

THE NEW START READING SERIES



RAISED UP DOWN SOUTH

By Lee Sheridan

Copyright 1989 East End Literacy Press

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

**Sheridan, Lee, 1937-
- Raised Up Down South**

(The New start reading series)
A project of East End Literacy.
ISBN 0-920013-09-0

1. Readers for new literates 2. Sheridan, Lee, 1937- 3. Afro-Americans - Biography 4. Boxers (Sports) - Canada - Biography
I. East End Literacy (Association). II. Title. III. Series.

PE1126.A4S48 1989

428.6'2

C89-093774-5

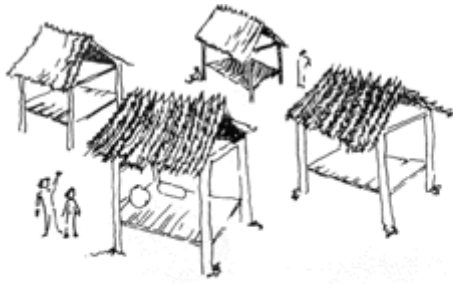
RAISED UP DOWN SOUTH

by Lee Sheridan



My Great-Grandparents

My great-grandfather, Green Sheridan, escaped from a slavery. The slaves were locked up in the barn at night. One night, he found a hammer and broke down the barn wall. Then he ran through the woods, trying to get away.



He got to a Cherokee Indian reservation. The Indians took him in. No one would go looking for him there. The Indians protected their land.



He lived with the Cheorkees for a long time.



He married the chief's sister. Her name was Winnie. She was a full-blooded Cherokee.



When slaves were freed, Green and Winnie moved Alabama. They raised up a family. I'm their great-grandson. I was born in Alabama in 1937.



My Mother

When I was a boy, my mother and father were always fighting. Every time I turned around, something was wrong.



When I was seven, my mother left my father because he beat her up. I was never old enough to talk to her and find out what happened.



She took my sisters and me to her brother's place in Fort Pierce, Florida. I guess she figured he could help her. We stayed with him and my Aunt Arleen when we first got there.



Then we moved into a place my mother got, We all lived in one room -- me and her and my two sisters.



We got by for a while. Then my mother started running around. She wasn't coming home at night.



My sisters and I were starving. I had to go out and find food wherever I could.



One night, my mother took us back to live with my aunt and uncle. Then she took off.

At first, it was good to be there. We could get something to eat. And my aunt seemed nice. She was a church-going woman.



But it wasn't long before she started beating me up. One night, she tied me to a bed and beat me.

My sister wanted to stick her with a knife.



Neighbours found out what happened. They got word to Winnie, my great-grandmother in Alabama. She sent my father down to get us. He took us back to live with Winnie.

I never saw my mother again.



Winnie

Winnie was a good woman. She raised three sets of kids. In those days, when something went wrong, the older people would take over the kids.

Winnie was in her seventies when she was raising us. She didn't have much money, only what her kids would send her from New York. And she was getting welfare for me and my sisters, but that was only five dollars a month for each kid.



Winnie could sing. You could hear her for miles when she was out washing the clothes. I liked listening to her.



Winnie was a smart woman to raise us up when things were so tough. She made quilts from rags. She canned food for us to eat. She made her own soap, like the Indians did. She made hog's-head cheese.

And she never lost her cool.

I wish I could be more like her -- to know things she knew. I'd be on top of the clouds.



My Father

My father was living with us in Alabama. One night, he had a party. A whiskey-runner showed up and got really drunk. He started pushing people around. Everyone got scared of him because he was white.

But my father wouldn't let anyone take over his place, so he beat the guy up.



He had to leave the South fast, because the Ku Klux Klan would have killed him. Winnie gave him money to leave.



You know how it was down south. Black people didn't have any rights. We couldn't walk on the same side of the street as white people. We couldn't sit down in a restaurant.

