kids do and think as they try to figure out their own lives, and the lives of their friends, acquaintances, and parents. Looking back on it all, it's a wonder that any of us survive. As a matter of fact, some of us don't!

Dick Edwards says

This book is largely set in Buckhead, where I used to live (1948-1956) and went to school (North Fulton HS 1948-1950). She defines (p.23) Buckhead as stretching from Peachtree Creek on the south to West Paces Ferry Road on the north, from Northside Drive on the west to Peachtree Road on the east. My sense was that it went further east than just Peachtree Road. She gives it an area of some 4 square miles. She mentions Crawford-Long Hospital, where my first child was born. In 1907 the first trolley line was laid down from downtown Atlanta to Buckhead. Jim Dickey wrote a poem about "The Buckhead Boys." (p.32), and was supposedly one himself. Buckhead is called Buckhead because in 1838 a man named Hardy Ivy mounted the head of a buck on a tree over his tavern and crossroads store (p.34). E. Rivers School is first mentioned on page 57. Another link to my own childhood is the presence of polio, which kills Lucy's little baby brother. The author says (p. 120) that in any family group there is a natural scapegoat. The narrator goes to NFHS (p. 142). The terms Pinks and Jells is discussed on p. 147, and the term Cocksman is used on p. 148. The author uses the term, Great American Nooky Quest, at the bottom of p. 157. The Varsity's Flossie May is mentioned on p. 183 (I have heard him chant/sing the Varsity menu many times). The narrator graduated from Princeton in 1958 (p. 250). On p. 254 is the emotional high point (so far) of the book: Sarah says to Shep as she is boarding the plane from NY (where she had been visiting him) to Atlanta: Don't come home. If you come home, it will be to her (meaning Lucy). The author misjudges Kennedy vs. Nixon debate on p. 274. At the top of p. 278, she refers to Army Rangers as "murderous peers." The narrator's mother is killed on a plane crash with a group of members of the Atlanta Art Association (p.397), who were touring the art galleries and museums of Europe. The plane crashed while taking off from Orly. This is the crash that killed the mother of my HS friend Ralph Barry (who's picture is on p. G-37 of my book). Tragedies, misfortune, and early deaths strike the friends and relatives of the narrator (Shep Bondurant), seemingly far more than the average person. He tells his best friend and 1st cousin Lucy Bondurant to take the gun she is holding (and with which she shot her husband) and shoot herself – and she does. The ending of the book is written in such an obtuse (to me) manner, that I had trouble interpreting what it meant. Was he committing suicide, merely jumping into the Chattahoochee, or just having a dream or vision? Pat Stacy thinks he was definitely killing himself. I suspect that she is correct, especially considering the negativity and pessimism inherent in the entire book. This is mirrored in Shep's sadness about the transformation of Atlanta from an idyllic, sleepy Southern town into a commercial big city. Ms. Siddons writes beautifully and with fine imagery in describing the personalities and psychologies of her characters. She makes a huge gaff (I didn't write down the page #) in referring to the county as "North Fulton County," unless of course it has been re-districted

since I lived there. In giving this a rating, I have trouble separating out the personal interest I have in the specific locale of the book. Without that, I would probably only give it a 5, given the unremittingly joyless sadness inherent in the work. Since the rating is my own personal rating, I will give it an 8.

Kim says

Writing this long after reading the book. I mainly recall it being too wordy. The plot was interesting, but it was a challenge to get through this book and quite depressing at times.

Natasja Holben Handy says

I reserve 5 stars only for my absolute all-time favorites, so 4 stars is still pretty great. This is nuanced classic southern literature, a la Pat Conroy and it both troubled and captivated me. It felt unusual that Rivers' narrator was male, and perhaps why the book is so compelling. It delves deep into his psyche and pulls things out that are unfamiliar though a females voice and downright unexpected by a man. I really appreciate what this book brought to the table.

