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The Field: A Senior Thesis in Progress

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THE FIELD:

A SENIOR THESIS IN

PROGRESS

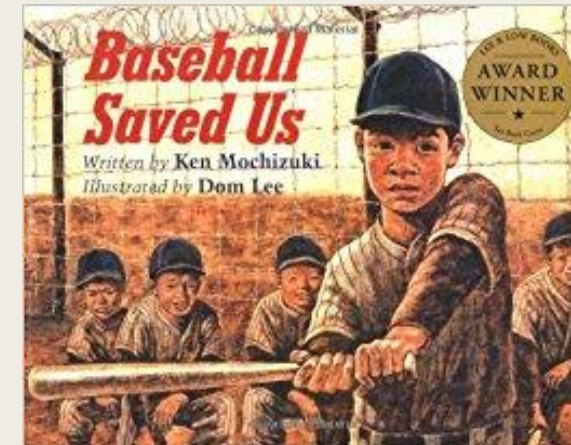
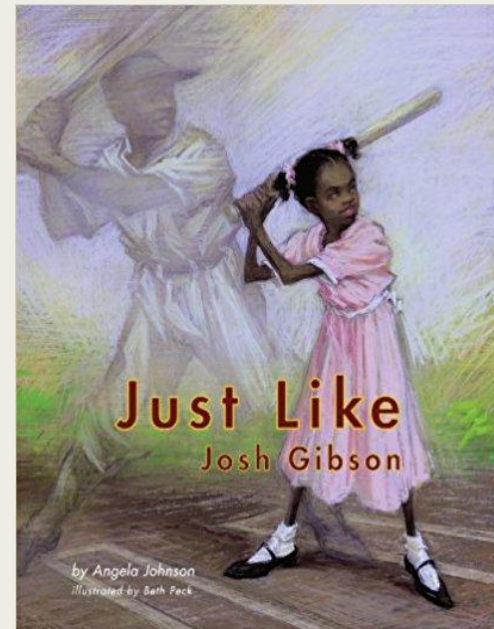
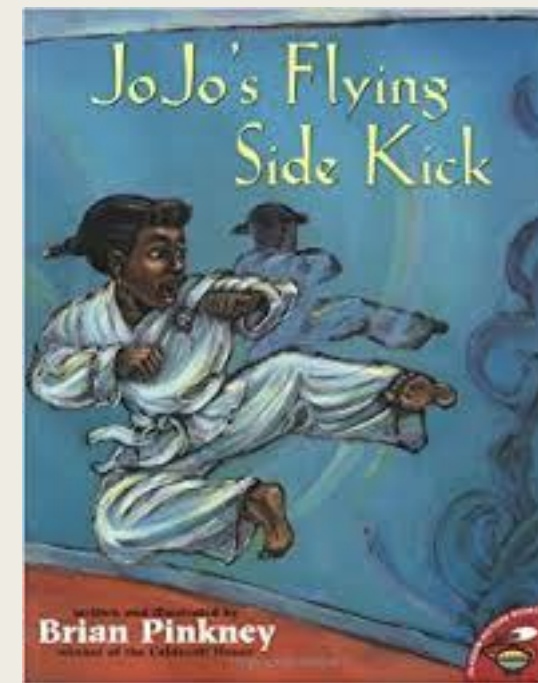
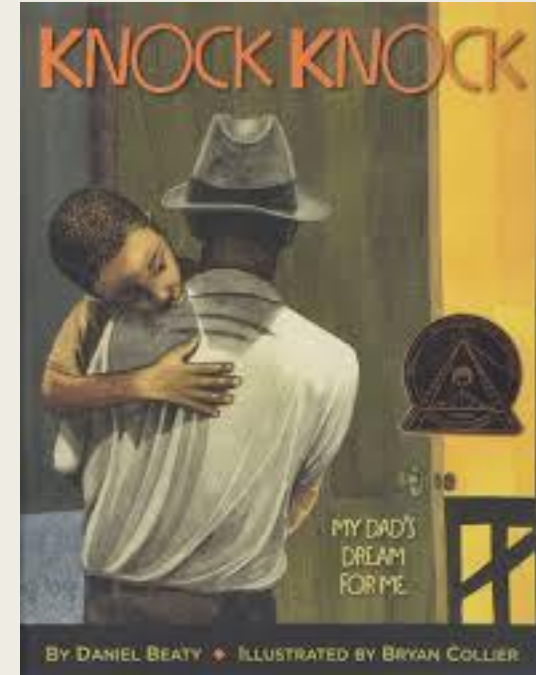
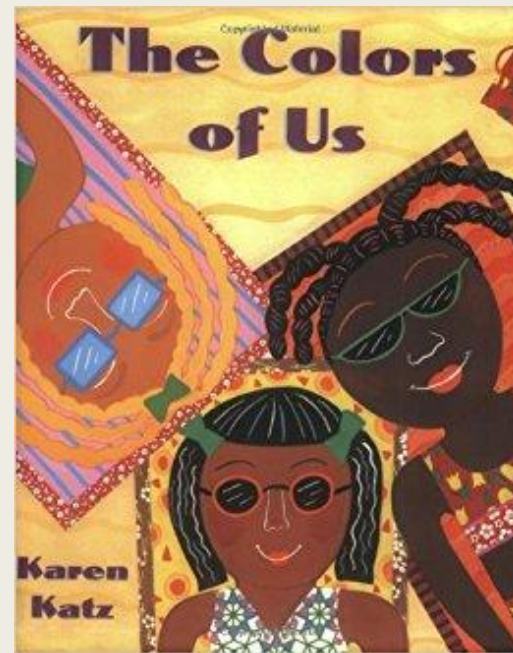
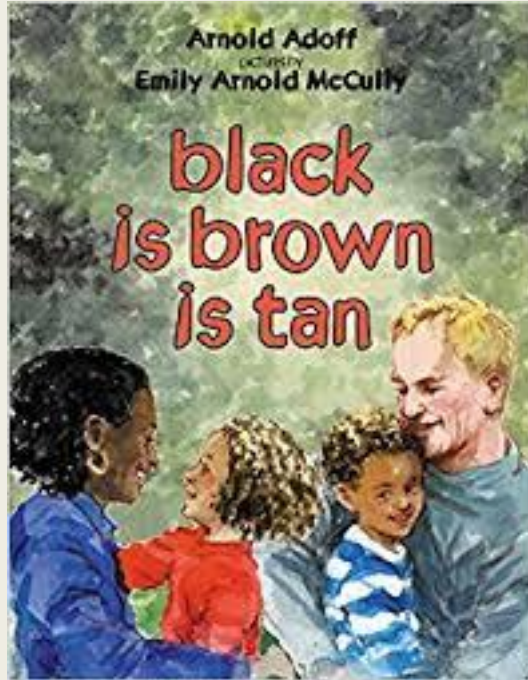
KACY SPEARS



