



Celia Garth

Gwen Bristow

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This is a story about a girl who wanted things to happen to her.

Celia Garth lived in Charleston, South Carolina, during the American Revolution. She had blond hair and brown eyes and a sassy face, and she worked in a fashionable dressmaking shop.

Things did happen to Celia, but not as she had planned. The king's army captured Charleston. The ravisher Tarleton swept through the Carolina countryside in a wave of blood and fire and debauchery. Caught up in the ruin were Celia and her friends -- the merry-minded Darren; Jimmy, whose love for Celia brought her into his tragedy; the fascinating Vivian, five times married; Godfrey, rich and powerful, who met disaster because he could control anything in town but the weather; the daredevil Luke.

Most people thought the Revolution was lost. Many Americans, like Celia's handsome cousin Roy, joined the king's side. Then out of the swamps appeared Francis Marion.

Marion was a little man. Marion was also crippled. But as Luke said of him, "When that man's leading a charge, he looks nine feet tall."

In the dressmaking shop, Celia became a spy for Marion. She sewed, she smiled sweetly, and in secret she risked her life sending information to this man that the king's whole army could not catch, the mighty little man to whom Tarleton angrily gave the name 'Swamp Fox'.

(from the front end flap)

Celia Garth Details

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From Reader Review Celia Garth for online ebook

Stacey says

I've been meaning to read a Gwen Bristow novel for quite some time. The novel was a lighter read than I had expected, some parts a little predictable, but I still found it very enjoyable. Celia was a bright character that has to overcome a lot in a time of war and you find yourself rooting for her. There isn't a whole lot of adult historical fiction set during the Revolutionary War which made this a unique experience. I would recommend this to historical fiction fans!

Michele says

Can I just tell you how much I like Gwen Bristow's books? She just has the best -let me wrap my arm around you and tell you a great story that you are just gonna love- style. Her characters are always flawed and honestly, it just makes you like them all the more. She does a great job with her historical research and I really felt like I was getting a true taste for colonial life. I loved how instead of just getting the dates and times you got a chunk of someone's life and saw that at times war was dull, oppressive and just about drove a person bonkers.

I think "Jubilee Trail" is still my favorite but this is a close second. The only question I have is why I am not giving it 5 stars?

Favorite quotes: page 7: The world was full of promises, and if you put your mind to it you could make them real.

373: Celia wondered how many people there were who, like herself, led a secret life. People who seemed colorless, but who actually were walking hand in hand with glory.

381: 381: This was November, the first time since March that she had seen him by daylight, and his eyes were such a dazzling, joy-giving blue.

Tweety says

Celia Garth, was fabulous.

I mean, really. It was the perfect gloomy day read.

I liked how Celia grew from a young twenty year old to a mature young woman. She went from thinking the war was dull since she couldn't see it to thinking it was a horrible thing. She learned that it was possible to love two men, and that sometimes what you think you want isn't really it.

Jimmy was a tall, lanky and ugly captain of the revolution. He was so kind to Celia, helping her catch her dreams and watching out for her. His family was the close kind, the ones with cozy rooms lined with books and a mother who says to Celia; *"Of course, child, you'll have two. With that waist line you could have a*

dozen" She laughed and patted her own plump sides," quite a bit of padding I've got. But oh, the fun I had getting it!" Do you see why I loved that family? So down to earth!

Then we have a family quite different, they like things just so, Vivian is a mother who's house is in order and everyone in it is too. But her son Luke, the cheek-piece, takes a shine to Celia and together they have numerous bantering conversations. They really made the book.

I just have one nit-picky thing to say. When Celia and other seamstresses had gentlemen callers, they were called boy friends. Later when mentioning men who kept company with women who weren't their wives, they were called girl friends. Maybe it's just me, but I think calling them mistresses or trollops or just "Lady Friends" would have been a more accurate way of referring to them considering the time period. Boy friend and girl friend didn't really come into common use till what, the fifties?

Other than that though, I was happy. I do think that Helen Topping Miller had more exciting descriptions of the American Revolution in her books *Slow Dies the Thunder*, *The Proud Young Thing* and *Trumpet in the City*. But Gwen Bristow is a bit better at the romance.

PG We have some war imagery, a few swears and mention of what soldiers would do to people and live stock. (Like rape, murder and burning the houses down)

Ashley Perham says

I had read most of this book a long time ago, but I never finished it! As I started to read it again, I wondered why I had liked it so much. The writing was a little choppy, and Celia was questionable. But then Luke walked through the door... And the book got a billion times better. Well maybe he's not *that* great, but he's pretty awesome.

