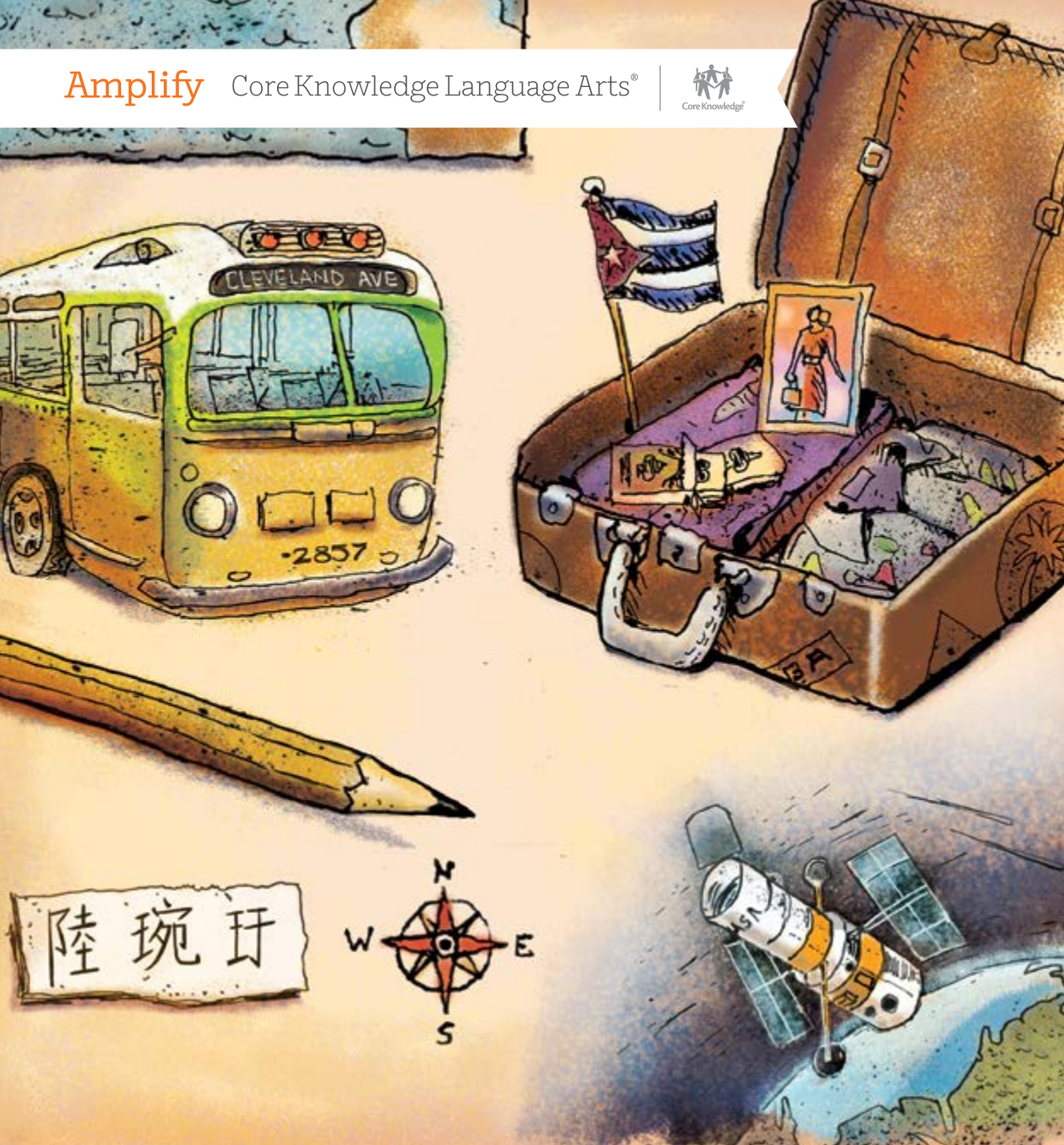
Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts®



Unit 1

Reader | Grade 5

Personal Narratives

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Personal Narratives

Reader

Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts

ISBN 978-1-68161-253-9

Illustrations by Dan Baxter

Printed in the USA
02 LSCOW 2017

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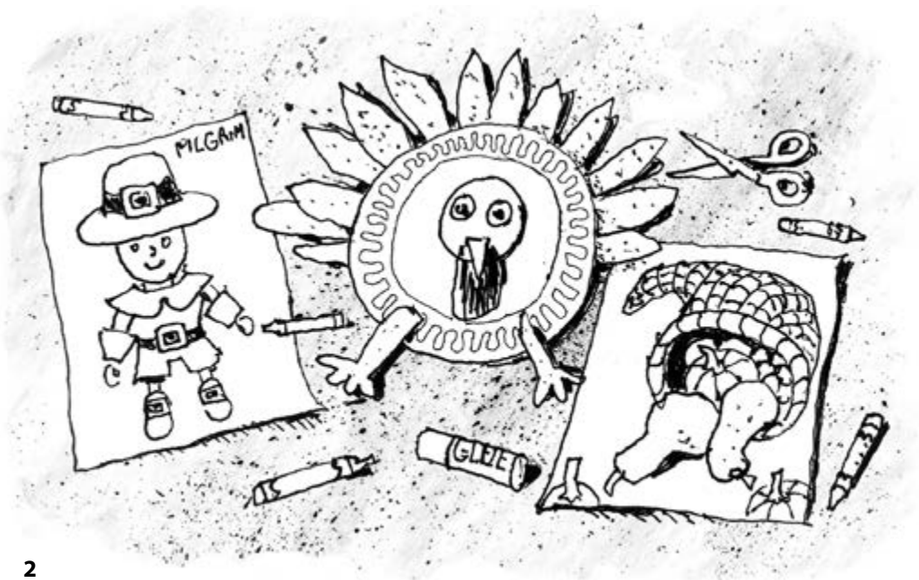
The First Real San Giving Day

by Richard Blanco

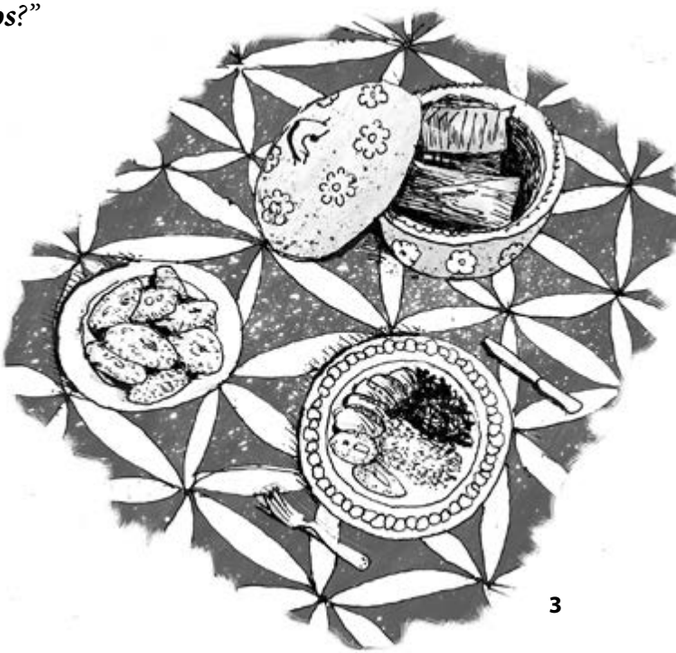
November came around and my teacher, Mrs. Echevarría, handed out some ditto sheets to color for Thanksgiving. The pilgrims' tall hats I colored black, the buckles on their shoes, gold; the **cornucopias** of squash and pumpkins, all kinds of oranges and yellows; the huge turkey, an amber-brown (a turkey, not a pork roast like my family always had for Thanksgiving). As we colored, Mrs. Echevarría narrated the story of the first Thanksgiving, enthusiastically acting it out as if she had been there: ". . . Then the chief of the Indians told Pilgrim



John, *We make big feast for you,* and Pilgrim John said, *Yes, let us give thanks for our new friends and for this new land where we are free.*" My teacher seemed to understand Thanksgiving like a true American, even though she was Cuban also. *Maybe,* I thought, *if I convince* ***Abuela*** *to have a real Thanksgiving, she and the whole family will finally understand too.*

With new **resolve** and colored **dittos** in hand, I approached Abuela that night as she sat at the kitchen table sorting through receipts and making a tally of her expenses. "Abuela, do you know what Thanksgiving is really all about—what it *really* means?" "*¿ Qué?*" she said without looking up from her notebook. "Thanksgiving," I repeated. She looked up at me blankly, and I realized she couldn't understand "Thanksgiving" in my properly pronounced English. So I **blurted** it out the way most Cubans pronounced it, as if it were the name of a saint: "San Giving, Abuela, San Giving." "Oh, *el dia de San Giving.* Yes, what?" she asked, and I began explaining: "It was because the Pilgrims and Indians became friends . The Pilgrims made a big dinner to celebrate and give thanks to God because they were in the land of the free and living in the United States." "What are *pilgreems?* And those black ***sombreros****?*" she asked, looking over my dittos, "We didn't wear those *en Cuba.*"

It seemed hopeless, but I insisted. "***Mira****,* Abuela—*mira,*" I continued, pointing at the dittos again. "They had turkey on San Giving, not *carne puerco* and *platanos.*



We are *americanos* like them now in the United States. We have to eat like Americans, Abuela, or else they'll send you back to Cuba." *"Ay, mi'jo,"* she said with a laugh, "we're not *americanos,* but no one is sending us back. We'll go on our own, when that *idiota* Castro is dead—and not one second before." "But, Abuela , I don't want to go back. I'm American. I want to have a real San Giving this year—like this ," I demanded, holding up the ditto. "You, *americano?* Ha—you're *cubano,* even though you weren't born in Cuba." She chuckled. "And what is that food in those pictures? I never saw a chicken that big." "That's not a chicken, Abuela, it's a turkey. Please—I'll help you cook," I pleaded, but she kept resisting.

I had no choice but to resort to coercion; I told her I wouldn't go buy specials for her anymore at Liberty Mart, the big American supermarket. "If we aren't going to be *americanos,* then why should we shop there?" I said. She took a long pause and looked over the dittos again before replying, *"Bueno,* let me think about it."

She slept on it for two days before making a decision : "Maybe you're right, *mi'jo.* Maybe we'll try San Giving how you say," she **conceded**, with one condition: "But I will make *carne puerco* too, just in case." It was settled. That Thanksgiving we would have turkey, as well as pork. I was **ecstatic,** but the pressure was on: I knew I wanted us all to have a real American Thanksgiving, but how? Abuela certainly didn't know, and the dittos weren't enough to go by. I didn't know as much about Thanksgiving as I thought I did. I needed help. That week Mrs. Echevarría had us make turkeys out of paper plates and construction paper. Surely she would know how to prepare a real Thanksgiving dinner, I thought, and so I asked her all about it. *"Ay, no,"* she told me. "My husband's mother does all the cooking for Thanksgiving. His mother is an *americana*—thank goodness. I can't even boil an egg." Great.

The next day at recess, I asked some of the American kids in class what they had for Thanksgiving. "Turkey—what else, dummy? With stuffing," Jimmy Dawson told me. "What's stuffing? " I asked. He burst out laughing, thinking I was kidding: "It's the stuff you put in the turkey," he tried to explain. "Oh, you mean like candy in a **piñata**?" I proposed. "No, no, dummy . . . with bread and celery and other stuff—that's why they call it stuffing," he tried to clarify. "Oh . . . okay." I pretended to understand exactly what he meant.

Nancy Myers told me her mother always made pumpkin pie. "Pumpkin? Like in Halloween?" I asked, bewildered. Patrick Pilkington said his favorite dish was candied yams. "Candied? With marshmallows? Like hot chocolate? On yams?" I asked him. They each described the dishes as best they could, but when I asked them how to make them, they couldn't explain. "I dunno," Jimmy said and shrugged, "my grandmother makes everything." Great.

Given all the fuss I had made the week before, Abuela knew something was **amiss** when I hadn't mentioned anything else about Thanksgiving. *"Mi'jo, qué pasó* with San Giving ?" she asked. "There's only five days left. I have to start cooking, no?" "Abuela," I whined, "I don't know what to buy or how to make anything. What are we going to do?" "No worry, we can have pork and black beans like we always have—maybe some Cubaroni? That's *americano* enough, no?" she said, genuinely trying to **appease** me. "I guess so, Abuela, but it's not the same," I said. *"Espera* a minute," she said, and darted to her bedroom. She returned with that week's Liberty Mart flyer: *"Mira,* look—this will help, *mi'jo."* It was a special flyer with pictures like the ones on my dittos and full of Thanksgiving Day items on sale, including turkeys and something called Stuffing-in-a-Box, which immediately caught my attention. Could it be true? Could Thanksgiving dinner be as easy to make as instant mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese? With the flyer as my guide, I made a list and Abuela calculated the cost to the penny: $27.35 plus tax; she gave me $30 and off I went on my bike to Liberty Mart, hoping Thanksgiving would be as easy and tasty as Spray-Cheese from a can—my favorite!