Linda says

Told (not entirely successfully) from a male point of view, Sheppard Gibbs Bondurant, aka Gibby, recounts his relationship with his cousin Lucy. Lucy came to live in Atlanta with her mother and baby brother when she was 5 and Gibby was 7; even then Lucy was haunted by nightmares and was a demanding and clinging child. They grew up in Atlanta society through the 50's and 60's Shep graduated from Princeton and got a job in New York City, vowing he would never return to live in Atlanta in spite of his mother's pleading. Circumstances made him change his mind, and he was again involved with Lucy, for the rest of her life. Much psychological material here, with co dependency, enablers, etc. etc. I wanted to shake Shep sometimes for not just saying no to Lucy. All ends happily I think but the ending seemed ambiguous to me. Not one of her better efforts.

Laura says

This book was horribly disappointing, mostly because I thought it was going to be wonderful. I began reading it with the idea that it would be similar to *Gone with the Wind*, and of course, it was not at all. The plot was interesting at times, but the book was just too long, too drawn out; the last 200 hundred pages were not much more than painful. And unfortunately, by the end of the story I found myself hating (and despising in some cases) every single one of the characters. My other major complaint is that the author gives away almost everything that happens in the preface and the first couple of chapters. You end up reading not to see what happens, but how it happens. Overall, though some parts were truly fascinating, I cannot say I reccomend the book.

Tara Hall says

Having come off another Siddons book just previous to this one, I had very high expectations. Peachtree Road satisfied most of them. I loved the main characters of Shep and Lucy from the first, and their glittering world of privilege—Shep's without lifting a finger, and Lucy's only through sheer determination. I loved the main supporting characters of Sarah, Charlie, Ben, Jack, Little Lady and even Jack's forbidding parents and Lucy's social climbing trash mother. There are at least 50 additional supporting characters of various roles besides these, creating a complex, living story of interrelated lives, and cause and effect, sometimes with terrible results. The story was utterly engrossing, the events compelling on their own—and especially alive with the history on the civil rights movement added seamlessly into them. I spent the entire evening reading, because I had to get to the end to see what happened. And for the longest time I can remember, I was glad that the book was near 600 pages, because I wanted it to go on and on to know how all the characters ended up.

My one real problem was the book is not linear. It begins at the funeral of Lucy, and I found most of the prologue incomprehensible, as it mentions characters by the truckload with no background to go with them. Having read the entire book, I was able to go back and make sense of it all to see the heavy foreshadowing present within it, but in retrospect I should have skipped right to chapter one and not tried to make sense of it until later. There is also a deep morose quality to this book, as there is with all tales of a golden era and its eventual end. While I enjoyed this, I will not reread it.

Overall opinion: Not as good as some of the other Siddons books, but definitely worth reading.

Stephanie says

Peachtree Road is a sweeping Southern magnum opus, centering around Old Atlanta and Buckhead. It follows the lives of Lucy and Shep Bondurant, first cousins with an incredibly close bond. The synopsis on the back may lead you to believe that it's about Lucy (even though the narration is done entirely by Shep), but in a sense it is really about neither; it's about a time and place and a generation disintegrated by its own weight and glittering "perfection." Ms. Siddons' prose is rambling and excessive and heady, much like the unconquerable honeysuckle vine whose scent seems to drift directly out of the pages. The ultimate plot may remind you of V.C. Andrew's books, but done with style, grace, and almost a little bit of wry humor. If Peachtree Road is anything, it is extremely well written.

At certain times it's almost too much: too much description, too much tragedy, too many characters and themes, too many pages left towards the inevitable conclusion that you only begin to accept around the same time Shep Bondurant does. It's almost as exhausting just to read as it is for Shep (and others) to be bathed in "Lucy-ness," but in the end I would say it's worth it. The last two paragraphs may leave you scratching your head, but for myself, I've come to the conclusion that only good things followed, even if they weren't talked about (and after 800 pages, I don't think I could have mustered the energy anyway). While it's true that the book could have been honed down and crystallized with some good editing, I would almost say that doing so would have diminished it in some way. That having been said, at least one part could have been cut out cleanly due to the impact it should have had but didn't.

My final verdict is this: I will read this book many times in the coming years, and learn something new from

it each time, until it has been absorbed into my brain in all its Southern glory and tragedy and abundant summer. My review may seem like a complaint, but Peachtree Road is as vivid, alive and deliciously exhausting as Lucy Bondurant herself.

Deb says

Some books are just banquets. This is one of them.

