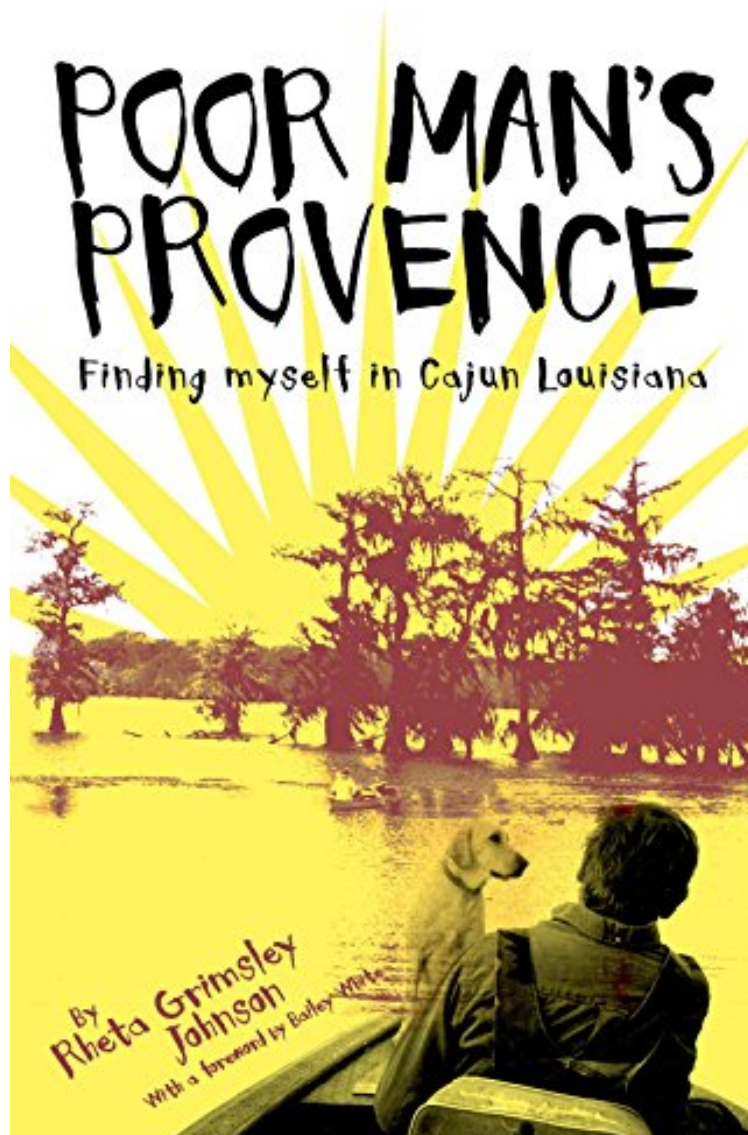


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## Poor Man's Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana

*Rheta Grimsley Johnson*

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**Rheta Grimsley Johnson : Poor Man's Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Poor Man's Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Sad-but-true: GOING, GOING, GONE . . .By R. BruceAs an indigenous Cajun from a slightly different locale--a bayou community of Southeast LA [ and an educated one, a book-reader and writer/teacher myself], I can attest to the fact that her insights and observations are true. Take it from a

resident--this is the Real Deal captured in stylish, stunning, insightful poetic prose. Sadly, this place which she depicts and where I grew up and still live is disappearing daily. What she describes was widely true and 100% evident in the 50s and early 60s when I grew up.. Now found only in isolated spots. Will be gone tomorrow as the life-giving waters which provided the economic sustenance for the transported refugee/inhabitants [both fishing and oil production] continue, not-so-slowly-but-surely, taking over land areas. Guaranteed. Catch it in this book before it is completely gone.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A don't miss read!By Darryl AI've read this book twice already! It is so real and perfectly describes the Cajun flair in the Henderson swamp area of Louisiana. Love it!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. She doesn't mind poking fun at herselfBy Kathy BaxterBecause I know the area she writes about, her descriptions of Cajun culture seem relatively accurate. She doesn't mind poking fun at herself, even portraying herself as something of an educated country girl-grown-up. The style is journalistic. The total effect is an entertaining quick read.

