



Miriam's Song: A Memoir

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Mark Mathabane first came to prominence with the publication of *Kaffir Boy*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller. His story of growing up in South Africa was one of the most riveting accounts of life under apartheid. Mathabane's newest book, *Miriam's Song*, is the story of Mark's sister, who was left behind in South Africa. It is the gripping tale of a woman -- representative of an entire generation -- who came of age amid the violence and rebellion of the 1980s and finally saw the destruction of apartheid and the birth of a new, democratic South Africa.

Mathabane writes in Miriam's voice based on stories she told him, but he has re-created her unforgettable experience as only someone who also lived through it could. The immediacy of the hardships that brother and sister endured -- from daily school beatings to overwhelming poverty -- is balanced by the beauty of their childhood observations and the true affection that they have for each other.

Miriam's Song: A Memoir Details

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Gail Mathabane says

If you liked reading "Kaffir Boy: the True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa," you will enjoy reading this book. It could be called Kaffir Girl because Mark Mathabane and Miriam Mathabane are siblings and were raised by the same strong, determined, long-suffering, patient mother who managed to keep all 7 of her children alive under apartheid. By the end of this book, you'll be eager to know how Miriam is doing. I won't give anything away because Miriam is my "skwiza" -- sister-in-law in the Tsonga language. She is truly a wonderful, remarkable human being and now lives in North Carolina.

Brett Swanson says

What an amazing, sad, inspiring book. Miriam's story gives a first hand experience of the extreme hardships the black people in South Africa faced under apartheid and the violence that preceded the fall of apartheid.

What I loved most about this book is how simple the writing is. It doesn't read like a scholarly, heavy-worded text. Mark, writing his sister's story, doesn't try to "smart" the story. The events are laid bare for all to understand and it makes for a better emotional connection to Miriam and all the struggles she faced.

Emily Adams says

As I knew so little about South Africa's immense struggle with the injustice of Apartheid, I found this book incredibly eye-opening, if not somewhat shocking. With each chapter I thought, "How could young Miriam possibly endure more?" - and then she would. Knowing that this is a memoir containing all facts rather than "loosely based on" or "partly fictionalized" scenes made it difficult to read. I often found myself needing to take a break from the book to process the inhumane and horrific things she experienced. However, I found that the slightly detached voice of the author (Miriam's brother) made it possible for me to forge my way through the text, whereas I could not stomach the violence of "A Thousand Splendid Suns" due to its intensely graphic descriptions. You should be aware of the content of this book, but be prepared for emotionally difficult content.

AJ P says

Second book I read on my Kenya trip.

I have wanted to read this one for a very long time, but was never able to find it in any book shop or library. So when I saw a copy at Capitol Hill Books, I had to get it!

I was a bit nervous to read it when I found out that Mark Mathebane wrote it, since I am not a fan of his personality (at least what I can see from his books). But, I liked the perspective that it would offer of his younger sister who stayed in South Africa during the turmoil of the 1980s and 1990s while he was living in America.

I really loved the stories as Miriam told them. I found her personality endearing, and her life is incredible. I liked this one much more than Kaffir Boy, though I should probably read that one again to get a better perspective. I also loved the perspective of life in Alexandria from her shy and quiet perspective. I also like the other view that is little told regarding the uprisings in the townships - that many of the children did not want to join, but were forced. Popular history would make you believe that all of the children willingly rose up to fight, when that just isn't true. So I'm glad to see a personal view of the other side.

I really loved it, and highly recommend it.

Marcy says

Mark Mathabane has written this story on behalf of his sister, Miriam, who stayed living in Alexandria, South Africa, long after her oldest sibling, Mark, went to America. Miriam and the rest of her family suffer continued abuses of apartheid. Miriam is a strong student of the Bantu education, which is far less equal than white education in South Africa. Miriam has dreams of going to America to become a nurse under Mark's care in America, who has married a white woman and has become the writer of Kaffir Boy, a bestseller on the New York Times list. Mark keeps his promise by bringing over his family, one by one to America. In Alexandria, Miriam is raped by a boy she has been friends with, has a child, and her dreams of finishing high school in Alexandria are delayed. School, because of extreme violence in the streets, is closed and open, closed and open. Living in poverty, fear, and violence shatters many dreams of those that live in the ghetto. Mark and Miriam's mom is the hero in both stories, fighting for her children to get an education against all odds, enabling them to attain their dreams.

Suzanne says

My rating is only about my personal response to the book, and not in any way a reflection on how well it was written. Mathabane did an excellent job of telling his sister's story. And that was the problem, I hated all the things she went through and just wanted to finish the book and think about something else.