I loved this book for so many reasons. One of them is Francis Marion. We watched the Disneyland Swamp Fox miniseries a while back, and I fell in love with the story of Francis Marion. Another reason is the spying. Cuz spies are cool.

The characters are another reason. There were a lot, and I was struggling to keep them straight, but eventually, the ones you need to know become distinct. I loved all of them! (The ones that were meant to be loved anyway) Celia changes a lot in this book, and I felt like I could relate to her. I guess deep down inside I do want things to happen to me! Jimmy was pretty good. I didn't like that we didn't get a bigger picture of Celia and his relationship before they fell in love. Vivian was awesome! I would love to be like her! (Not everything probably, but some things) Luke was Luke! I loved his knowledge of the Bible! It made me laugh! (And I came across "Jerry" in my devotions the other day) I thought the majority of the characters were great and seemed real!

Maybe the biggest reason I loved this book was that it made you think about things. Especially near the end. I didn't really like how it ended tho :(I'm still thinking about those things! What's the difference between loving and in love? (Or did Luke make that up cuz he was jealous?) Do I know anybody like Marietta who can wrap their life and happiness up in someone else's? (I'm not that person) Why was Vivian so special? How can I get that vitality of Marion's men? And more questions that I can't remember right now! I love books that make me think and sort of "apply them to my life"

In conclusion, I loved this book soooooo much!!! I need to read it again or buy it! I HIGHLY recommend

this to people who like historical fiction, or just a good book!

Laura says

This book is what all historical fiction ought to be - accurate historic facts and a gripping story line of fictional characters. I enjoyed it so much, I plan on purchasing the book so it can be read again! It's a great companion to "Johnny Tremain" because in that book you have a male hero right in the middle of all the action, but in "Celia Garth" you have a female hero on the outskirts of it. I love getting the two perspectives.

Celia Garth, the main character, is a naive girl working as an apprentice to a seamstress in Charleston, South Carolina. She hears bits of news about the war with Britain but doesn't much care about it until the revolution comes to her. When the king's army lays siege and then captures Charleston, her life is turned upside down, and she must decide which side to place her allegiance. The story is a page-turner.

Along with loving the story, I learned about a part of the American Revolution that I had not yet been aware. I didn't know that most of the south was under British occupation and fear of the ravisher Colonel Banastre Tarleton. I didn't know about the man who was finally able to defeat him, Francis Marion, whose unorthodox military tactics originated modern guerrilla warfare, and is credited in the lineage of the United States Army Rangers.

I looked up several of these key American Revolution figures on Wikipedia, and both Tarleton and Marion are controversial figures. Gwen Bristow unabashedly favors the American view of Tarleton being a scoundrel and Marion being a hero. If she were a British author, those opinions would be reversed.

I read "Celia Garth" over the 4th of July holiday. What a great book to better appreciate the sacrifices made for our independence and freedom!

Naksed says

In *Celia Garth*, Gwen Bristow cleverly draws the reader in what seems to be a lightweight, comedic tale, with a ditzzy, silly, social-climbing, young heroine who made me think at first this was gonna be a Becky Sharp doppelganger. Then, lo and behold, we are plunged into the horror, the real horror of war. From the siege of Charleston by British forces, to their savage plunder of nearby plantations, and persecution of those who were perceived as less than loyal to the King, after their initial victory over the Americans, Bristow painted a picture of the American Revolution that was realistic, heartbreaking, and vivid.

The second half of the book, after the invasion and occupation of the Brits, has our heroine becoming a spy for the rebels. Well, this was very underwhelming for me, as was the tepid romance. The author obviously did her research of the era so I was disappointed that she did not get inspired to have her heroine emulate some of the fascinating, adventurous, real-life, female heroes of the American Revolution. There was so much swashbuckling opportunity here! Unfortunately, our heroine is relegated to passing little messages hidden in sewing baskets. Quel dommage :(

First half was stellar, second half just underwhelming. I would still recommend this for people who, like me, know very little of the details of the American Revolutionary Wars.

LemonLinda says

This was such a comfort read for me - quick and easy historical fiction set in Charleston during the American Revolution with strong, lovable characters and a good storyline. That is a perfect read for me. Celia Garth is a strong, independent young woman who lost both parents as a child and lived with her uncle and his family who although in the planter class struggled a bit. When the family begins to try to marry her off she turns to her talents as a seamstress and she secures a place with a well known dressmaker in town. There her life changes. She has never felt that she belongs to anyone and that she truly mattered to them but this changes in many ways.

