

DREAMS OF FREEDOM

by Laurie Wallmark
Art by Oliver Dominguez

“**T**IME TO GET up, Speedy,”
Daddy said.

I yawned. “But it’s still dark,” I said,
plopping my pillow over my head.

“Today’s a big day,” he said.
“Remember?”

I scrambled out of bed. “OK,
I’m awake!”

Last night, my parents said we’d be
driving all the way to Washington, D.C.
But not for a vacation. We were going
to a march for jobs and equal rights.
People from around the world would
be there.

I chose my best dress, the yellow
one with bright red flowers. Mom
said, “If we dress like ragamuffins,
no one will listen.”

After a quick breakfast, the five of
us—Mom, Daddy, my sister Carol, my
brother Marc, and me—piled into our
big green Dodge. The trip from New
Jersey to Washington took forever.
We sang to pass the time. Mom taught
us the words to a song called “We
Shall Overcome.”



I DON'T LOOK MUCH LIKE A
GROUNDHOG ANYMORE.

February 25



YOU LOOK LIKE A RAGAMUFFIN,
SOMEBUG IN RAGGED, DIRTY
CLOTHES.



As we got closer to the city, the roads grew more and more crowded. We passed buses and cars filled with people going to the march.

“Look!” I pointed to a car next to us. “There’s Amy!” Amy’s parents and my parents were best friends, and so were we. I rolled down my window and waved. Mr. Carter tooted his horn as they passed.

“I can’t wait till Amy moves in next door,” I said. “Do you think we’ll be in the same class?”

“Oh, sweetie, they might not be moving in.” Mom shook her head. “The builder won’t sell to the Carters.”

“Why not?” I asked. “Doesn’t he like them?”

Marc snorted. “C’mon, Laurie. He doesn’t want dark-skinned people on our side of town.”

“Well, that’s just silly!” I said.

“Yes, it is,” Mom said with a sigh. “That’s why we need to march.”

When we reached Washington, there were people all over the place—more than a hundred

February 28

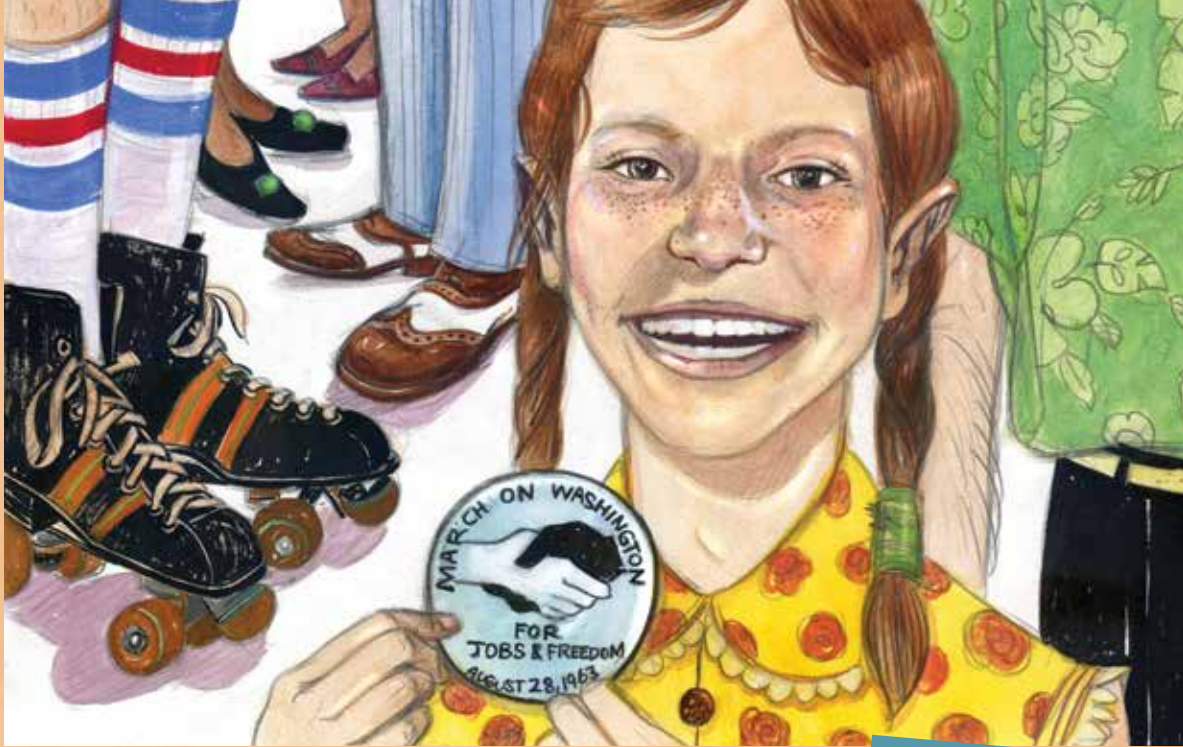
HALLELUJAH! THE THERMOMETER HAS FINALLY GONE UP! NOT BY MUCH, BUT IT’S GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.