For over a decade, syndicated columnist Rheta Grimsley Johnson has been spending several months a year in Southwest Louisiana, deep in the heart of Cajun Country. Unlike many other writers who have parachuted into the swampy paradise for a few days or weeks, Rheta fell in love with the place, bought a second home and set in planting doomed azaleas and deep roots. She has found an assortment of beautiful people in a homely little town called Henderson, right on the edge of the Atchafalaya Swamp. These days, much is labeled Cajun that is not, and the popularity of the unique cultures food, songs and dance has been a mixed blessing. The revival of French Louisianas traditional music and cuisine often has been cheapened by counterfeits. Confused pilgrims sometimes look to New Orleans for a sampler platter of all things Cajun. Close, but no cigar. Poor Mans Provence helps define what's what through lively characters and stories. The book is both personal odyssey and good reporting, travelogue and memoir, funny and frank. This beguiling place is as exotic as it gets without a passport. The author shares what keeps her coming home to French Louisiana. And as NPR commentator Bailey White observes in her foreword, "Both Rheta's readers and the people she writes about will be comfortable, well fed, highly entertained, and happy they came to Poor Man's Provence."

From Publishers WeeklyAccording to newspaper columnist Johnson, life in Cajun Country, deep in the heart of Southeast Louisiana, is "the opposite of live and let live; it's more like mind my business and I'll mind yours." In this largely winning read, Johnson does exactly that with the residents of her adopted, beloved Bayou home, Henderson, La. Her distinct perspective, that of an accepted neighbor who's still considered an outsider, drives this observational memoir. Travel readers will enjoy chucklesome details--a town with about five surnames, Henderson's phone book "is the only one... I know of to use nicknames in its listings"--but Johnson's news background proves both blessing and curse. On one hand, she's a fearless reporter, but her profiles too often cut short just when they're getting good. She touches on the poverty, racism and other troubles (like hurricanes), but doesn't probe in much depth, effectively reducing some of her friends and neighbors to two-dimensional ciphers. Where she does achieve a more nuanced portrait, readers will find a wonderful, personal look into a Cajun community. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Rheta Grimsley Johnson is that big-hearted woman of country music. In telling about her adopted people of Cajun-Country, Louisiana, she lets slip a bit about herself: Rheta Grimsley Johnson, friend to the common-man. Never a tourist, sometimes a traveler, she scouts out places with heart to settle for a spell. In Poor Mans Provence, Johnson settles in Henderson, Louisiana, to highlight the lives of ordinary people about the business of simply living. Her magic pen turns French-Cajun names into song; and, as always, Rheta Grimsley Johnson pays tribute to undiscovered regional artists at moments of self-discovery--who needs Hollywood when you have Henderson? In Rheta Johnson's eyes, everybody's beautiful, except for those who think they are." Janice Daugharty "Poor Man's Provence is what results when one beloved national treasure decides to infiltrate and write about another beloved national treasure, Louisiana's Cajuns. Johnson gives us an insider tour of an outsider culture, and it's as dead-on as Levi-Strauss and as funny as Mark Twain. As the Cajuns would put it, you need dis book, you." Cynthia Shearer, author of The Celestial Jukebox "Talk about love at first sight. After chasing stories all over America for three decades, syndicated columnist Rheta Grimsley Johnson was caught up short when she fell for a gawky little one-room boat for sale in the vast Atchafalaya Swamp of Louisiana. She heard a Cajun voice say, "You need dat boat, you," and when she bought it her life was transformed. This is her love song to the Cajun Nation." Paul Hemphill, author of Hank Williams and Leaving Birmingham "For everyone who watched Passion Fish the second time for the music and scenery, Johnson has invited us to a real feast--a chronicle from inside the spicy sweet heart of Cajun country. The only bad thing about this wonderful memoir is that it is sure to bring tourists." Mary Hood, author of Familiar Heat and And Venus is Blue "Rheta Grimsley Johnson first went to Louisiana about the time I was getting to know the place. Our paths never crossed until decades later when we both found ourselves in Atlanta. Now she has gone back, and she's taken me with her in Poor Mans Provence, the most evocative rendering of Acadiana I know. I close my eyes and am at the crawfish festival in Breaux Bridge again, every care behind me, a plate of shimp etouffe and all the time in the world before me." Michael Skube "In her memoir, Poor Mans Provence, veteran journalist