The town is split with divided loyalties - Patriot and Tory - but the two sides coexist until the British finally occupy the city and begin to roam the countryside killing and pillaging as they go. The love and comfort she has found is initially destroyed but Celia finds her revenge working as a spy and revealing small secrets helping Colonel Francis Marion (the real figure known as the Swamp Fox) to make life miserable for the British. Through this she really finds herself and grows into a more confident and fulfilled young woman.

Misfit says

This is the tale of Celia Garth, a 20 year old woman trying to make a living as a seamstress in Charleston, South Carolina during the Revolutionary war. The author does a great job of setting up the scenes of the town and plantations, and the history of the time. We follow Celia and her friends through the seige of Charleston by the British, living through the constant shelling and lack of food until the final surrender.

At first, things seem normal after the surrender and Celia begins to build a new life, but tragedy strikes after the British go back on their promises and Celia must start life afresh. This time, while working as a seamstress she is also a bit of a "spy" for the colonials.

This was a wonderful story of love and courage, with a great dose of history thrown in. I don't know enough about the period to say how accurate it is, but I thoroughly enjoyed immersing myself in another century for a day or two. This is also a good choice for a younger reader, as the "love scenes", if you can call them that, are extremely chaste. Note, this book is scheduled to be republished in December 2008.

Rosina Lippi says

I wrote the introduction for this edition of Celia Garth, but it appears under my pen name, Sara Donati. And here it is:

At age thirteen I discovered historical fiction by means of Gwen Bristow's Jubilee Trail, and with that began a life long preoccupation with stories set in the past.

By the time I was seventeen I had read hundreds of novels about civil wars (British and American), the

Revolution, the Anglo-Saxons and the Norman Invasion, ancient Rome and Greece.

I considered myself something of a connoisseur, someone who could tell her Mary Renault from James Michener. The stories I liked best were the ones that focused on the lives of women, who were so often banished to the periphery in the historical fiction best sellers. Even at a young age I was skeptical of James Fenimore Cooper's portrayal of women struggling to survive on the New-York frontier.

My impression was that male authors didn't really know how to write female characters, and they didn't particularly regret that lack. Women were wonderful for filling in detail and establishing background; a man had to have a family to fight for, after all. The most a reader could hope for was a female with grit, that stock character who knows how to shoot a gun and speaks her mind now and then, but isn't really fulfilled until she embraces her feminine nature.

Even female authors fell into this trap. Scarlett O'Hara was a strong-willed, spoiled, manipulative, vain wretch who wrestled her fate to the ground and held it there determined to get what she believed she deserved. Except, of course, she fails, because Scarlett doesn't know what she wants. She rejects the love of a good man, and is doomed to unhappiness.

Gwen Bristow took a different approach. Her female characters may be introduced to us as young and inexperienced; they may even be naïve. But they are otherwise serious-minded individuals with strong feelings about matters other than engaging the interest of men.

This is certainly true of Celia Garth. A young woman with few family ties, she is proud of her skills as a seamstress and ambitious. She depends in the first line on her own intelligence and sense of self. Unlike many primary characters in early historical novels, she does not fling herself into harm's way. Harm comes, certainly, in the form of another war and a British army bent on not only subduing, but mastering and humiliating a rebel colony.

Celia has a strong sense of herself and her abilities, and what it means to be a Southerner (first) and an American (second) in occupied Charleston. She does fall in love, but her choice is a good man with a family who loves and respects her. The conflict is not an internal one for Celia; she does not doubt her choices. The force that moves her story along is external: when the marauding British army takes everything she holds dear, the Revolution is no longer academic for Celia. Step by step she becomes more involved, of her own free will.

Her love story, as touching as it is, is secondary to the role she has taken for herself as a spy.

Celia Garth is a novel that straddles a line. She takes great pains to recreate Charleston as a war zone; Celia and those close to her are shaken, again and again, by the constant barrage of artillery fired from British ships in the harbor. The Revolution is not a sanitized affair; there is death and injury and loss of property; there is despair and grievous insult and loss of hope. There is division within the community; Celia's cousin takes the King's side and shows no empathy for Celia even in her worst days. The stories of the many secondary characters, good, indifferent and bad, come together to bring 18th century war-time Charleston into three full dimensions.

