

Level 1: Emerging Writers

Winner: Alvin P. Johnson
San Diego Public Library, READ San Diego

Book: *March*

Author: John Lewis and Andrew Aydin

Dear Congressman Lewis,

I read “March” and wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed reading it. Even though we grew up in different times and in different places I can relate to many of the things you talked about in your book.

I was born in New York City in the mid-fifties and spent summers at my Uncle Tony’s farm in North Carolina. So, I can relate, at least in part, to your growing up in rural Alabama. Uncle Tony’s farm was a part of his small town; he farmed three pieces of land around his home, one more down the road, and still another piece of land further down. He drove his tractor to each piece of land. He wasn’t a sharecropper like your family; still it was hard work and he put in long days.

What I like most about your story about growing up on your family’s farm was your “Chicken Ministry.” I didn’t preach to our chickens like you. However, I did get to know the chickens and I didn’t like to eat one that had been killed for dinner. Like you I would refuse to eat it. How could I eat someone I knew? I didn’t mind eating a chicken that came from the grocery store; that was different.

I did not have to get up before dawn like you did. Still, I had to do chores. When I asked Uncle Tony if I would get paid for helping he said that all the meals and a place to stay was payment enough!

Uncle Tony’s white horse was mean to everybody except me. My cousins did not like being around him he was mean—he even kicked one of them in the head. I had a secret weapon though—sugar! It took a while but he became gentle with me. Riding him was a different story. No matter how much I tied the cinch, it would loosen up, the saddle would slip and I had to get off and try again. I guess he had a secret weapon too!

Going to school was different from what you had to go through. School in New York was close and was integrated. I also spent time in schools in North Carolina but didn’t have many problems there either. I even tried out for the basketball team but my Uncle did not have time after chores to pick me up from late night practices and games.

I was impressed with your story about integrating lunch counters. You and your fellow organizers went through so much, faced violence and hostility and yet never deviated from your pledge of non-violence. That was inspirational. I was a little too young to remember those things clearly. However I remember studying them in school, so it is awesome to hear about them from a leader, like you who helped make a difference. Thank you so much and thank you for this book.