The store was more crowded than I had ever seen it before. I roamed around for a while looking for stuffing, but it wasn't listed on any of the signs above the aisles. I noticed a lady wearing **culottes** and a fancy pendant necklace just like Mrs. Brady from *The Brady Bunch*—surely she was American, I thought; surely she would know all about making a Thanksgiving meal. I worked up the nerve to ask her where I could find the stuffing, pointing to the picture of it on the flyer. "Well, how sweet. You're helping your mother fix Thanksgiving dinner?" she asked as if I were three years old. "Yes," I said, seizing the opportunity, "but I don't know where to find anything." "Oh, don't worry, honey," she continued, "just go to the end of aisle eight. They have everything you'll need, pumpkin." Did she call me *pumpkin?* Why? Or did she

mean they had pumpkin pie there? I was confused. "Really? Even pumpkin pie?" I asked. "Oh, I don't know, honey. I always buy the frozen ones. It's so much easier than making one from scratch," she offered. Frozen pumpkin pie? Could it be that easy?

Just as Mrs. Brady said, I found everything in the special Thanksgiving display at the end of aisle eight, including the Stuffing-in-a-Box. I read the instructions on the box: *Boil 1-1½ cups water and ¼ cup margarine in a medium saucepan. Stir in contents of Stuffing Mix pouch; cover. Remove from heat. Let stand 5 minutes. Fluff with fork.* Just as I had hoped— easy as mashed potatoes. Abuela's saying, *Cómo inventan los americanos,* rang truer than ever to me then. There were also cans of yams at the display, alongside bags of tiny marshmallows, just as Patrick Pilkington had told me. What he didn't tell me (or didn't know) was that the instructions for candied yams were right on the marshmallow bag: *Put mashed yams in casserole. Mix together margarine, cinnamon, brown sugar, and honey. Top with miniature marshmallows. Bake at 325 degrees until heated through and marshmallows are bubbly.* Even Abuela could make that once I translated for her. There were also cans of something called

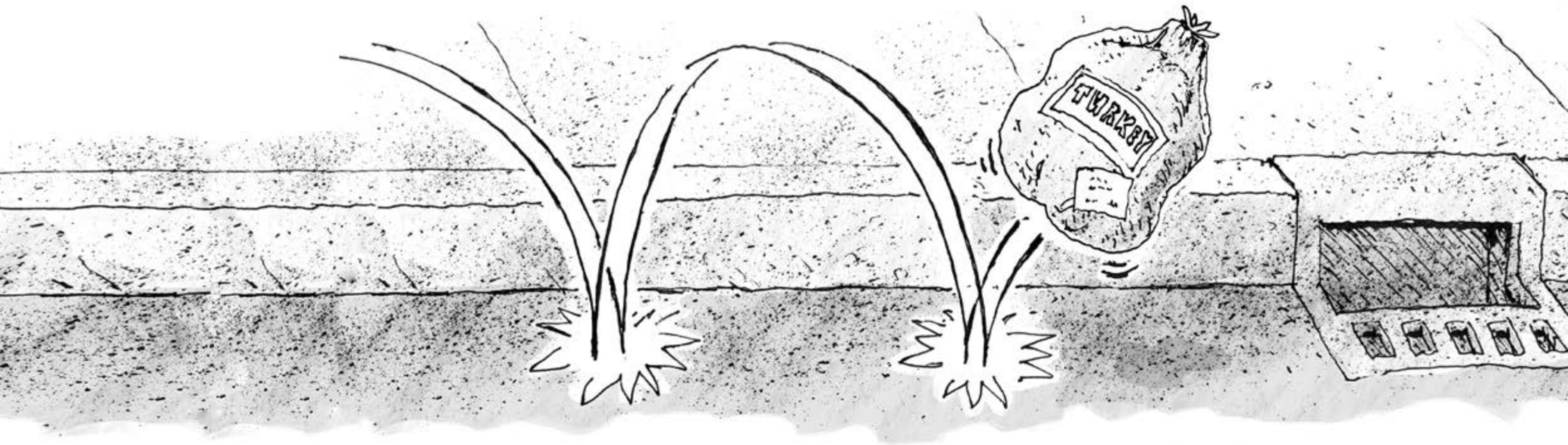
"Cranberry Jelly" piled up high. *Jelly in a can?* I wondered. None of the American kids had mentioned that, but I saw other customers tossing one or two cans into their carts. I followed suit, figuring it was important for something.

All I needed was the turkey. *Will Abuela know how to cook something that enormous?* I worried, staring at the case full of frozen turkeys. Sure, the turkeys on the dittos had looked big, but these were three, four, five times the size of a chicken. Would Abuela freak out? But I noticed the turkeys also had cooking instructions printed right on the wrapper. I read them over and discovered the turkey had a timer that would pop up when it was done—*¡cómo inventan los americanos!* The instructions also recommended three-quarters of a pound per person, so I started counting relatives and family friends who we considered relatives anyway, blood or no blood: *tío* Mauricio and my bratty cousins , Margot and Adolfo; *tías* Mirta, Ofelia, and Susana; my godparents; *tíos* Berto, Pepé, and Regino; the mechanic, Minervino, and his wife. Altogether, about twenty-something guests,

I estimated, and figured I needed at least a twenty-pounder. There was no way I could carry it on my bike all the way home with the rest of the groceries. I'd have to come back just for the turkey.

Considering the number of guests, I went back to the display and got two more boxes of stuffing, six cans of yams, four bags of marshmallows, and three cans of cranberry jelly (whatever that was for), and then I picked up a frozen pumpkin pie like Mrs. Brady had suggested. Proud as a Pilgrim in 1621, I floated down the aisles with my loaded cart, ready for my first real Thanksgiving. When I got home, I set the bags down on the kitchen table and explained to Abuela that the turkey was too big and I needed to go back right away. *"Pero* how you going to carry it?" she asked, concerned. "Your Abuelo can't take you—he's at a baseball game with Caco . You'll have to wait until *mañana."* But I didn't want to wait until the next day. What if they ran out of turkeys? I told Abuela I'd tie the turkey to the handlebars on my bike. She thought it over for a moment, then handed me a piece of twine from the kitchen drawer where she kept twist ties, matches, and birthday candles.

I hopped back on my bike, darted to Liberty Mart, got my bird, and tied all twenty-one pounds of it across the breast onto my handlebars. But getting it home wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. When I rode over the **pothole** in front of St. Brendan's **rectory** like I always did for the heck of it, one of the knots slipped and the frozen turkey slid like a **shuffleboard** puck down the sidewalk and into the gutter before stopping inches away from the catch drain. *No problem,* I thought; it was frozen and sealed in plastic. I picked it up and tied it even tighter with a few extra knots. But while I was cutting through a parking lot, it fell again and skidded under a huge four-door sedan. I crouched down and tried to grab it, but it was just out of my arm's reach. Finally I squirmed under the car on my belly and yanked it back, the turkey and me emerging grimy and blotched with oil.



By then, the sweaty condensation on the bird made it impossible to tie to the handlebars. I took off my T-shirt, wrapped it around the turkey like I was **swaddling** a baby, and retied it for a third time, thinking that would do the trick. Not so. Crossing Eighty-seventh Avenue it came loose again. I swerved to avoid running it over and fell off my bike. There we were: me and a twenty-one-pound turkey, lying on the pavement in the middle of a four-lane road just as the traffic light turned green and cars began honking **incessantly**. *Surely the Indians and Pilgrims must have had an easier time,* I thought. With one hand on the handlebar and the other barely able to carry the turkey, I managed to inch my way over to the sidewalk. "That's it!" I yelled at the bird. I tied it to the bike seat and walked my bike the rest of the way.

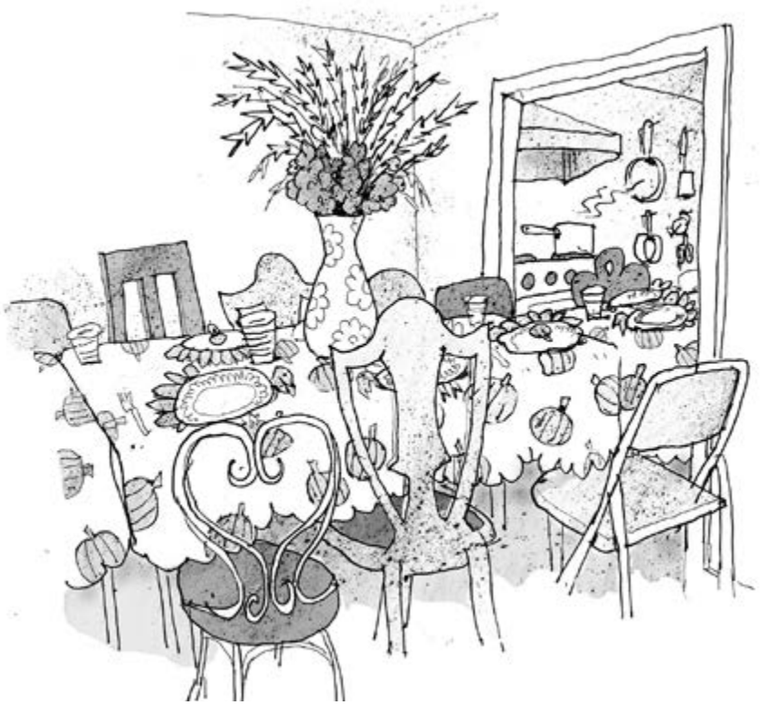
Once home, I washed off the scuff marks and **grime** with the garden hose before presenting the turkey to Abuela. There was a tear in the plastic seal, but the turkey was still frozen and intact. *"Qué grande. Qué lindo,"* Abuela praised it, none the wiser, and made room for it in the freezer. Mamá poked around and snooped inside the grocery bags. "What's all this for?" she asked Abuela, who looked at me to answer her. "We're gonna have a real *San Giving* this year, Mamá. Abuela's going to make a turkey and yams and everything," I explained. "*¿Cómo?* Turkey? Nobody knows how to make that. Especially not your Abuela. She can't even cook Cuban food too good," she jabbed. "Don't worry," Abuela said, trying to remain calm. "You just sit down and relax—like you always do. Riqui is helping me—and he knows what he's doing." *"Bueno,"* Mamá replied, "I don't know, you better cook something else too—some *carne puerco,* just in case." *"Sí, sí, sí*—whatever," Abuela said just as the bird slipped through her hands. It slid across the **terrazzo floor**, bounced down the single step from the kitchen into the Florida sunroom, and knocked into the TV. It lay

there, mocking us, mocking *me,* basking in the sunlight, enjoying the breeze whispering through the **jalousie windows** and the view of the backyard mango tree framed by the sliding glass door.

Early on Thanksgiving morning, Abuela told me to put the turkey outside. "That's the best way to defreeze it," she said with authority. I put the turkey in a baking pan and placed it in the middle of the backyard terrace where the sun could shine on it all day. And Abuela faithfully followed all my instructions as I translated them to her, without adding any additional ingredients of her own: no **saffron**, no garlic, no **cumin.** By two o'clock the yams were ready for the marshmallow topping and we had finished a pot of Stuffing-in-a-Box. *"¿Cómo?* Why? Where?" Abuela asked, as bewildered by the concept of stuffing as I was, despite Jimmy Dawson's explanation, which I **parroted** to her: "Yes, Abuela, inside. That's why they call it stuffing." We stuffed the bird and put it in the oven alongside Abuela's *just-in-case* pork shoulder, which she had marinated overnight with bitter orange and garlic *mojito.*

Wafts of roasting turkey. Wafts of roasting pork. The competing scents battled through the house while I helped Papá and Abuelo set up folding domino tables on both ends of our dining table . We assembled a mishmash of desk chairs, beach chairs, and stools stretching from the kitchen into the living room to seat all twenty-two relatives. I spent the rest of the afternoon making construction paper turkeys like Mrs. Echevarría had taught us in class. I placed one at each setting, then drew pumpkins all over the paper tablecloth and cut into its edges to make a frilly trim. Abuela added a bouquet of **gladiolus**, which didn't fit the theme but made the table look better, despite the plastic plates and utensils.

"*¡Ay, Dios mío!* Come over here!" Abuela yelled for me. "What is that blue thing?" she asked, alarmed by the pop-up timer in the turkey, which she hadn't noticed before and I had forgotten to point out. "Relax, Abuela. It's nothing. It's supposed to pop when the turkey



is cooked," I explained. " Really? *Cómo inventan los americanos.* They make everything so easy," she said, relieved, then slid the turkey back into the oven, only to call me over again twenty minutes later. *"Bueno,* the *puerco* is done. The turkey must be done too— look at it," she said. *"Pero,* Abuela, the blue thing hasn't popped up. We can't take it out!" I demanded. *"Ay, mi'jo*, look at the skin, toasty like the *puerco,"* she insisted, knocking on it with the back of a spoon. "It's done I tell you. *Además,* it's already seven o'clock. We have to put the other things in the oven before everyone gets here." *"Pero,* Abuela, we can't," I repeated. She ignored my protest. "What do you know about cooking? Give me *los yames* and *el* pie." I knew it was useless to argue any further and hoped for the best as I topped the yams with marshmallows and cinnamon and took the pumpkin pie out of the freezer.

