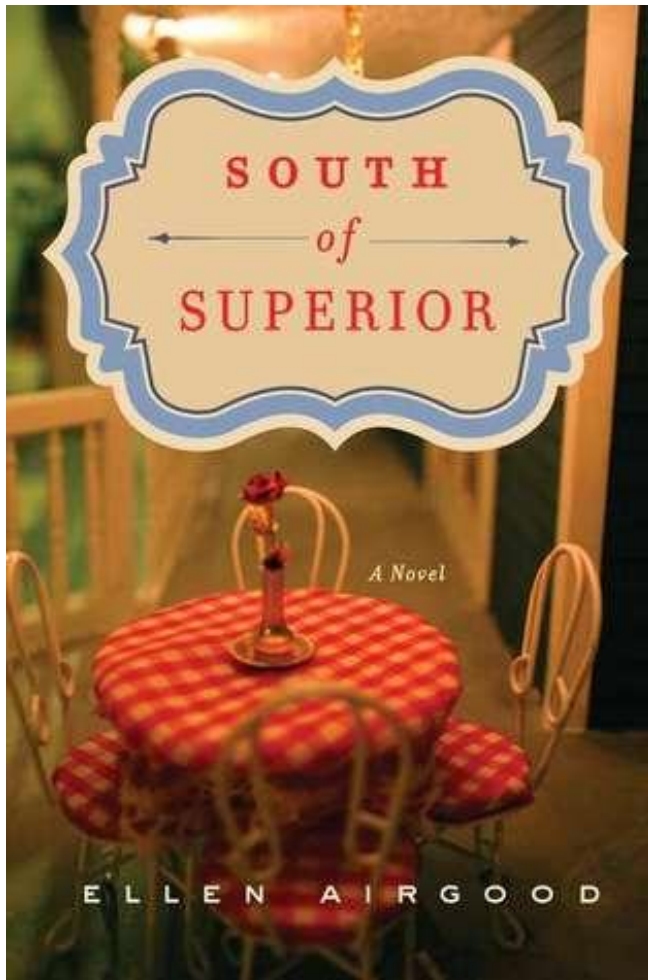


About the book...



[South of Superior](#) is the debut novel of author Ellen Airgood. When Madeline Stone left Michigan's Upper Peninsula many years ago, she never thought she'd be back. After being shunned by her grandfather and left behind by her mother, she made Chicago her new home. Yet when an aging friend of her grandfather's needs a caretaker she returns to her old hometown to help out, hoping to clear the air once and for all with her estranged grandparent. Once she's back, she begins to learn the importance of kinship and camaraderie in a town where everyone knows one another, and everyone sticks together. Soon Madeline realizes that it doesn't matter where she's been, because this may be exactly where she belongs.

-Books & Authors

About the Author...



I grew up on a small farm, the youngest of four children. My father was a blacksmith and a schoolteacher. For the last nineteen years I've been a waitress in Grand Marais, Michigan. I was twenty-five when I came to this tiny town, on a camping trip with my sister, and fell in love with the man who made my cheese sandwich and chocolate malt at the local diner. We met, exchanged assessing, almost challenging gazes, and six months later we got married. I told my sister we would, on the way back to our campsite that first day. "You're crazy," she said worriedly. But pretty soon she grinned, shook her head, started getting into the spirit of it. "Well," she said. "this is going to be interesting." And it has been.

I've never been sorry. My husband Rick and I run a diner together, a job which is always consuming, often punishing, and hugely fulfilling. Most of what I know about maturity and compassion, not to mention story, I've learned from waiting tables. We work eighty to a hundred hours a week together almost year around, and one way or another we've faced the constant barrage of setbacks and frustrations and equipment failures that restaurant work is, the high stress and long hours. There is so much satisfaction in it, though: the goodness of hard work, the joy of feeding people a meal they love, the delight of long friendships, the pride in a job well done, All kinds of people come here from all kinds of places, and we get to meet them, to hear their stories, and pretty often we get to make them happy for the time that they are here.

