



Always Wear Joy

By Susan Fales-Hill
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Introduction

Growing up with a mother who performed with the likes of Lena Home and Alvin Ailey, Susan Fales-Hill thought nothing of watching her mother, Josephine Premice, perform in an acclaimed black Broadway musical one moment and host one of her celebrated salons, where Maya Angelou and Bobby Short might rub elbows with Gore Vidal, the next. And come summer time, the entire family -- including Josephine in false eyelashes and costume jewelry -- would flee to Faletton, the summer estate that belonged to her white father's aristocratic family. Here fox hunts displaced the Double Dutch jump that Fales-Hill learned in Brooklyn while visiting her grand-pere, a Haitian political émigré whose family had also enjoyed prominence and who taught Susan that black was beautiful and anything but inferior. Both a universally touching mother-daughter story and a portrait of an American family that is dazzling in its public life -- because of the company they kept and the values they forged -- and emotionally vulnerable in their private life, *Always Wear Joy* is a memoir the reader won't soon forget.

Discussion Questions

1. Susan Fales-Hill says in the book, "clothing represented freedom for my mother. 'I may not get this part, I may not get to stay in that hotel -- but nobody's going to control how I present myself, and I'm going to present myself magnificently.'" Discuss the symbolic role of style and clothing in Josephine Premice's life.
2. Mothers are the models for self-esteem development in their daughters. Discuss how Josephine Premice was a model for Susan Fales-Hill in both her childhood and in her working life and how being a black woman raising a biracial daughter in a white world affected this.
3. In relation to people's perceptions on both sides of her racial heritage, Fales-Hill has said, "There is always someone who says, 'You're not singing the song I want you to sing.' I could have moved to Europe and married a white guy and not had to deal with race at all, frankly." From what we've learned about her in this memoir, discuss why you think she chose to stay in America and live the life she does.
4. In 2002, we saw a black actor and actress both win Oscars for their lead roles in film for the first time in history. Susan Fales-Hill talks about the Friends of the Black Emmys, an organization created to honor black actors, writers, directors and producers, most often overlooked at the mainstream Emmys. We often think of the arts as being a very progressive industry so why are the Oscars and Emmys still lagging behind? Why do you think it is important that the arts do better?
5. *Always Wear Joy* is a memoir of a mother as the heroine in her daughter's life. If you were to write a memoir about your mother, what would be some of the themes?
6. If *Always Wear Joy* has a driving theme, it is that families are complex units. Discuss the complexities in your own families and how that has affected your relationship with your parents and with the world you encounter every day.

About the author

Susan Fales-Hill is an award-winning television writer and producer. She has worked on shows ranging from *The Cosby Show* to *A Different World*, *Linc's*, and *Suddenly Susan*. Her writing has also appeared in *Vogue*, *Town & Country*, and *Travel & Leisure*. She lives in New York City.