The doorbell rang. "I told you," she said **smugly**. "*Ándale*— get the door." It was the Espinoza clan who arrived first— all three generations: *tía* Mirta with her showgirl hips; *tío* Mauricio wearing

a tie and jacket, unwilling to accept that his days as a Cuban tycoon were over; their two children—my cousins—with fancy names: Margot and Adolfo; and their grandmother Esmeralda, who was constantly picking food out of her ill-fitting dentures. They burst through the door with kisses, hellos, and *Happy San Givings. Tía* Mirta handed Mamá a giant pot she brought with her. *"Mira,* here are the *frijoles.* I think they are little salty, *pero* Mauricio was rushing me," she said. Minutes later cousin Maria Elena arrived with her hair in curlers and a plastic-wrapped glass pan full of *yuca con mojito. Happy San Giving.* Then *tío* Berto with four loaves of Cuban bread under his armpits. *Happy San Giving.*

At first I thought it was Abuela who didn't trust that a purely American meal would satisfy. But when she was totally surprised by *tía* Ofelia's golden caramel flan, I knew it wasn't her; it was Mamá who must've asked everyone to bring a dish to sabotage Abuela's first attempt at a real San Giving. My suspicion was confirmed when *tía* Susana arrived with a platter of fried plantains in a bed of grease-soaked paper towels. *"Mira,"* she said to Mamá, handing her the platter, *"los plátanos* that you asked me to bring— I hope they are sweet. Happy San Giving." "Oh, you didn't have to bring nothing, *pero gracias* anyway," Mamá said, casually placing her palm against her cheek, a gesture that always gave her away when she was lying.

Abuela served the pork roast next to the turkey, pop-up timer still buried in the bird. A Cuban side followed every American side being passed from hand to hand. "That sure's a big chicken," *tío* Pepé chuckled as he carved into the bird and then the pork. "What's this, the **innards**?" he asked when he reached the stuffing. I had to explain the stuffing concept again to all the relatives as he piled generous portions of turkey and pork on everyone's plates. Papá was about to dig in when I insisted we say grace, proudly announcing I would read a special poem I had written as a prayer in Mrs. Echevarría's class.

Dear God:

Like the Pilgrims and Indians did long ago

we bow our heads and pray so you'll know

how thankful we are for this feast today,

and for all the blessings you send our way

in this home of the brave and land of the free

where happy we shall forever and ever be.

Amen.

As soon as I finished, *tía* Susana asked *tío* Berto, who then asked Minervino, who then asked Maria Elena, who then asked me what the heck I had just said. None of them understood a single word of my prayer in English. *"Bueno, ahora en español por favor," tío* Mauricio requested, and I had to do an impromptu translation of my prayer in Spanish that ended with a resounding *Amen* and a roar of *"¡Feliz San Giving! ¡Qué viva Cuba!"* from the family. Nothing like the dittos.

And so the moment of truth was at hand, or rather, at mouth, as everyone began eating. Not even a minute later Mamá asked, "What's this with *canela y merengue* on top? So sweet. Are you sure this isn't dessert?" Abuela instantly responded to her spurn: "They are *yames,* just like yuca but orange and sweet—that's all. Just eat." *"Ay, Dios mío*—orange yuca! What about blue beans?" Mamá laughed, and the rest of the family joined in. "They are not like yuca. They are like boniato. It's what they ate on the first Thanksgiving ," I explained. "Really . . . they had march-mellows that long ago?" Mamá quipped. She saw my face crumple. "What else do you know about San Giving, *mi'jo*?" she asked me, changing her tone and taking an interest. I went on for a few minutes, telling the tale of the Pilgrims and Indians in Spanish so

that everyone could understand. But soon the conversation changed to *tía* Mirta's black beans. "You make the best *frijoles* in all Miami," Papá complimented her, and everyone agreed as they poured ladlefuls of black beans over their mashed potatoes like it was gravy. Nothing like the dittos.

"What's this *baba roja* for?" Abuelo asked me, holding a dish with a log of cranberry jelly. I was embarrassed to admit that I hadn't figured out what it was for. "Well, it must be for *el pan,*" Abuelo assumed, and he began spreading cranberry jelly on his slice of Cuban bread, already buttered. *"Oh . . . sí . . . sí."* Everyone responded to the solved mystery and followed suit. It was the thing they all seemed to enjoy the most, besides the roasted pork, of course, which *tío* Berto couldn't stop praising as perfectly seasoned and perfectly tender. He spooned the bottom of the roasting pan and poured pork fat drippings over the lean slices of turkey on his plate. *"Ahora sí.* Much better. Not so dry," he proclaimed after a taste, and then proceeded to drench the platter of carved turkey with ladles of pork fat swimming with sautéed onions and bits of garlic. Nothing like the dittos, but at least after that everyone had seconds of the turkey.

After dessert, Abuela made three rounds of Cuban coffee. Papá turned on the stereo system and put in *Hoy cómo ayer,* his favorite **eight-track** tape with eight billion songs from *their days* in Cuba. The **crescendo** began and Minervino took his butter knife and tapped out a matching beat on his soda can. Before you could say Happy San Giving, there was a **conga line** twenty Cubans long circling the domino players around the Florida sunroom.

When the conga finished, the line broke up into couples dancing while I sat **sulking** on the sofa. *You can't teach old Cubans new tricks,* I thought, watching the shuffle of their feet. There seemed to be no order to their steps, no **discernible** pattern to the chaos of their

swaying hips and **jutting** shoulders. And yet there was something absolutely perfect and complete, even beautiful, about them, dancing as easily as they could talk, walk, breathe.

As I began picking up the rhythm, Abuela dashed into the room twirling a dishcloth above her head and demanding, *"¡Silencio! Silencio, por favor!"* Papá turned down the music and the crowd froze waiting for her next words. "*Tío* Rigoberto just called—he said he heard from Ramoncito that my sister Ileana got out—with the whole *familia!"* she announced, her voice cracking as she wiped her eyes with the dishcloth and continued: "They're in **España** waiting to get *las* **visas**. In a month *más o menos,* they will be here! *¡Qué emoción!"* She didn't need to explain much more. It was a journey they all knew—had all taken just a few years before. A journey I didn't know, having arrived in America when I was only forty-five days old. But over the years I had heard the stories they always told in low voices and with teary eyes, reliving the

plane lifting above the streets, the palm trees, the rooftops of their homes and country they might never see again, flying to some part of the world they'd never seen before. One suitcase, packed mostly with photographs and keepsakes. No more than a few dollars in their pocket; and a whole lot of ***esperanza.*** That's what the Pilgrims must have felt like, more or less, I imagined. They had left England in search of a new life too, full of hope and courage, a scary journey ahead of them. Maybe my family didn't know anything about turkey or yams or pumpkin pie, but they were a lot more like the Pilgrims than I had realized.

The next morning Abuela made toaster treats and *café con leche* but didn't eat, complaining she had had stomach cramps all night long. She said Abuelo was still in bed, nauseated. Mamá admitted she threw up before going to sleep, but thought it was the strange Stuffing-in-a-Box. I had diarrhea, I confessed, as did Papá. Caco claimed he was fine. None of us knew what to make of our upset stomachs until *tía* Esmeralda called. She told Abuela she had been throwing up all night and was only then beginning to feel like herself again. She blamed it on those strange *yames.* Then *tío* Regino called and said he'd had to take a dose of his mother's *elixir paregórico,* which cured anything and everything; he blamed it on the flan, thinking he remembered it tasting a little sour. The phone rang all day long with relatives complaining about their ailments and offering explanations. Some, like *tía* Mirta, blamed the cranberry jelly; others blamed the black beans or the yuca that was too garlicky. And some, like me, dared to blame it on the pork. But surprisingly, no one—not even Abuela—blamed the turkey.

In 1968, Richard Blanco was born into a family of Cuban exiles in Spain. Shortly after he was born, the family emigrated to the United States, where they settled in Miami, Florida.

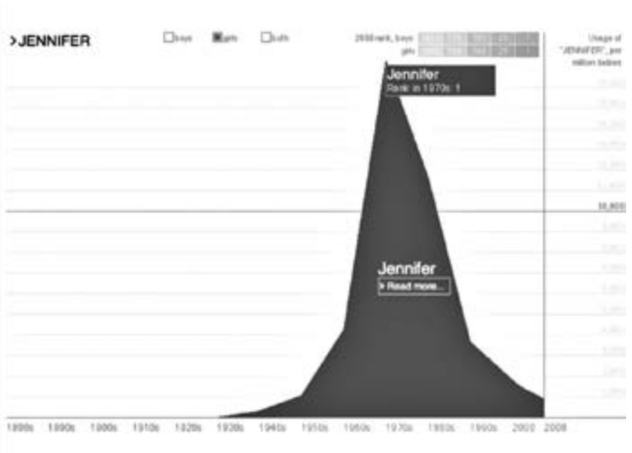
While Blanco was passionately creative growing up, he was also excellent at math and science, leading him to become a civil engineer. However, his creativity was not forgotten, and he went on to lead a double life, pursuing writing alongside his civil engineering career. His dedication was met with wide success, including the honor of being chosen to read his poetry at Barack Obama's second Presidential Inauguration.

Hello, My Name Is

by Jennifer Lou

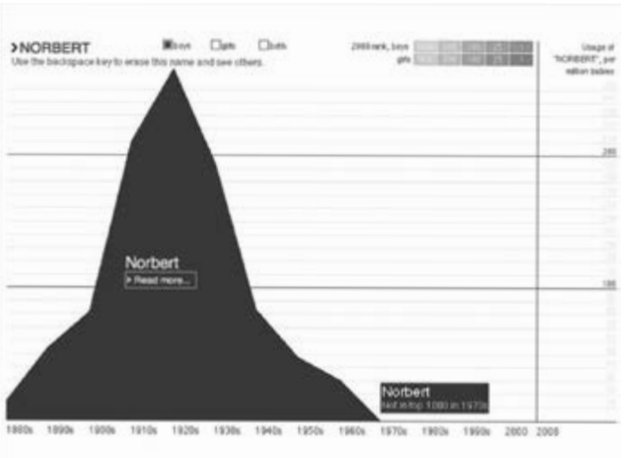
The author of "Hello, My Name Is" calls her narrative a graphic essay. That's because she carefully selected images to add meaning to the words of the text. As you read "Hello, My Name Is," think about how the images provide details and descriptions beyond what is stated in the written words alone.

BabyNameWizard.com charts Jennifer as *the* most popular girl's name in the 1970s, the decade I was born.

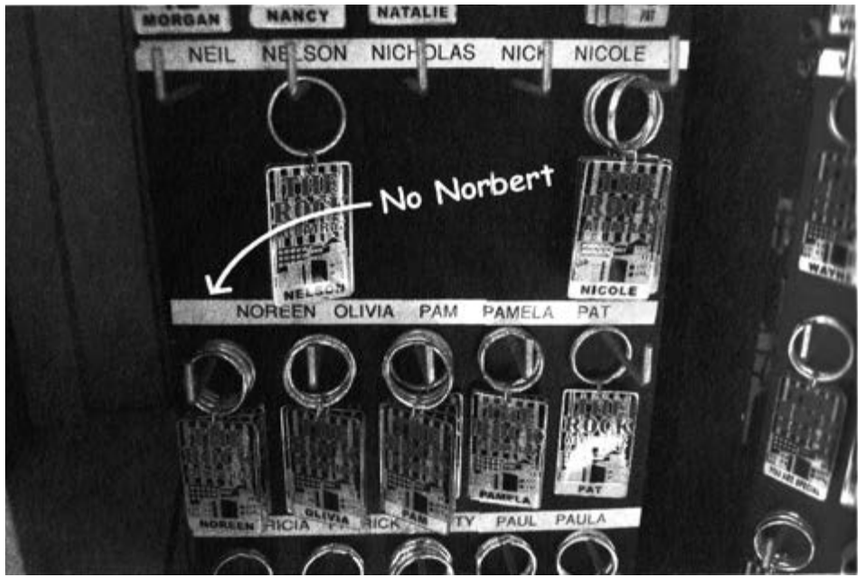


There were so many people in my high school named Jen that I learned to not respond to it unless my last name followed.

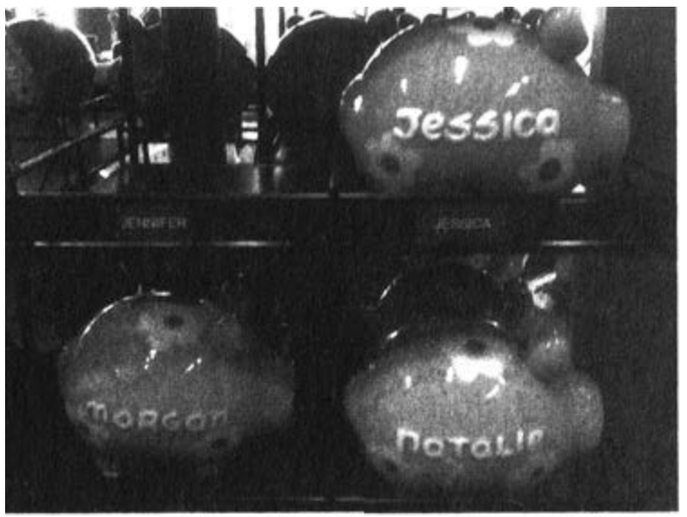
To understand how I got my name, you'll need to know the name of everyone else in my family. When my father came to the United States from China, he chose the name Nelson for reasons he can no longer remember. I like to think it's after **Nelson Mandela** or even **Willie Nelson**, but it's more likely that it's because his Chinese name, Neng-Yin, also begins and ends with an N. When my parents had their first child, they wanted his name to start with that same letter. They also wanted something unique. My brother's English name is Norbert . BabyNameWizard.com shows that Norbert topped the charts at number 222 in 1920. It wasn't even in the top one thousand in the 1970s, the decade he was born.



