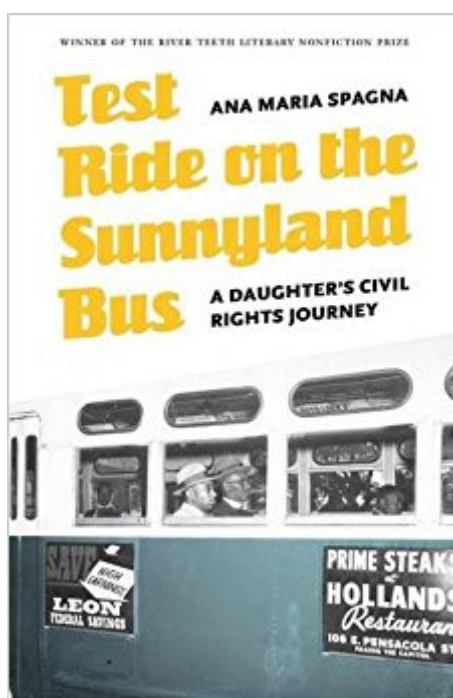


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# Test Ride On The Sunnyland Bus: A Daughter's Civil Rights Journey (River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize)



## Synopsis

Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus chronicles the story of an American family against the backdrop of one of the civil rights movement's lesser-known stories. In January 1957, Joseph Spagna and five other young men waited to board a city bus called the Sunnyland in Tallahassee, Florida. Their plan was simple but dangerous: ride the bus together—three blacks and three whites—get arrested, and take their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. Fifty years later Ana Maria Spagna sets off on a journey to understand what happened and why. Spagna travels from her remote mountain home in the Pacific Northwest to contemporary Tallahassee, searching for the truth of the incident and her father's involvement. Her journey is complicated by the fact that her father never spoke of the Sunnyland experience and died unexpectedly when she was eleven. Seeking out the other bus riders, now in their seventies, Spagna tries to make sense of their conflicting stories. Her odyssey becomes further troubled by the sudden diagnosis of her mother's terminal cancer. A Winner of the River Teeth Literary Nonfiction prize, Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus deftly weaves cultural and personal history, memoir, and reportage in this fascinating look at a family and a nation's past.

## Book Information

Series: River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize

Paperback: 286 pages

Publisher: Bison Books; First Edition edition (April 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0803217129

ISBN-13: 978-0803217126

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.7 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #237,163 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Hispanic & Latino #503 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Minority Studies #626 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Civil Rights & Liberties

## Customer Reviews

"Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus stands as a magnificent testament and tribute to the lives of many people—Ana Maria Spagna's parents, the many patriots of the civil rights

movement, and the citizens of communities far and wide, large and small. Her surprising story renewed my awe in the interconnectedness of all of our lives and affirmed that the current championing of hope in our country is a hope deserving of all its fervor."•Kathleen Finneran, author of *The Tender Land: A Family Love Story* (Kathleen Finneran 2009-09-29)"A beautifully written account."•Teresa Scollon, *ForeWord* (Teresa Scollon *ForeWord* 2010-03-11)"With this new and nuanced memoir, Ana Maria Spagna shows us yet another facet of herself. In the field of universal human questions, "Who am I?" takes a close second to the simple yet elegant, "Why?" The author crosscuts through both in *Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus*."•Ann Beman, *Literary Review* (Ann Beman *Literary Review*)"[*Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus* is] a personal journey, filled with revelation after revelation about humanity and family and self."•Joe Ponepinto, *Raven Chronicles* (Joe Ponepinto *Raven Chronicles*)"*Test Ride* is the story of Ana Maria's voyage of personal discovery, as much autobiography as biography, as she comes to terms with memories and family relationships."•Paul T. Murray, *MultiCultural Review* (Paul T. Murray *MultiCultural Review*)

Ana Maria Spagna is the author of *Now Go Home: Wilderness, Belonging, and the Crosscut Saw*, which was named a Best Book of 2004 by the Seattle Times. Her work has appeared widely in publications such as *Orion*, *Utne Reader*, and *North American Review*. She lives and writes in Stehekin, Washington.

I lived through those days in Tallahassee. The Sunnyland bus did not follow the route that the writer notes in her book. If it went out Thomasville Road, it was either the Beard Street Bus or the Betton Hills Bus.....I rode those two buses to and from high school everyday. Those buses did not go to Sunnyland. Just really disappointed in the book. The writer spent most of the book trying to convince the reader that she did not really want to write this book. The book could have been much better if the writer had really been committed to writing this book.

I came to to send this book to my good friends at the Muskegon County Museum of African American History, but now I see I can also have an opportunity to share a spirited and enthusiastic recommendation. Years ago I worked with Ana Maria and had the challenge of trying to keep up with her doing hard physical labor. As an extra bonus for the work, I got the pleasure of hearing her stories and watching her writing career grow and bloom. Her latest book, though, is a real surprise for me. I thought I knew all her stories, and yet her telling of the story of her father's involvement in

the Tallahassee bus boycott of 1957 is really wonderful and educational and creates a bridge from now to an era most of us never really fully appreciated. I cannot recommend the book highly enough, but when you read it you will discover new stories and new heroes, and you will be drawn even closer to the heroes in your own story and your own history. For a white LA valley girl she has connected with a southern All-American iconic story in a way that I can only envy, and in a way that I hope lots of people can find educational and inspiring. I really want to hear what you think of her story.

Spagna writes with a gorgeous combination of unflinching honesty and an understanding heart. Her "Test Ride" is a must-take journey.

Ana Maria Spagna weaves a daughter's doubts about her father's past as a civil rights activist with her own human weaknesses in ways that left me smarter and connecting with her own emotional ride. I thank her for expressing my own questions and fears about my aging mother's illnesses, as well as for diving into the murky waters of "did the Civil Rights movement improve anything?". Her answers are personal, yet helped me clarify my own. And, I now understand a piece of the movement I knew nothing about, and from reading a beautifully written, poignant, personal story, not a textbook!

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