Stacy Genobles says

There's lots to dislike about this book. Main characters Shep (male cousin, narrator) and Lucy (repeatedly stated to be 2 years younger than Shep, moves in with Shep's wealthy family when her shiftless dad runs away) are selfish, incestuous, callous, co-dependent snobs. Lucy in particular is a delinquent.

Because Shep wuvs her so, he repeatedly defends Lucy's decisions. He describes Lucy as NEVER deliberately cruel, on a day when pre-teen Lucy sneers that their friend with a leg brace* (from childhood polio) can't keep up on a bicycle ride. Because she taunts the crippled boy, he and everyone else follow her, determined to prove they are just as capable as Lcy.

What are they capable of? Vandalizing an old mansion that they think is abandoned. They're not actually sure whether the reclusive old widow who left there has left town or not, but they chuck rocks at her house, break into it, and do thousands of dollars worth of property damage some time in the 1940's.

I say "some time" because the author seldom uses actual dates, just says that X character is "___" years old when an event happens. But her math is terrible.

The flashback/memoir starts with Shep remembering how he met Lucy and her younger siblings when they moved into his home at Peachtree Road. **Shep was 7, Lucy was 5.** No year given.

When Lucy has lived with the family for a couple months or about a year, they hear on the radio that the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor. Alrighty then. Author doesn't list the date, but most people either learned in school or via Google that **Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7th, 1941.**

So we can infer that Shep was likely born in 1934, and Lucy was born in 1936. Theoretically Shep could have been born in late December of 33, but the weather is/was mild on his birthday, so I doubt he was a winter baby.

(Not surprisingly, looking up the author's birthdate reveals that Anne Rivers Siddons was born in 1936. Could "Lucy" be a thinly disguised Author Avatar? I hope not cause Lucy is a violent, hateful human being. I'll talk a bit on why Lucy's terrible in the SPOILERS section.)

back to the math fail

Shep receives a car for his 16th birthday. A Plymouth Fury with a red and white two-tone paint job.

The car is too flashy and Shep soon tires of driving it, gets a different vehicle later. Obviously a Stephen King/Christine shout-out. Problem is Furys were only made from 1956-1978. Gran Fury came later but that's

also discontinued now. The Belvedere Fury was only made from 56-58 and you'd have to customize it to get the 'Christine' color scheme. Otherwise that model (2 door, hardtop coupe) would be beige and gold.

To be 16 and get a Plymouth Belvedere Fury, the EARLIEST a person could be born is 1940.

If Shep was born in 40, Lucy would be born in 42, and therefore Lucy could never have heard the original broadcast about Pearl Harbor, the kids wouldn't even meet until some time in 1947, when WWII was already officially over.

My guess is the author just wanted a cool, iconic 50's car for Shep to use in high school, and never bothered to think that the cars available at the start of the decade (Jan, 1950) would not necessarily be the same as those available by the the decade's end (Dec, 1959).

The whole timeline is confusing and full of historical and pop cultural inaccuracies. The boys in Shep's school wear pompadour hairstyles (which was more of a late 50's/early 60's fad) but the male narrator can't remember why his gang was called the Jells. His best guess? The Jells were colorful and vibrant, like jelly beans.

Ffft, no. It was the hair gel stupid, that's why they also called it jelly rolls. I wasn't born until long after the 50's but I've watched Grease and I've read fashion encyclopedias. It ain't that hard to look these details up. Furthermore, Shep recalls seeing Frank Sinatra in Pal Joey during his HS years. That's 1957.

Anyone who was in HS during 57 but ALSO recalls listening to the original Pearl Harbor news broadcast between 7-8 years of age must have failed several grades. 23 Skidoo shout not be your age or your graduation cry.

SPOILERS

As for the main girl/love interest in the book, Lucy is terrifying and dangerously aggro. Srsly, this girl punches her baby brother and kid sister for trying to sit in a shady spot on the lawn, because she'd named the shady patch "Dumboozle Town, Florida" and wanted it to be just for her and Shep alone.

Lucy punches the toddler Jamie, a boy not even 24 months old, and middle sibling Adelaide aka "Little Lady" was between 4-5 years old. Little Lady survives with some cuts and bruises. Jamie hits his head after being pummeled by Lucy's fists, is unable to cry out or speak properly after that, family minus Lucy and Shep takes Jamie to the hospital, he dies.