This is the route I took to becoming a writer. I didn't get an MFA or study writing in school. I could have learned about life anywhere, but fate brought me here, to the end of the earth and a tiny town that time forgot. My customers have given me good practice as a storyteller, too. It's a matter of survival. If I can entertain people, draw them over to my side, they won't murder me when I'm the only waitress of the floor and the cook is swamped and the wait is long and we're out of silverware and I didn't know the fish was gone when I took their order.

Writings

- *Prairie Evers*, Nancy Paulsen Books (New York), 2012

Reviews

Publishers Weekly

In Airgood's charming yet uninspired debut, Madeline Stone takes a job caring for Gladys Hansen, the final companion of the grandfather she never knew, and Gladys's ailing sister in McAllaster, Mich. On the north coast of Lake Superior she finds "a wide, wild quiet, so spacious it seemed endless, and she wondered how it might change a person." Gladys, the younger, feistier of the two sisters, is desperate to hold onto the old ways even as modern life becomes too obvious to ignore. She's the bad cop to her sister's good, and Madeline finds it hard to adjust to her meanness. She also finds it discomfiting when locals comment on her resemblance to ancestors she never knew, and Gladys is less than forthcoming about the Stone family history. To help fill her days, Madeline takes a part-time job at the local pizzeria and becomes close to Paul, the owner, who has financial woes of his own. Over time, Madeline and Gladys make peace, and old secrets are revealed. An abandoned child that Madeline takes in finally allows Airgood to address her prevailing theme--the true nature of family. (June)

Booklist

Airgood's engaging debut is the novel, brimming with quirky characters, that everyone who moves to a small, tightly knit town imagines he or she might someday write. Madeline, recovering from the death of her beloved surrogate mother and resigned to the fizzling out of her most recent romance, decides she's due for a change. She moves from Chicago to McAllaster, Michigan, on Lake Superior, to live with old family friends Gladys and Butte, two octogenarian sisters who need her help. She quickly becomes immersed in the lives of McAllaster's inhabitants, who are struggling in hard times. Gladys' friend sells eggs and maple syrup on the corner farthest away from the cop on patrol. A young single mom tries to supplement her waitressing jobs with the occasional drug deal. The pizza-parlor owner/prison chef reads Joseph Campbell in his rare spare time. Airgood runs a diner herself, which is surely the basis for some of her novel's intricate side plots and juicy small-town gossip, which makes this a sure bet for fans of Maeve Binchy, Rosamunde Pilcher, or Fannie Flagg.--Deborah Donovan

Kirkus Reviews

Matching pace to place, there's little urgency either in Airgood's novel or in McAllaster, the small town on the shore of Lake Superior for which 35-year-old Madeline impulsively, implausibly gives up life, work and a fiance in Chicago. The reason given is to take care of sweet, elderly Arbutus and her cranky sister Gladys, who had been the "good friend" of Joe, Madeline's grandfather. When Madeline's druggie young mother abandoned her illegitimate baby, Joe could have taken the child in, but he refused, and Madeline was brought up by a kind stranger whose long, recently concluded battle with cancer has equipped her for taking care of the elderly. Finding friends, a little family and the attractive owner of the pizza parlor in McAllaster, Madeline also develops an ambition to take over Gladys' and Arbutus' decayed but lovely old hotel. Airgood uses scattered events (a court case, a fire, a traffic accident) to point out community values, the long play of rural history and therapeutic, neighborly good deeds. More sensitive, less sugary than similar books in the genre, this combination of romance and self-discovery ends, unsurprisingly, in a tidy, happy place.

