



Evelyn 'Slim' Lambright

The Sweethearts of Soul
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Which of the characters in the story most resembles your own personality — if any — and why?

You know, when *The Justus Girls* was released, about half of the people who read it swore up and down that I was Jan. The other half just *knew* that I had to be Sally! My answer to them at the time was I thought I was a little bit of them all: Jan, Sally, Peaches and Roach — all of them were created by me from various parts of my own personality.

Same with *The Sweethearts of Soul*. Venus, Addie, Ruthie, and Fluffy, even Birdie, can all be found in the mind of their maker, though a lot of people who know me will tell you that I'm really, really Ruth. I don't know where they get that from! How could they ever confuse Ruthie, all loud, wrong, potty-mouthed and up in peoples' faces, with a delicate, refined, conservative matron such as myself?

Just pay 'em no mind! And that's the truth or my name ain't — uh — Slim!

You have a great way of capturing siblings at their best and worst, and showing how family can put their differences aside to come to each other's aid. Were you influenced by your own family experiences?

Of course, I was. Not only by my own family, but by other families as well. My grandmother raised foster children, back in the days when the children stayed with the foster parents for long periods of time, so MuDear is sort of a tip of the cap to her. My grandmother raised some children from infancy to age 18, many of whom have remained in touch with us and are considered members of our family. I find that the strongest and the best of families have a way of pulling together when the going gets rough, whether they are families by blood, foster families or even families by adoption. The same shared values produce the same shared families.

What motivated your decision to write about a '60s girl group? How do you feel about the fact that many musicians from that era have been mistreated or forgotten?

Well, they always tell you to write what you know, so that's exactly what I did. As far as the screwed-over musicians, of course I feel bad about it. Not only do I feel bad about it, I also feel mad about it.

If you really love this music and feel the same way, read the autobiography by the great Ruth Brown and look up The Rhythm and Blues Foundation on the internet. Perhaps you, too, will feel inspired to do something about it, even if it's just sending a note of support.

What message do you want readers to come away with after reading *The Sweethearts of Soul*?

I would hope they would come away inspired. *The Justus Girls* was about old friends, *The Sweethearts of Soul* is about family, but the message remains the same. Look around you, look into your own life, see what needs to be done, what needs to be changed, what needs to be set right, and go to work. Make it happen before it's too late. I know it's much easier said than done, but it *can* be done. Go to work, girl.

Is it true you were in a '60s band called "The Sweethearts of Soul"? How much of your own experience as a member of a Philly girl group did you infuse into your story?

Hmph! You should have seen what I had to leave out! Yes, it's all true. I was fifteen years old when we began, and most of what you read about in the book did, in fact, happen. In fact, after the book was published, the ladies in my old group started reminding me of other stories I had just plain forgotten about.

Like the time a member of a then-prominent male group received notes, letters, and a postcard warning him that he would be shot at the Midnight Show at the Uptown Theatre in Philly. Well, they had all kinds of security there, undercover police, even FBI, since the threats had been sent by U.S. Post Office.

The group went on, anyway, but let me tell you they were some scared singers that night! All went well, no one was shot, and the sender of the mailings, a spurned lover, was eventually arrested and prosecuted.

Then there was the time another group decided to use live gunpowder in their stage act. They had the gunpowder placed into homemade firecrackers set to go off at a certain time. The guys were onstage, holding the firecrackers behind them, waiting for their cue to drop them on the floor. Only the firecrackers didn't go off on cue. They went off earlier, setting the group's collective butts on fire. Really! The gunpowder actually burned holes in the seat parts of their pants. They performed the rest of their act facing the audience at all times, and were rushed to the hospital afterwards, pants and butts on fire! It was a real Naked City moment.

But on the serious side, being a member of a group such as The Sweethearts of Soul taught me discipline, taught me how to work with others for a common cause, and brought out strengths I never knew I had. Same as being in the drill team in *The Justus Girls*. Peace Out, Slim L.