WHERE THE STORY
CAME FROM...

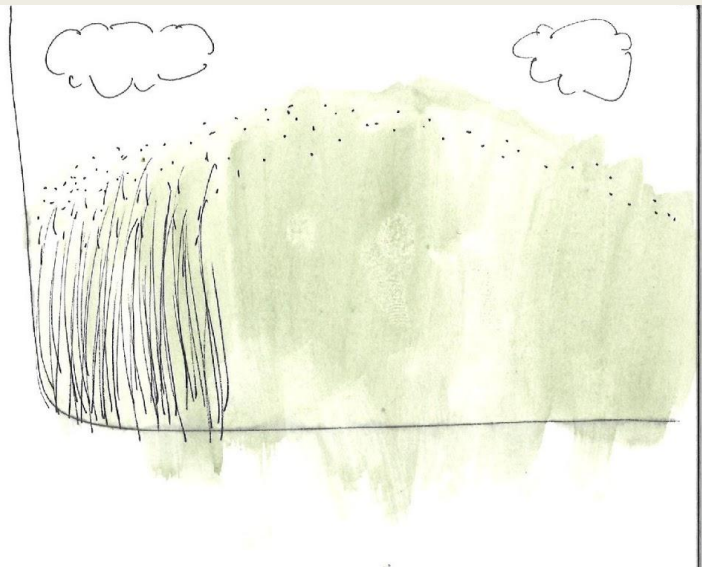
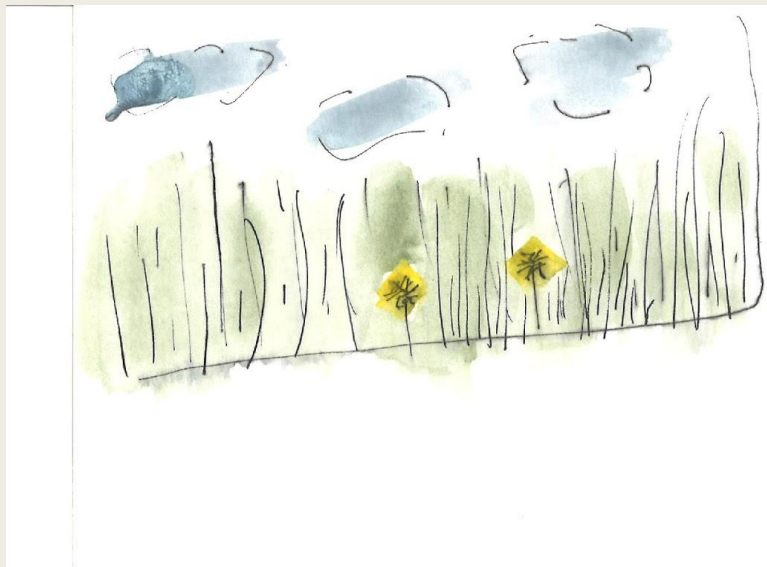
I'M NOT AN
ART MAJOR, BUT...

RESEARCH



ARTISTIC AND TEXT STRATEGY

- From black and white to all color
- Muted colors
- Size of the text
- Artistic process in deciding on a style



The Field

Written by JV McKinney
Illustrated by Kacy Spears



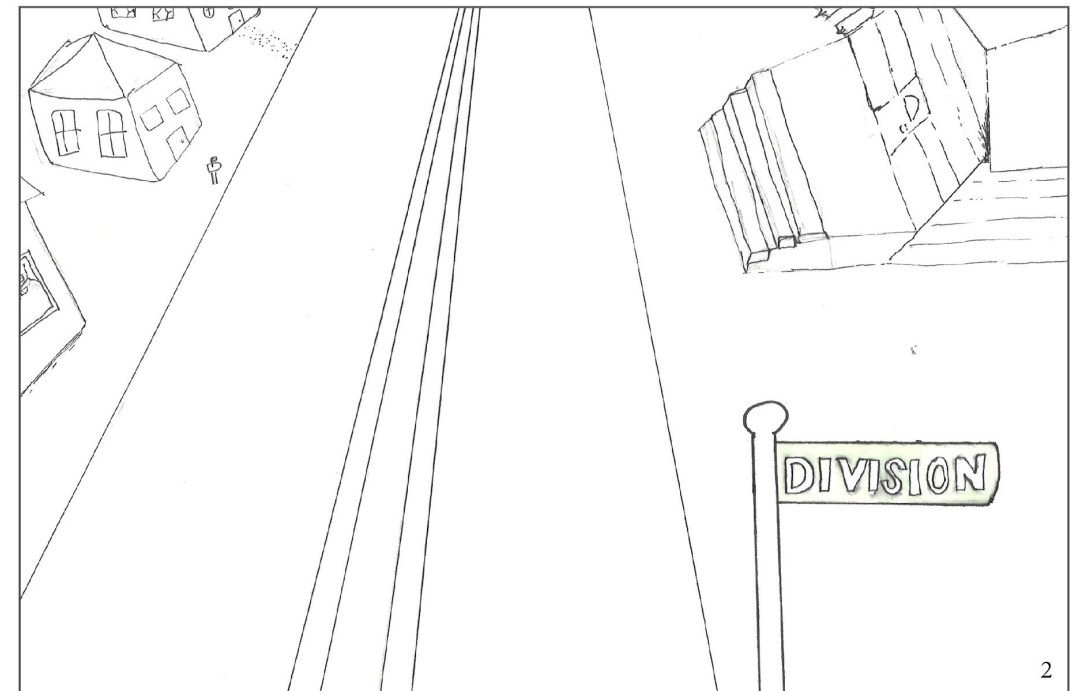
For The McKinney Family

My brother and I grew up in a small town in the East Arkansas Delta in the '40s and '50s.

