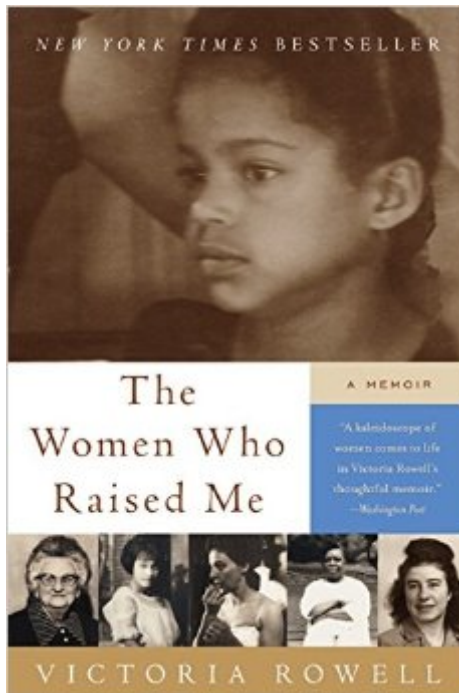


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# The Women Who Raised Me: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Born as a ward of the state of Maine, the child of an unmarried Yankee blueblood mother and an unknown black father, Victoria Rowell beat the odds. *The Women Who Raised Me* is the remarkable story of her rise out of the foster care system to attain the American Dream—and of the unlikely series of women who lifted, motivated, and inspired her along the way. From Agatha Armstead—a black Bostonian who was Victoria's longest-term foster mother and first noticed her spark of creativity and talent—to Esther Brooks, a Paris-trained prima ballerina who would become her first mentor at the Cambridge School of Ballet—*The Women Who Raised Me* is a loving, vivid portrait of all the women who would help Victoria transition out of foster care and into New York City's wild worlds of ballet, acting, and adulthood. Though Victoria would go on to become an accomplished television and film star, she still carried the burden of loneliness and anxiety, particularly common to those "orphans of the living" who are never adopted. Vividly recalled and candidly told, her story is transfixing, redemptive, heartbreaking, and, ultimately, inspiring.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Five MOVING Stars!! Notable TV actress ("Diagnosis Murder" and "The Young and The Restless") Victoria Rowell has written a moving memoir of her life, which stands as a testament to the power of love above all else. But mainly it is an appreciation of the woman who gave birth to her and those women who raised her. Many fans will be shocked to learn she was a ward of the state of Maine for years. Her father, whom she never met, was black and her white mother, whom she only met a few times, was descended from the Mayflower group, which makes Victoria a member of the 13th

generation of that notable original group. She spends considerable time in the Prologue going over her lineage on her mother's side of the family, and she and her daughter take a trip back in time, examining their family roots in Maine. The trip with her daughter to the gravesite and her solo trip to Augusta are very emotional. The book primarily covers "the many surrogate mothers, grandmothers, aunts, fosterers, mentors, grande dames, and sisters who were as much in my blood as was my own blood-the women who raised me." These were some truly amazing and caring women who opened their hearts and homes to her. This book clearly shows us that, besides the bad things we often hear, good things can come from foster parenting and adoption. In her case, it did 'take a village' to raise her. In that regard, Victoria's life is a sterling example of both individual determination and unselfish support from others. And, not content to walk away with her fame, she has made adoption a cause in her life through the "Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan". Beyond that, I really like her writing style.

While some readers and/or reviewers may take great pains to dissect Rowell's descriptions of her biological mother--and various foster mothers and mentors--I will avoid the unnecessary recounting of every detail of these remarkable women. Needless to say, the venerable and undaunted Black farm owner Agatha Armstead, Rowell's long-term foster mother, receives considerable and much deserved attention in this book. (The "Agatha" Award is named for Armstead and given annually by Rowell's nonprofit organization The Rowell Foster Children Positive Plan.) Yet there may be some readers who may have difficulty understanding the author's obvious need to elevate and illuminate her biological schizophrenic White mother, Dorothy Rowell. With no contradictions, the author's real and literary attempt at exposing, explaining, and claiming her biological mother is stunningly African-American; less than a handful of us Black folks can claim any kind of racial purity due to our slave past--a past shaped as much by sexual exploitation and the occasional breaking of social and legal codes that proscribed interracial relations, as by the exploitation of labor. Both old and new Black American literature, like Black American life, is filled to the brim with accounts of unknown and unnamed ancestors, many of whom did not arrive from Africa; most of whom were not anxious to claim their darker relatives. This memoir is a 20th and 21st century story as old as Black America itself. For persons who are visibly and culturally Black, yet who have a White parent, shaping an identity can be visceral and defiantly individual.

Victoria Rowell, film and television actress, chronicles her life as a foster child in her memoir, *The Women Who Raised Me: A Memoir*. Rowell was the product of a blue-vein, old money Caucasian

mother, whose family were Mayflower descendants, and an unknown black man. Her mother, Dorothy Collins, suffered from mental illness exhibiting schizophrenia. There were six children, three boys and three girls, all from different fathers. When Rowell was three months-old she was taken in as a foster child by Bertha Taylor, who wanted to adopt her but was not allowed to because of the state of Maine's statutes regarding interracial adoption. Little Vicki was only two years-old when she was taken away from her and placed in the home of a black woman, Agatha Wooten Armistead. Her two older sisters, also, both biracial, were taken in by Agatha. Under Agatha's care, Rowell thrived in a loving, extended family in rural Maine. Bertha came from a family of formidable women with austere backgrounds. Agatha encouraged Rowell's love of dance and purchased a how-to book so that when she had her first audition at eight years-old, though she was self-taught, her natural talent netted a scholarship to a prestigious dance program. At age 17, she received a scholarship to ABT, American Ballet Theater, thus starting an illustrious career that would lead her into modeling, commercials and eventually television, most notably an actress on *The Young and the Restless* and *Diagnosis: Murder*. Along the way, Rowell had an on again, off again relationship with her mother, Dorothy, who finally died in 1983. She also had other temporary and foster mothers of various backgrounds before she became an emancipated minor. Each of these women left something precious with her that she treasures to this day.

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