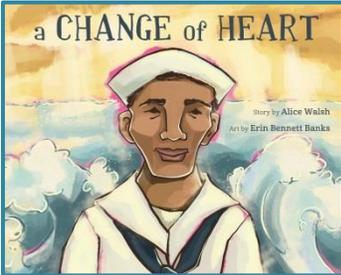


Spotlight Review



February 24, 2017

Alice Walsh's *A Change of Heart* tells the inspirational and true story of Lanier Phillips, an African American who credits his achievements to the night he was rescued from a shipwreck off the coast of Newfoundland.

Indeed, since that fateful night in 1941, Lanier went on to become the first African American to graduate from the U.S. Navy's sonar school, win numerous awards, and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in the historical Selma march.

There may be a bit of misdirected pride on Walsh's part. Originally from Newfoundland herself, there's an uncomfortable subtext that the Newfoundlanders that came to Lanier's rescue represent all Newfoundlanders and that racism didn't exist there—a virtual paradise compared to Georgia, Lanier's home state. Unfortunately that is simply not true. It certainly was not true in the time of first contact with the Beothuks, was not true when I grew up there, and I am guessing there are those still feeling the sting of it there today.

Regardless, there were Newfoundlanders that night whose hearts were in the right place and for Lanier, they made all the difference. Of course, Lanier sells himself somewhat short here and one of the better messages that Walsh gets across concerns his eternal optimism and perseverance. He first joined the navy in the hopes of rising above those that hoped to oppress him, only to find himself once more considered a second class citizen. Just as this new reality threatened to destroy him emotionally, the kindness of a few strangers help rid him of his bitterness and resentment. He could have chalked it all up to a one-off experience, but he did not. Instead he took it as the impetus he needed to keep fighting.

Written as a children's book with vibrant and unique art from Erin Bennett Banks, there's plenty to hold a child's attention while even more fodder for follow up discussions.

John Mutford

Library Manager