We lived on Division Street.

It was a great place to live if you were white.

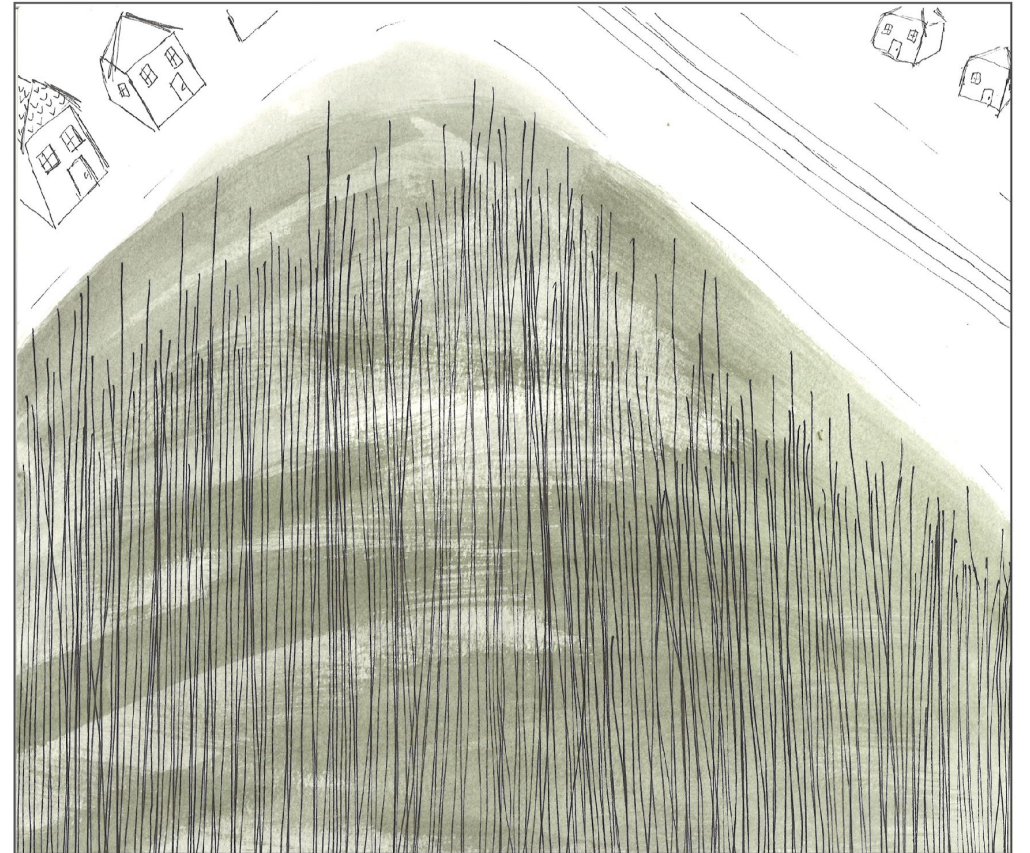
Our small frame rent house was in the last block of South Division before it passed under the railroad tracks and entered the African-American community.



Bub and I and three white friends from that tiny
one block area loved to play
baseball.

There was no organized ball back then and no good
location to play.

However, beyond the tracks and across Division,
was a field covered with weeds knee high to a
grown man.

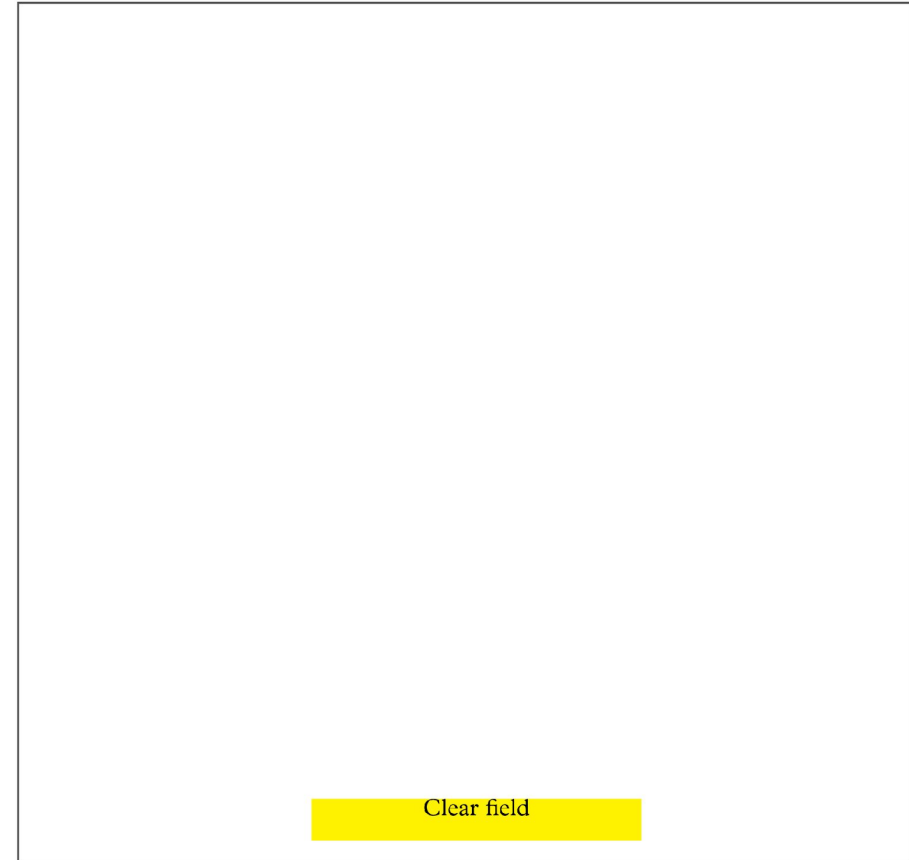


Our dad asked the owners of the field to mow it for us.