Rheta Grimsley Johnson gets it right. She finds the heart that draws her back to this quirky paradise with its every beat. Not far from Lafayette, Johnson is introduced to the kind of people who are salt of the earth despite their idiosyncratic personalities." First Draft "Poor Mans Provence might make a great gift for yourself and someone whos not from around here. Its an easy read and a fun book." Reba McMellon, M. S., LPC, The Mississippi Press "Poor Man's Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana is Grimsley Johnson at her very best, conveying her own love of one small Louisiana town, and introducing us to its inhabitants and idiosyncrasies." Leslie Criss, Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal "The longtime newspaper columnist, who lives in Iuka, writes with charm and candor of her second home in Henderson, La. The spicy warmth of Cajun culture comes through in these stories of people and places and the personal spaces they touch." The Clarion-Ledger "Rheta paints word portraits of the inhabitants that make you want to sit down with all of them over a plate of crawfish. As ever, she calls it as she sees it, but what she sees is the honesty of the people and the land." Vince Vawter, Knoxville News Sentinel "Shes been everywhere, interviewed everybody, written thousands of pieces ... and now, shes written a book. Oh, its not her first one (she wrote one, for example, about Charles Schultz of Peanuts), but it is a particularly lovely book. What a writer. Weve always known that. She makes us hack scribblers want to stomp on the word processor and never write another word." Bob Sanders, Opelika-Auburn News "Johnson, 54, has written a memoir of her new life, Poor Man's Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana that teems with critters, characters and lessons from the road less taken." Jim Auchmutey, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution "The chapters of Poor Man's Provence are organized by topic: Cajun family life and food, Acadian celebrations, and, most of all, wonderfully odd characters." Don Noble, Tuscaloosa News "Poor Man's Provence is a rich examination of a colorful, cultural state. We know it, but it's nice to read that someone good with a pen thinks so too." Chere Coen, The Daily Advertiser "...future generations will be able to use Grimsley's book as an accurate time capsule reflecting how life was for Cajuns in these times." The Times of Adadiana "True to her unblinking commentaries, Johnson sees the area and its people with an eye that penetrates deeper the usual newcomer." Herman Fuselier, The Daily Advertiser "Johnson is not the first person to take the geographic cure and find solace in an exotic location, although Henderson is not quite Provence (the title is a reference to the hit book A Year in Provence). The difference between Johnson and other nomads is that she has the keen perspective and fine writing skills to bring her insights to the page. Shes not just a rolling stone either. She still has her place in Henderson and still lives there part of the time. Her abiding love of the people and place shine through in her writing. Louisianas bruised image could use more healing like Johnsons book provides." Greg Langley, The Baton Rouge Advocate "Award-winning writer Rheta Grimsley Johnson has traveled and covered the south for more than three decades and was a 1991 Pulitzer Prize finalist for commentary but it was an assignment to cover boar hunting in Louisiana that truly changed her life. Johnson fell in love with local culture and bought a second home in Henderson, intent on fully experiencing Acadiana traditions and rhythms. She chronicles that quest in Poor Mans Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana, her new book that reads like part travelogue and part memoir. While locals may not find any major revelations in the book, Johnsons clear prose and the presence of multiple landmarks and personalities make it an engaging read." Scott Jordan, The Independent, Lafayette Louisiana "It's a book that is both a personal odyssey and good reporting, travelogue and memoir, funny and frank. Its setting is as exotic as it gets without a passport!" Valley Times-News "[Poor Mans Provence is] a refreshing study of all things Cajun, or at least all things Cajun that can be observed and absorbed by a fascinated reporter of Southern life. Given Johnson's easy raconteur's style, it will have readers stopping to read aloud." The Anniston Star "Johnson writes about Cajun country and people with such admiration and affection that it's near impossible not to fall in love with them yourself." Birmingham Magazine "Johnson's experiences, good and bad, transformed her. Alas, in the decade since she and her husband bought the houseboat, the landscape she fell in love with has undergone radical change as well, and not for the better. In a thoughtful coda, Johnson lists the usual culprits big box stores, tract mansions, widened highways and thousands of outsiders. Yet she concludes on a hopeful note, asserting that the natives remain as devoted to their friends, family and distinctive culture as ever. "Poor Man's Provence" details this devotion in thoroughly engaging fashion." John Sledge, Mobile Press-Register "It's fun to watch someone fall under the spell of a place. As Atlanta journalist Rheta Grimsley Johnson chronicles her love affair with Louisiana in "Poor Man's Provence: Finding Myself in Cajun Louisiana," local readers no doubt will remember what drew them here, too, what made them put down roots, stay put, hang on. Who doesn't want to share their love of home? Here's wishing Rheta Grimsley Johnson lots more Cajun stories to come. Her story, that time-honored account of finding -- and making -- a home, is a sweet celebration of our heartland." Susan Larson, The Times-Picayune "Distinctive about Rhetas writing is her sense of humility and respect for her subjects. With the lightest touch, she informs, challenges and takes us somewhere new." The Commercial Dispatch "In her latest book, Poor Man's Provence, Johnson writes of Henderson, her other home when not in Iuka, Mississippi. Part history lesson, part travel piece, a memoir and a personal odyssey, the book contains vivid essays on the Acadian people, their culture, music, food, and joie de vivre (joy of living). More than anything though, the book is a love story. Not puppy love with its tentative sideways glances, or the raw physical attraction of lust, but real lovethat starts with curiosity and intrigue and slowly blossoms into an enduring passion and emotional connection." Valley Planet "[Poor Mans Provence] is a bright and breezy memoir sure to entrance natives and tourists alike." Acadian

