

A Touch of Gray

A Great American Story Revisited

Lou Vickery

*“Former pro baseball player, Lou Vickery, has delivered a
“Big League” story... and it has nothing to do with baseball.”*

-Dr. Larry Cosper

‘A Touch of Gray’... Touches The Soul

A review by Bonnie Bartel Latino

“Alabama native and former professional baseball player, Lou Vickery, is colorblind in a way that has nothing to do with optical competency. Vickery’s colorblindness is easily diagnosed in his novel *A TOUCH OF GRAY: A Great American Story Revisited*. In the Prologue, Lou writes: *‘A Touch of Gray is not a story about being black or white, although the differences are evident throughout the book. It’s a story about the risk of reaching out...of looking beyond the color of one’s skin to find the real person within. It’s a story about a bond-for-life friendship between two young boys and a small supporting cast -- everyday heroes who face life with an attitude to survive and prosper -- who for a moment in time, understood the importance of painting life with a touch of gray...a coming together of black and white.’*

Set in rural southern Alabama in the early-to-mid 1950s, this book is a compellingly honest portrayal of life in the rural south during the segregation era. The centerpiece of the story is the relationship between Tater Jackson, who is black, and Victor Anderson, who is white – and the interaction of their respective families. The social climate in the farming community where they lived was highly unfavorable for two youngsters of different races developing and sustaining a friendship, much less a close relationship.

Tater and Victor attend separate schools and separate churches, and the houses they live in are worlds apart, although their homes are only about one hundred yards from each other. The hospital and all public buildings are also segregated. There is one "picture show" in town, where black patrons are required to sit in the balcony with a separate bathroom, water fountain and concession stand. Despite these differences, Tater and Victor are virtually inseparable during their time on the farm, until the social and cultural pressures of the times irreversibly altered the course of their unusual relationship.

Each chapter in the book comes alive with activity as it captures the escapades of the two young friends as they move from being ‘yard young’uns’ to being ‘road young’uns.’ Tater and Victor get into all the expected, if somewhat predictable, predicaments that young boys did back in those days, plus a few that were not so predictable – a water moccasin falls out of a tree and into their boat while fishing; their mamas tell them not to go to a woody area

near "Bush" Creek, but of course they do, and they discover a moonshine still and are chased with guns blazing by the 'shine runners; young Victor's racist cousin from Mobile puts a burr under the saddle of a horse and dares Tater to ride. When Tater is thrown and injured, he is wily enough to get even, without being as mean spirited as Victor's city slicker cousin. You get the picture.

"A Touch of Gray" works -- primarily because of Vickery's conviction in his theme. Though this is a work of fiction, not a memoir, one suspects Vickery has experienced first-hand the realities about which he has chosen to write. One also suspects that Vickery didn't "choose" to write this story at all. Like many debut novels, the story simply would not remain either in Vickery's head or his heart, where it has lurked since his days as a professional baseball player in Atlanta in the early 1960's -- a city fighting at the time to move beyond its segregated past.

There are references and memories in "A Touch of Gray" that jolts us back to a time some might just as soon forget. But readers will not soon forget Victor, Tater . . . or Lou Vickery, who's writing strength is his ability to craft a realistic story that stretches from compassion to injustice; humorous to tragic; tender to frightful; exciting to dangerous.

Reading "A Touch of Gray" is the perfect way to celebrate the eternal gift of forgiveness, life and hope to the world. Readers of all ages will enjoy this book. I can't recommend any gift that would be more beneficial than Lou Vickery's debut novel, "A Touch of Gray." You can find it at Amazon.com or buy an autographed copy at Lou's website: **www.louvickerybooks.com**.

Alabama native, Bonnie Bartel Latino is a former columnist for "Stars and Stripes" newspaper in Europe, and was the recipient of a Vanderbilt University Media Fellowship to study "The Culture of the South."

BOOK FACTS:

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