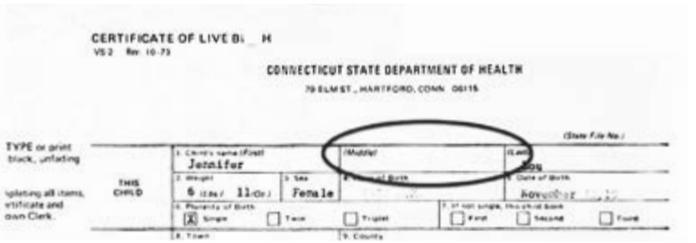
My parents also chose Norbert because of its meaning: northern brightness. It's Germanic in origin. Two years and ten months after my brother's arrival, I was born. By then, my mother had learned that you could never buy souvenirs with the name Norbert on them.



My mom's chosen English name is Julie. So when I was born a girl, they scoured the baby name book for popular "J" names. And they fell in love with the name Jennifer for both its popularity and meaning: the **fair** one. What my mom hadn't anticipated was that because the name was so popular, souvenirs with my name were often sold out.



So my full name is Jennifer Lou. No middle name. Nothing. Everyone else in my family has their Chinese name as their English middle name. It's on official documents, passports, licenses, and in my brother's case, his birth certificate. The middle name field on my birth certificate? Blank. A parental **oversight** because they hadn't made the time to select a Chinese name.


CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BI H

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Jennifer

Female

Having no middle name is even more significant when you grow up in white, middle-class Connecticut where everyone has one. It was a rough childhood. Not only did I have to learn how to ski, how to play tennis, and how to tie sweaters around my neck, I also had to navigate **Puritan** New England middle name–less. "You're incomplete!" friends would say.

I took matters into my own hands. When I started seventh grade at Sage Park Middle School, I enrolled as Jennifer Elizabeth Lou. I picked Elizabeth because it was the whitest name I could think of. And, my God, I wanted to be white because in Windsor, Connecticut, where less than one percent of the population was Chinese, white, to me, meant belonging. It meant being pretty and popular, and that boys would like me. I had it in my head that they didn't like me because I was Chinese. Different. But really, they didn't like me because I was ugly.

This is my seventh grade yearbook photo. The **antithesis** of delicate and fair. Notice the layered, 'fro-like perm, the buck teeth, and fangs. Thankfully, the black-and-white photo softens some of my brilliant fashion choices: a cantaloupe-colored T-shirt with concrete gray collars and a smoking hot, pink pair of glasses, thicker than a Coke bottle.

By ninth grade, I was ready to shed my inner white Elizabeth, mainly because I thought the initials JEL looked stupid. I returned to plain Jennifer Lou, and I started to like that I didn't have a middle name. I liked that I was the only one in the family whose Chinese name wasn't their English middle name. I was two separate entities.

My Chinese name is 陸琬玕 (Lù Wǎn Yú). One May I asked, "Mom, what does my Chinese name mean?"

"What?" she said, annoyed. "It doesn't mean anything."

"Well, what's Norb's Chinese name mean then? Also nothing?"

"Oh, no, his name means 'joy to the world.'"

Of course it does.

I later pressed for more clarification. I discovered why my Chinese name never became my English middle name. When I was born, my mom didn't have a Chinese name picked out for me. Instead, my mom sent all my birth information back to Taiwan to a Chinese **astrologer.** She needed to know what elements to include in my name based on my birth details. If you know nothing else about Taiwanese culture, know that they are crazy superstitious. You can't leave rice uneaten on your plate, put your chopsticks standing up in a bowl, give an umbrella or knives as gifts—and your daughter can't be named without an astrologer.

The astrologer said that my name needed jade. This is the character for jade:

玉

This is a common variation of the character for jade:

王

In Chinese culture, jade is said to possess the five essential virtues of Chinese philosophy: compassion, modesty, courage, justice, and wisdom. Virtues she thought I might need when trying to be "the fair one." So, as she created my name, my mom weaved as much jade as possible.

Lù, my last name, means land:

陸

Wǎn means gentle, gracious. Wǎn is traditionally written with the female root:

婉

But Mom took it out and swapped in the jade root:

琬

Yú is an antiquated version of the character for jade:

玗

I guess that makes my Chinese name mean "the land of gentle jade." Pretty lame compared to "joy to the world," if you ask me.

So that is how I ended up with two names: a simple English name, and a **customized** Chinese one. Actually, if you count my nicknames, I have at least fifteen names. They range from obvious abbreviations like J-Lou to more story-oriented ones like Gimpy, Potty Lou, and Evil.

Then there are the nicknames that reflect my stage in life. Five years ago, in the midst of a post-breakup, mid-career crisis, I came to a **realization**. There was no point in trying to be something I wasn't (white) or something others wanted me to be (the fair one). I started making mass changes in my life—challenging old, traditional beliefs from my past, particularly the negative, self-destructive ones, and exploring new and healthier trains of thought. When you clean house and tear down that Great Wall, it's easy to second-guess what you're doing. But I **persevered**, and through it, I gained a greater sense of confidence. I started feeling free to be myself, enough so that the **spunk** and spark returned to my life, enough so that a good friend started calling me "Jen 2.0." I would spit out a sassy, witty comment and he would hiss, "Watch out! It's Jen 2.0!"

I had become a newer, speedier, more **enhanced** version of the old me. And I began to love my names for what they are, for what they aren't, and for the betweenness that they capture. Because I finally learned to love the uniqueness that is me.

So if you're ever in the market for a name, drop me a line; my family knows a good astrologer.

Jennifer Lou grew up in Windsor, Connecticut in the 1970s. Lou is a writer in San Francisco, whose work focuses on her life as a Chinese American. She has founded a group for humor storytelling, works for a digital publisher, and serves on the board of Youth Speaks, an organization dedicated to supporting young poets and writers. She spends her downtime volunteering at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Introduction to *Rosa Parks: My Story* and *Step by Step*

In 1954, in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution does not permit laws requiring the separation of African Americans from whites. Before then, however, such laws were very common, especially in the South, where African Americans often had to use separate bathrooms, ride in separate train cars and attend separate schools. This forced separation of the races was known as segregation.

In theory, the separate African American facilities were supposed to be equal to those provided to whites, but this was hardly ever so. In the case of education, the results of segregation were especially harsh. Many state governments provided no support to African American schools, leading to many African American children receiving very poor educations.

The next two personal narratives are by African Americans who grew up during the era of segregation. Rosa Parks's memoir, *Rosa Parks: My Story,* written with Jim Haskins, describes her childhood in rural Alabama, where African American children attended a run down one-room school house, while the whites in the area went to a very modern school that Alabama paid for. Parks also writes about her efforts to fight segregation, including a very famous act of protest on a public bus.

Bertie Bowman, the author of *Step by Step,* also grew up in the south during segregation. At the age of thirteen he moved to Washington D.C., and despite widespread prejudice against African Americans, he achieved great success as a business owner and working for the United States Senate.

Rosa Parks: My Story

How It All Started

by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins

One of my earliest memories of childhood is hearing my family talk about the remarkable time that a white man treated me like a regular little girl, not a little black girl. It was right after World War I, around 1919. I was five or six years old. Moses Hudson, the owner of the **plantation** next to our land in Pine Level, Alabama, came out from the city of Montgomery to visit and stopped by the house. Moses Hudson had his son-in-law with him, a soldier from the North. They stopped in to visit my family. We southerners called all northerners Yankees in those days. The Yankee soldier patted me on the head and said I was such a cute little girl. Later that evening my family talked about how the Yankee soldier had treated me like I was just another little girl, not a little black girl. In those days in the South white people didn't treat little black children the same way as little white children. And old Mose Hudson was very uncomfortable about the way the Yankee soldier treated me. Grandfather said he saw old Mose Hudson's face turn red as a coal of fire. Grandfather laughed and laughed.

Rosa Parks: My Story

Not Just Another Little Girl

by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins

I was about six when I started school. Sylvester started a year later, when he was around five. We went to the one-teacher black school in Pine Level, in a little frame schoolhouse that was just a short distance from where we lived. It was near our church, the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, right in the churchyard. In many places the church was used as the school, but in Pine Level we had a separate schoolhouse on the church grounds. We had first grade to sixth grade, and there were about fifty to sixty children in the one room. We sat in separate rows by age, and at certain times the larger students would go up to read or recite and then at other times it was the smaller ones' turn.

My first teacher was Miss Sally Hill, and she was very nice. I remember she was a light-brown-skinned lady and she had really large eyes. When the children would tease me or say something to me about how small I was, I would start crying, and I would go up and sit with her. And sometimes she would call me up and talk with me.

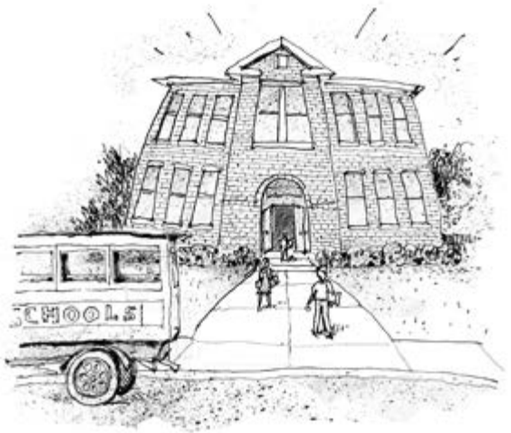
I was already reading when I started school. My mother taught me at home. She was really my first teacher. I don't remember when I first started reading, but I must have been three or four. I was very fond of books, and I liked to read and I liked to count. I thought it was something great to be able to take a book and sit down and read, or what I thought was reading. Any books I found where I couldn't read the words, I made up a story about it and talked about the pictures.

At school I liked fairy tales and Mother Goose rhymes. I remember trying to find *Little Red Riding Hood* because someone had said it was a nice book to read. No matter what Miss Hill gave me to read, I would sit down and read the whole book, not just a page or two. And then I would tell her, "I finished this book." Then I started learning to write, making my letters.

I had Miss Hill for only a year. After that Mrs. Beulah McMillan was our teacher. We called her Miss Beulah. She had been a teacher for a long time and had taught my mother when she was a girl. My mother had a picture of this same little school with the students in front of the schoolhouse on the steps—in rows on the steps and down on the ground. The shorter ones and the boys were on their knees on the ground. My mother never wanted me to show it to anybody because it was a real battered-up old picture. But I liked it. I used to take my magnifying glass and look at the faces, which were very small.

I liked Miss Beulah, and I liked school. We had fun there. At recess, the girls would play what we called "ring games" like Little Sally Walker Sitting in the Saucer, Rise Sally Rise, and Ring Around the Roses. The boys would play ball. I don't think the girls played much ball at school. We used to play at home a little bit. My mother would buy us a ball, and we'd have to be very careful because pretty soon a rubber ball would be lost. It didn't last too long. We called what we played baseball. I wasn't too active in it, because if I tried to be active I'd fall down and get hurt. I wasn't very good when it came to running sports.

Some of the older boys at school were very good at running sports and playing ball. They were also the ones who were responsible for wood



at the school. The larger boys would go out and cut the wood and bring it in. Sometimes a parent would load a wagon up with some wood and bring it to the school, and the boys would unload the wagon and bring the wood inside.

They didn't have to do this at the white school. The town or county took care of heating at the white school. I remember that when I was very young they built a new school for the white children not very far from where we lived, and of course we had to pass by it. It was a nice brick building, and it still stands there today. I found out later that it was built with **public money**, including taxes paid by both whites and blacks. Black people had to build and heat their own schools without the help of the town or county or state.

Another difference between our school and the white school was that we went for only five months while they went for nine months. Many of the black children were needed by their families to plow and plant in the spring and harvest in the fall. Their families were sharecroppers, like my grandparents' neighbors. Sharecroppers worked land owned by plantation owners, and they got to keep a portion of the crop they grew. The rest they had to give to the owner of the plantation. So they needed their children to help. At the time I started school, we went only from late fall to early spring.

I was aware of the big difference between blacks and whites by the time I started school. I had heard my grandfather's stories about how badly he was treated by the white **overseer** when he was a boy. My mother told me stories the old people had told her about slavery times. I remember she told me that the slaves had to fool the white people into thinking that they were happy. The white people would get angry if the slaves acted unhappy. They would also treat the slaves better if

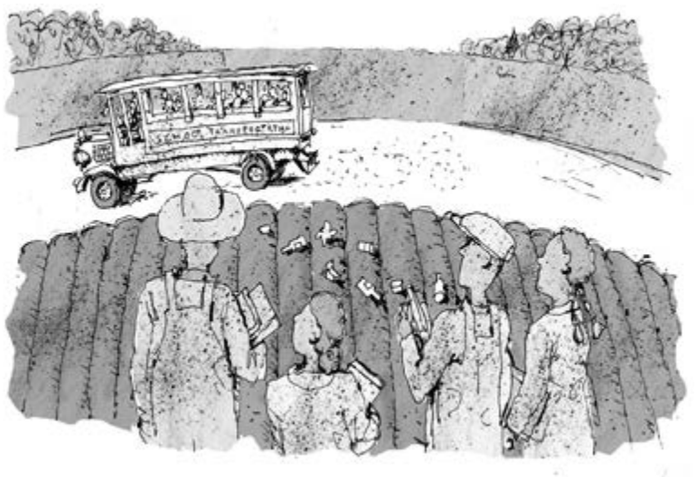
they thought the slaves liked white people.