I was eleven in that spring of '53.

It was a time when kids could “just be” and adults did not micromanage every move.

After school that first day, the five of us grabbed our gloves, bats, and a ball and headed down to our new field, pulling a red wagon filled with dirt from our backyard for an official pitcher's mound.



The freshly mown grass smelled wonderful. The field was huge - room to run, throw and hit as hard as you could without any worry about breaking a window.

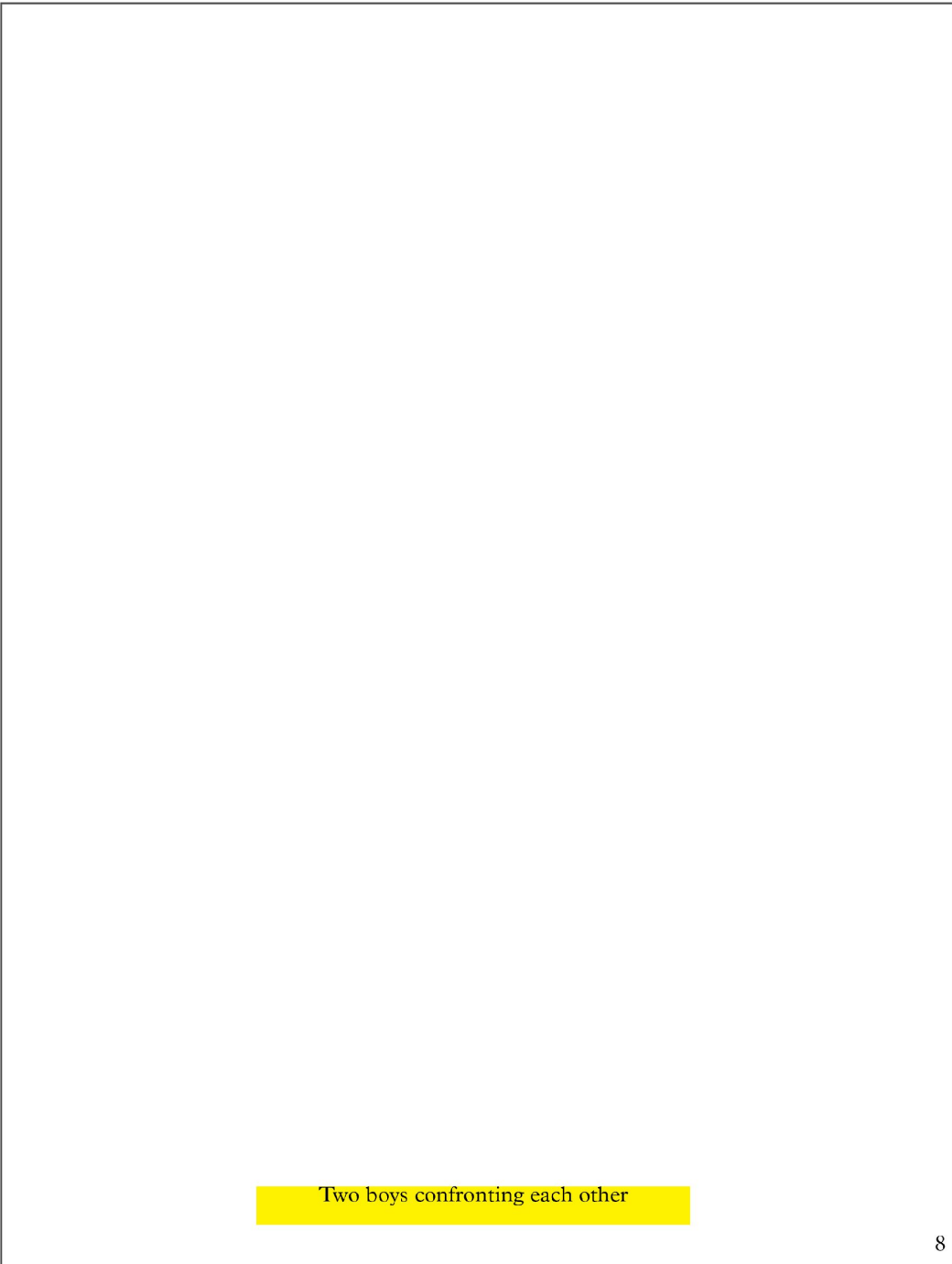
It was pretty much heaven.

Soon, some black kids about our age drifted in and watched us from the sidelines. After a time, the older one came over to me and asked if they could join us.

“Of course not,” I said.

“This is our field, and besides, you don’t have any gloves or bats.”

You just did not do things like that back then in the Delta.



Two boys confronting each other

Pitcher's mound destroyed

We returned the next afternoon, and our pitcher's mound was kicked to smithereens.

The black kids were sitting quietly on the sidelines. Immediately, we went back home, refilled the wagon, headed back, and rebuilt the mound and played ball the rest of the day.

The next afternoon,
our mound was flattened again.
This destroy-and-rebuild malarkey
went on for more than a week.

We started to bring a load of dirt on the way down.

