

FEELING IN THE BLANKS ... FOR JOSEPH MCCOY

© KaNikki Jakarta, Poet Laureate of Alexandria, Virginia
(April 17, 2020)

Black Boy

Born to Ann and Samuel as Reconstruction ended
And the era of Jim Crow started
Left many family members broken hearted
Before his life as a man officially began
A sorrowful trend amongst black families
Tugging on heart strings to rejoice or weep
when black boys are birthed
A blessing and a curse on a family tree
Because we're never sure if someone will kill you
And write you down in history untrue
After accusing you of crimes like
Assaulting someone white
Talking back to someone white
Looking at someone white
Whistling at someone white
Despite putting up a fight or screaming a denial
You might get a trial
But it will be unjust
Although you initially denied it all
I think you thought it was best to confess...
This is not a history that belongs to you alone
And if you would have grown
Just a bit older
You may have cried on someone's shoulder
Two years later over another black boy named Benjamin Thompson
Who shares this story too
I wish I could talk to you
I would ask you what really took place
I wish I could look upon your face
to hear your story
The way that you would have it told
The way that circumstances would unfold
On April 23, 1897

Truth is, I want to pen your story
But the newspapers don't show
What happened all of those years ago
But this is what I know...
You were born Joseph McCoy
You had four siblings and you were the youngest boy
And before you were ever thought to be
Your grandmother Cecilia McCoy was born free
More than a half century
Before you were lynched
Hanged from a lamppost and shot multiple times
No family members would claim your body
And no one was ever charged with a crime
But, this is not the part of your story that I would want to tell
I don't want to recap the horrible night a mob of 500 retrieved you from jail
I don't want to write about your how your funeral was held
Instead,
I would like to highlight
That despite the fact you didn't celebrate your 21st birthday
Today,
123 Years Later
You are celebrated
You are remembered
A legend, a light
Shining bright
even in your absence
An ancestor whose story far surpassed the details of your death
A part of history that will let in peace be the way you rest
No one remembers the names of the people who took your life
They don't get glory for spreading bitterness and strife
But you
Joseph McCoy
A black boy
Born to Ann and Samuel as Reconstruction ended
And the era of Jim Crow started
Whose death left many family members broken hearted
Before his life as a man officially began
A horrific trend
In black history
Another tragedy

But your history will be one remembered alongside
Others who were also lynched, shot, or hanged
But we will remember your name
Because your history is within my pen now
Within my words now
A black writer
Who decided to write about you in a positive way
But still today
We are left with the question
Who could you have grown to be?
If they would not have killed you