

# BOOKS

## Home's loss leaves family adrift

'The Yellow House' a gripping memoir about blood, water and skin.

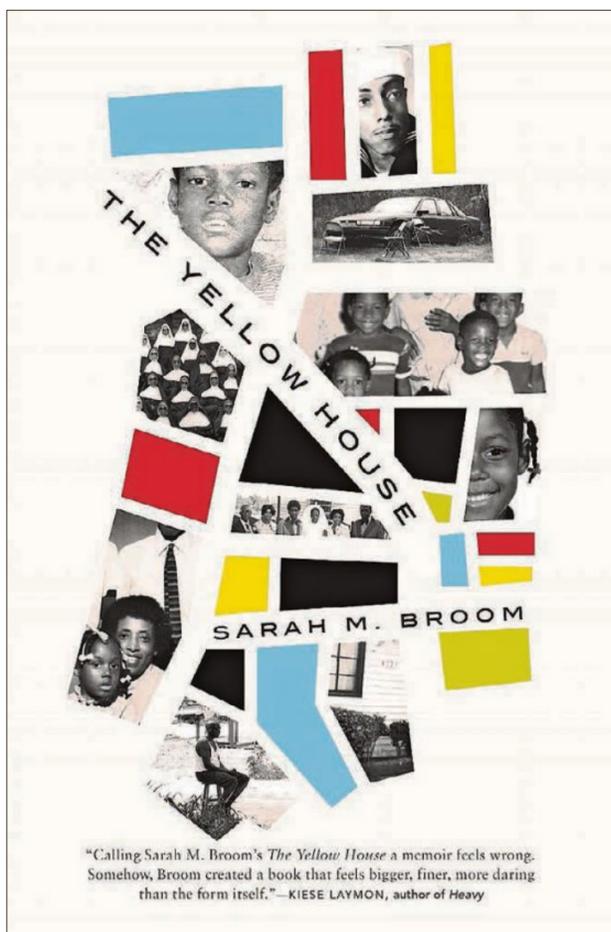
By Suzanne Van Atten  
For the AJC

Mention New Orleans and most people think of the French Quarter, with its cast-iron balconies, rowdy bars, street musicians and Mardi Gras parades. It is the heart of the city's tourist industry, attracting 18 million visitors a year. But despite its titanic significance to the city's economy, the French Quarter encompasses less than 1 square mile of real estate in a city of 400,000 people. Point being, there is a lot more to New Orleans than the tourist attractions, and that's the part debut author Sarah M. Broom writes about in her thoughtful, nuanced memoir, "The Yellow House."

New Orleans East doesn't show up in glossy tri-fold brochures promoting tourism. It barely registers on some maps of the city. But it's where Broom grew up, the youngest of 12 siblings in a two-bedroom shotgun house bought in 1961 for \$3,200 by her mother, Ivory Mae, a 19-year-old widow who was eight months pregnant at the time.

It took three years to make the place habitable, at which time Ivory, her second husband Simon Broom and their combined brood of eight children moved in. The family grew, and so did the house, gaining an upstairs bedroom, a second bathroom and a den, hastily constructed from salvaged materials following Hurricane Betsy. Simon's workmanship never measured up to Ivory's high standards, but she made it a home, decorating it with yellow carpet, handmade curtains and French provincial furnishings.

Projecting an immaculate image was a quality Ivory prized. Her children were sharp dressers, thanks to her keen skills with a sewing machine. They presented a spit-shined profile at school and church that contrasted sharply with the state of their home, which



slipped into disrepair after Simon Broom's death just six months after the author was born.

"We looked like people who had money. In how we dressed but more than that, in the way we carried ourselves ... possibly with airs ...," Broom writes. "The house, unlike the clothes our mother had tailored to us, was an ungainly fit."

Because of that, the family turned inward, strengthening its ties with one another within their shabby but still beloved shelter. Even her grown brothers who left to start families of their own were drawn back when their

relationships fizzled.

"I cannot pinpoint the precise moment when I came to understand that no one outside our family was ever to come inside the Yellow House," Broom writes. "Without knowing how it came to be, we left every person in our world who was not family outside ..."