Discussion questions (www.us.penguinroup.com/)

1. Gladys always tells Madeline how much of an outsider she is, how much she doesn't understand the ways of McAllaster. By the end of the novel do you think Madeline is a part of the town? In what ways has she let the community of McAllaster transform her? In what way has she transformed the community?
2. Throughout the novel, Madeline is looking for a sense of purpose, for something to guide her life. At the end of the novel, do you think she's found that sense of purpose? What do you think it is? How is it different from what she was expecting when she first came to McAllaster?
3. Change is a major themes of the novel, and yet so much of what both Gladys and Madeline love about McAllaster is how the town follows an older way of living. What kind of changes happen in the novel? Which character do you think is the most changed by the end?
4. While Madeline and Gladys are deeply stubborn people, Arbutus is more likely to be adaptable. Do you think this makes Arbutus any less strong than the other women? In what ways is she just as stubborn? What do you think Madeline learns from Arbutus's way of getting her own way?
5. Think about the Bensons. Do you think that they are wrong to want to improve their business? What could they have done to be more in keeping with the community? What does Madeline learn that they do not?
6. Values are important to all the characters in the novel. How are Madeline's values different from Gladys's? Paul's? What do you think Randi's values are? The Bensons? Think about yourself. Which character do you feel most similar to?
7. At the start of the novel, Madeline takes an immediate dislike to Randi while Gladys has more patience for her. What do you think Gladys sees that Madeline does not? Think about how Madeline and Randi's relationship changes. How do you think Madeline's increased knowledge both about herself and about her history changes how she feels about Randi?
8. We never get to meet Joe Stone or learn why he gave Madeline away. What do you think his motivations were? Do you think he made the right choice? How did his giving Madeline away make her more like the Stones?

9. Life in McAllaster is hard. Why do you think Madeline ultimately chooses it over returning to Chicago? What virtues do you see in it? What qualities would you want to emulate in your own life?

10. The novel ends on a note of anticipation. What do you think will happen to the characters after the book has ended? How do you think what Madeline has learned will help her handle future hardships?

Read-Alikes

Steve Amick, [*The Lake, the River and the Other Lake*](#) (2005)

Steve Amick's first novel tells the story of a little Midwestern town that has come far from its roots as a farming village and its earlier origins as an Indian community. Situated on the beautiful strip of land between Lake Michigan and Lake Meenigeesis, the town of Weneshkeen, Michigan, has become a vacation destination, all but overrun during the summer by out-of-towners, the wealthy of whom buy up the increasingly valuable local real estate. In one of approximately 12 plotlines that follow Weneshkeen's permanent and temporary residents, old-timer Roger Drinkwater, an Ojibwe Indian and retired Navy SEAL, resents the influx of strangers and particularly the sounds of their jet skis on the lake. Roger takes the jet skis personally, and has begun to wage a guerrilla war upon them. Other characters include the female deputy sheriff suspicious of Drinkwater, a retired minister familiarizing himself with the Internet, a divorced septic tank cleaner and his computer-savvy daughter, a fabulously wealthy businessman, and the vonBushberger family of cherry growers. Interconnections between them form the basis of this humorous social commentary.

Elizabeth Bass, [*Miss You Most of All*](#) (2011)

As Rue and Laura Anderson work to make Sassy Spinster Farm a success, Rue must also raise her daughter by herself. Rue and Laura are surprised when Heidi shows up unannounced and needing help. Heidi is their long-lost stepsister who lived with them for several years until Heidi's mother left their father suddenly one night. Rue still considers Heidi family and, despite Laura's protests, welcomes Heidi to Sassy Spinster Farm. Yet Heidi has a secret reason for being there and needs Laura and Rue's sisterhood more than ever.

Nicholas Sparks, [*Safe Haven*](#) (2010)

Young Andrea Sachs accepts a promising editorial assistant's job right out of college, hoping to parlay it into a spot at *The New Yorker* within a year. However, keeping up with the inane demands of her boss, Miranda Priestly, editor-in-chief of *Runway* magazine, proves more wrenching than Andrea could ever have imagined, and she begins to wonder if it's really worth it.

Barbara Taylor Bradford, [*Three Weeks in Paris*](#) (2002)

In Paris, four young women once shared the time of their lives. Now, seven years after they left the prestigious Anya Sedgwick School of Decorative Arts, they are coming back for the eighty-fifth birthday celebration of the school's founder and grande dame. Designer Kay Lenox returns with her career soaring and her marriage crumbling. American Jessica Pierce is determined to unravel the baffling disappearance of the man she loved in Paris. Italian Maria Franconi must face the women whose friendship she lost--and her deepest doubts about herself. And Alexa Gordon knows that Paris is still about a man she can't resist, even as she is about to become another man's wife.

