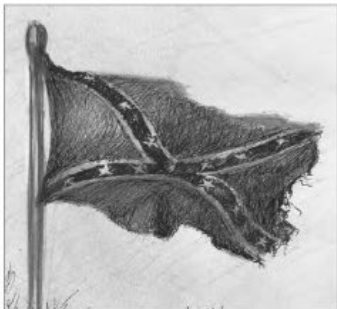


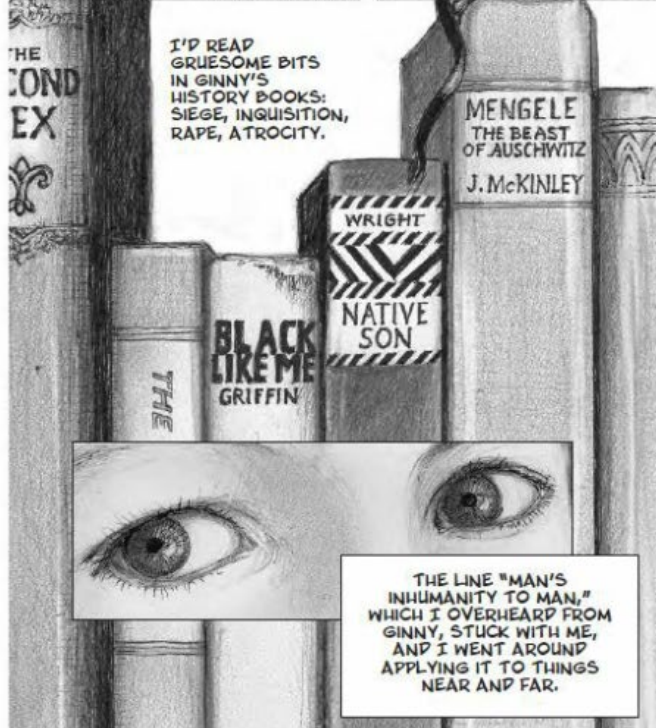
chapter 9
KNOW ALABAMA



BY THE TIME MY 4TH-GRADE TEACHER PASSED OUT OUR KNOW ALABAMA TEXTBOOKS, TOO MUCH HAD HAPPENED FOR ME TO SWALLOW EVERYTHING THE AUTHORS CLAIMED.

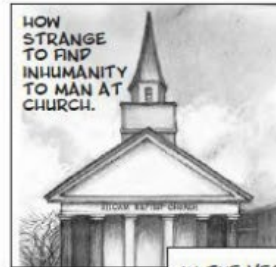


I'D WITNESSED SEGREGATION; I'D SEEN RACISM.



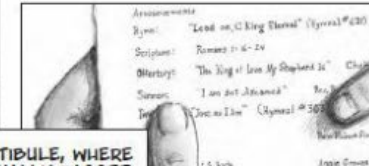
I'D READ GRUESOME BITS IN GINNY'S HISTORY BOOKS: SIEGE, INQUISITION, RAPE, ATROCITY.

THE LINE "MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN," WHICH I OVERHEARD FROM GINNY, STUCK WITH ME, AND I WENT AROUND APPLYING IT TO THINGS NEAR AND FAR.



HOW STRANGE TO FIND INHUMANITY TO MAN AT CHURCH.

YET, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT MY FATHER WITNESSED ONE SUNDAY DURING THE VOTER-REGISTRATION DRIVE OF 1965.



IN THE VESTIBULE, WHERE USHERS USUALLY PASSED OUT PROGRAMS...

...HE ENCOUNTERED PEACONS ARMED AGAINST INVASION.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

IT'S FOR YOUR PROTECTION, YOUNG LADY.

RUMOR HAD IT THAT BLACK ACTIVISTS INTENDED TO INTEGRATE WHITE CHURCHES, MUCH THE SAME WAY THEY CONDUCTED SIT-INS AT LUNCH COUNTERS.



I DON'T KNOW IF MY FATHER EXPRESSED HIS DISMAY VERBALLY...