Feeling shame for something she deeply loved was a complex set of emotions for a child also grappling with the loss of a universally adored father, whom she never knew. She coped by fleeing as far as she could, starting with college in Texas, then to a

**NONFICTION**  
**"The Yellow House"**  
by Sarah M. Broom  
Grove Atlantic  
384 pages, \$26

**AUTHOR APPEARANCE**  
**Sarah M. Broom.** AJC  
Decatur Book Festival. 5:30 p.m. Aug. 31. Free. Historic DeKalb Courthouse.  
decaturbookfestival.com.



Sarah M. Broom

job with O Magazine in New York City. That's where she was when, in the parlance of New Orleanians, the water came in 2005.

Little was left of the Yellow House after Hurricane Katrina. Broom paints a harrowing picture of her family members' various experiences escaping the city to points east and west, from California to Georgia. Most of them would never return.

The author reacted to the family's loss by taking a nonprofit job in war-torn Burundi, an alarming move considering how little forethought she gave relocating to such a dangerous environment rife with civil unrest.

"I was genuinely interested in placing what happened in New Orleans in a more global context to understand how loss, danger

and forced migration play out in other parts of the world," Broom writes. "I was also finding, I can admit now, anthropological, academic language for the urge to distance myself from the fate of my family, which of course was my fate, too."

Eventually, Broom returned to New Orleans, taking an apartment in the French Quarter for a year while she researched the history of her house and her family for the memoir. On move-in day, she noticed that her brother Carl appeared ill at ease in her third-floor apartment with a balcony overlooking one of the tourist district's busiest corners. He would never return after that day, saying, "Not everybody meant to be in them Quarters."

While Katrina is the cataclysmic event that centers Broom's story, "The Yellow House" isn't really about the storm. It's about the devastating, generational effects of social, economic and political disparity across racial lines, and how people with few resources are decimated by disaster. But don't mistake that description for a dry account of public policy. Broom has done an astonishing job stitching together the stories of her family, the history of the city and her investigations into how developers and governmental agencies contributed to her family's situation, and she embroiders it with enough heart and drama to keep the reader awake at the night, eager to see the outcome.

"The Yellow House" is filled with a lot of memorable characters, but none resonate like Carl, who stands guard over the patch of land where the family's house once stood while they wait years for restitution. Not only does Carl keep the grass trimmed and chastise drunks who dump their empties there, but he often holds court at night at a table and chairs set up in the front yard where he drinks and entertains old friends who pass by.

"He was the keeper of memory," writes Broom. In a different way, she is, too.

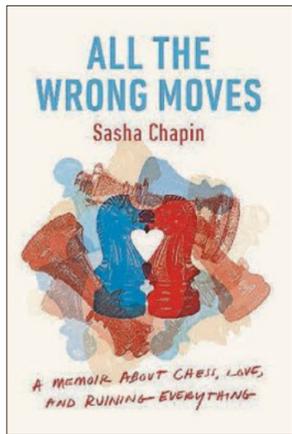
## Can chess be bad for your health?

By Sasha Chapin  
Special To The Washington Post

The quest memoir is a balky beast. To tame it as well as Canadian journalist Sasha Chapin does in "All the Wrong Moves," you'll need an obscure but preferably universal target of obsession — chess mastery, in his case — a vague discontent with your present existence, a lover or two, a guru and the globe-trotting freedom to pursue your quixotic quarry. Leaven the chase with comic doses of self-doubt, then sift out any epiphanies at odyssey's end.

"It's tricky to explain the appeal of chess to someone who doesn't play," Chapin concedes, yet he makes all the right moves in doing just that. The game's "infinite tapestry" first hooked him when he joined his high school team in Toronto: Chapin fell so hard for the 64 squares that "it felt like a possession — like a spirit had slipped a long finger up through my spine, making me a marionette, pausing only briefly to ask, 'You weren't doing anything with this, were you?'"

That fascination spawned an addiction — Chapin's nearly ruinous (see subtitle) two-year plunge down the rabbit hole of online



**NONFICTION**  
**"All the Wrong Moves: A Memoir About Chess, Love, and Ruining Everything"**  
By Sasha Chapin  
Doubleday, 240 pages,  
\$24.95

blitz and live tournament chess. Mesmerized by the game's "ecstatically various" combinations, he "spent almost all of my money, neglected my loved ones, and

accumulated a few infections" to prepare for the Los Angeles Open, where Chapin (rated 1390) hoped to topple a player rated 2000.

Slow your roll there, board freak — didn't the United States reach peak pawn when Bobby Fischer became world champ in 1972? Nope — chess commands the devotion of 600 million acolytes around the globe today, meaning one in 12 Earthlings play the game in some capacity.

