Souders’ Log, Ch. 1, book 2.

**Synopsis**

*My Name is Sally Little Song* by Brenda Woods

Up North is not the only direction for a slave girl and her family to run to escape slavery. There is Down South to the Seminole Indians. Sally Harrison is an eleven year old girl who was born into slavery. Her Pa, Titus, finds out that his children are going to be loaned to another Plantation owner. Not knowing if his Children will ever be returned, he decides to take his Son, Abraham, his Daughter, Sally May, and his wife, Dessa, on a family saving adventure into the unknown.

This wonderful story is full of adventure, terror, sadness, and hope. Great characters greet the reader on every turn. There is the House Slave, Joshua and irascible January July. The new Indian friends Turtle Lily and Laughing Dove welcome Sally May into their tribe. Smiling Deer teaches her many things.

Many unique characters show the family a new life. This book is full of descriptive poetry introducing each chapter. After reading the book one will understand the last line of the ending poem.

“My skin is as brown as mud, my eyes as dark as the bottom

of a well at night, my hair black and softer than wool of

any lamb. I am twelve years old, neither slave nor free.

My name is Sally Little Song.”

**My impression of the text and my experiences interacting with it:**

I immediately responded with understanding when I read the opening poem of this powerful story.

Brenda Woods’ begins her book, *My Name Is Sally Little Song,* with the following poem:

“Mornin’ com

But no sun

And quiet is everywhere

Then I hear raindrops

Fallin’ hard on the roof

And I feel my big teeth

Part my lips as I smile

No cotton Pickin’

No cornfields today

Me and brother Abraham

Might e’en get to play”

As a child, raised on a working farm, there was no sweeter sound than that of a hard rain pounding out the song no work today. This poem brought back wonderful memories and set the scene of a child who enjoyed release for the sheer pleasure of play. Sally May the central character of the story is still young enough to feel the security of her parents. She isn’t aware yet that her parents are not the final word of her life. She knows she is a slave and that her parents are also slaves, but she has heard her Master and owner say, “born on Harrison land you sur’nuf gonna die on Harrison land.” To this young and still innocent twelve year old Master Harrison is a good and powerful man. I felt the memory of when I came to the realization that mother and father were not the powerful creatures I once thought they were and I became very protective of Sally May nearly immediately.

Sally May was sent to the plantation owners house to help dust. When Sally May arrived at the big house she was put to service under Lucinda one of the regular house maids. Sally May didn’t like Lucinda because she had a haughty attitude. Sally May was in the bedroom of the Master’s daughter and spied a book on the shelf. Sally May wanted to read very much. She picked the book up and Lucinda stepped in the room and told her you better put that book down. Lucinda asked her if she could read. She replied that she couldn’t read she was just looking at the pictures. Lucinda took the book and tore one of the pages. She then took the book to the Master’s daughter, Missy, and told her that Sally May tore it. Sally May was marched outside and Missy took a switch and gave her a stinging lashing on both of her bare legs cutting them cruelly. I felt shame that a human being could inflict such cruel punishment on another human being. Sally May knew that to deny tearing the book would be a waste because house servants were always believed over field hands.

When Joshua informed Sally May’s Pa Titus that she and her brother Abraham were going to be loaned to another plantation in another state panic ran through his heart. He knew that the kind of loan that was being transacted meant that he would probably never see his children again. Titus decided right then and there that he had to escape from the plantation and take his children and wife somewhere that they could stay together. The adventure begins. The planning just took two days and in the middle of the night Sally May and her family began the journey that would change her life forever.

The family was headed to Florida to find shelter with the Seminole Indians. They had to cross much swamp land. There were sakes and gators. Sally May’s Mother is attacked by a gator. She is rescued by Pa, but dies a few days later from a fever and her wounds. Sally May is grief struck yet she realizes that she must get strong as her mother had taught her for she was now the strength emotionally for both her Pa and her brother Abraham.