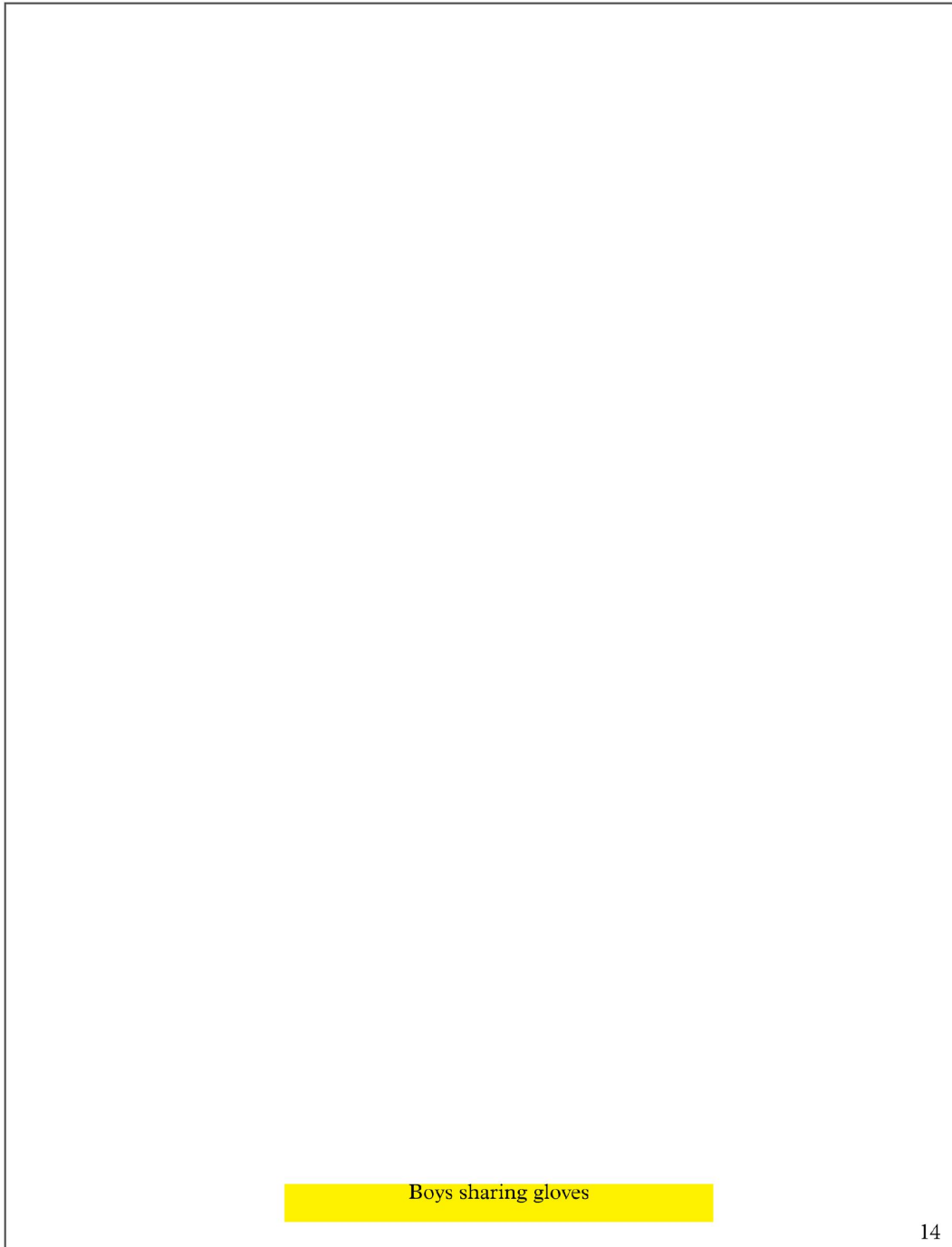
It was a lot of work, and
something did not feel right.

Boys carrying the wagon to the field

One afternoon after rebuilding the mound, I simply walked up to the kid who had asked about playing.

I told him my name, and he told me his.

When I handed him my glove, he took it, smiled and said “thanks.”



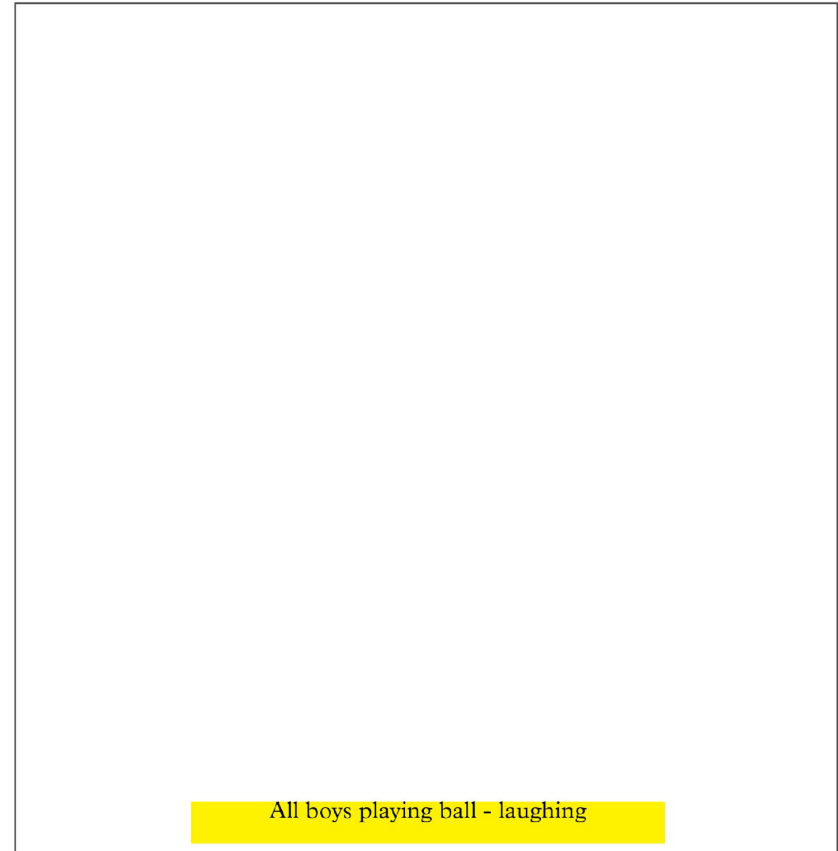
Boys sharing gloves

We shared equipment and players doubled. Ten kids had a blast that evening until dark.