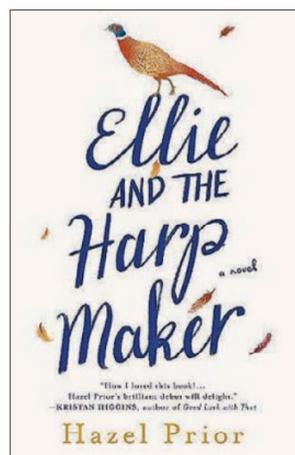
Desperate to "figure out why I was so terrible," our hero journeys to the chess mecca of St. Louis for enlightenment by koanspouting grandmaster Ben Finegold. The secret of chess, please? You must play as if you want the game to go on forever.

In the end Chapin ruins precisely nothing, unless you count a couple of botched writing assignments — one of which leads to love with his magazine editor. Realizing that a chess nut's best move is simply not to make that fateful first one, he finds solace in the example of fellow melancholic Paul Morphy, who torched the chess world for two years in the 1850s before abandoning the game: "The ability to play chess is the sign of a gentleman," Morphy once said. "The ability to play chess well is the sign of a wasted life."

### Opening Lines

**'A woman came to the barn today. Her hair was the color of walnut wood. Her eyes were the color of bracken in October. Her socks were the color of cherries, which was noticeable because all the rest of her clothes were sad colors. She carried an enormous shoulder bag, canvas. It had a big buckle (square), but it was hanging open. The woman's mouth was open too.'**

"Ellie and the Harpmaker" by Hazel Prior. Berkley, 336 pages, \$26



### Best-sellers

**HARDCOVER FICTION**

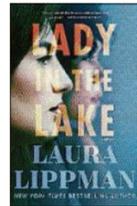
1. **One Good Deed** David Baldacci
2. **Where the Crawdads Sing** Delia Owens
3. **The Nickel Boys** Colson Whitehead
4. **The New Girl** Daniel Silva
5. **Star Wars: Thrawn: Treason** Timothy Zahn
6. **Under Currents** Nora Roberts
7. **Summer of '69** Elin Hilderbrand
8. **Window on the Bay** Debbie Macomber
9. **City of Girls** Elizabeth Gilbert
10. **Backlash** Brad Thor
11. **Lost and Found** Danielle Steel
12. **The Silent Patient** Alex Michaelides
13. **The Chain** Adrian McKinty
14. **Ask Again, Yes** Mary Beth Keane
15. **Lady in the Lake** Laura Lippman

**HARDCOVER NONFICTION**

1. **Comfort Food Shortcuts** David Venable
2. **Unfreedom of the Press** Mark R. Levin
3. **The Pioneers** David McCullough
4. **Becoming** Michelle Obama
5. **Girl, Stop Apologizing** Rachel Hollis
6. **Three Women** Lisa Taddeo
7. **Dare to Lead** Brené Brown
8. **The Life of a Wannabe Mogul** Bella Thorne
9. **American Carnage** Tim Alberta
10. **Justice on Trial** Hemingway/Severino
11. **Alone at Dawn** Schilling/Longfritz
12. **It's Not Supposed to Be This Way** Lysa TerKeurst
13. **Everything Is (Expletive)** Mark Manson
14. **Medical Medium Celery Juice** Anthony William
15. **Aftermath** James Rickards

**PAPERBACK**

1. **Before We Were Yours** Lisa Wingate
2. **The Tattooist of Auschwitz** Heather Morris
3. **Ambush** Patterson/Born
4. **The Mueller Report** (published by Scribner)
5. **Little Fires Everywhere** Celeste Ng
6. **The Adventure Zone: Murder on the Rockport Limited!** McElroy/Pietsch
7. **The Woman in the Window** A.J. Finn
8. **The Reckoning** John Grisham
9. **The Flight Girls** Noelle Salazar
10. **Official SAT Study Guide (2020 ed.)**
11. **Born a Crime** Trevor Noah
12. **The Overstory** Richard Powers
13. **The Secret Orphan** Glynis Peters
14. **The Outsider** Stephen King
15. **A Gentleman in Moscow** Amor Towles



A housewife-turned-reporter in 1960s Baltimore investigates a murder case



Singer and actress chronicles her life in poetry



A British farmer's daughter takes charge of a girl orphaned during World War II