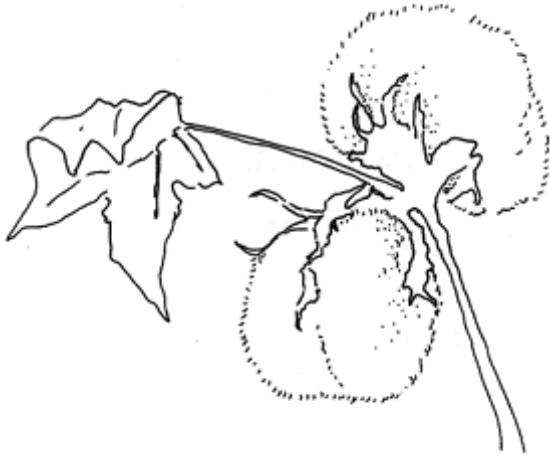


That was the last time my father worked down south. He went north to Niagra Falls, New York. My sisters and I stayed with Winnie in the wintertime.



Uncle Nathan and Aunt Gussie

Every spring, I went to stay with my Uncle Nathan and Aunt Gussie on their farm in Florida. I went just before planting season and stayed until we brought in the crops in the fall.



Every day, all of us black kids worked in the fields picking cotton with mules, planting peanuts or corn, and shaking dirt from the hay before we stacked it.



We started working young. If you were old enough to carry a bucket, you had to work.

We saw the white kids going to school every day in buses.



After school, they would be playing outside. I wished I could do that too, but I had to work.

I never thought about school at the time. Nobody ever mentioned reading and writing. When I think of it now -- What a break those white kids had!



My uncle Nathan could read his name
some, but he couldn't do his math. He and
his family were sharecroppers.
Sharecroppers work on other people's
farms.



The people who owned the land gave my uncle seeds, fertilizer, and food on credit. At the end of the year they would take out what he owed them.

My uncle was supposed to get some money, but he came out in the hole each year. I think he was cheated by the people he worked for. He couldn't keep track of what they owed him. He must have known that he was getting cheated. People knew, but they didn't say anything.



At that time, black people were scared to say much.
People are speaking out now. They come out and say
what they got to say.



Boxing

In the wintertime, when I lived with Winnie, I was out all the time trying to make a buck. I could always get a job, like gardening or moving bales of hay. We thought men who worked behind desks were sissies. A man's job was to work hard.



If you didn't have a job or an education, you got into boxing. My heroes were Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson.

But even Joe Louis lost a lot of money because he didn't have an education.



I always wanted to be a boxer when I was a kid. We used to listen to the radio when Joe Louis was fighting, and we watched him on the sports reels at the movies.



I used to see things in the movies and I would go home and try it out:
Take a bag, tie it up with sawdust in it, and punch it.
Bang-bang-bang!
No gloves. That's how I learned to box.



And when I got in a street fight, it worked!

Sometimes I had to fight to protect my sisters.



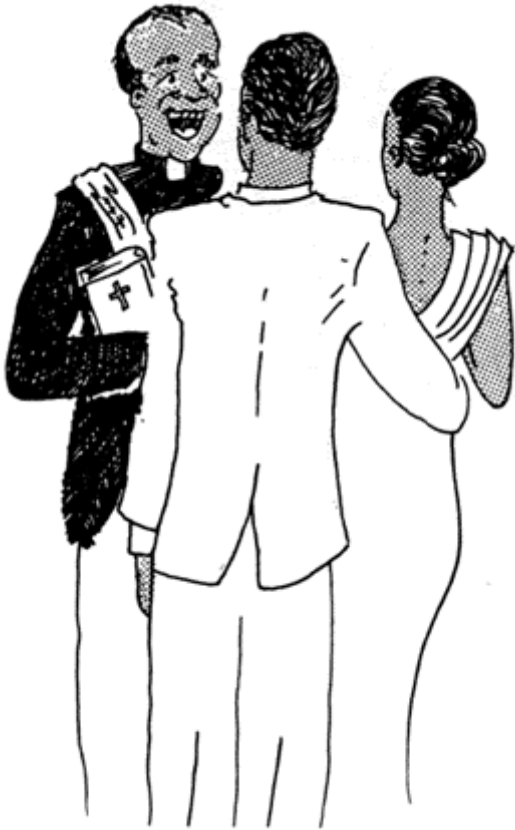
Going North

When I was seventeen, I moved to Niagra Falls to live with my father. I wanted to find out more -- to get around.

I got a job making more money than I would have down south.



It wasn't hard to leave the South and I never looked back. The only thing I missed was my sisters.



I met a nice Canadian girl in Niagra Falls.
We got married and moved to Toronto.



