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Publication Date: June 15, 2011

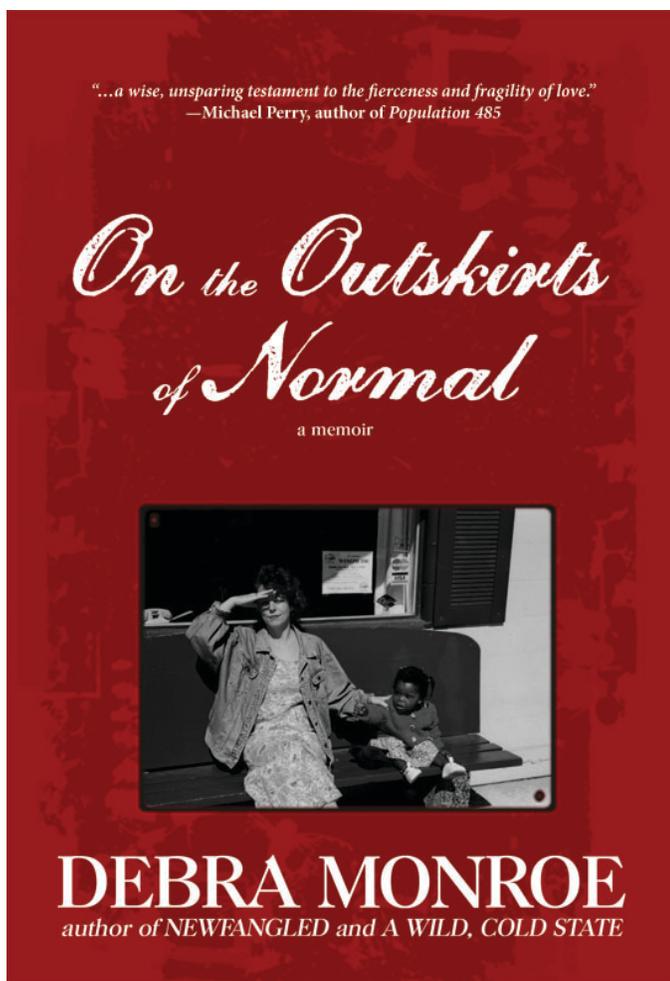
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# On the Outskirts of Normal

a memoir

by Debra Monroe

now in paperback and ebook editions from Engine Books



The Year's Best Reading in 2010  
A Top Ten List Selection  
*The Barnes and Noble Review*

Best Southern Books of 2010                      2010 Best Books  
*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*    *San Antonio Express-News*

“REQUIRED READING: In a setting where working mothers are rare, novelist and single mom Debra Monroe’s adoption of a black baby puts her *On the Outskirts of Normal*...”  
—*Vanity Fair*

“PICKS: Should a middle-aged white woman with a history of failed relationships try to raise a black baby in small-town Texas? Author Monroe proves she’s got the right stuff.”  
—*People*

“OUR PICKS: *On the Outskirts of Normal*. Debra Monroe writes about the complications, and gifts, of transracial adoption.”  
—*Salon.com*

“RECOMMENDED READING: This unsentimental memoir about a white woman who adopts a black baby in small town Texas.”  
—*O: The Oprah Magazine, The Reading Room*

“Debra Monroe had been a hidden treasure until 2010 when the world discovered her extraordinary memoir...a true tale of building a family and life in rural Texas.”  
—*Southern Living*

In her first memoir, award-winning novelist and short story writer Debra Monroe tells the story of her quest to become the parent her adopted daughter, Marie, deserves, while facing illness, the death of her own mother, and a seemingly-doomed but eventually fruitful search for a love of her own. Each of the memoir’s thirteen chapters relays a time period and series of events that contributes to Monroe’s path from a sense of powerlessness in her world to, as she says, getting her “clout.” As a single, white mother to a black daughter in a picturesque town, that path is fraught with difficult encounters and hard-won victories. Monroe builds herself and her still-forthcoming child an addition to her tiny cabin with only a stack of plans and a group of loveable if sometimes difficult subcontractors. She battles illness—Marie’s and her own—and nearly dies from a botched surgery. She grieves the death of her mother, whose companionship she has only recently rediscovered after a long absence. Through it all, she maintains grace and patience in the face of inadvertent racism and commentary from a Greek chorus of observers, all of whom wonder: How did she and Marie end up together? The answer, of course, is that they were made for one another, that they belonged to one another the minute they met.