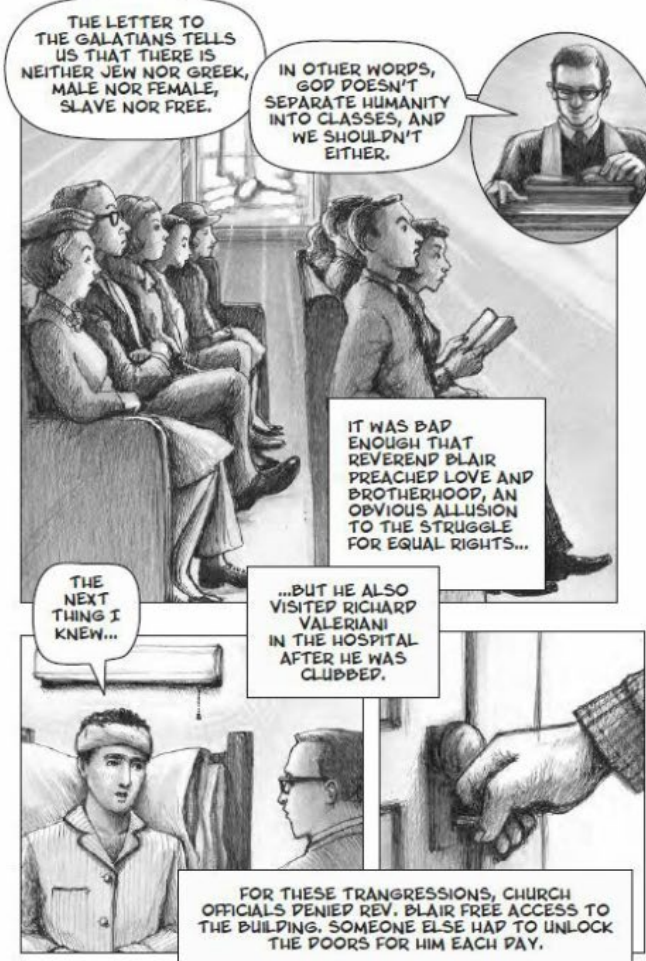


...OR, IF LIKE A HANDFUL OF OTHERS, HE SIMPLY WALKED OUT,

AND VOICED HIS FEELINGS AT HOME WHERE IT WAS SAFE.

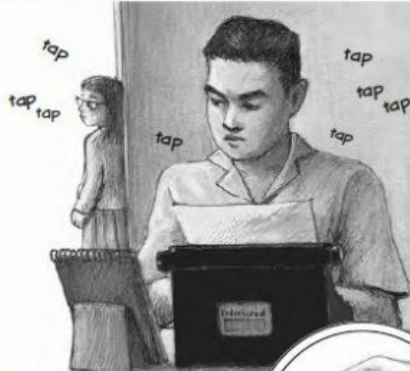


AT THE FAR END OF WASHINGTON STREET, WHERE MY FATHER WOULD HEAD NEXT, THE METHODISTS HAD THEIR HANDS FULL WITH AN OUTSPOKEN MINISTER.

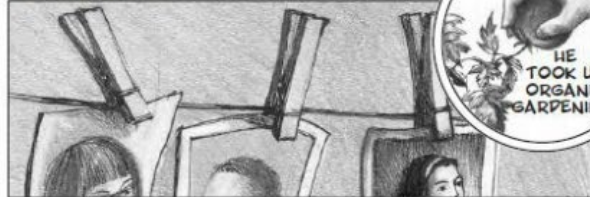


SO THE METHODISTS DIDN'T PAN OUT EITHER, AND MY FATHER ABANDONED CHURCH ATTENDANCE FOR YEARS TO COME.

HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO OTHER PASSIONS, SUCH AS THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES.



HE TOOK PHOTOS.



HE ENFORCED A HOUSEHOLD STANDARD OF ACADEMIC DEVOTION.



CONSEQUENTLY, I DID ALL MY SCHOOLWORK, NO MATTER HOW AWFUL THE TEXTBOOK, WHICH WAS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF KNOW ALABAMA.

[THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS COME FROM THE TEXT OF KNOW ALABAMA, EXCLUDING ILLUSTRATIONS.]

CHAPTER VIII PLANTATION LIFE



Now we have come to the happiest way of life in Alabama before the War Between the States.

Now suppose you were a little boy or girl and lived in one of the plantation homes many years ago. You wake up early in the morning, bathe, dress, and run down the long stairs to have breakfast with your family.



