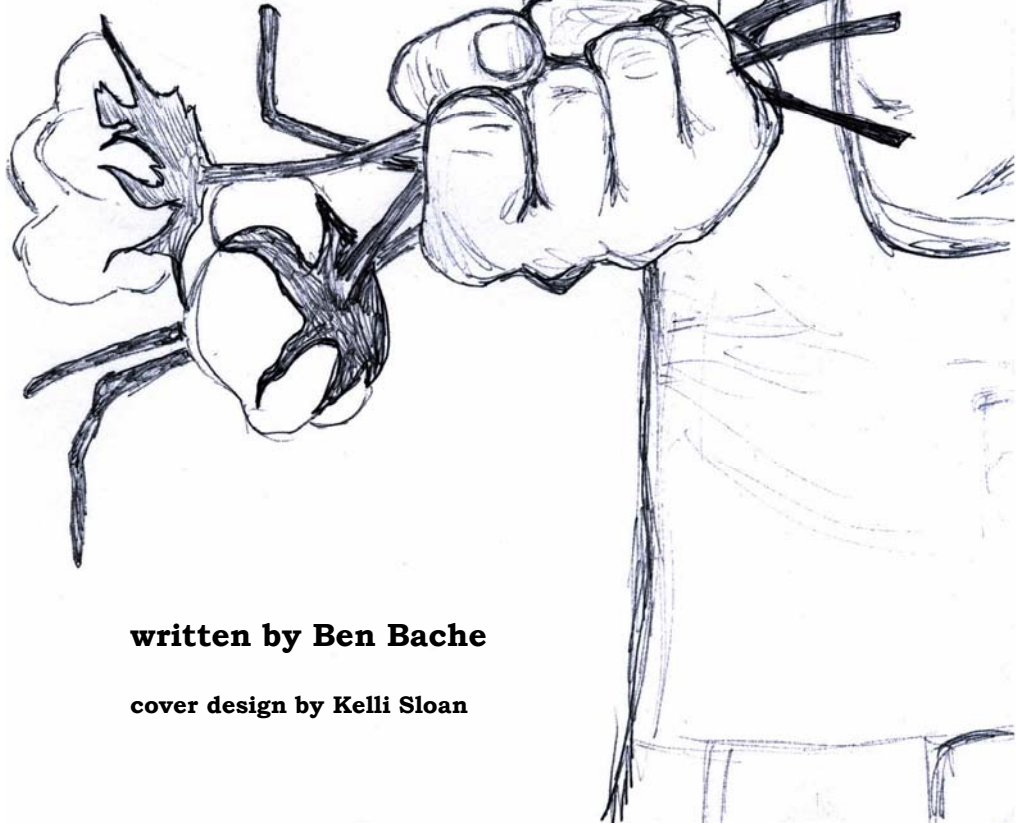


Palmetto

ROOTS

The Great Depression through the
eyes of a 9 year-old African
American boy.



written by Ben Bache

cover design by Kelli Sloan

Homecourt  Publishers

■ Greenville, SC



Pop said
that his new
job was to
help build a
state park.

8 — Pop's New Job

Pop went to work a couple of days later. He was sent to a training camp for the Civilian Conservation Corps. Pop said that he sort of felt like he was in the Army.

The camp lasted for two weeks. When it was over, Pop came back for a day to see all of us and to pack his things.

The following morning, Eddie came by to pick up Pop in a covered wagon. He and Pop were going to their first day on the job. They

were assigned to a project in the town of Cheraw. It was twenty miles away, and it took half a day to get to by wagon.

I didn't see Pop very much while he was working in Cheraw. He would leave for a week or so, and come back for only a day or two. Then he would leave again. This lasted for a few months.

I asked him what he did while he was gone. "I'm helping to build Cheraw State Park," he answered.

"What's that?"

"A big forest," he explained. "I'm clearing trees, cutting trails, building cabins, things like that."