When white people died, their slaves would have to pretend to be very sorry. The slaves would spit on their fingers and use it to wet their cheeks like it was tears. They'd do this right in front of the little slave children, and then the children would do the same thing in the presence of the grieving white people.

I was glad that I did not live in slavery times. But I knew that conditions of life for my family and me were in some ways not much better than during slavery.

I realized that we went to a different school than the white children and that the school we went to was not as good as theirs. Ours didn't have any glass windows, but instead we had little wooden shutters. Their windows had glass panes.

Some of the white children rode a bus to school. There were no school buses for black children. I remember when we walked to school, sometimes the bus carrying the white children would come by and the white children would throw trash out the windows at us. After a while when we would see the white school bus coming, we would just get off the road and walk in the fields a little bit distant from the road. We didn't have any of what they call **"civil rights"** back then, so there was no way to protest and nobody to protest to. It was just a matter of survival—like getting off the road—so we could exist day to day.



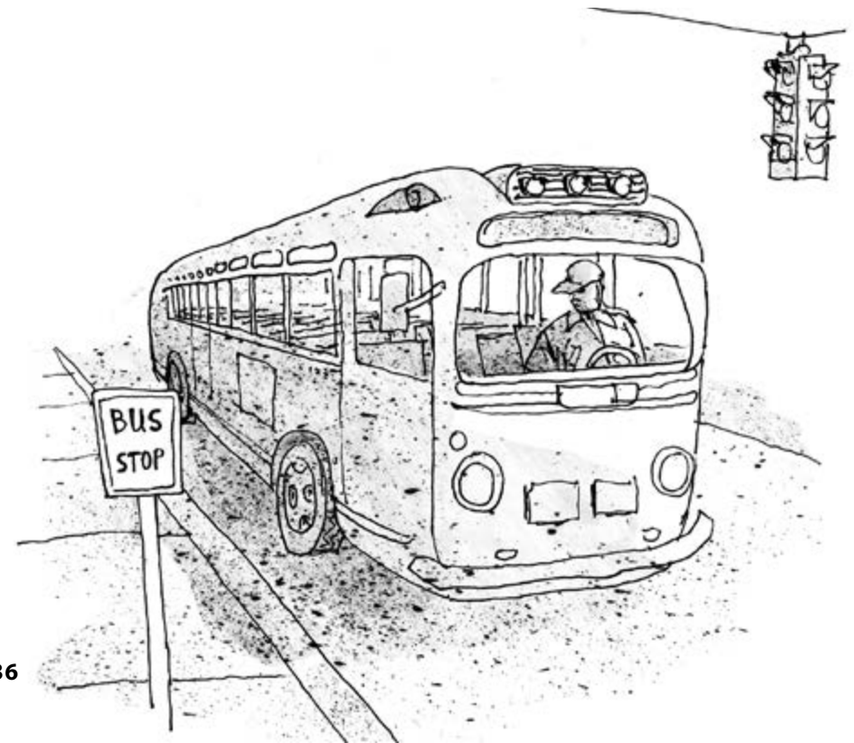
Rosa Parks: My Story

We Fight for the Right to Vote

by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins

The second time I tried to register to vote, I was put off a Montgomery city bus for the first time. I didn't follow the rules.

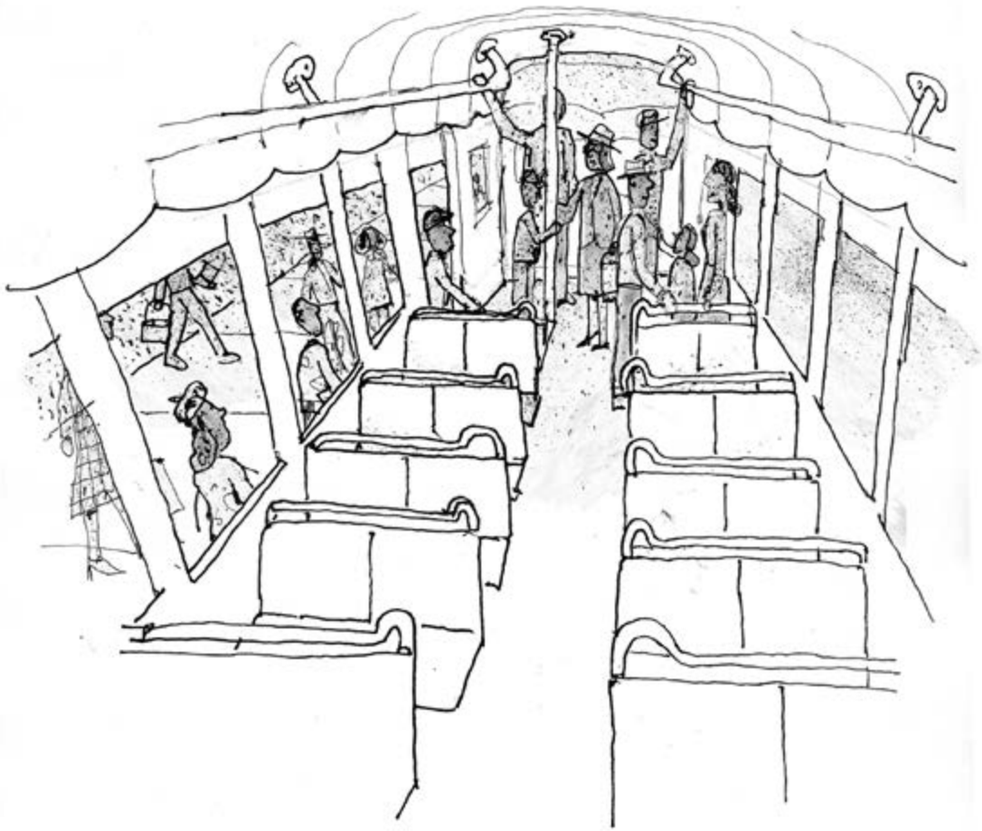
Black people had special rules to follow. Some drivers made black passengers step in the front door and pay their fare, and then we had to get off and go around to the back door and get on. Often, before the black passengers got around to the back door, the bus would take



off without them. There were thirty-six seats on a Montgomery bus. The first ten were reserved for whites, even if there were no white passengers on the bus. There was no law about the ten seats in the back of the bus, but it was sort of understood that they were for black people. Blacks were required to sit in the back of the bus, and even if there were empty seats in the front, we couldn't sit in them. Once the seats in the back were filled, then all the other black passengers had to stand. If whites filled up the front section, some drivers would demand that blacks give up their seats in the back section.

It was up to the bus drivers, if they chose, to adjust the seating in the middle sixteen seats. They carried guns and had what they called police power to rearrange the seating and enforce all the other rules of segregation on the buses. Some bus drivers were meaner than others. Not all of them were hateful, but segregation itself is vicious, and to my mind there was no way you could make segregation decent or nice or acceptable.

The driver who put me off was a mean one. He was tall and **thickset** with an **intimidating** posture. His skin was rough-looking, and he had a mole near his mouth. He just treated everybody black badly. I had been on his bus as a passenger before, and I remember when a young woman got on the bus at the front and started to the back and he made her get off the bus and go around to the back door. One day in the winter of 1943 the bus came along, and the back was crowded with black people. They were even standing on the steps leading up from the back door. But up front there were vacant seats right up to the very front seats. So I got on at the front and went through this little bunch of folks standing in the back, and I looked toward the front and saw the driver standing there and looking at me. He told me to get off the bus and go to the back door and get on. I told him I was already on the bus and didn't see the need of getting off



and getting back on when people were standing in the **stepwell**, and how was I going to squeeze on anyway? So he told me if I couldn't go through the back door that I would have to get off the bus—"my bus," he called it. I stood where I was. He came back and he took my coat sleeve; not my arm, just my coat sleeve.

He didn't take his gun out. I was hardly worth the effort because I wasn't resisting. I just didn't get off and go around like he told me. So after he took my coat sleeve, I went up to the front, and I dropped my purse. Rather than stoop or bend over to get it, I sat right down in the front seat and from a sitting position I picked up my purse.

He was standing over me and he said, "Get off my bus." I said, "I will get off." He looked like he was ready to hit me. I said, "I know one thing. You better not hit me." He didn't strike me. I got off, and I heard someone mumble from the back, "How come she don't go around and get in the back?"

I guess the black people were getting tired because they wanted to get home and they were standing in the back and were tired of standing up. I do know they were mumbling and grumbling as I went up there to get myself off the bus. "She ought to go around the back and get on." They always wondered why you didn't want to be like the rest of the black people. That was the 1940s, when people took a lot without fighting back.

I did not get back on the bus through the rear door. I was coming from work, and so I had already gotten a transfer slip to give the next driver. I never wanted to be on that man's bus again. After that, I made a point of looking at who was driving the bus before I got on. I didn't want any more run-ins with that mean one.

Rosa Parks: My Story

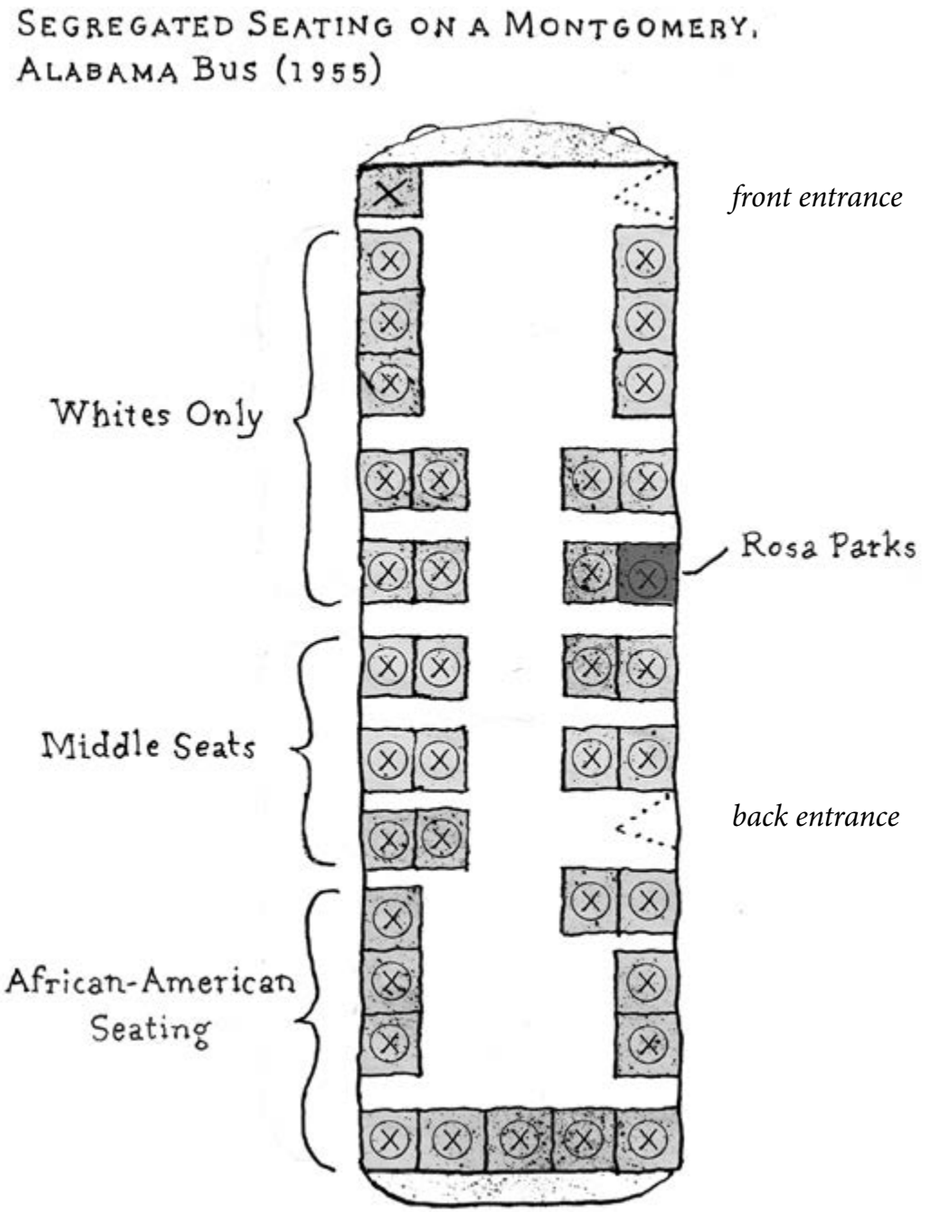
"You're Under Arrest"

by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins

When I got off from work that evening of December 1, I went to Court Square as usual to catch the Cleveland Avenue bus home. I didn't look to see who was driving when I got on, and by the time I recognized him, I had already paid my **fare**. It was the same driver who had put me off the bus back in 1943, twelve years earlier. He was still tall and heavy, with red, rough-looking skin. And he was still mean-looking. I didn't know if he had been on that route before—they switched the drivers around sometimes. I do know that most of the time if I saw him on a bus, I wouldn't get on it.

I saw a **vacant** seat in the middle section of the bus and took it. I didn't even question why there was a vacant seat even though there were quite a few people standing in the back. If I had thought about it at all, I would probably have figured maybe someone saw me get on and did not take the seat but left it vacant for me. There was a man sitting next to the window and two women across the aisle.