The Negro cook whom you call "Mammy" comes in bringing a great tray of food. You have known her all your life and love her very much.

"Good morning, Miss Mary; good morning, Mr. John," she says.

"Good morning, Mammy," you reply.

And Mammy smiles and sets the dishes of hot food on the table.



You eat a big breakfast because you are hungry and looking forward to a long day of fun on the plantation.



"You want to ride the fields with me today?" your father asks.

"Yes, sir," you answer, and you get on your horse.

You turn into the road beyond the iron gate and ride off toward the flat acres of cotton and corn fields. You can see Negroes working in the white cotton.



In these days of slavery, the plantation owners had many slaves. Most of them were treated kindly. There were a few masters who did not treat their slaves kindly.



As you ride up beside the Negroes in the field, they stop working long enough to look up, tip their hats, and say, "Good morning, Master John."

You like the friendly way they speak and smile; they show bright rows of white teeth.

"How's it coming, Sam?" your father asks one of the old Negroes.

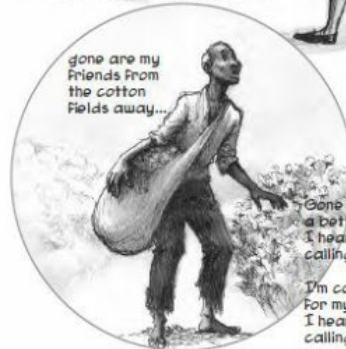
"Fine, Marse Tom, jes' fine. We got 'most more cotton than we can pick." Then Sam chuckles to himself and goes back to picking as fast as he can.



IN SCHOOL ASSEMBLY, WE SANG SONGS RANGING FROM PATRIOTIC TO FOLK. MY FAVORITE WAS "OLD BLACK JOE," BY STEPHEN FOSTER. I WAS A FAN OF PATHOS IN THOSE DAYS.



Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay...



gone are my friends from the cotton fields away...

Gone from the Earth to a better land I know, I hear their gentle voices calling, "Old Black Joe."

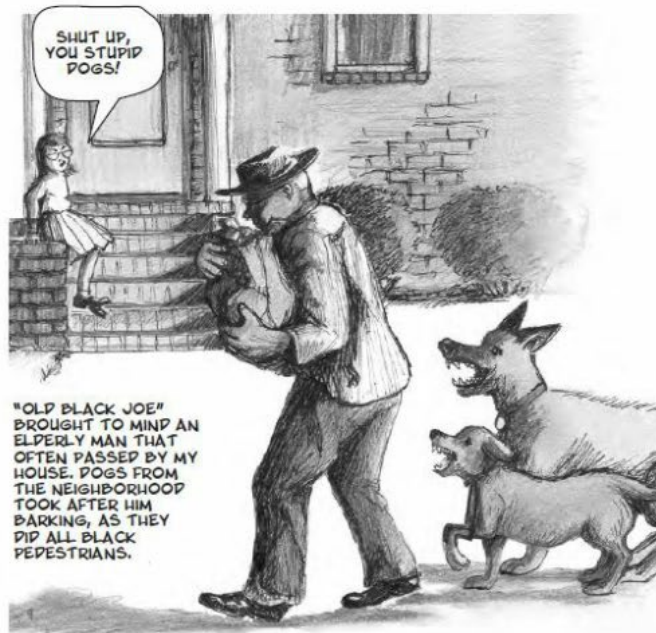
I'm coming, I'm coming, for my head is bending low. I hear those gentle voices calling, "Old Black Joe."

SOMETIMES I FELT A LUMP IN MY THROAT FOR POOR OLD JOE.

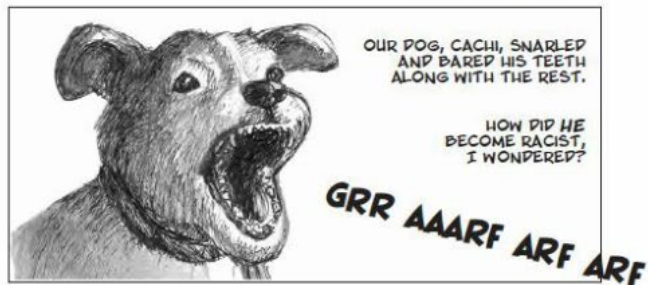
THE OLDER BOYS LOVED THIS SONG FOR THE COMIC OPPORTUNITY IT GAVE THEM. THEY ROUTINELY TURNED THE LAST LINE INTO A MOCK HOWL.