We could hit to all fields.

Before, it was out if you hit it to right field.

The phrase “our field”
forever took on a new meaning.



All boys playing ball - laughing

Field with burlap bags, chalk baselines, blue sky

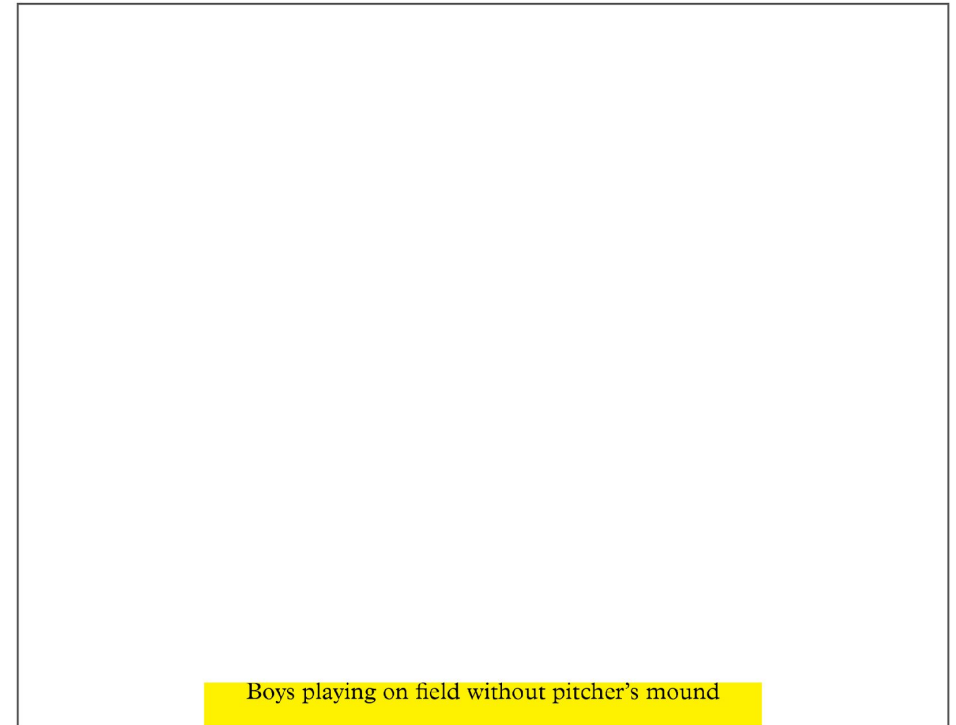
After school the next day,
the pitcher's mound was not disturbed.

Also, someone had chalked baselines
from home to first to third.

Burlap bags with sawdust had replaced
our flimsy pieces of cardboard at each base.

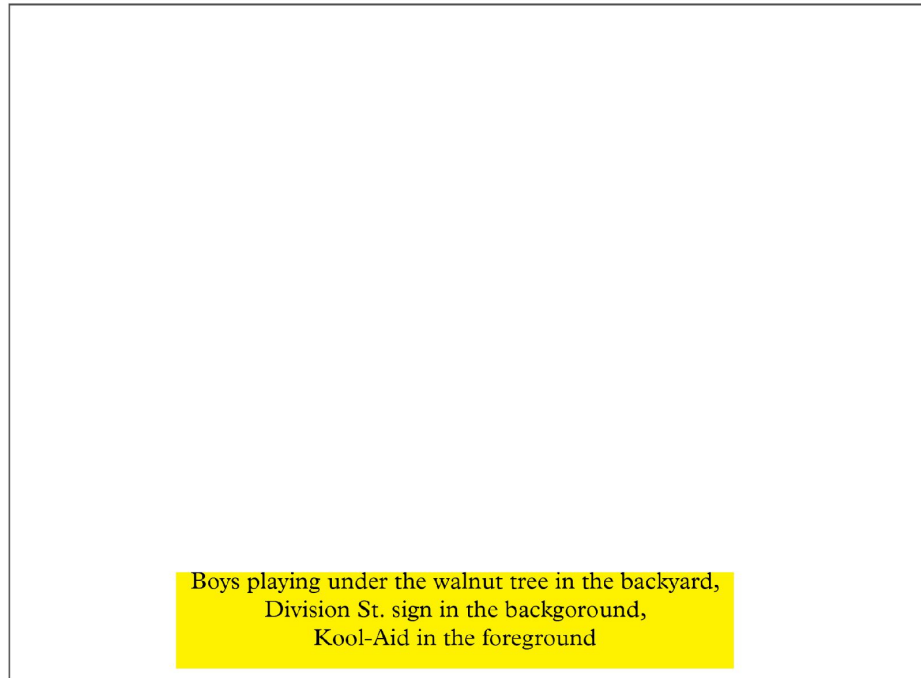
The field had become a very special place for some
lucky kids from both sides of the tracks.

Four years later in Little Rock,
grown-ups politicked to fears, activated troops,
closed schools, embarrassed the state forever
and took years to accomplish far less
than a few kids did
in a little over a week
at the field.



We soon did away with the
built-up pitcher's mound.
The center of so much conflict in the beginning
was not even needed when we started
playing together.

On blazing hot summer days,
the whole crew would come to our house and play
a creative version of “small ball” in the shade of the
huge walnut tree in our backyard.