The next stop was the Empire Theater, and some whites got on. They filled up the white seats, and one man was left standing. The driver looked back and noticed the man standing. Then he looked back at us. He said, "Let me have those front seats," because they were the



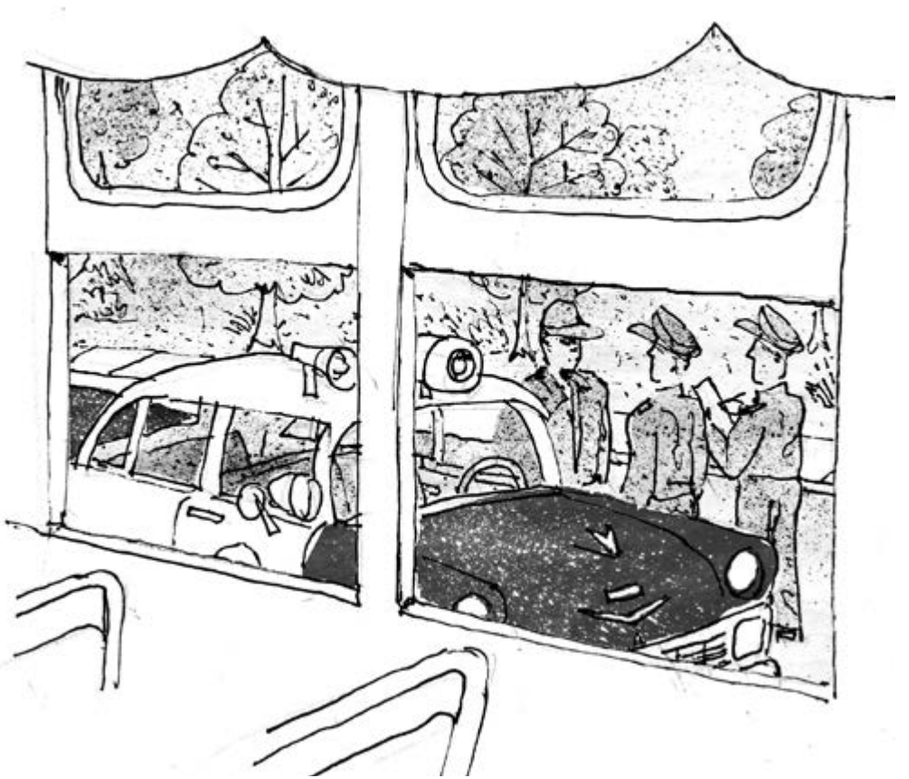
front seats of the black section. Didn't anybody move. We just sat right where we were, the four of us. Then he spoke a second time: "Y'all better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats."

The man in the window seat next to me stood up, and I moved to let him pass by me, and then I looked across the aisle and saw that the two women were also standing. I moved over to the window seat. I could not see how standing up was going to "make it light" for me. The more we gave in and complied, the worse they treated us.

I thought back to the time when I used to sit up all night and didn't sleep, and my grandfather would have his gun right by the fireplace, or if he had his one-horse wagon going anywhere, he always had his gun in the back of the wagon. People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.

The driver of the bus saw me still sitting there, and he asked was I going to stand up. I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'm going to have you arrested." Then I said, "You may do that." These were the only words we said to each other. I didn't even know his name, which was James Blake, until we were in court together. He got out of the bus and stayed outside for a few minutes, waiting for the police.

As I sat there, I tried not to think about what might happen. I knew that anything was possible. I could be **manhandled** or beaten. I could be arrested. People have asked me if it occurred to me then that I could be the test case the NAACP had been looking for. I did not think about that at all. In fact if I had let myself think too deeply about what might happen to me, I might have gotten off the bus. But I chose to remain.

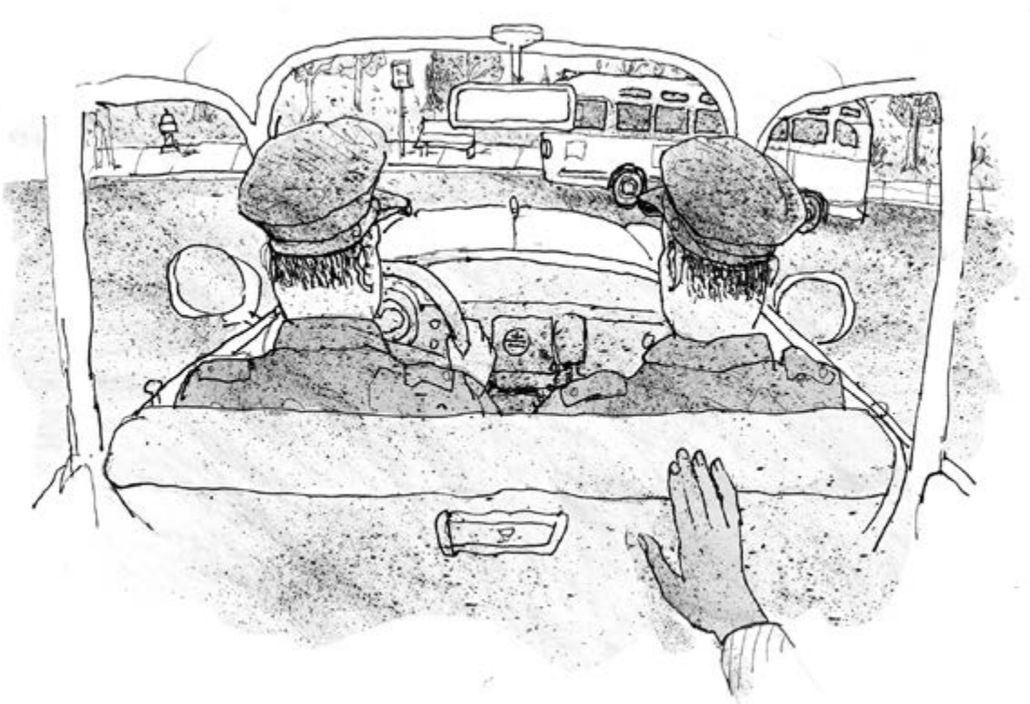


Meanwhile there were people getting off the bus and asking for transfers, so that began to loosen up the crowd, especially in the back of the bus. Not everyone got off, but everybody was very quiet. What conversation there was, was in low tones; no one was talking out loud. It would have been quite interesting to have seen the whole bus empty out. Or if the other three had stayed where they were, because if they'd had to arrest four of us instead of one, then that would have given me a little support. But it didn't matter. I never thought hard of them at all and never even bothered to criticize them.

Eventually two policemen came. They got on the bus, and one of them asked me why I didn't stand up. I asked him, "Why do you all push us around?" He said to me, and I quote him exactly, "I don't know, but the law is the law and you're under arrest." One policeman

picked up my purse, and the second one picked up my shopping bag and escorted me to the squad car. In the squad car they returned my personal belongings to me. They did not put their hands on me or force me into the car. After I was seated in the car, they went back to the driver and asked him if he wanted to swear out a warrant. He answered that he would finish his route and then come straight back to swear out the warrant. I was only in custody, not legally arrested, until the warrant was signed.

As they were driving me to the city desk, at City Hall, near Court Street, one of them asked me again, "Why didn't you stand up when the driver spoke to you?" I did not answer. I remained silent all the way to City Hall.



Rosa Parks was born in Tuskegee, Alabama on February 4, 1913. Known as "the first lady of civil rights," Parks was a lifelong civil rights activist and a member of the NAACP, where she worked as a youth leader, and then as secretary to the NAACP president.

On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks refused to give up her seat on a public bus for a white passenger after the whites-only section of the bus filled up. She was arrested, and the legal case that followed became the starting platform for the citywide Montgomery Bus Boycott, which would then launch a nationwide effort to end the segregation of public facilities. Parks died in 2005, and is remembered as an icon of the Civil Rights movement.

Step by Step

A Boy Goes to Washington

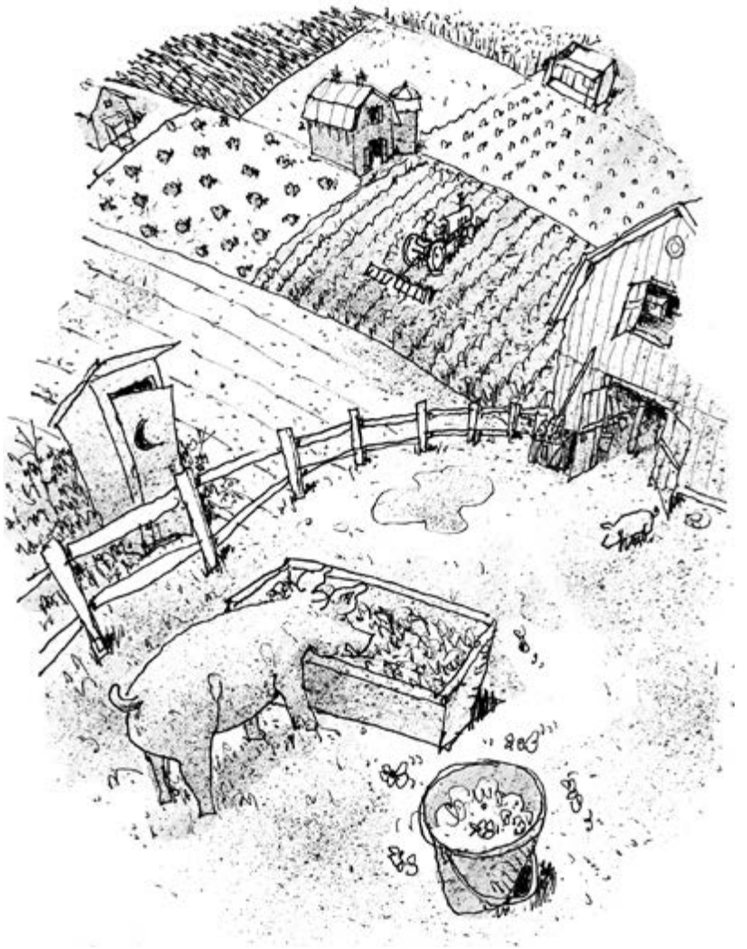
by Bertie Bowman

BERTIE BOWMAN, you are only thirteen years old and here you are, on your way to the big city, I thought, feeling the seat under me. I watched the scenery from the windows, the flat landscape, and the farmers walking around in their fields in the distance.

My mind was closed to all things past. I was not going to look back on my farm days, hog slopping, or the long hours of toil. I didn't give a thought to things back at home. That train rolled on all day long, to the song of the metal against the tracks, the blur of the towns and villages moving past my eyes. I wasn't going to get to Washington until around eight o'clock that night, and I told the porter that I would be glad to work if he needed anyone to help him.

"We'll see," the porter said, very aware of the white conductor, who could make trouble for him if he wanted. "There's always something to do around here. But be careful of the conductor. He's in charge of the porters and attendants."

The conductor walked back and forth through the aisle, checking on the porters and attendants, all colored, making sure that everything was up to standard. I watched the porter, who kept



out of his way but did his work. His job was to help with the bags, to meet the requests of the riders, and put out the steps when the train stopped. All the attendants worked in the kitchen, cooking meals and serving the commuters. I learned much on that train. Everything was so new and different in this environment outside of Summerton. It was my first experience in a much bigger world. For example, the train featured a flush toilet and I was only familiar with outhouses in my rural town.

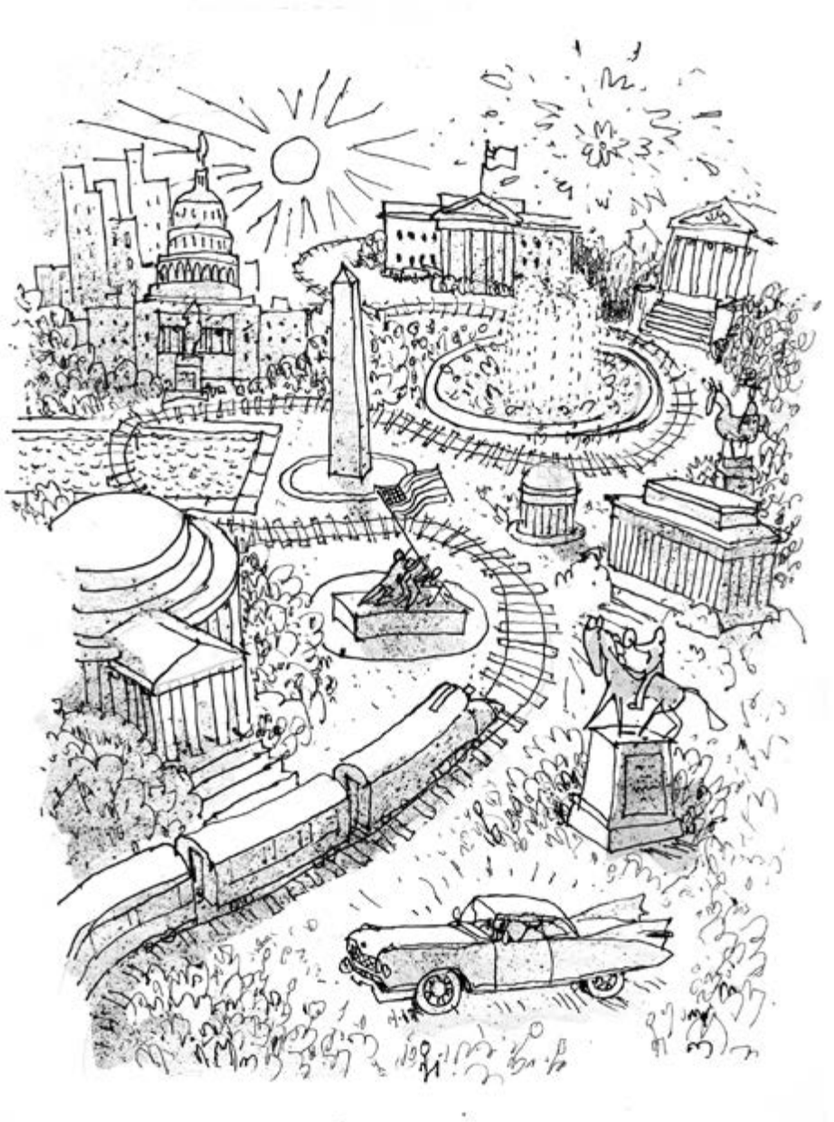
As soon as the train made its first stop, I learned how to put down the steps, gracefully without much fanfare, and then I watched the porter assist the white ladies in all their finery off to the platform. We loaded their baggage onto carts. The colored passengers traveled in separate cars from the white people, cramped from inferior passage, and did not get the porters' assistance. They got off the best way they could. According to the rules, the colored riders could not put their bags on a cart; they had to carry them.

