

Dorí Sanders

A H A R V E S T O F H U M A N K I N D N E S S

by Anastasia Howard



OH, YOUR MOUTH JUST GETS TO WATERING THINKING ABOUT YOUR FIRST BITE of a sweet and juicy Sanders Farm peach picked ripe that morning from the tree. You can just close your eyes and tilt your head back giving your nose free reign to guide you like a compass to one of the sweetest spots of South Carolina. It's just a country road ride to Filbert, down the Number 5 Bypass from I-85. 'Bout a stone's throw from the North

Carolina border you'll round a gentle shoulder on Highway 321 and get a whiff of nature just reaching out to pull you in. Go with it. Because that's just the joy of life oozin' out of a family that made a fresh-air farmstand a landmark here in the South.

Let your tires kick up a bit of dusty road when you pull in off the black top. It settles down quickly enough. Before you can even step one foot to the ground, you're sure to hear a gentle rippling voice greeting you with a make-you-feel-welcome, "Hello, my darlin'." That's just Dori Sanders. Lived here all her life. One of 10 brothers and sisters born on the same farm her daddy bought back in 1916. She and her brothers put heart, soul and dollar into the 200 acres that give them shelter and livelihood year in and year out. "Got the best peaches right here," she'll say, "picked fresh this morning."

If you're lucky, you'll be standing just right when the breeze is still. That warm Carolina haze starts to dance around you and tease you with wafts of that summer fruit kissed by the sun.

Likely you'll find yourself in good company of folks who set out for a rare open-air farmstand with fresh-from-the-earth produce and fresh-from-the-heart conversation with Dori. You'll find her here most every day during harvest seasons selling peaches by the peck and by the bag, bushels of corn, okra, crowder peas, potatoes, watermelon, strawberries and more. She'll tell you she's just a country farmer with a passion for reading and a good ear for listening.

But if you're like thousands, no, hundreds of thousands of students from shore to shore, you know Dori has an imagination that can turn a grain of sand into a castle. With a story or two to tell, you'll find Dori is tending to more than land. No doubt she has nourished the minds of many students with her book *Clover*, required reading in most schools across the U.S. No, she's not just a country farmer. She's a spark of human nature.

And like moths caught by the flicker of her glow, a world of literary lovers calls on Dori to share her light. She has lectured at the University of Denmark in Northern Europe. Has seen *Clover* translated into a half-dozen languages, reach its 14th hardback and 18th paperback editions. Hallmark Productions put flesh to her pages when they produced a made-for-television movie. She holds writing seminars at the University of Utah, and master writing classes throughout the South. In one breath she'll tell you how to pick the best watermelon, and in another she's quoting Leo Tolstoy

and Louis Pasteur. She credits her father, a farmer and school principal in his day, and Julius Rosenwald, pioneer of Sears, Roebuck & Company, for teasing her mind to imagine, "What if..." It was in 1917 that the Julius Rosenwald Fund for the "well-being of mankind" funded books to South Carolina's rural black schools.

You're a friend right off. Whether you made your way from Virginia, Arizona, California or as close as the Isle of Palms, the Sanders Farm and Dori are like going home. Maybe it's a "reminds-me-of-family" recipe from her *Country Cooking* cookbook that makes you come. Or, maybe you just caught yourself smiling when you saw her on a cable-tv cooking program or NBC's *Today Show*. Could be, it's that something more you saw in her thoughtful eyes, and you knew she made you feel still. Tranquil, like a blue sky puffed out with proud clouds over the honest land. And like a cool pitcher of water waiting at the end of your journey, there's no disappointment when you get there. Everything is as you thought it would be, sweet and earthy.

Remind yourself to look for a simple old, gray tree stump when you drive up. "That's my writing stump," she says. No telling if it will be near the tin-roof farmstand or secreted in a corner where quiet leads her pen. See, she moves it about to keep the bright sun on her paper as she writes.

And ask Dori about the old storytelling rock down the dirt road past what Hurricane Hugo left of the fishing pond. University experts say it's millions of years old, still bearing the concave ripples of the ocean current. The late Charles Kuralt was really taken with the phenomenon when he featured Sanders' farmstand. But to Dori and her siblings, old storytelling rock is just where they spent many a childhood hour, making up fantastic stories of adventure and colorful recollections of family. Many that have made their way into her award-winning books.

From June to September, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., you'll find the Sanders farmstand open for business. Even on Sundays. As Dori likes to say, "The peaches don't know it's Sunday and won't wait for Monday to turn ripe." Then from October to December, when colors of amber, maple brown and gold take hold of Filbert's trees, the Sanders Farm winds down to weekend-only hours. But, there you'll find Dori, her brothers, and a trail of new and old friends just kicking back with a few stories about life in one hand, and a Sanders peach in the other.