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know," he shrugged. "Maybe so people can visit the park. They can go camping, fishing, and hunting."

Then Pop smiled and said, "Besides, these are hard times, and there isn't much work. I think that President Roosevelt and his friends are making up jobs for people to do."

To me, it seemed silly that someone would go into a forest and start cutting down trees. But I was glad that Pop was working again.

Things started to get back to normal – but not completely. There was more food on the table, and Pop seemed happy again. But it wasn't the same as when he was working on the farm.

For example, once Pop came home with a black eye, and another time with a swollen lip. When Mama saw this, she always hugged him and started to cry.

Pop put his hand on her shoulder and told her not to worry. "Not all of the white folks like to work with a colored man."



Mama would get angry at him for fighting, and Pop would tell her, "I know that it is dangerous to fight – but sometimes it is more dangerous not to."

One morning, when Eddie came to pick up Pop, we noticed that he had a big cut across his forehead. Eddie told us that he had hurt himself while cutting down a tree. I later heard Pop tell Mama that Eddie had stepped in when some men started throwing sticks at Pop.

Pop promised Mama that most of the men that he worked with were good people. They were nice to him, even if they weren't used to working around colored men. There

were just a handful of thugs who tried to cause trouble.

“Don’t forget,” Pop told Mama, “We should be thankful that I have a job. Most of the black men in this county are starving. They would love to be in my position.”

In the area where we lived, Pop was one of the few colored men who had a job. Every night, there were still knocks at the door. It would always be a friend of Pop’s wanting to come and say good-bye.

“I’ve got to move up north so that I can find work and support my family,” he would say.

I didn’t know why everyone was moving up north. One day, when Pop came home from work, I asked him, “Where is everyone going?”

“Wherever they can find work,” he said, “These are tough times.” I was getting used to adults saying that these were “*tough times.*”



There were more factories in the North than in the South.

I was confused, “Why does everyone think there is more work up north?”

“That’s where the factories are,” Pop said. “We don’t have too many factories in South Carolina. We have a few textile mills—but not enough of them. And the ones we do have are too small and old.”

We sat there quietly for a few moments. “Pal, I want to talk to you about something,” Pop said, breaking the silence.

I could sense that he was about to say something important. Pop continued, “It’s always possible that we will have to move

north sometime soon. It's much easier for a colored man to find work in the north."

That was a strange thing for Pop to say. He already had a job, so why would he want to move?

Besides, I didn't want to move away from home, and Jasper, and everything else that I knew. I wanted things to go back to the way they were before the farm shut down.

I decided not to argue with Pop. If Pop wanted us to move, then there was a good reason—even if I didn't know what it was.

That night, I woke up to the sound of crying in the kitchen. I got out of bed and tip-toed closer to the door. I did not want to wake Mary and George.

I could hear Mama and Pop talking. Pop was saying, "There's nothing that we can do. They need to make sure the white folks have jobs."

Mama was crying as she heard the news. Pop continued, "People are complaining. They

can't have a colored man working while white folks don't have jobs."

I had heard enough. Pop was losing his job. Suddenly I understood why we needed to move away from our home.

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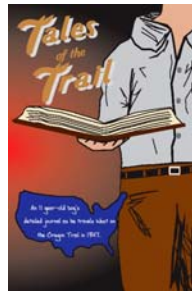
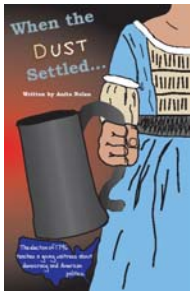
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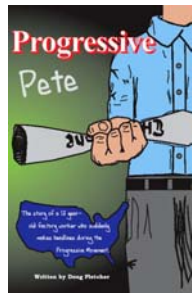
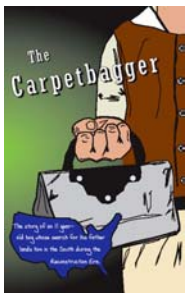
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