Later, after I had eaten my lunch of ham and bacon sandwiched between biscuits, I helped out in the kitchen cleaning off the tables, and they rewarded me by giving me a free dinner. I took the dinner back to my seat in the segregated car where all the colored passengers ate food that they had brought with them. In that time, we could not go on the train without taking along our own food and drink, because we could not buy any in the dining car. That was only for white people.

The train trip and helping those guys out were very positive experiences, ones that convinced me that I'd made the right decision. I could survive away from home. I knew I could survive in the big city. If I could help those men do their work, after all, I could certainly hold down a job when I got to the city. Unlike some of the young guys, I was not too serious about myself. I could get along with anybody. The porter and the attendant seemed to like me, kidding me constantly, joking that I acted as though I was just hired on.

"Are you trying to take over our jobs?" they asked me. As it turned out, it wasn't just a joke, because later, when the train got close to Washington, they asked if I would really like a job on the train. They also said the white conductor said he would hire me because of the excellent work I had done that day.

But I had a mission. One mission alone: to be a success in the city. I told them no. The main reason I did not take that job was that it interfered with the game plan I'd had in my head for so long. I was going to go to the city, where I could get a job wearing a uniform, wearing a hat, and driving a shiny car. Who wanted to go back down South? I knew I would like it here, with its opportunities. I knew I could do a lot of growing up here and mature into quite a man. Also, the porter informed



me a lot about his work schedule, and how he would work without any time off all the way from the South to New York City and back again. It sounded almost as exhausting as farm work.

When the train pulled into Washington, I had never seen so many lights. It was like the world was on fire. As I gathered my stuff, the porter asked me again if I wanted the train job.

"No," I said. "I am finally in the city. This is what I have been waiting for all my life."

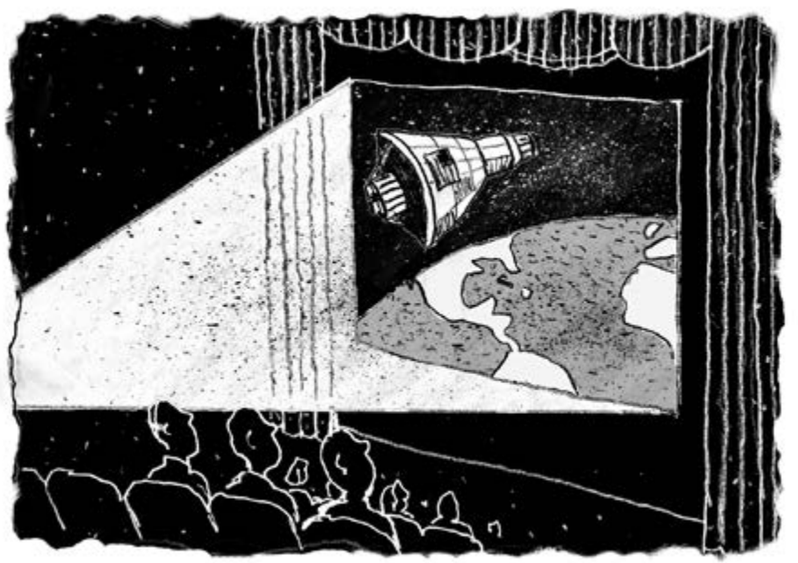
Bertie Bowman was born in Summerton, South Carolina in 1932. The fifth of twelve children on a poor farm, Bowman dreamed of leaving for Washington D.C. In 1944, Bowman met campaigning senator Burnet Maybank, who declared that if anybody in the crowd that day came to Washington, D.C. they should stop by and see him. At thirteen years old, Bowman ran away from his home and the farm and took Maybank up on his offer.

Maybank helped young Bowman get a job sweeping the steps of the Capitol Hill building. From there Bowman made a place for himself. Over the next sixty years Bowman would rise through the ranks to become a staffer for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He kept a diary of his experiences through those remarkable years, which became the basis for his autobiography.

A View of the Earth

by Michael Massimino

In 1984 I was a senior in college, and I went to see the movie ***The Right Stuff***. And a couple of things really struck me in that movie. The first was the view out the window of **John Glenn's** spaceship—the view of the Earth, how beautiful it was on the big screen. I wanted to see that view. And secondly, the camaraderie between the original seven astronauts depicted in that movie—how they were good friends, how they stuck up for each other, how they would never let each other down. I wanted to be part of an organization like that.



And it **rekindled** a boyhood dream that had gone dormant over the years. That dream was to grow up to be an astronaut. And I just could not ignore this dream. I had to pursue it. So I decided I wanted to go to **graduate school**, and I was lucky enough to get accepted to **MIT**.

While I was at MIT, I started applying to **NASA** to become an astronaut. I filled out my application, and I received a letter that said they weren't quite interested. So I waited a couple years, and I sent in another application. They sent me back pretty much the same letter. So I applied a *third* time, and this time I got an interview, so they got to know who I was. And then they told me no.

So I applied a fourth time. And on April 22, 1996, I knew the call was coming , good or bad. I picked up the phone, and it was Dave Leestma, the head of flight crew operations at the Johnson Space Center in **Houston**.

He said, "Hey, Mike. This is Dave Leestma. How you doing this morning?"

And I said, "I really don't know, Dave. You're gonna have to tell me."

And he said, "Well, I think you're gonna be pretty good after this phone call, 'cause we wanna make you an astronaut."

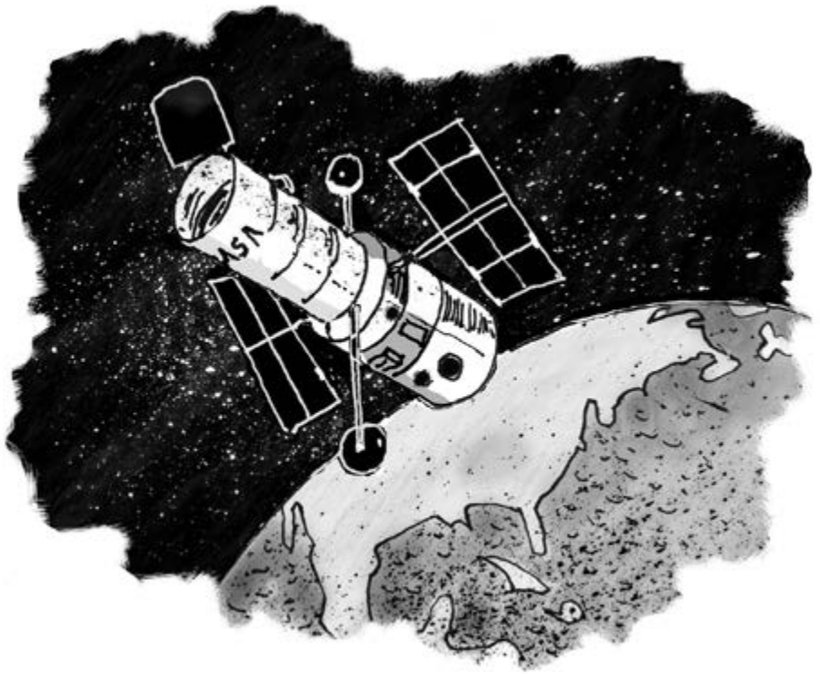
Thirteen years after that, it's May 17, 2009, and I'm on **space shuttle** *Atlantis,* about

to go out and do a spacewalk on the **Hubble Space Telescope**. And our task that day was to repair an instrument that had failed. This instrument was used by scientists to detect the atmospheres of far-off planets. Planets in other solar systems could be analyzed using this **spectrograph** to see if we might find a planet that was Earth-like, or a planet that could support life. And just when they got good at doing this, the power supply on this instrument failed. It blew. So the instrument could no longer be used.

And there was no way really to replace this unit or to repair the instrument, because when they launched this thing, and they got it ready for space flight, they really buttoned it up. They didn't want anybody to screw with this thing. It was buttoned up with an access panel that blocked the power supply that had failed. This access panel had 117 small screws with washers, and just to play it safe, they put glue on the screw threads so they would never come apart. You know, it could withstand a space launch, and there was no way we could get in to fix this thing.

But we really wanted the Hubble's **capability** back, so we started working. And for five years, we designed a spacewalk. We designed over one hundred new space tools to be used—at great taxpayers' **expense**, millions of dollars, thousands of people worked on this. And my buddy Mike Good (who we call Bueno)—he and I were gonna go out to do this spacewalk. I was gonna be the guy actually doing the repair.

And inside was Drew Feustel, one of my best friends. He was gonna read me the checklist. And we had practiced for years and years for this. They built us our own practice instrument and gave us our own set of tools so we could practice in our office, in our free time, during lunch, after work, on the weekends. We became like one mind.



He would say it, I would do it. We had our own language. And now was the day to go out and do this task.

The thing I was most worried about when leaving the **airlock** that day was my path to get to the telescope, because it was along the side of the space shuttle. And if you look over the edge of the shuttle, it's like looking over a cliff, with 350 miles to go down to the planet. And there are no good handrails.

When we're spacewalking, we like to grab on to things with our space gloves and be nice and steady. But I got to this one area along the side of the shuttle, and there was nothing good to grab. I had to grab a wire or a hose or a knob or a screw. And I'm kind of a big goon. And when there's no gravity, you can get a lot of **momentum** built up,

and I could go spinning off into space. I knew I had a safety **tether** that would probably hold, but I also had a heart that I wasn't so sure about. I knew they would get me back, I just wasn't sure what they would get back on the end of the tether when they reeled me in. So I was really concerned about this. I took my time, and I got through the **treacherous** path and out to the telescope.

The first thing I had to do was to remove a handrail from the telescope that was blocking the access panel. There were two screws on the top, and they came off easily. And there was one screw on the bottom right and that came out easily. The fourth screw is not moving. My tool is moving, but the screw is not. I look close and it's stripped. And I realize that that handrail's not coming off, which means I can't get to the access panel with these 117 screws that I've been worrying about for five years, which means I can't get to the power supply that failed, which means we're not gonna be able to fix this instrument today, which means all these smart scientists can't find life on other planets.

And I'm to blame for this.

And I could see what they would be saying in the science books of the future. This was gonna be my legacy. My children and my grandchildren would read in their classrooms: *We would know if there was life on other planets… but Gabby and Daniel's dad…*My children would suffer from this.

Gabby and Daniel's dad broke the Hubble Space Telescope, and we'll never know.

And through this nightmare that had just begun, I looked at my buddy Bueno, next to me in his space suit, and he was there to assist in the repair but could not take over my role. He had his own

responsibilities, and I was the one trained to do the now broken part of the repair. It was my job to fix this thing. I turned and looked into the cabin where my five **crew mates** were, and I realized nobody in there had a space suit on. They couldn't come out here and help me. And then I actually looked at the Earth; I looked at our planet, and I thought, *There are billions of people down there, but there's no way I'm gonna get a house call on this one. No one can help me.*

I felt this deep loneliness. And it wasn't just a "Saturday afternoon with a book" alone. I felt…**detached** from the Earth. I felt that I was by myself, and everything that I knew and loved and that made me feel comfortable was far away. And then it started getting dark and cold.

Because we travel 17,500 miles an hour, ninety minutes is one lap around the Earth. So it's forty-five minutes of sunlight and forty-five minutes of darkness. And when you enter the darkness, it is not just darkness. It's the darkest black I have ever experienced. It's the complete absence of light. It gets cold, and I could feel that coldness, and I could sense the darkness coming. And it just added to my loneliness.