They reach the Seminole Indians and are accepted by the tribe. Her Pa and brother Abraham are taught how to build boats to use in the swamp for harvesting fish. She is allowed to play as much as she needs to. Her realization that she can play and be a part of the tribe slowly leads her to a feeling of her importance to her immediate family as well as the tribe. She realizes that her Pa is falling in love with Smiling Deer and she knows that he will probably take her as a wife. She finds fulfillment and happiness but always holds her Mother dear in her heart and becomes integrated into the tribe.

This book moved me on an emotional level. It brought back to me the horrible situation of slavery and at the same time that triumphant feeling that sweeps over us when we have fought for our place and found victory through overcoming the harsh realities of life and its constant challenge. When the tribe gives Sally May a new name, Sally Little Song becomes a person who will live in my memory as someone I will always be proud to have known.

**Critical Response**

Brenda Woods is an African American voice that speaks in a musical tone through poetry and prose. She has an uplifting style yet approaches the serious aspects of life that young people must confront and will confront when they enter into the world of *My Name Is Sally Little Song.*

Ms. Woods has already been awarded the Coretta Scott King Honor book award for her previous work, *The Red Rose Box.* She is an authentic teller of stories. *My Name Is Sally Little Song* is ample proof that she deserved the award and the many more she will receive in the future.

This young adult novel pulls the heartstrings and carries the reader back to a time when the blatant inhumanity of slavery was the law of the land. The story is being told in first person narrative by the lead protagonist. Terse dialog in slave dialect moves the story rapidly along. The leading protagonist of the story is Sally May. She presents herself as someone quick to respond and strong of opinion. Ms. Woods doesn’t flesh out the character of Sally May by giving insights into her thinking or intellectual processing. The reader is forced to ascertain the personage of Sally May through her conversation and her responses to either physical or emotional stimuli. We know Sally May is suffering when she cries or when she is struggling in a fruitless attempt at avoiding a switching of her bare legs. A whipping of such brutal application that it cuts her legs and leaves bleeding wounds.

This story moves through dialog and short descriptive paragraphs of minimal insights. An example of the short descriptive paragraphs and there are few of them can be found in Chapter 7.

“None of us could keep from laughing loud. For a twinkling we were happy and free.

I wondered if this was what Delilah’s heaven was like.”

Ms. Woods’ minimalist presentation of the protagonist’s thoughts creates little room for conjecture concerning the thinking process of Sally May. She keeps the reader moving through the story and creates through this form of minimal character reflection a merge of the reader and Sally May.

Ms. Woods’ terse dialog creates fast and hard understanding of Sally Mays’ Pa. He becomes upset at

Abraham his son and scolds him. The Mother’s remonstration of Pa paints a picture of her protective nature toward her children and all of this revealed in six short lines of dialog:

But Pa snatched the fruit from his hand. “Might be fulla

poison, boy… I swear you ain’t got a licka sense!”

Abraham got a beaten-down look on his face and sat in

the grass.

Don’t be hard like a hammer, Titus. The child be hun-

gry,” Mama chastised Pa as she stroked the top of Abrahams head.

In this short dialog we see the words beaten-down, hammer, and hard. The power of this is increased because the reader knows that Titus is a black smith and hammer and beating are part and parcel of a blacksmiths trade.

Here and throughout the novel we see the meaning of text explained fully by the language of the text. Ms. Woods’ power lies in her ability to paint her prose in short precise strokes that guides the reader into the action with breathless wonder. She plots the story tightly with the reader knowing that danger is just one line ahead and the resolving of the danger just a page turn away. This type of breakneck adventure can sometimes be disjointed but she handles it with the ease of a skilled swordsman and the thrusts and jabs are countered well with practiced parries and then the destroying lunge.

I highly recommend this book for any young adult reading class. It is an honest genuine story that will enable the reader to get a taste of two different groups of social behavior. How these two groups interact with one another shows us the spirit of people who are not led by the need of capitalistic greed.