Oooooold Blaaaaaack Joooooooooe!



THE MAN PAID THEM NO MIND. HIS FACE FROZE INTO A STOIC MASK AS HE SHUFFLED ALONG.



AS WE PROGRESSED IN OUR STUDY OF THE CIVIL WAR, THE TEXTBOOK BECAME EVEN MORE SURREAL.

RECONSTRUCTION

The things that happened in these years caused bad feelings—many more bad feelings than the war had caused.



"Carpetbaggers" were those people from the North who came to the South to live after the war....

Most of them were not honest men, and they came to steal and cheat people.

The "scalawags" were Southerners who turned against their own people in the South.



The state legislature in Montgomery was made up of "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" and Negroes.



The loyal white men of Alabama saw they could not depend on the laws or the state government to protect their families.

[ALL EXCERPTS COME FROM THE TEXT OF
KNOW ALABAMA, EXCLUDING ILLUSTRATIONS.]

A band of white-robed figures appeared on the streets of Pulaski, Tennessee. No one knew who they were.

The Klan did not ride often, only when it had to.



They held their courts in the dark forest at night; they passed sentence on the criminals and carried out the sentence.

The sign of the Klan was a large fiery cross. Whenever the cross was seen burning on a hillside at night, people knew that the Klan had struck again.



Sometimes in the quiet night the sound of galloping horses would be heard in the streets; the Klansmen would pass like ghosts and disappear.



EVER SINCE OUR ARRIVAL IN ALABAMA, WE'D HEARD PLENTY OF KLAN STORIES.



THEY'D BEATEN UP
FREEDOM RIDERS
IN A BIRMINGHAM
BUS DEPOT.

THEY'D BOMBED THE SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH IN
BIRMINGHAM, KILLING FOUR CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS.



Denise
McNair, 11



Carole
Robertson, 14



Addie Mae
Collins, 14



Cynthia
Wesley, 14



MOST RECENTLY,
THEY'D GUNNED DOWN
CIVIL RIGHTS VOLUNTEER
VIOLA LUIZZO AS SHE AND
HER PASSENGER DROVE
ALONG A PARK HIGHWAY.

THESE THINGS HAPPENED
LESS THAN A TWO-HOUR
DRIVE FROM OUR HOUSE.



I'D HEARD PLENTY
OF KLAN STORIES.

195

A NATIONAL MAGAZINE WE SUBSCRIBED TO PUBLISHED A FEATURE
ON THE KLAN THAT INCLUDED A SHOCKING PHOTO.



THIS MILD-LOOKING FAMILY RAN
COUNTER TO ALL MY PREVIOUSLY
HELD NOTIONS ABOUT WHO WORE
KLAN ROBES.



A
GUY
LIKE
HIM.

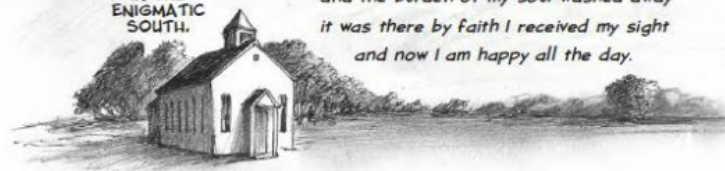
BUT JUDGING BY THEIR
FACES, THE KLAN
COUPLE WASN'T
VILLAINOUS.
THEY BLENDED
IN WITH THE
RURAL,
BIBLE BELT
ALABAMA
POPULATION
I KNEW WELL.