Shep's Mom aka Lucy's Aunt grounds them but tells the kids not to blame themselves as Jamie died of infantile paralysis/polio although the symptoms described in the book makes it sound more like complications from his head injury was the actual cause of death. Considering the family issues a "quarantine" that is broken less than a week later, polio as COD seems unlikely.

Lucy is able to manipulate Jamie's death to suit her own purposes. She breaks curfew, steals from her Mom's purse ~while the mother that Lucy hates so much was volunteering at a Red Cross canteen, still reeling from the death/burial of Jamie but wanting to do her part for the war effort. Yeah, this is the kind of skewed sympathies book where the honest, hard-working Mom is labeled SO MEAN and the disobedient, petulant daughter is punished for no reason, waaah!~

Lucy then kidnaps Little Lady, shoves her in a too small stroller, calls a taxi, and goes to the Greyhound Station, where she purchases 2 tickets to Louisiana, a state she lived in once.

When the police track her down, Lucy lies that she was only trying to send her sister somewhere safe from polio, didn't mean to be bad, boo-hoo. The Rich Uncle swallows the lie and forgives her, the grounding or "quarantine" ends. Lucy then confesses to Shep that she only wanted to send Adelaide away because she's a dumb crybaby and that if both Jamie and Adelaide were gone her father would come back.

I'd have more sympathy for Lucy's abandonment issues/daddy complex if she wasn't also a lying, manipulative, bossy, brat, who shows zero remorse about punching people and sheds NO tears when her baby sibling died. I ain't even touching the incestuous romance that Shep and Lucy develop. 50 Shades of DO NOT WANT. Go back to Flowers In The Attic, y'all.

dreamer says

Delicious, but disturbing.

I've been sitting here trying to come up with something that would do this novel justice, and honestly, I think that's about right. What else can you say about a book that shocks the hell out of you many times (and not always --or ever-- in a good way) but you devour it?

Claire Fullerton says

There's no other way to say it, "Peachtree Road" is the written word at its finest; 797 pages of evocative, soul-stirring wonder written in a first person voice that laughs in the face of lesser writers adhering to the widely, overemphasized and uninspired writing rule of "show, don't tell." This book tells, and it does so fearlessly in a voice that could only come from a blue-blooded insider coming of age in 1960's Atlanta. Without judgment or condescension, and more in the vein of an objective matter of course, the reader is gifted with the voice of Shep Bondurant as he lays the backdrop of his riveting life shaping story, a story so scathingly unusual as to psychologically scar, yet somehow the reader understands the crumbs offered along the way of this cause and effect, sins of the father story.

In the opulence of aristocratic, pre-civil rights Atlanta, when the city was but a Southern town divided by race and class, partitioned into those who live in mansions and those who serve within, Shep Bondurant is an only child rattling around his family mansion on Peachtree Road. An unexpected knock on the front door sets the course of his life in motion, when his parents unwittingly take in a poor relation and her two small children on sufferance. Thus the stage is set when Shep, a sensitive, lonely boy, has his cloistered life blown open up by the entrance of his cousin, Lucy Bondurant, who is damaged and captivatingly feral as an alley cat. The two form an immediate bond that deepens as the pair mature, but it is its repercussions that play throughout this episodic story, wreaking havoc beneath the surface of a setting where all that glitters is not gold. "Peachtree Road" unapologetically captures a way of life in an era long gone by. It is populated by emblematic, supportive characters, and weaves and dodges as it finds its footing in an arc spanning fifty years in the turbulent, most pivotal times of the American South. It is a human drama uninfluenced by privilege, the kind that reminds us all that there is no escaping life's disillusioning, defining sorrows, nor their lasting effects. Authentically and accurately told, "Peachtree Road" reaches into the bone marrow and leaves its handprint; it is an epic Southern saga for the ages and one not to be missed.

Arthur Sperry says

Very interesting book about several generations of Atlanta Aristocracy and populated with some Dickensian characters. Many an unexpected plot twist abounds!

