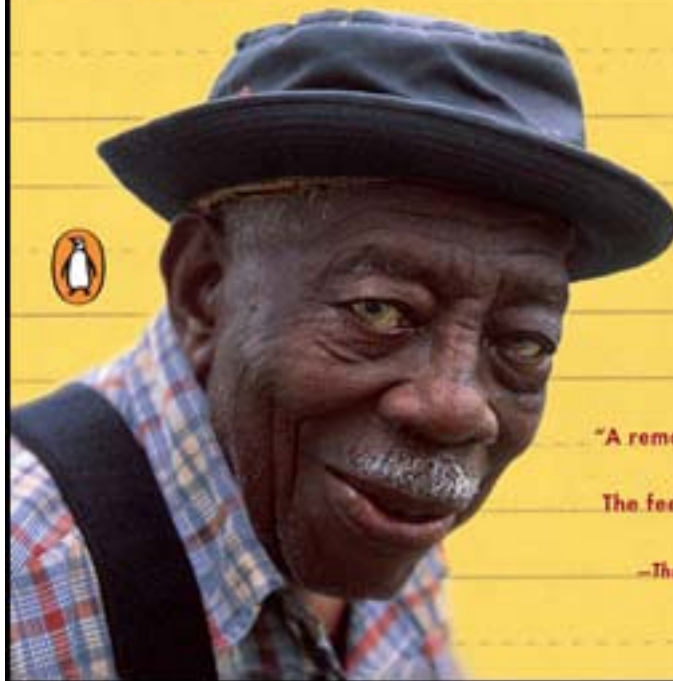


George Dawson and Richard Glaubman

Life

Is So Good

One man's extraordinary journey through the 20th century
and how he learned to read at age 98



"A remarkable autobiography . . .

The feel-good story of the year."

—The Christian Science Monitor

Amazing Grace

By Bill Keith

George Dawson was a great man, the real kind. He wasn't a general, or a politician, but a humble man who insisted on his dignity as a human being.

George never gave up on life -- you might say he lived rejoicing -- though he was born poor and did not learn to read until he was 98-years-old and published a book entitled

Life Is So Good two years later.

And he was one of us. George was born in Marshall in 1898 and passed to the great beyond in 2001.

You really have to be somebody to do what George did: grow up in a sharecropping family, spend your life working with your hands, never be given an education, and still write a book.

As he tells it, the Dawsons worked hard to survive. George, his parents, and his four brothers and sisters, lived in a three-room log house. The only thing they had was that house, a barn, an outhouse, a few chickens and a mule.

Picking cotton and selling "ribbon cane" syrup brought in the only cash.

But they were happy. "We had almost nothing, but we had each other...even on cold mornings when the fire had burned down, I would wake up under a blanket...warm and cozy," George said.

He was only four-years-old when he began working on the farm with his father, hauling water to the men and women chopping cotton, taking care of the chickens and the mule.

It must have been the hardest thing in the world, but George learned to accept segregation, Jim Crow and its evils; including lynching. One day George

saw his friend Pete, who was 17, hanging from a tree in the woods near George's home.

Pete was accused of being too friendly with a white woman.

His friend had done no wrong and George carried emotional scars with him the rest of his life.

A lady for whom he worked once suggested that George eat with the dogs.

He refused.

You see, there's that dignity.

"I did all my growing up in Marshall but was always on the outside," George recalled. "I couldn't read in those days and never even looked at a newspaper...In those days, it seems like everything had two stories, the white story and the colored story."

When he was 21, George left home, looking for work, traveling by steam trains all across America. He helped build levees on the Mississippi River, drove spikes for the railroad and worked on ranches breaking wild horses.

Nine years later he returned to Marshall, only to learn his family was gone, just gone, and George never heard from his mother or father again.

"Even if they had tried to find me, I couldn't have read their letter," he said.

Later, he married Elzenia Arnold, who could both read and write, and they had seven children. George always tried to help his children with their homework.

Thanks to numerous media interviews, we know Seattle writer Richard Glaubman helped George write his book.

Glaubman was impressed. He was "overwhelmed by the sheer simplicity of George's wisdom. I felt that I stood in the presence of greatness," Glaubman said.

Once, when the two men were drinking hot chocolate together, Glaubman

asked George, "Do you see that cup as half full or half empty?"

"I see it as being enough. So it's just fine," George said.

In his book, George talks a lot about the day a Marshall man, Carl Henry, visited his home. Henry was with an adult reading program.

When Henry asked him if he wanted to learn to read, George replied, "I'll get my coat."

"Writing my name, that was one of the greatest things I learned," George said. "Before I wrote X's, that was my name for 100 years. That was all I had. Now every morning I wonder what I'll learn..."

The book was a hit and Oprah invited George to be on her show. *Guideposts* magazine ran a story about him.

George outlived four wives, all his siblings and two of his seven children. He died on July 5, 2001 in Dallas.

George is gone but still lives in the hearts of the millions who knew about his life. He's an inspiration to me.

Although he endured hardship, danger and injustice, George never gave up on his dream.

George was probably the oldest man in history to earn a GED, which he did when he was 103, the same year he died.

It's time for Marshall to nominate George for the Ring of Honor, located at the Courthouse, to join Lady Bird Johnson, Y. A. Tittle, Bill Moyers,

George Foreman, James Farmer, Jr., and others.

I believe all those impressive people would welcome George into their company.

I'm sure St. Peter did.

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