LOOKS LIKE YOU CAN BURN THAT SUIT SOON, SAM.



HOORAY! LET’S TELL OPHELIA THAT SPRING REALLY IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER!



thousand. I'd never seen so many people in my life!

We found a place to sit on the grass near an enormous pool. It was sticky hot, and I wanted to jump in. But Mom said the Reflecting Pool was for looking, not swimming. A tall, pointy building shimmered across the pool's surface. "The Washington Monument," Carol said.

Mom bought us giant buttons to wear. The one I picked was blue with two hands shaking, one black and one white. I pinned it on the collar of my yellow dress.

While we waited for the march to start, I talked to people from different places. One family flew on an airplane all the way from Hawaii. I saw a man on roller skates wearing a red sash across his chest that said "Freedom." He had skated all the way from Chicago!



BUT WHERE IS OPHELIA?
I HAVEN'T SEEN HER
SINCE . . . I CAN'T
REMEMBER!



UMM . . . SHE EEZ
MAYBE HOLED UP
IN HER LOG?



Finally, an announcement boomed through the loudspeakers. It was time to march. I bounced from foot to foot, but we had to wait our turn. With all those people, it took forever.

The crowd spilled onto Constitution Avenue. There were no cars on the road, just people. We crossed our arms and held hands. People stretched across the street from one side to the other. So did my grin.

Everyone was so friendly, like we were one big family—babies, kids, parents, and even grandparents. We sang and clapped our way down the street.

Someone shouted questions, and we yelled back the answers:

“What do we want?”

“Freedom!”

“When do we want it?”

“Now!”

Before long, my legs got wobbly. Daddy lifted me high on his shoulders. I saw a river of people—black and white, men and women, kids and adults. It looked like a rainbow-colored painting, a moving one.





I wanted to carry a sign, but Mom said they were too heavy. So I read them out loud.

Freedom Now!

One Man, One Vote!

Jim Crow Must Go!

“Who’s Jim Crow?” I asked.

“Not who, what,” Marc said. “Laws that say blacks and whites can’t do things together.”

“Like what?”

“Like they can’t go to the same school.”

My jaw dropped. I thought of Amy.

“They can’t do that, can they?” I asked.

“I’m afraid they can,” said Mom. She kissed my hand. “That’s why we’re here.”

By the time we reached the Lincoln Memorial, I was exhausted. During the long speeches, I made friends with a boy standing near us. We both liked the singing. When the choir sang “We Shall Overcome,” everyone joined in. I sang the loudest of anyone.

SORRY TO WORRY YOU,
BUT WHEN SAM SAW HIS
SHADOW, I REMEMBERED
THE POEM AND KNEW I
HAD TO GO.



POEM? WHAT POEM?



NOW I REMEMBER!





After a few more speeches and songs, a man wearing a dark suit walked on stage. Mom told me the man was the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King. His deep voice rang out.

“I have a dream . . .”

The crowd hushed.

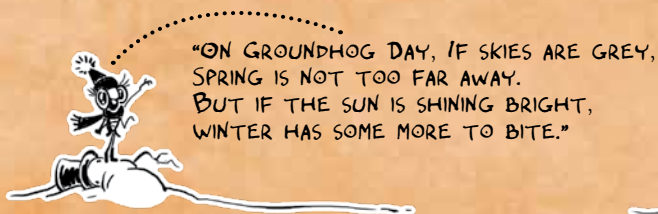
“. . . my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!”

Goose bumps popped up all over my arms. Daddy pretended to wipe sweat from his face with his handkerchief, but he didn’t fool me one bit. I knew he was wiping his eyes.

After the speech, we waded through the river of people back to our car. I slept most of the way home.

And dreamed. 🦋

Author’s Note: This story is based on my experiences attending the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom when I was eight years old. A quarter of a million people came together to show the world we supported equal rights and opportunities for everyone, regardless of skin color. That day, my family and I heard the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s inspirational “I Have a Dream” speech. August 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of this historic event.



GOT THAT RIGHT! WINTER CHEWED US UP AND SPIT US BACK OUT AGAIN!