Joanna says

This book was moving, gripping, intriguing, striking, and a revelation of the treatment of black women in apartheid South Africa. I loved *Kaffir Boy* but the story of Miriam, Johannes' sister that was left behind in South Africa, was able to grossly illustrate the abusive and violent lives of black women in Alexandria. *Miriam is a strong women determined to stop at nothing to achieve her dream. I have nothing but appreciation for her as a human being and a woman.*

This book describes the apartheid violence that escalated in the 1980s and 1990s, when Kaffir Boy ends. But in particular, the book describes the violence perpetrated against black women, which can be reduced down to Miriam's words: "They beat them, they rape them, they kill them, all mainly because the world in which they live teaches them these bad things." While reading the book, you really have a sense of how apartheid policies perpetrated against blacks instituted the continued violence between blacks whether they be men, women, or children. A gripping story that is a must read!

Brandi Fundingsland says

an eye opening look at South African life during apartheid

Tessa says

This memoir is from the perspective of Miriam, sister to the author, Mark. Mark's story is chronicled in *Kaffir Boy*. I found Kaffir Boy to be much better written. However, this book makes a good companion piece to Kaffir Boy. I especially appreciate hearing a girl's perspective. Even though I am a bit critical of the book, I am incredibly glad I read it. In an easy way, it helps one understand better life under Apartheid. For that reason alone, it could be more than 3 stars.

Lesley says

I know a bit about South Africa and apartheid, a very little bit, because of my age and remembering the horrible videos on the news from Soweto. This book takes you much closer than any news broadcast and into the lives of one family as seen through the eldest daughter's eyes and told to her brother Mark. He is the author of Kafir Boy which brought him international recognition after he appeared on Oprah Winfrey's show.

The book is a shocking eye opener. Things may be somewhat better there now, but not by much. I intend to follow up with more of Mark Mathabane's books. If you are at all interested in how the rest of the world lives, this (or probably any of Mark's books) is a must read.

Yvonne says

The biography of Miriam Mathabane, sister of Mark Mathabane, during the years that Mark described in Kaffir Boy and Kaffir Boy in America. Having read all three books, it is striking to me how different the lives of African men and women are, how disparate their expectations and opportunities. Mark's autobiographies give a chilling picture of life under Apartheid and, later, the long adjustment of settling in a foreign land. I think Miriam's Song is better written than either of his earlier books and is an interesting, if sad, read. It certainly shows the resiliency of S. African women and portrays how young people can get swept up in events beyond their control.

Liz says

Loved it! This is the story of Miriam growing up in South Africa during Apartheid. It's a slightly different perspective than Kaffir Boy in that Miriam is younger than Mark and so most of this book is written after Mark leaves home. And, it is different in that girls and boys are treated differently. Still, I am amazed at the resiliency of the family and the desire in Miriam to continue her education and do everything in her power to realize her dream of becoming a nurse.

Kelton Crooks says

If you want an understanding of South African apartheid, this is the book for you. An incredible true story of a woman finding her strength during apartheid and how she lived day to day. Wonderful book. Changed how I viewed and engaged the world around me.

sarah says

A great companion book to 'Kaffir boy'. I never learned much on apartheid in school so a lot of the content was shocking to me. For those who read mathabane's first book this follows it by telling the story of his sister (and family) who was left behind when he left for america. (not a spoiler by the way, it says so on the back cover) Recommended to anyone interested in knowing more about him and getting a closer look at africa.

Anstjfla says

This book is a memoir of the writer's sister called Miriam. While Mark Mathabane leaves to America in the time of Apartheid, his family stays behind, encountering the hardships that blacks face during the time. Miriam, the one who speaks in the story, aims her goal of being a nurse, and she continuously reach for this goal despite the hardships she faces. The Bantu education was way behind compared to those which whites had recieved, but Miriam had a strong goal to achieve, and this gave her strong determination, unlike the people who dropped out or gave up on their schooling. She is a mentally strong person who has ambitions and willpower- I think she was one of the lucky people because unlike many other, she had a definite goal to live upon. She lives through the rebellion and later, saw the destruction of Apartheid. When I read this book, I remembered the phrase "heaven helps those who help themselves". Miriam was born in a situation where there seemed little hope. Her family had small wages (10 rands at first), her father drank and gambled, and she was beat in school for not carrying her handkerchief and not cutting her nails. However, things start to get better for those who work hard. Mark, the oldest brother of Miriam, is able to go to America and publish a book called Kaffir Boy. Her mother and father gets a better job, and the Habitat for Humanity builds a house for them. Mark's wife, Gale invites Miriam to study abroad in America, and she with her son finally is able to move closer and persue her dreams once again. I thought this story also could relate "to Kill a Mockingbird" because the story emphasizes the family love, and the willpower and courage to carry on through difficult times(Atticus going on with the trials even when he knows it would fail, Miriam continuing to study when she missed school for a year.)It also shows the relization of the discriminate worlds that surrounds us.