LifeStyle "Johnson provides satisfyingly light entertainment." Prairie Schooner "According to newspaper columnist Johnson, life in Cajun Country, deep in the heart of Southeast Louisiana, is "the opposite of live and let live; it's more like mind my business and I'll mind yours." In this largely winning read, Johnson does exactly that with the residents of her adopted, beloved Bayou home, Henderson, La. Her distinct perspective, that of an accepted neighbor who's still considered an outsider, drives this observational memoir." Publishers Weekly

About the Author Rheta Grimsley Johnson has covered the South for over three decades as a newspaper reporter and columnist. She writes about ordinary but fascinating people, mining for universal meaning in individual stories. In past reporting for United Press International, The Commercial Appeal of Memphis, the Atlanta Journal Constitution and a number of other regional newspapers, Johnson has won national awards. They include the Ernie Pyle Memorial Award for human interest reporting (1983), the Headliner Award for commentary (1985), the American Society of Newspaper Editors Distinguished Writing Award for commentary (1982). In 1986 she was inducted into the Scripps Howard Newspapers Editorial Hall of Fame. In 1991 Johnson was one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for commentary. Syndicated today by King Features of New York, Johnson's column appears in about 50 papers nationwide. She is the author of several books, including *Americas Faces* (1987) and *Good Grief: The Story of Charles M. Schulz* (1989). In 2000 she wrote the text for a book of photographs entitled *Georgia*. A native of Colquitt, Ga., Johnson grew up in Montgomery, Ala., studied journalism at Auburn University and has lived and worked in the South all of her career. In December 2010, Johnson married retired Auburn University history professor Hines Hall.