At the cross
at the cross

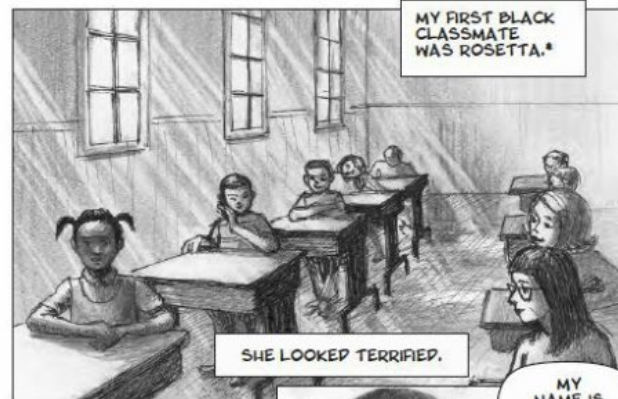
IT WAS
ANOTHER
PUZZLE PIECE
IN THE
ENIGMATIC
SOUTH.

where I first saw the light
and the burden of my soul washed away
it was there by faith I received my sight
and now I am happy all the day.



196

TWELVE YEARS AFTER THE SUPREME COURT RULED THAT SEPARATE WAS IN NO WAY EQUAL, PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PERRY COUNTY FINALLY TOOK A STEP TOWARD DESEGREGATION.



MY FIRST BLACK CLASSMATE WAS ROSETTA.*

SHE LOOKED TERRIFIED.

AT FIRST, ALL SHE HAD TO DO WAS SPEAK HER NAME AND MANY OF MY FELLOW 5TH-GRADERS WOULD BREAK INTO GIGGLES.

Y'ALL STOP BEING SO MEAN TO ROSETTA. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT IF PEOPLE LAUGHED AT YOU?



*NOT HER ACTUAL NAME

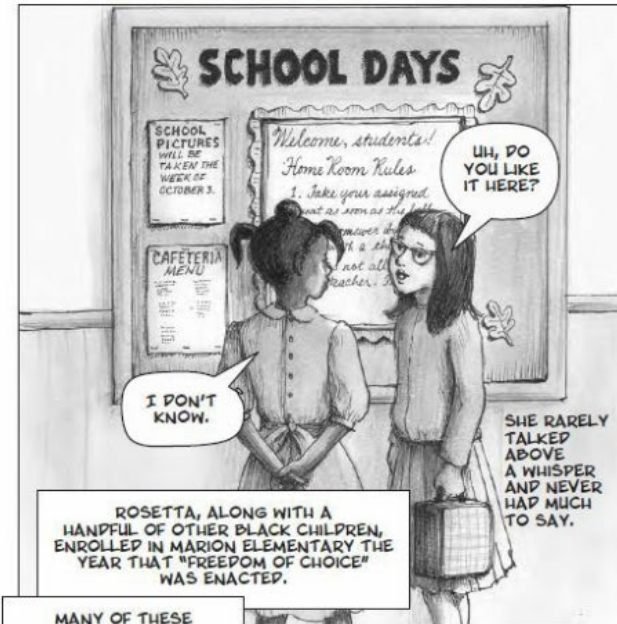


MY NAME IS ROSETTA PERDUE.

TEE HEE HEE

ROSETTA'S MOST ARDENT DEFENDER WASN'T A TEACHER OR ANOTHER OUTSIDER LIKE ME. SHE WAS A FEARLESS GIRL NAMED SUSAN.

I WAS NO SUSAN. MY OVERTURES TOWARD ROSETTA WERE CLUMSY AND INEFFECTIVE.



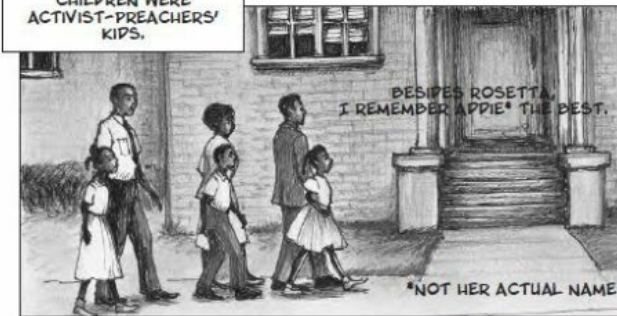
UH, DO YOU LIKE IT HERE?

I DON'T KNOW.

SHE RARELY TALKED ABOVE A WHISPER AND NEVER HAD MUCH TO SAY.

ROSETTA, ALONG WITH A HANDFUL OF OTHER BLACK CHILDREN, ENROLLED IN MARION ELEMENTARY THE YEAR THAT "FREEDOM OF CHOICE" WAS ENACTED.