I became a professional boxer when I was 22.
At one time I was ranked third in Canada.



Winnie lived to see my first child. She was 88 years old and on her death-bed. She knew we were coming to visit before we got there.

She told her daughters:
"Lee is coming to visit with his wife and his little girl."



That was 30 years ago.

I went to Alabama last summer and tried to find my mother. I sure wish I could have found her I would look everywhere for her if I could.

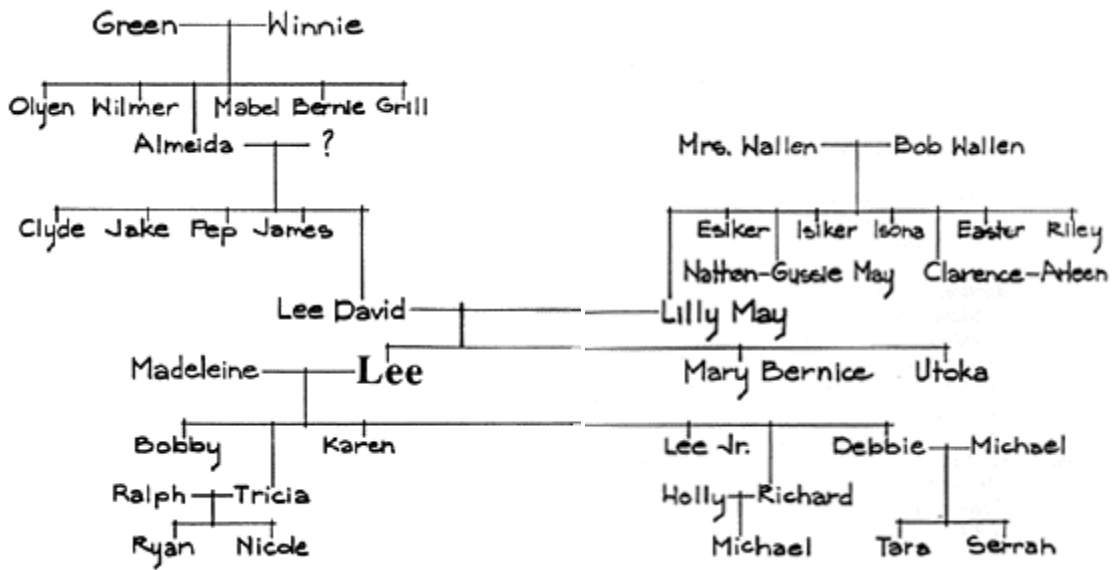


My mother couldn't read or write. If she could have, we might have kept in contact. When I was growing up poor people didn't have telephones. A lot of families lost contact with each other.



If I could find her, I'd tell her we all got old now and we understand.

Lee Sheridan's Family Tree



The New Start Reading Series is published by East End Literacy Press. The stories are written by adult learners at the Toronto East End Literacy Project and produced by volunteer tutors, adult learners and staff. The series is designed as reading material for adult learners of basic literacy and English as a second language.

*For more information write:
East End Literacy Press
265 Gerrard Street East
Toronto, Ontario M5A 2G3
Canada
(416) 968-6989*

The production group for Raised Up Down South was: Loxley Adams, Betsy Alkenbrack (co-ordinator), Catherine Alkenbrack, Gail Dobbs, Joseph Fassel, Carolyn Ingram, Maureen Kahn, Michele Kuhlmann, Sally MacBeth, Jerry Lee Miller (illustrator), Michael Moore, Lee Sheridan, David Smiley (photographer), Vivien Stollmeyer, and Ruth Wehleau. Special Thanks to the members of the Writer's Voice, the Drop-in, and the George Brown College groups at East End Literacy for editorial comments; and to DADA, Designing Aids for Disabled Adults, for use of their computer.

Printing courtesy of Spence & McCartney Ltd. Special thanks to Matthew Humeniuk.

RAISED UP DOWN SOUTH



Lee Sheridan lives and works in Toronto, Canada. He is learning to read and write at East End Literacy. In this book, Lee looks back on his life as a child and teenager in the American South.

"This book is about things I never talked about before," says Lee. "It feels good to get it off my chest, to free my mind."

Jerry Lee Miller is an artist, and a learner at the St. Christopher House Literacy Program in Toronto.