

## They Raised Me Up: A Black Single Mother and the Women Who Inspired Her

Carolyn Marie Wilkins



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At the height of the cocaine-fueled 1980s, Carolyn Wilkins left a disastrous marriage in Seattle and, hoping to make it in the music business, moved with her four-year-old daughter to a gritty working-class town on the edge of Boston. *They Raised Me Up* is the story of her battle to succeed in the world of jam sessions and jazz clubs--a man's world where women were seen as either sex objects or doormats. To survive, she had to find a way to pay the bills, overcome a crippling case of stage fright, fend off a series of unsuitable men, and most important, find a reliable babysitter.

Alternating with Carolyn's story are the stories of her ancestors and mentors--five musically gifted women who struggled to realize their dreams at the turn of the twentieth century:

Philippa Schuyler, whose efforts to "pass" for white inspired Carolyn to embrace her own black identity despite her "damn near white" appearance and biracial child;

Marjory Jackson, the musician and single mother whose dark complexion and flamboyant lifestyle raised eyebrows among her contemporaries in the snobby, color-conscious world of the African American elite;

Lilly Pruett, the daughter of an illiterate sharecropper whose stunning beauty might have been her only ticket out of the "Jim Crow" South;

Ruth Lipscomb, the country girl who dreamed, against all odds, of becoming a concert pianist and realized her improbable ambition in 1941;

Alberta Sweeney, who survived a devastating personal tragedy by relying on the musical talent and spiritual stamina she had acquired growing up in a rough-and-tumble Kansas mining town.

*They Raised Me Up* interweaves memoir with family history to create an entertaining, informative, and engrossing read that will appeal to anyone with an interest in African American or women's history or to readers simply looking for an intriguing story about music and family.

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