

## The Song of Sarah: Poverty and Plenty, Grit and Grace, Wit and Wisdom

**Charlene Pillow Little**

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*This memoir written to help Little's grandchildren understand her coming of age in the 1950s will also appeal to women today.*

Grandchildren often wonder what grandparents were like when they were children, teenagers, or young adults. This interesting book, *The Song of Sarah*, about Charlene Pillow Little's life history provides her four grandsons with definite answers about growing up in the Natural State and entering the workforce as a single young woman.

Little's parents were poor farmers living in Mississippi County, Arkansas, with two sons when she was born on December 3, 1937, in their home. Two additional sons arrived thereafter. Little describes what life was like as the only girl in the family, while also being determined to work as hard on the farm or do just as well as the boys at school and in life. In first grade, dismayed that the boys had middle names while she did not, Charlene gave herself the name Sarah, foreshadowing her individuality and boldness. As soon as she graduated high school, she moved to a boardinghouse in Memphis and started a job at Southern Bell.

Typical descriptions of driving around town, getting a soda at the drugstore, sneaking out to drive her father's vehicle, being coy while dating, or moving from place to place because of her husband's job will be mundane to most. Views on poverty, welfare, and liberal democratic ideas—from the serious, such as affordable health care, to the ridiculous, such as Bill Clinton's insistence that he did not inhale—are personal, interesting, vivid, and guaranteed to resonate with many.

The included black-and-white photos show Little with family members such as her beloved maternal grandmother, Elizabeth McClain, who helped deliver her at birth; father-in-law, Robert; and mother-in-law, Mary. As details of Little's life unfold, pictures are added of her husband, Richard; two daughters, Kim and Julie; their husbands; and the grandchildren; giving the illusion that the scenes of her life are opening and closing with each passing page.

The primary purpose of the book is to help Little's grandchildren imagine what her life was like, understand her views about things like being poor but proud and hardworking, and realize that the time in which she grew up and got married was different from but also similar to the present day. She achieves her purpose by describing, usually in a humorous way, things that have remained constant—such as typical feelings (anger at family members), interests (spending time with friends), and distractions (boys). While the conversational tone addresses her grandchildren directly, others will also be interested to learn what it was like for a young woman to come of age in the fifties on the farms of rural Arkansas, be a career woman, or date within social customs drastically different from those experienced by women today.

KAUVONIA HINTON (February 5, 2015)

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