Bristow was a proud native of the South. Her love for South Carolina and Charleston are palpable. Thus it isn't surprising that in trying both to tell a true story and to honor her home she does in fact sidestep the issue of slavery. There is no contemplation of that institution; it just is. The many slaves in the story hate the British as much as their owners do. This may be seen as a simplification or even as denial on Barstow's part, or simply as a realistic representation of how Celia saw and understood her world.

For Celia, as is the case with many of Barstow's female characters, personal happiness – family, marriage, children – is a byproduct of a life lived on a wider plain where challenges must be overcome. Celia Garth earns her happy ending. With Celia, Barstow gives us a complex, ambitious character who can strive for personal fulfillment in a whole range of ways.

There may well have been young women like Celia who spied for the colonial forces during the Revolution, women whose stories have been forgotten. If there are such records, the details will be spotty and open to interpretation; the historical record is what it is, and doesn't strive to convince anybody of the facts or even to make them palatable or believable.

The novelist does bear that burden, and Barstow is equal to the challenge. With Celia Barstow she gives us an extraordinary young woman living in Charleston during the Revolution – a setting as extraordinary as Celia herself.

Sara Donati

June 24 2008

Diane Lynn says

Wonderful story set during the American Revolution. Celia Garth lives in Charleston and works as a seamstress. She experiences the Revolutionary War and even plays a part. The descriptions of the area are very well done. I did have one minor nitpick, I've never known Carolina Jessamine to be in full bloom in June. Had the author said anytime between December and March, I wouldn't have had a quibble. Other than that, Gwen Bristow can sure tell a great story. I absolutely love her writing.

Amy S says

Celia Garth is a young and pretty girl who works in a dressmaker's shop in Charleston. Although the Revolutionary War is being fought, Celia really doesn't care as it doesn't seem to affect her life much. She only knows she wants adventure and fun.

But when the British invade Charleston and her life is changed forever, Celia finds out what she is really made of and what she really cares about. She is forced to grow and change through times of devastating loss and true joy. She finds courage as a spy, listening in on Tory women's conversations in the dressmaker shop, knowing that if she too is captured there will be terrible consequences and no one will be able to help her. She has found adventure, but not in the way she once dreamed of.

Very good historical fiction. Well written characters to the point that I really felt her sorrows and joys. I wish there were a sequel so I could continue to follow these characters and how they were able to adjust after the siege of Charleston.

Anne - Books of My Heart says

This review was originally posted on Books of My Heart

I received this book for free from Publisher in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

This is the first historical romance I remember and a favorite of mine in my teen years. I own an original hardcover copy. I bought the ebook and now I have listened to the new audio release. It is a very long time since I read **Celia Garth**, so it was shocking to me how clearly I remembered everything and how some of the concepts became part of my own life beliefs. I decided to be an appreciator.

The story both because of being written over 50 years ago plus it's a historical romance does have some

dated concepts. Slavery is part of the world. There are definitely class distinctions. Women perhaps did not have much power but many were portrayed as strong and smart.

The war is a big factor in the plot and the story. It may or may not be historically accurate. Either way I loved it. The battles and strategies fascinated me. Some truly grim things happen during war. I enjoyed the tales of Francis Marian, the Swamp Fox.

Celia is a new adult and does undergo a great deal of growth and some of the hardships of being an orphan and the war. She is a seamstress which I loved because I sew. (In my teen years, I sewed pretty much every day). Her desire to be independent and make her own choices in life resonated with me. I loved her circle of friends which developed throughout the story. I liked Celia and hoped for her success!

“I don’t think,” she added, “that you’d understand.”

“Why not?” he asked genially.

“You’re so content the way you are. Oh Darren, don’t you ever want to—to be somebody?”

Darren chuckled. “I am somebody. I’m an appreciator.”

“A what?”

“An appreciator,” said Darren. “A person who appreciates things.” He grinned. “People who do things need other people to appreciate them. Don’t they?” In spite of her worryment Celia began to laugh. Darren went on. “I’m fairly bright and I’ve got pretty good taste. I can appreciate books and music, and good clothes, and good food and wine—why Celia, I’m mighty important in the world.”

Narration:

Gabra Zackman is one of my favorite narrators. I listened to this at 1.25 speed which was comfortable, even with the southern accents. She did a nice lilt which seemed to fit. I thought both the male and female voices worked well. Having read the book many times, it was interesting to have the emotional development of her performance.

