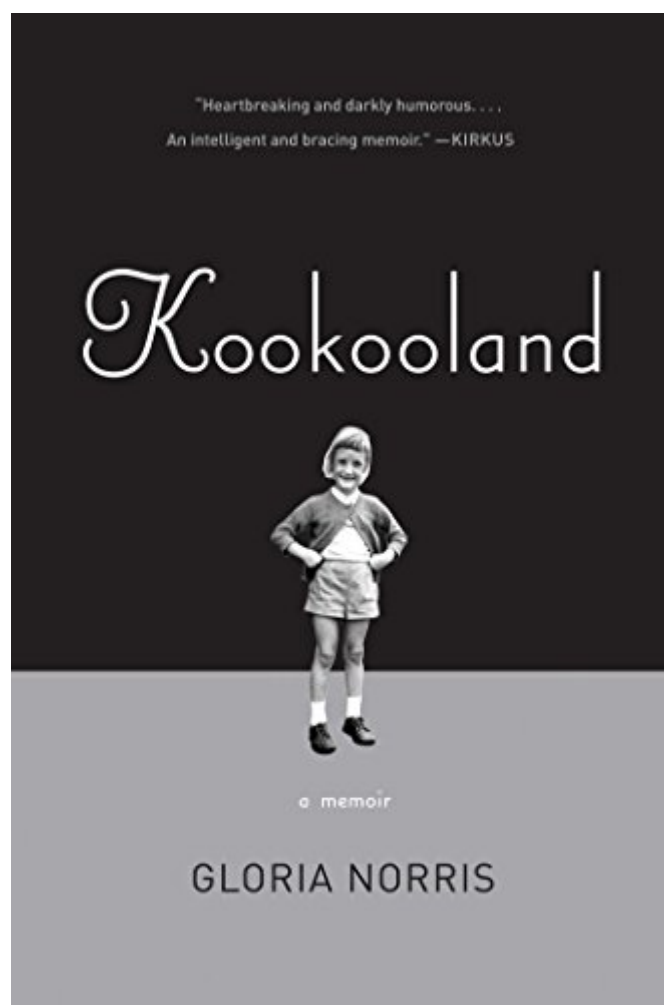


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# KooKooLand



## Synopsis

Gloria Norris's *KooKooLand* is a memoir written on the edge of a knife blade. Chilling, intensely moving, and darkly funny, it cuts to the heart and soul of a troubled American family, and announces the arrival of a startlingly original voice. Gloria Norris grew up in the projects of Manchester, New Hampshire with her parents, her sister, Virginia, and her cat, Sylvester. A snapshot might show a happy, young family, but only a dummkopf would buy that. Nine-year-old Gloria is gutsy and wisecracking. Her father, Jimmy, all dazzle and danger, is often on the far side of the law and makes his own rules "which everyone else better follow. Gloria's mom, Shirley, tries not to rock the boat, Virginia unwisely defies Jimmy, and Gloria fashions herself into his sidekick "the son he never had. Jimmy takes Gloria everywhere. Hunting, to the racetrack, to slasher movies, and to his parents' dingy bar "a hole in the wall with pickled eggs and pickled alkies. But it is at Hank Piasecny's gun shop that Gloria meets the person who will change her life. While Hank and Jimmy trade good-humored insults, Gloria comes under the spell of Hank's college-age daughter, Susan. Brilliant, pretty, kind, and ambitious, Susan is everything Gloria longs to be "and can be, provided she dreams big and aces third grade like Susan tells her to. But, one night, a brutal act changes the course of all their lives. The story that unfolds is a profound portrait of how violence echoes through a family, and through a community. From the tragedy, Gloria finds a way to carve out a future on her own terms and ends up just where she wants to be. Gripping and unforgettable, *KooKooLand* is a triumph.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

KooKooLand was a harrowing, poignant book about growing up poor in Manchester, NH in a family where words were weapons and fists were used to demand absolute obedience. This book is about being terrorized by a racist, small-minded father who drinks, lies, steals and bullies his way through life right up until his death. It is about being unprotected by a beaten-down mother and it is about the captivating spell he cast on his youngest daughter who became tough and compliant to earn her father's favor and stay safe. And yes, to be loved by him as much as he was capable. There are many memoirs about alcoholism, poverty and violence but what is unique about this memoir is Gloria's voice which is childlike, brave, terrified and completely present. She brings you right in to what it is like to be THAT child, with THAT father and I read straight through the night with my heart hanging outside my body yearning and hoping for this little girl. Interwoven, and really the dead center of Gloria's story, is her crush on an older girl who seems to be making it. Studious, church-going, kind with her eye on her future, Susan also lives with a violent father. Susan encourages Gloria, lets her know that she can escape her past and urges her to do well in school and move forward. Gloria hangs on to her words, uses her as a model of how her future might be different from her mothers and even tries to believe in God for her. We watch Susan graduate and then go to medical school when tragedy happens. Without giving away too much detail, it is suffice to say Gloria learns that all is not what it seems and the the truth is that it is so hard to move past a violent childhood, sometimes impossible to do so.

â œKooKooLandâ • (2015 publication; 367 pages) is a memoir from debut author Gloria Norris (best known for her work with Woody Allen in the 80s), reflecting on what it was like to grow up in Manchester, New Hampshire in the 50s and 60s in a close knit Greek family. As the book opens, we are in 1963 and get to know the family Norris while they are on their way to a drive-in movie: Gloria being the youngest, her sister Virginia, her mother Shirley and her dad Jimmy. Ah yes, Jimmy! It doesnâ™t take all that long before we start to understand that Jimmy, who came over from Greece at a young age, has the temperament of a volcano, and is equally unpredictable as he is ruthless,

rude, emotionally abusive and flat-out a bully, all the while being funny (or so he thinks), and jealous. And those are the mild attributes. After the first chapter, the book goes back in time to when the author was just a small girl, and it amazes me once again the amount of detailed information and descriptions that the author can recall from such young age. (Someone needs to tell me the secret on how to do that!). Towards the end of the book, when the author returns home after her first semester of college, she realizes, with sadness, that Jimmy is never going to change, so she kept counting down the days until i could get out of Jimmy Jail. The book gets stronger the deeper we get into it, and the last 100 pages or so are simply riveting, and very revealing (no worries, I won't spoil). But in the end it's all about the Jimmy, the guy who time and again keeps teasing his daughters until they are close to crying, and then tells them he's just joking, leaving behind an emotional wreckage that will takes years to get over from (if at all).

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