Holly says

I first read this book when it was released in 1989. I have re-read it many times over the years, and just finished reading it again. Those first two hundred pages are just so redolent of a lost era; one that happened before I was born, but I heard about from my parents who grew up in the same time, just considerably further north. Siddons telling of Shep Bondurant's childhood is so nostalgic and evocative; I just love the first 200 pages of this book.

So it isn't really like Gone With the Wind at all, except in the broadest sense that the world the main characters loved so well has disappeared. Yes, most of the action does take place in Atlanta, but you can't compare A Tree Grows In Brooklyn with Bonfire of the Vanities simply because the action takes place in the 5 boroughs of NYC.

Lucy Bondurant has nothing in common with Scarlett O'Hara.....in fact, she is the polar opposite of Scarlett. Lucy can't save her own self, let alone be responsible for anyone else. Scarlett was strong, manipulative and a realist. Lucy, too is manipulative, but she manipulates from the position of weakness, neediness and extreme idealism.

Few of the characters are noble; they are all flawed in some way; the reader doesn't have to like or admire any of them, it is interesting enough just to observe them.

After reading many reviews, it seems as though many readers didn't understand the ending. The bridge in question is the same bridge that Shep and Lucy's group of friends all jumped off from during their swimming excursions of the Chattahoochee River. In high school, Shep was too afraid of heights to jump from the bridge, and he was mocked for his inability. When Shep stands on the railing of the bridge and Sarah calls out to him; he is not attempting suicide, and she is not encouraging him. With Lucy dead he is finally free; his burden has been lifted and he is no longer responsible for his crazy, wonderful, troubled cousin. I kind of think that he and Sarah finally got together after the last scene of this book.

Oh, and for the people who complained that the book starts out with Lucy's funeral, creating a spoiler.....bullshit! At the beginning of the book, the reader has no idea who Lucy is; you know nothing about her, so the fact that she is being buried is immaterial. You have to read the book, find out who Lucy was, and what her life was like. You need to know the details of her relationship with her cousin Shep. Something tells me that these people who complained about "knowing how it ended" are probably the same people who loved the movie Titanic.....even though they knew it sank with hundreds of people on board.

I wouldn't recommend this to anyone who is seeking a great romance, because it isn't a romance novel at all. More tragic than anything else, as many of Siddons novels seem to be. I would recommend it to any open-minded person who enjoys a good, epic, slice of life novel.

Marsha says

A must-read for Atlantans. I read it after I had moved here and it got me interested in Atlanta's rich and colorful history. Everytime I drive Peachtree Road in Buckhead I glance over at the last mansion and think about this great book.

Minty McBunny says

Oh my gosh y'all, I am so sorry to everyone who has ever tried to get me to read this author, but I can't, I just can't. This is my second attempt, I tried to read Low Country about 10 years ago and it just did me in with the verbal diarrhea. Still, people whose literary opinions I like and tend to agree kept telling me how great she is and how I should really read her novels. So I made a valiant effort, but oh my Lord have mercy, why use one word when 2000 will do? The first 150 pages could have probably been condensed down to 15. I am not above liking some florid descriptions of cities and homes and people, but good gravy, there's a time when you have to stop beating the reader over the head with your \$.50 adjectives and get on with the story. I soldiered on to my self imposed halfway mark. I surrender. Anne Rivers Siddons and I are just never going to get along.

Carrie says

The first time I picked up this book, I put it down after about 20 pages because I just couldn't get into it. Some months later, I picked it up again, started reading it and was so sucked into the story that I was sad to see the book end. I absolutely loved this book.

Lois says

Growing up in Atlanta off of Peachtree Road, a daughter of the book's generation of Southerners, I found this book compelling reading. Again and again it triggered stories about my grandfather. Although he came from the wrong side of the tracks and far too poor to be one of the "Buckhead boys" of the book, he pulled himself up by "his own bootstraps" to join the ranks of the powerful city aristocracy, especially in the political arena. The book helped me understand my own heritage in new ways, especially the cultural dimensions of Atlanta white women.

Tori says

one of my alltime favorite books; written from the point of view of a man (unusual for this author), Shep, growing up in Buckhead in the 50's and 60's - follows his life and the life of his cousin, Lucy - really interesting since I live in Atlanta - one of my favorite authors and this is my favorite books of hers