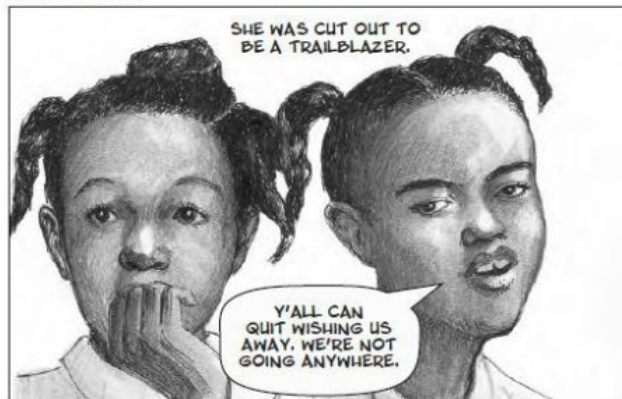
MANY OF THESE CHILDREN WERE ACTIVIST-PREACHERS' KIDS.



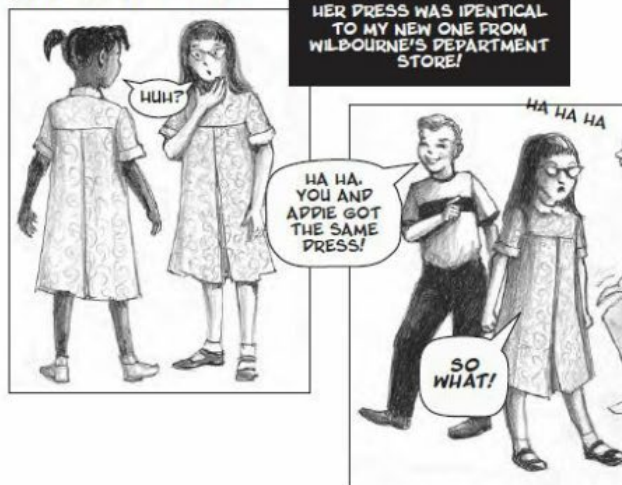
BESIDES ROSETTA, I REMEMBER APPIE* THE BEST.

*NOT HER ACTUAL NAME

FOR ONE THING, SHE WAS AN ALL-A STUPENT, AND ALTHOUGH SHE WAS A YEAR OR TWO YOUNGER, SHE HAD ENOUGH FIRE FOR HERSELF AND ROSETTA.



ONE DAY BEFORE THE BELL FOR HOMEROOM SOUNDED, ADDIE AND I CAME FACE-TO-FACE.



ONE DAY, THAT "FREEDOM OF CHOICE" YEAR, THE PRINCIPAL MYSTERIOUSLY CALLED A GROUP OF HONOR ROLL STUDENTS TO HIS OFFICE.



THE NEW LIBRARIAN, WHO WAS ALSO THE FIRST BLACK AUTHORITY FIGURE IN MY LIFE, HAD COMMITTED A SERIES OF ERRORS.

1. SHE DRESSED AS NO TEACHER WE'D EVER KNOWN.

THIS DELIGHTED THE BOYS, BUT ALSO PREJUDICED OUR JUDGMENT OF HER CHARACTER.



2. SHE REGARDED US ALL WITH A STONY GLARE THAT WON HER NO FRIENDS. I SENSED THAT THE COLOR OF OUR SKIN OFFENDED HER.



3. SHE HAD A HABIT OF DISAPPEARING INTO THE LITTLE OFFICE BEHIND THE CIRCULATION DESK.



IT WAS THIS DISAPPEARING ACT AND THE SPECULATION IT STIRRED THAT MOST INTERESTED THE PRINCIPAL.

WAS SHE SMOKING?



WAS SHE DRINKING?



WE COULD NOT SAY FOR SURE. WE HAD SEEN NOTHING BUT A CLOSED DOOR.

AFTER THIS, SHE WAS GONE FOR GOOD. I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN AND CAN'T EVEN RECALL HER NAME.

I DIDN'T MISS HER; SHE PLAINLY HATED US. BUT BEING ASKED TO RAT ON HER LEFT ME WITH AN UGLY FEELING.

