



Girl Hidden

A Memoir by Jesse Rene Gibbs



The names and identifying details of some of the characters and places in this book have been changed.

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Notes:

Beach Boys, *Good Vibrations*, *Smiley Smile*, 1967
Rick Ross, *Cult Education Institute*
WEBA Reference, *Wikipedia.com*

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*To Sarah,
without whom this book
would never have been written.*

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Mabel gently handed her niece the leather-bound journal wrapped in pink tissue paper. It was a stolen moment alone in the farmhouse, and the aunt took her chance. Jesse's small, slender hands took the gift and hurriedly unwrapped it, the paper making a scrunching sound. She opened the beautiful book, admiring the cream-colored paper, the fine horizontal lines that ended in a delicate swirl at the bottom of each page. Inscribed on the inside of the journal were the words:

Jesse,
Write your book.
Love,
Auntie Mabel

Prologue



The hardest part about writing a memoir is this: I lived through it all. It's hard to build drama when you know that I survived. And luckily, better than I should have. In writing this book I've agonized over every page, and rewritten it nearly a dozen times because of new information that I've discovered or new insight on an old situation. But I lived through all of it.

Even though this book is written in narrative form, please note that it's my story, told from my point of view. You'll see pieces in it where you wonder, "Now, how did she know this?" The truth is I either found out later, or figured that this was how it happened beyond the realm of actual fact. And sometimes I just guessed. To that end, most of the names in this book are changed to protect the innocent, anonymize the less innocent, make space for healing, and mollify the just plain grumpy.

This book is written for me, to help me figure out the true story of what happened in my life – or at least, a version of the truth that I can live with. And it's written for all those who are walking through something themselves. This story comes with a couple of serious abuse trigger warnings that you're going to want to take into account before you read it. There are bonus features (from the collection of half a dozen boxes in my closet) that include court files, FBI documents, letters, cards, photos, and journals from multiple people who were affected by or caused this story; I've added some of the more interesting ones to this book.

I grew up the oldest daughter in a family of twelve... no, eight – twelve? Thirteen. Seven! Geez, I don't know. Depends on the day, I suppose. Let's just say that there were a lot of us.

The bulk of my memories were of growing up in the farm country of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. The Blue Ridge is located about halfway to the bottom of the Appalachian trail and is a majesty of rolling hills fading into the blue of the mountains' namesake. There is a beauty to the North Carolina country that you just don't find anywhere else.

The highways typically ran right through the center of town, which meant all the truckers came through with their cargo, but the little towns welcomed them (and their money) with open arms. The farm country folks stayed pretty much outside of town, except for visits to the feed store causing random tractors to roll down Main Street. There were twenty-seven Baptist churches, three non-denominational

churches, and one Catholic Church. There were two apartment complexes where the “poor people” lived – or so we assumed, because what kind of person doesn’t own a home?

There were annual Ku Klux Klan rallies on the street, where they would walk right by all of the black families who came out to watch, and the white folks who came out for moral support – whether to the black families or the white, no one knew for sure. Black people did not marry white people in a “civilized society,” and so were rarely seen socializing. There was a young woman who was pregnant with a black man’s baby, so her parents disowned her. My family was accused of killing the child and burying it on our property.

There was the Berkley House Bed and Breakfast toward the end of town, with gold plated silverware and hardwood floors, rumored to be the local sex worker house. There was a mansion up on a hill that overlooked the other humble houses in the town. In the local cemetery, there was “Will B. Jolly” carved into the graves used by bootleggers back in the twenties; we found seven. Everyone had some form of thick southern drawl, though the length of the “aw” would extend the further south you went.

There was a tiny baseball field and a tinier fire department. There was an old lady in the foothills that let us raid her garden during the summer. And in exchange, we helped her husband bring in the hay for their animals every year.

There was a blacksnake in the attic; the door opened inside the closet next to my bed. We’d find his abandoned skins left behind in the summer months measuring close to seven feet in length. There was a creek with crawdads and a moss-covered bridge. There were mulberry and pecan trees that filled our aching bellies as the weather turned.

There were fireflies in the woods. We used to watch their sparkles for hours and then collect them in jars. There were hot summer days and freezing cold winters. There were dogs that were my best friends, cats that kept me warm at night, and a cow that committed suicide. There was red clay instead of dirt, hayfields instead of grass, and Lenny’s Mill: the local grain mill on a glacier-fed creek, where you could take a dip if you were brave enough to challenge the frigid waters.

This is where I grew up. But it is not where I started. My story actually launches thousands of miles from this tiny town, and like so many things in my life, it begins with my mother.

I guess the best way to start this might be to talk about my name. Jesse. Jesse René, in fact. Still trying like hell to figure out why the René. But Jesse... I asked her once, “Why Jesse?” She said that she was going to name me Veronica Sunshine – but didn’t want “anyone calling you Ronni, ‘cause that’s a boy’s name.”

Anyway, my name’s Jesse – notice the masculine spelling? It’s a really long story. But it might just be worth a read, and I promise to try to make it magical in the end.

About the Author



Jesse René Gibbs is an author, designer, dancer, and survivor.
She lives in Seattle, Washington.