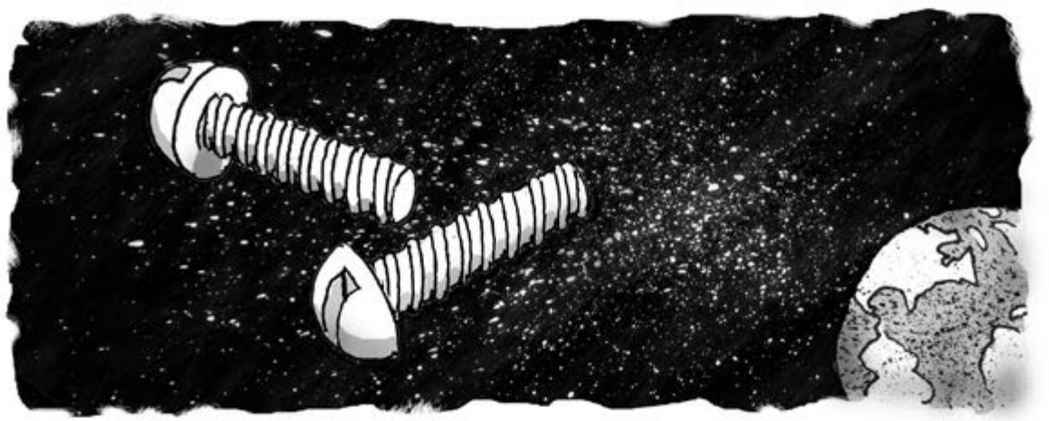
For the next hour or so, we tried all kinds of things. I was going up and down the space shuttle, trying to figure out where I needed to go to get the next tool to try to fix this problem, and nothing was working. And then they called up, after about an hour and fifteen minutes of this, and said they wanted me to go to the front of the shuttle to a toolbox and get **vise grips** and tape. I thought to myself, *We are running out of ideas. I didn't even know we had tape on board. I'm gonna be the first astronaut to use tape in space during a spacewalk.*

But I followed directions. I got to the front of the space shuttle, and I opened up the toolbox and there was the tape. At that point I was very close to the front of the **orbiter**, right by the cabin window, and

I knew that my best pal was in there, trying to help me out. And I could not even stand to think of looking at him, because I felt so bad about the way this day was going, with all the work he and I had put in.

But through the corner of my eye, through my helmet, you know, just the side there, I can kinda see that he's trying to get my attention. And I look up at him, and he's just cracking up, smiling and giving me the okay sign. And I'm like, *Is there another spacewalk going on out here?* I really can't talk to him, because if I say anything, the ground will hear. You know, Houston. The control center. So I'm kinda like playing **charades** with him. I'm like, *What are you, nuts?* And I didn't wanna look before, because I thought he was gonna give me the finger because he's gonna go down in the history books with me. But he's saying, *No, we're okay. You just hang in there a little bit longer. We're gonna make it through this. We're in this together. You're doing great. Just hang in there.*

And if there was ever a time in my life that I needed a friend, it was at that moment. And there was my buddy, just like I saw in that movie, the camaraderie of those guys sticking together. I didn't believe him at all. I figured that we were outta luck. But I thought, At least if I'm going down, I'm going down with my best pal.



And as I turned to make my way back over the treacherous path one more time, Houston called up and told us what they had in mind. They wanted me to use that tape to tape the bottom of the handrail and then see if I could yank it off the telescope. They said it was gonna take about sixty pounds of force for me to do that.

And Drew answers the call, and he goes, "Sixty pounds of force?"

He goes, "Mass, I think you got that in you. What do you think?"

And I'm like, "You bet, Drew. Let's go get this thing."

I get back to the telescope, and I put my hand on that handrail, and the ground calls again, and they go, "Well, Drew, you know, you guys are okay to do this, but right now we don't have any downlink from Mike's helmet camera." I've got these cameras mounted on my helmet, so they can see everything I'm doing. It's kinda like your mom looking over your shoulder when you're doing your homework, you know?

And they go, "We don't have any downlink for another three minutes, but we know we're running late on time here, so if you have to…" And I'm thinking, *Let's do it now while they can't watch!* Because the reason I'm taping this thing is if any debris gets loose, they're gonna get all worried, and it's gonna be another hour, and we'll never fix this thing. We've been through enough already.

So I'm like, *Let's do it now, while Mom and Dad aren't home. Let's have the party.*

So I say, "Drew, I think we should do it now."

And Drew's like, " Go!" And bam! That thing comes right off. I

pull out my power tool, and now I've got that access panel with those 117 little bitty screws with their washers and glue, and I'm ready to get each one of them. And I pull the trigger on my power tool and nothing happens, and I look, and I see that the battery is dead. And I turn my head to look at Bueno, who's in his space suit, again looking at me like, *What else can happen today?*

And I said, "Drew, the battery's dead in this thing. I'm gonna go back to the air lock, and we're gonna swap out the battery, and I'm gonna recharge my oxygen tank." Because I was getting low on oxygen; I needed to get a refill.

And he said, "Go." And I was going back over that shuttle, and I noticed two things. One was that that treacherous path that I was so scaredy-cat-sissy-pants about going over—it wasn't scary anymore. That in the course of those couple hours of fighting this problem, I had gone up and down that thing about twenty times, and my fear had gone away, because there was no time to be a scaredy-cat, it was time to get the job done. And what we were doing was more important than me being worried, and it was actually kinda fun going across that little jungle gym, back and forth over the shuttle.

The other thing I noticed was that I could feel the warmth of the sun. We were about to come into a day pass. And the light in space, when you're in the sunlight, is the brightest, whitest, purest light I have ever experienced, and it brings with it warmth. I could feel that coming, and I actually started feeling optimistic.

Sure enough, the rest of the spacewalk went well. We got all those screws out, a new power supply in, buttoned it up. They tried

it; turned it on from the ground. The power supply was working. The instrument had come back to life. And at the end of that spacewalk, after about eight hours, I'm inside the air lock getting things ready for Bueno and me to come back inside, but my commander says, "Hey, Mass, you know, you've got about fifteen minutes before Bueno's gonna be ready to come in. Why don't you go outside of the air lock and enjoy the view?"

So I go outside, and I take my tether, and I clip it on a handrail, and I let go, and I just look. And the Earth—from our altitude at Hubble, we're 350 miles up. We can see the **curvature.** We can see the roundness of our home, our home planet. And it's the most magnificent thing I've ever seen. It's like looking into heaven. It's paradise.

And I thought to myself, *This is the view that I imagined in that movie theater all those years ago.* And as I looked at the Earth, I also noticed that I could turn my head, and I could see the moon and the stars and the Milky Way galaxy. I could see our universe. And I could turn back, and I could see our beautiful planet.

And that moment changed my relationship with the Earth. Because for me the Earth had always been a kind of a safe **haven**, you know, where I could go to work or be in my home or take my kids to school. But I realized it really wasn't that. It really is its own spaceship. And I had always been a space traveler. All of us here today, even tonight, we're on this spaceship Earth, amongst all the chaos of the universe, whipping around the sun and around the Milky Way galaxy.

A few days later, we get back. Our families come to meet us at the airfield. And I'm driving home to my house with my wife, my kids in the backseat. And she starts telling me about what she was going through that Sunday that I was spacewalking, and how she could tell,

listening, watching the NASA television channel, how sad I was. That she **detected** a sadness in my voice that she had never heard from me before, and it worried her.

I wish I would've known that when I was up there, 'cause this loneliness that I felt—really, Carol was thinking about me the whole time. And we turned the corner to come down our block, and I could see my neighbors were outside. They had decorated my house, and there were American flags everywhere. And my neighbor across the street was holding a pepperoni pizza and a six-pack of beer, two things that unfortunately we still cannot get in space.

And I got out of the car, and they were all hugging me. I was still in my blue flight suit, and they were saying how happy they were to

have me back and how great everything turned out. I realized my friends, man, they were thinking about me the whole time. They were with me too.

The next day we had our return ceremony; we made speeches. The engineers who had worked all these years with us, our trainers, the people that worked in the control center, they started telling me how they were running around like crazy while I was up there in my little nightmare, all alone. How they got the solution from the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, and how the team that was working on that Sunday figured out what to do, and they checked it out, and they radioed it up to us.

I realized that at the time when I felt so lonely, when I felt detached from everyone else—literally, like I was away from the planet— that really I never was alone, that my family and my friends and the people I worked with, the people that I loved and the people that cared about me, they were with me every step of the way.

Michael Massimino was born in Franklin Square, New York on August 19, 1962. After attending Columbia University where he earned a degree in Industrial Engineering, Massimino attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for graduate school, receiving a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering in 1992. During his time at MIT he applied to NASA to be an astronaut four different times until he was finally chosen as a candidate in 1996.

Massimino has been on two space flights, logging a total of 571 hours and 47 minutes in space, including 30 hours and 4 minutes of spacewalking across four space walks. Both of his flights were launched to service the Hubble Space Telescope, including the final Hubble repair mission.

Glossary

A

abuela, n. grandmother (Spanish)

airlock, n. a chamber astronauts must pass through when entering or exiting a spacecraft

amiss, adj. improper

antithesis, n. opposite

appease, v. satisfy

astrologer, n. person who predicts the future based on the positions of stars and planets

B

blurted, v. said suddenly

C

capability, n. power; ability

Caucasian, adj. white

charades, n. a game in which players act out a word or phrase without speaking

civil rights, n. protections from discrimination and other unjust treatment

conceded, v. admitted defeat

conga line, n. a popular Cuban dance

cornucopias, n. horns containing food and drink

crescendo, n. section of a song where the music becomes loud and intense

crewmates, n. members of a group that work together on a ship, aircraft or spacecraft

culottes, n. shorts that resemble a skirt

cumin, n. a spice often used for cooking

curvature, n. bend

customized, adj. built according to individual requirements

D

detached, v. separated

detected, v. observed

discernible, adj. recognizable

ditto sheets, n. paper copies

E

ecstatic, adj. very happy

eight-track tape, n. a music player that was popular in the 1960s and 1970s

enhanced, adj. improved

España, n. Spanish word for the country of Spain

esperanza, n. hope (Spanish)

expense, n. cost

F

fair, adj. attractive; having a light complexion

fare, n. payment for public transportation

G

gladiolus, n. flowering plants in the iris family

graduate school, n. a school for post-college study

grime, n. dirt

H

haven, n. safe place

Houston, n. the control center for NASA space flights, located in Houston, Texas

Hubble Space Telescope, n. a space telescope that orbits the earth

I

incessantly, adv. without stopping

innards, n. internal parts of a body

intimidating, adj. threatening

J

jalousie windows, n. windows with adjustable blinds

John Glenn, n. one of the first seven American astronauts

jutting, v. extending outwards

M

manhandled, v. physically mistreated

mira, v. look (Spanish)

MIT, n. a university in Massachusetts famous for teaching science and engineering

momentum, n. force of movement

N

NASA, n. the United States agency that oversees the space program

Nelson Mandela, n. a South African civil rights leader

O

orbiter, n. part of the space shuttle that carries the crew

overseer, n. supervisor

oversight, n. careless error

P

parroted, v. repeated

persevered, v. persisted in the face of obstacles

piñata, n. a paper mache figure filled with candy

plantation, n. large farm on which the laborers usually are not the owners

pothole, n. a hole in pavement

public money, n. government funds

Puritan, n. member of a branch of Protestantism

R

realization, n. a clear understanding

rectory, n. a house attached to a church

rekindled, v. reawakened, brought to life again

resolve, n. determination

S

saffron, n. a spice often used for cooking

shuffleboard, n. a game in which players push a puck with long sticks

smugly, adv. with confidence that one is correct

sombreros, n. large hats traditionally worn in Spain and Mexico

space shuttle, n. a type of spacecraft used by NASA from 1981 to 2011

spectrograph, n. a type of camera attached to the Hubble Space Telescope

spunk, n. spirit; liveliness

stepwell, n. stairway

sulking, v. behaving as if one is unhappy

swaddling, v. wrapping up tightly

T

terrazzo floor, n. tiled floor

tether, n. a cord fastening something or someone to a base

***The Right Stuff,* n.** a 1983 movie about the first seven American astronauts

thickset, adj. having a broad body

treacherous, adj. dangerous

V

vacant, adj. empty

visas, n. documents sometimes required for travel between countries

vise grips, n. tools used to hold things firmly in place

W

wafts, n. aromas

Willie Nelson, n. a famous country music singer

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Acknowledgments

These materials are the result of the work, advice, and encouragement of numerous individuals over many years. Some of those singled out here already know the depth of our gratitude; others may be surprised to find themselves thanked publicly for help they gave quietly and generously for the sake of the enterprise alone. To helpers named and unnamed we are deeply grateful.

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We would like to extend special recognition to Program Directors Matthew Davis and Souzanne Wright, who were instrumental in the early development of this program.

Schools

We are truly grateful to the teachers, students, and administrators of the following schools for their willingness to field-test these materials and for their invaluable advice: Capitol View Elementary, Challenge Foundation Academy (IN), Community Academy Public Charter School, Lake Lure Classical Academy, Lepanto Elementary School, New Holland Core Knowledge Academy, Paramount School of Excellence, Pioneer Challenge Foundation Academy, PS 26R (the Carteret School), PS 30X (Wilton School), PS 50X (Clara Barton School), PS 96Q, PS 102X (Joseph O. Loretan), PS 104Q (the Bays Water), PS 214K (Michael Friedsam), PS 223Q (Lyndon B. Johnson School), PS 308K (Clara Cardwell), PS 333Q (Goldie Maple Academy), Sequoyah Elementary School, South Shore Charter Public School, Spartanburg Charter School, Steed Elementary School, Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy, Three Oaks Elementary, West Manor Elementary.

And a special thanks to the CKLA Pilot Coordinators, Anita Henderson, Yasmin Lugo-Hernandez, and Susan Smith, whose suggestions and day-to-day support to teachers using these materials in their classrooms were critical.

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ISBN 9781681612539

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