Over a three-year period,
we wore the grass down to bare dirt.
The ball bounced true like on a gym floor.

Mom would furnish Kool-Aid.

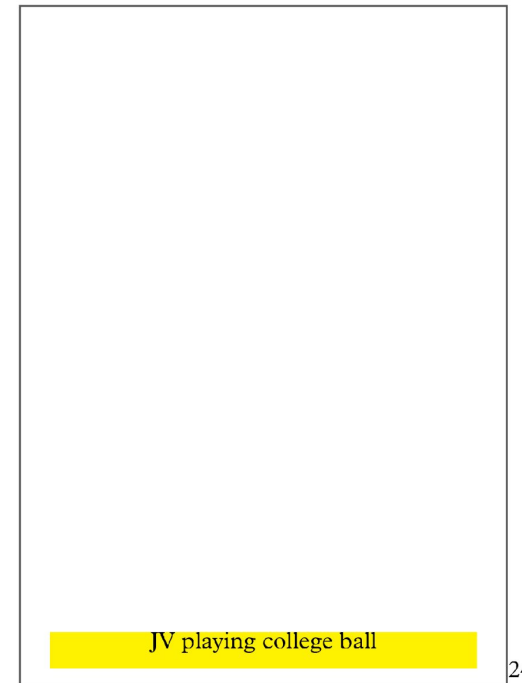
It did not last forever.

By junior high, we each had other interests
at different schools and drifted apart.

The grass regrew in our backyard,
and I played organized baseball
through four years of college,
followed by more than 20 years
of adult league softball.

I never again played a single game
with a black teammate.

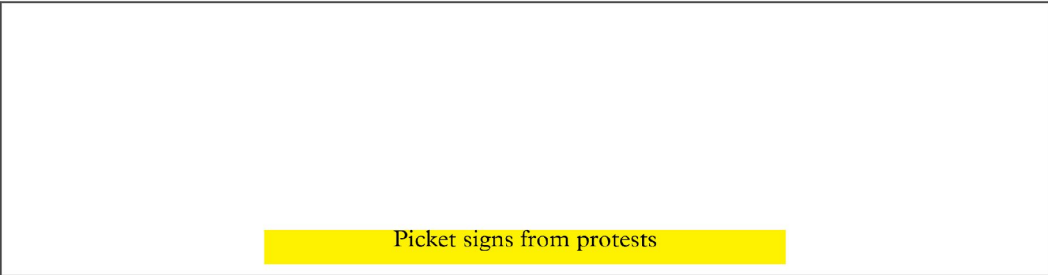
Never.



In 1969, dangerous racial tensions were crackling in our small Delta town.

Mom and dad still lived in the old house on Division.

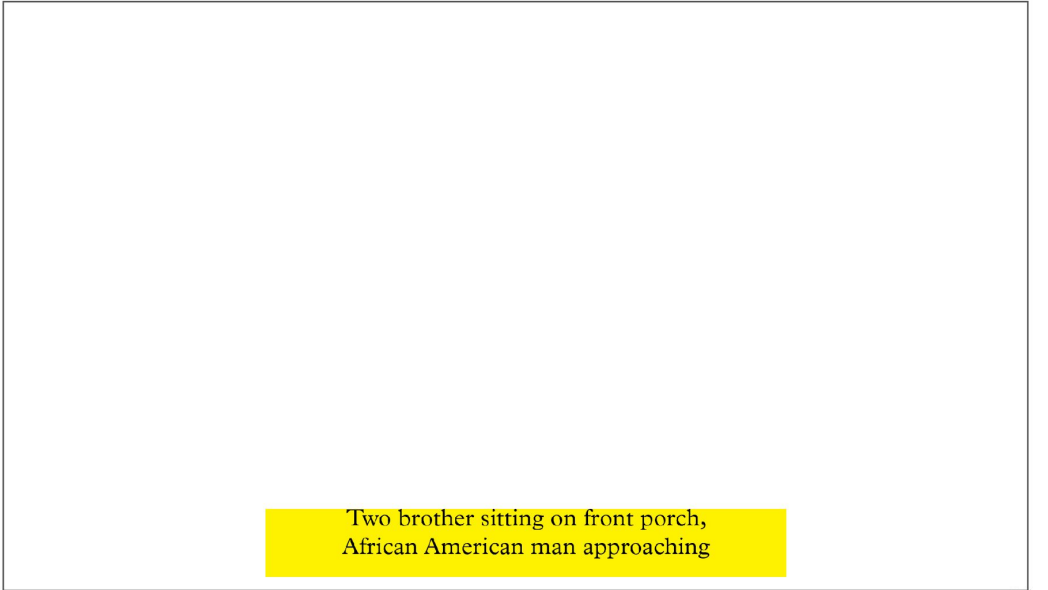
My brother and I were very concerned.



Picket signs from protests

We were in our 20s, married and with jobs in other cities.

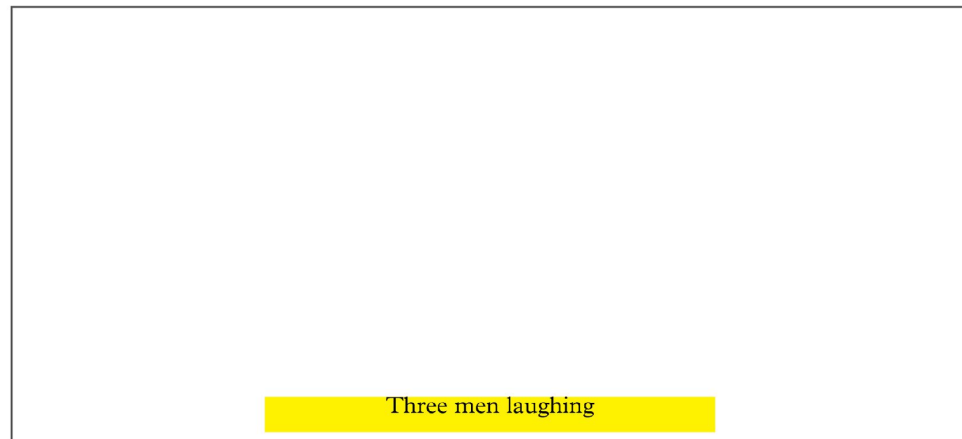
We were back home for a brief visit that summer and sitting on the front porch when a huge African-American male walked into our yard and approached us.