Listen to a clip [here](#) .

QNPoohBear says

Warnings:

- 1) The jacket flap gives away the plot. Don't read the whole thing!
- 2) This is a story about war. There are horrific acts of violence that appear as part of the plot. You can't skip it because the whole plot depends on it. The war action is told rather than shown, but it's told in enough gruesome detail to be a textbook, similar to *An Infamous Army*.

Plot summary without spoilers

Celia Garth is young, pretty and bored to death working as an apprentice seamstress in Charleston, South Carolina during the Revolutionary War. Ceila is always looking to the future. Her present is not satisfying enough for her. She longs to sew a real dress and become a well known seamstress instead of going back to the country as a poor relation. When her friend Captain Jimmy Rand tells her of an older lady who wants a dress that really fits but has exacting standards, Celia jumps at the chance. Vivian Lacy is not a sweet little old lady. She's small but when she stands she appears nine feet tall. She's tough, she's had to be because she's buried four husbands and two children, and she's particular about what she wears. Dealing with Vivian isn't easy, but she takes a liking to Celia and vice versa. Celia experiences the joys of her first love affair and the excitement of being engaged. Then the British arrive in Charleston harbor and the war becomes all to frighteningly close to home for Celia. Celia remains true to the "rebel" (American) cause in her heart though she must fight the odds to do it.

Review without spoilers

This story is a sweeping saga of a young woman's journey to adulthood. It's hard to say what I thought of the plot without revealing spoilers, so I will begin with the writing.

This author had a real knack for describing the place setting in such beautiful detail that I felt like I was there. I could feel the oppressive heat and see the cypress trees and the church steeple. She also excelled in creating likeable, believable characters that come to life and stay with you after the book is done. The reader will feel every emotion the characters are feelings and feel for them as they experience joy and sorrow. Gwen Bristow also excelled at research. I knew a little bit about the Revolutionary War in the South and I plan to look it up and see if she got her facts right. I learned a lot about South Carolina history and I feel bad for South Carolina for getting destroyed during two wars. The history is also the downfall of the book. There's a bit too much telling and relating of events that can be found in history books. The history is better when it's told from the point-of-view of a character and what happened to them. The story truly shines when it's about the characters and what happens directly to them. I was mostly interested in Celia and what would happen to her rather than what happened to South Carolina because that I already knew! (hooray for Nathanael Greene, my statesman). I also didn't like the unapologetic view of slavery. They're all kind to their "negro servants" without mentioning those negro servants are enslaved. The "servants" love their white owners like family. They grew up together and are family. Excuses, excuses, excuses. I found it particularly distasteful when a small scale farmer intends to turn their estate into a full working plantation. That means slave labor. I don't care how KIND the characters are, they're still owning other human beings and that I can not stand. Though the characters will be long dead by the Civil War, it makes me sad to think their family will be on the wrong side of history.

The plot is engaging once the Siege of Charleston starts. Thought I knew about the Francis Marion, Banastre Tarleton and a bit about the history, I had a hard time putting the book down because I wanted to know what would happen to the characters. The unspeakable tragedy of this story really made me upset. I couldn't believe that anyone could be so cruel but I know it happened and I know the Union did something similar during the Civil War. It's heartbreaking to see it happen to the characters. I loved the anecdotes about Francis Marion and how Luke was a part of that story. Tarleton makes a good villain, but it sounds like some of his

deeds may have been misrepresented and turned into tall tales later on. Including the characters into real life events made the history more interesting anyway. The very end of the book was odd. The romance was rushed but at first it worked within the plot but then it was kind of glossed over and summarized. The last scene feels out of place. I wanted something more after that.

Now, here be minor spoilers, read at your own risk!

(view spoiler)

I enjoyed the book more than I thought I would. Aside from the length and violence, this book would be a good young adult read. Fifty years ago romance novels consisted of kisses only so this novel is clean in that respect. There are scenes with husband and wife in bed but just lying in bed together holding each other. A character gives birth but it's not described. All of the graphic content is reserved for the war.

Tasha says

I gave this a 5 star review because the story really gave me a sense of being in Charleston during the war and really getting an understanding of the times. The story is well-written and I enjoyed the characters as well. Looking forward to reading more from this author.

Ruth Chatlien says

This was one of the first books to make me love historical fiction, and I so enjoyed reading it again. I loved the characterization of Celia and the portrayal of the time period just as much as I first did forty-some years ago.