Kristina Riggle, [*The Life You've Imagined*](#) (2010)

In *The Life You've Imagined*, author Kristina Riggle chronicles the friendship of two childhood friends who come back together as adults after a series of misfortunes. Gambling addict Cami has all but retreated from the world, still smarting from her mother's death. Meanwhile, Cami's best friend Anna

has just returned to their small hometown, where she must confront her long-buried feelings for a childhood flame as well as the prospect of the family business being shut down. Can these two friends reconcile the pain of their respective experiences and learn to embrace life on life's terms?

Pearl Cleage, [*What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day*](#) (1997)

Ava Johnson leaves her cosmopolitan Atlanta and runs home to Idlewild, Michigan when she discovers that she's HIV-positive. She hopes that her childhood home will help her come to terms with her new situation--and with all the things she thinks she'll never have. But it isn't long before she begins to suspect that maybe her life isn't over after all.

Watch-Alikes

[*Whip It*](#) (2009)

In a town near Austin, Bliss Cavendar's strong-willed mom believes Bliss, at 17, can win pageants - the key to a happy life. Bliss isn't the beauty pageant type: she's shy, quiet, and has just one friend, Pash, her fellow waitress at a diner. Things change for Bliss when she discovers a women's roller derby league in Austin, tries out, proves to be whip fast, and makes a team. Now she needs to become someone tough on the rink, keep her parents from finding out where she goes twice a week, and do something about a first crush, on a musician she meets at the derby. Meanwhile, mom still sees Bliss as Miss Bluebonnet. Things are on a collision course; will everyone get banged up?

[*Conviction*](#) (2011)

A working mother puts herself through law school in an effort to represent her brother, who has been wrongfully convicted of murder and has exhausted his chances to appeal his conviction through public defenders.

[*In the Land of Women*](#) (2007)

Devastated over his breakup with his girlfriend, Carter Webb leaves Los Angeles to stay with his ailing Grandmother in her suburban Detroit home. Across the street lives the Hardwicke family. As Carter struggles to reconcile his own inner conflicts, he is drawn into the pains and loves of the Hardwicke women. All the Hardwicke women, in their way, fall in love with Carter. Each woman, in her own way, helps Carter find his way back.

[*The Upside of Anger*](#) (2005)

Terry Wolfmeyer is a sharp-witted suburban wife who is left alone to raise her four headstrong daughters when her husband unexpectedly disappears. Things get even more hectic around their house when Terry falls for her neighbor Denny, a once-great baseball star turned local radio D.J. This leaves her daughters out on a limb because now they have to juggle their own romantic ups and downs as well as having to deal with the dilemmas of their mom.

[*Winter Passing*](#) (2006)

Actress Reese Holden has been offered a small fortune by a book editor if she can secure for publication the love letters that her father, a reclusive novelist, wrote to her mother, who has since passed away. Returning to Michigan, Reese finds that an ex-grad student and a would-be musician have moved in with her father, who cares more about his new friends than he does about his own health and well-being.

The Five-Year Engagment (2012)

In San Francisco, after a year's relationship, Tom proposes to Violet; she accepts. She's an experimental psychologist, hoping for a post-doc at Cal. He's a sous chef who runs the kitchen when

the chef is away. When Cal falls through and she gets an offer in Ann Arbor, Tom agrees to support the move, turning down a job as chef at a new restaurant. The move requires postponing the wedding. At Michigan, Violet is in her element, but Tom is underemployed and frustrated; he's Stoic for a while, but when two years in Michigan become four, Tom's frustrations boil over, and on the eve of yet another wedding date, they must make a choice. Is there any other alternative?

Listen-Alikes

- Barenaked Ladies, '[Talk to the Hand: Live in Michigan](#)' (2007)
- Steve Amick, '[There's Always Pie](#)' (2005)
- Red Hot Chili Peppers, '[Stadium Arcadium](#)' (2012)
- Brett Dennen, '[Hope For the Hopeless](#)' (2008)



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