Two brother sitting on front porch, African American man approaching

It was one of our friends from the field.

The three of us talked, laughed,
and shared great stories
about beautiful times together years before.



Eventually, the conversation changed to ugly times
happening right then in the town we loved.

As our friend started to leave, he said,
“Don’t worry about your parents.
They will be safe.”

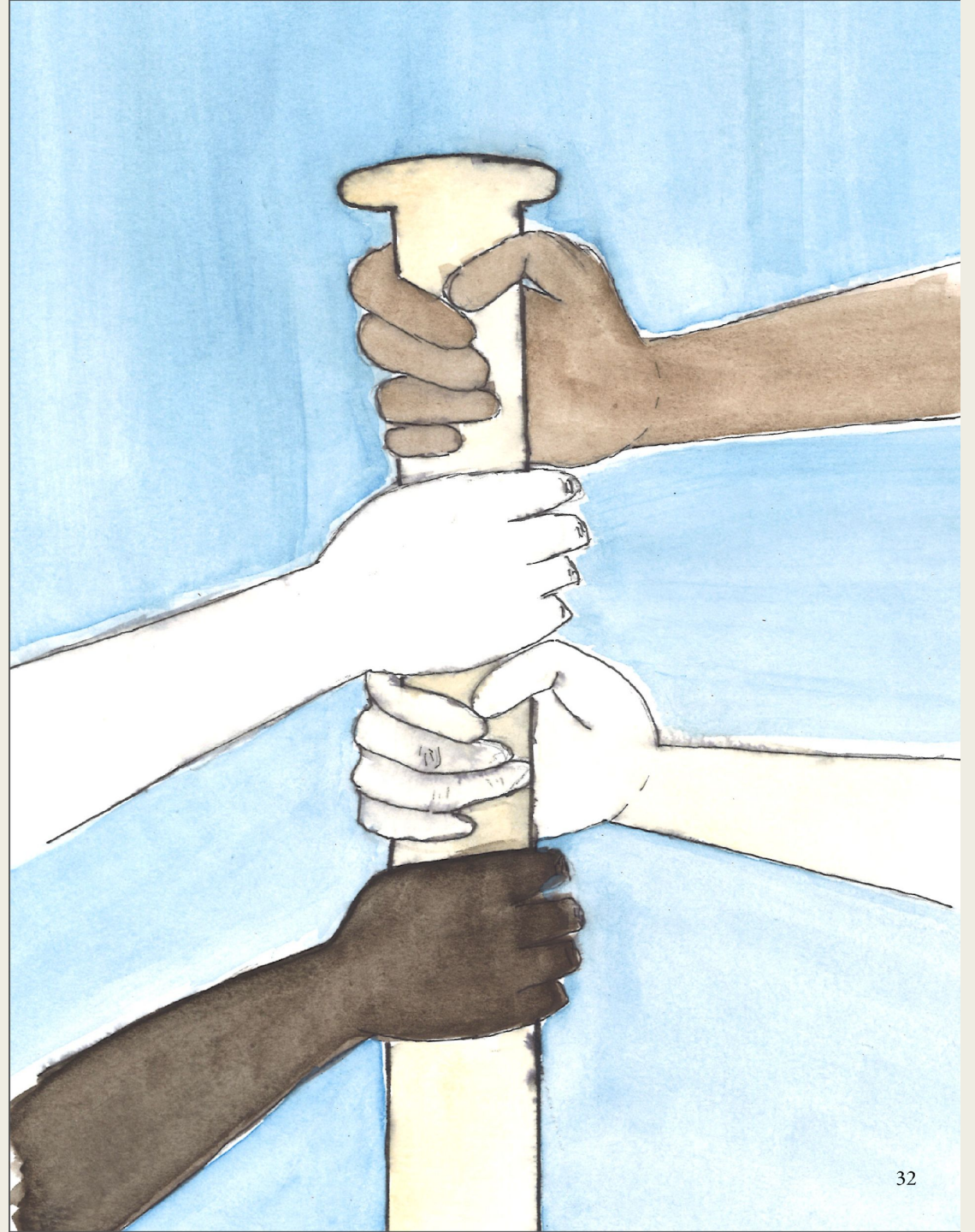
The field has become one of the
driving narratives of my life.

The small rent house is gone,
but the field still exists,
literally in dirt and grass,
and powerfully in metaphor.



I can still return to my hometown,
walk to the center of the field
and “just be.”

I remember the sweet smell of fresh-cut grass
from decades before,
the surprise of sawdust bags
and chalked baselines,
the way black and white hands looked together
“climbing the bat”
for first pick when choosing sides,
the reverence our new friends
displayed the first time they
held a Jackie Robinson bat.



I will never forget
the deep emotions stirred
when our friend
assured us of our parents' safety.

My life has been filled with tremendous blessings.

Without question,
one was being paart of a small group
of black and white kids,
just being kids,
years ago in the East Arkansas Delta.
playing ball past sundown-
on the same side of Division.

It was pretty much heaven.

Illustrator's Note

I had a very sentimental reaction to JV McKinney's "The Field" the first time I heard it. Bryan McKinney, JV's son, played a recording of JV reading his short story in my Issues of Communication class at Ouachita Baptist University. The class was centered around racism and how to interact with the evil, how to see it for what it is, and we posited ways to reduce the evil. Like JV, I also grew up in a small Arkansas town where racism reared its ugly head.

I hope this book will show how racial reconciliation can start small.