About the Book

Taking a Chance on Love

The heart must be ready and brave. That's surely the only way anybody can get past the opening lines in my book: "God help me. I stopped hating white people on purpose a year ago."

I myself couldn't write the words until I'd stumbled around for months missing the point. I tiptoed around the keyboard, making believe that I was going to the heart, but missing it by a mile. That's because I was scared – worried like many writers that readers wouldn't accept what I needed to tell them most. In the end, I wrote – and rewrote – the same 40 or so pages of safe, fearful words, terrified that I'd somehow say the wrong thing. Then my friend and agent Carla Glasser, who doesn't have any fear about getting right to the point, called me up and said this, "You are a writer. So write what you absolutely must say." So I sat down and wrote these words. God help me.

A dam broke.

The next sentence just sort of poured out of my fingers and the next sentence and the next. And instantly I could see where I had to start and where I was going with these pages that would become My First White Friend. I would start it with a confession – talk flat out about race hate and what it had done to me, just pull out all the stops – and finish with a resolution or a "closure" to all of my racial mess. I would pick apart the reality, as James Baldwin put it, where "all you are ever told about being black is that it is a terrible, terrible thing to be."

I would do this. But then I would make peace with it. God help me. And then the surprise happened. The writing changed my life.
So now I am somebody new. I started out writing about race. I ended up converting to forgiveness.

But first I had to learn about forgiveness – learn from scratch, because candidly I knew nothing about forgivin...
from a working-class and secure black family. What are Raybon's views about the important role the family plays in love, self-esteem, and forgiveness? Would you say that both the mother and the father are survivors? How so?

3. In 1958 at the pool, a lighter-skinned black girl turns to Raybon and remarks, "You're kind of dark, Patricia." Like a mantra, these words repeat in her head. The impact is powerful. She writes, "I don't know how to transform myself. And in 1958, the truth is that I am ugly. The world says it's so. And I can't change any of that." Why was this comment a turning point for Raybon? What did it say about the pressures she and her peers felt to conform to white images of beauty? Compare Raybon's feelings as an "ugly" black nine-year-old with her self-image in the chapter "The Affirmation."

4. "Forgiveness, for all its moral gloss, starts in a church." Do you think Raybon could have come to the decision to forgive if religion had not been a part of her life? Discuss how the black church was a haven for her.

5. Kerry Monroe is remembered as "the white avenging angel for doing what was right. For going. For reaching. For risking and trying." Looking back, the author is amazed at how pure Monroe's intentions were. "We are skeptical of kindness so unfailing, sympathy so instant," she writes, quoting Wallace Stegner. How important was Monroe to the author's process of forgiveness? Was the memory of this one episode a turning point for Raybon, or was the event meaningful only in retrospect?

6. King and Gandhi both explore the duality of hate: If I hate myself, I can't love others; if I hate others, I can't love myself. Do you think this is true? Why is this concept at the heart of Raybon's transformation?

7. By tracing three generations of a black family in America, Raybon outlines the racism that she, her parents, and her grandparents have faced. In the 1920s it was cotton fields, lynchings, and the KKK. In the 1950s it was Jim Crow laws, segregated housing, and separate public facilities. What are the racial hotpots today? How has the language changed, become more subtle?

**Author Bio**

Patricia Raybon is the award-winning author of I TOLD THE MOUNTAIN TO MOVE, a 2006 Book of the Year finalist in *Christianity Today* magazine’s annual book awards competition; and MY FIRST WHITE FRIEND, her racial forgiveness memoir that won the Christopher Award. She is also author of the One Year® devotional, GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS. A journalist by training, Patricia has written essays on family and faith, which have been published in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, *USA Weekend* and *In Touch* of In Touch Ministries; and aired on National Public Radio. She is also a regular contributor to *Today's Christian Woman* online magazine.

With degrees in journalism from Ohio State University and the University of Colorado at Boulder, Patricia worked a dozen years as a newspaper journalist for the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*. She later joined the journalism faculty at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where for fifteen years she taught print journalism. Patricia now writes
full-time on “mountain-moving faith.”

Patricia and her husband, Dan, are longtime residents of Colorado and have two grown daughters and five grandchildren. Founder of the Writing Ministry at her Denver church, Patricia coaches and encourages aspiring authors around the country and is a member of the Colorado Authors League and the Authors Guild.

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by Patricia Raybon

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