“Having driven across the country to see her brand-new adopted granddaughter, Debra Monroe’s mother says the first thing that comes into her head: ‘I knew she’d be black, but not *this* black.’ Monroe simply says, ‘Mom, there’s a blank in the baby book called *Grandma’s First Words*.’ The sly, dry humor of this—the offering of the second chance, the reminder that everything, even the mistakes, will be written down—tells you most of what you need to know about Monroe’s approach to life, and to memoir. Her generosity of spirit never fails her.”

—Marion Winik, author of *First Comes Love*

“High-velocity verve and gripping insight matched in rare form by the level of compassion—anyone who cares this much about getting a little girl’s hair just right is a truly endearing person. Flaws and question marks, local places, very particular people, wit and weariness and astonishment at the myriad ways a life unfolds—inviting readers not only to the comfortable “outskirts of normal” but the genuine heart of it all.”

—Naomi Shihab Nye

“Sometimes the barren years bloom, flourishing atop old scar tissue, and give each of us a new heart. This, then, is the promise of Debra Monroe’s extraordinarily poignant, powerfully written memoir, which charts one woman’s tenacious journey into strength and unlikely motherhood and unexpected joys. She gathers along the way the brave yet painful knowledge of what love costs. Monroe is an unflinching commentator on self as well as society, a myth-buster as well as a trailblazer in an America that is neither post-racial nor post-sexist, and I suspect the significance of this book will only grow in value, a cultural benchmark, in the years and decades ahead of us.”

—Bob Shacochis, National Book Award winner

author of *Easy in the Islands* and *Domesticity: A Gastronomic Interpretation of Love*

“Compelling and full of pain and honesty, *On the Outskirts of Normal* wrestles with the messiness of the search for insight in the wake of trouble. Debra Monroe approaches the subject of race, always fraught with landmines, with humor and humility. Full of stylish shifts and comic, edgy observations, Monroe’s story reveals much about parents who are present and parents who are absent, about good and bad caregiving, and about the stability of the places we call home.”

—David Haynes, author of *Somebody Else’s Mama* and *The Full Matilda*

“Any narrator who repels an intruding raccoon by pelting it with books of poems has my full attention. Debra Monroe has written a wise, unsparing testament to the fierceness and fragility of love.”

—Michael Perry

author of *Population 485: Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time* and *Truck: A Love Story*

“Debra Monroe forges not only her charming “family against the grain,” but a remarkable canniness about motherhood and its twin perils, grief and love.”

—Karen Brennan, author of *Being With Rachel*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Debra and Marie Monroe, 2009

Photo by Scott Van Osdol

**DEBRA MONROE** has written four books of fiction and one memoir: *The Source of Trouble*; *A Wild, Cold State*; *Newfangled*; *Shambles*; and *On the Outskirts of Normal*. Her books have been widely reviewed and won many awards, including The Flannery O’Connor Award and the John Gardner Fellowship. They’ve been nominated for the National Book Award, listed as “Required Reading” in *Vanity Fair*, as “Our Picks” on *Salon.com*, as “Recommended Reading” in *O: The Oprah Magazine*, and named in annual “Best Ten Books” lists by *Elle* magazine and *The Barnes and Noble Review*. She lives in Austin, Texas, and teaches in the MFA program at Texas State University.

**TITLE: ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF NORMAL: A MEMOIR**

**AUTHOR: DEBRA MONROE**

**PUBLICATION DATE: JUNE 15, 2011**

**ISBN: 978-0-9835477-0-9**

**PRICE: \$14.95 PAPERBACK; \$6.99 EBOOK EDITIONS**

**(ebook ISBN: 978-0-9835477-4-7)**

## ABOUT ENGINE BOOKS

Engine Books is a boutique fiction press established in 2011, publishing novels, short story collections, collected novellas, and related volumes. We publish four titles each year, ensuring full attention to the editing, production, and promotion of each book. *On the Outskirts of Normal* and *Shambles* comprise the press’ first releases. Forthcoming titles include original short story collections from National Book Award Finalist Patricia Henley and award-winning short story writer Gregory Spatz, among others. Learn more at [enginebooks.org](http://enginebooks.org).