

# Essie Rose's Revelation Summer



**Deanie Yasner**

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**Deanie Yasner**



**Golden Alley Press**  
Emmaus, Pennsylvania

This book is a work of fiction. Although references to real people, places, and events are used to create authenticity, the story, characters, and dialog are all products of the author's imagination.

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*To Delphia, my real Pearlie May*  
*and*  
*To Esther Hershenhorn*

*It takes courage to grow up  
and become who you really are.*

*e. e. cummings*

## *My Writer's Notebook*



*Title:* Essie Rose's

Revelation Summer

*Name:* Essie Rose Ginsberg

*Address:* 74 Calhoun Street

Tipton, Mississippi

*Date:* Summer Vacation, 1953



## ***To the Reader***

Dear Reader,

This story was mine and mine alone to tell.

I was an Old Soul child growing up in the deep South in the 1950s, a member of the only Jewish family in a town where there were so many things I did not understand; for instance, the Jim Crow laws that kept people separated by their skin tone. African Americans were called colored people back then, which is why I chose to use that term in this story. They were not allowed to go into certain public places like libraries or sit at lunch counters. I knew of these first hand, because my best and only friend, our African-American housekeeper, Delphia, always had to wait outside for me.

Even though I was white, not “colored,” I, too, felt segregated. I was the odd-girl out. Not only was I of a different faith than the rest of my town, I was shy, and my parents owned a store on the “wrong side of the tracks” where the African-American people did their

shopping. But lucky for me I had Delphia to nurture my Old Soul. We were “two peas in a pod,” as she used to tell me. It was Delphia’s love and devotion to me that became my inspiration for writing this historical fiction novel.

It is my fondest hope that you, my readers, might take your inspiration from Essie Rose Ginsberg’s journey, that you muster your own courage and make your voices heard.

Now don’t fret, get on with your business and make yourselves proud.

Deanie Yasner  
New Hope, Pennsylvania  
June 2019



## ***The Letter***

*Tuesday, June 23*

There are so many things I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. Like, for instance, why our end-of-the year school party had to be so hurtful thanks to Donna Sue Hicks. I swear I will never set foot inside Robert E. Lee Elementary School again.

Donna Sue slammed the last crumbly chocolate cupcake on my desk. The whole class turned their heads and stared at me. “Oh,” she said smiling, “I almost forgot you.”

Then Mary Jo Jamison, Donna Sue’s partner in crime, handed me a vanilla ice cream Dixie Cup.

“Me, too, I almost forgot you. Sorry it’s half-melted.” They looked at each other and giggled.

I was so wishing Miss Williams would point her long wooden ruler toward the door and shout, “Donna Sue Hicks and Mary Jo Jamison, march yourselves down to the principal’s office right this minute for those unkind words I heard you say to Essie Rose!”

I was all ready to point my sharpened yellow No.2 pencil at the two of them. “Good riddance! I hope Mr. McCallister makes you both stay there one whole hour after the last bell rings!”

But Miss Williams didn’t say a single word.

As usual, neither did I.

Like always, I turned my eyes away and scrunched down in my chair. I grabbed my Social Studies book, the only one big enough to hide my face from 25 pairs of eyes staring straight at me.

Things went from bad to worse when I was walking home and realized the same two mean girls had followed me to the drinking fountain by the main gate of Tipton, Mississippi’s one and only Ben Ray Edwards Municipal Swimming Pool.

Donna Sue tucked her long blonde hair behind her

ears. Then she leaned over and splashed water in my face just as I was about to take my first cooling-off mouthful.

“We’ll wave to you when we pass the kiddie pool every day, won’t we, Mary Jo?”

“Of course we will, Donna Sue,” Mary Jo said.

I wiped my face with my tee-shirt and pretended two things. Number one, their teasings didn’t make one bit of difference. Number two, I wasn’t getting madder at myself by the minute for not being able to tell them what they were doing was plain rotten.

Things went from worse to worst in front of the First Baptist Church. A long plastic banner with purple capital letters was strung from one end of the church to the other.

Donna Sue, who was chosen “Little Miss Tipton” in fourth grade, marched in front of me with her hands hugging her hips and read the sign aloud: “SUMMER BIBLE SCHOOL BEGINS JULY 15. ALL ARE WELCOME!” And in her I’m-So-Sure-of-Myself voice she proclaimed, “Except you, of course, Essie Rose Ginsberg. My mama said your family doesn’t believe what we believe so our Bible School is not for the likes of you. This is not where you belong. Right, Mary Jo?”

Mary Jo, who should have been chosen “Little Miss Follow the Leader,” piped up in her high-pitched voice, “Right and right!”

My face felt hotter than the Mississippi sun beating down on my head. If I were brave enough to have said what I WANTED to say with those right words Pearlie May says are somewhere deep inside me, I would have told them I didn’t need their First Baptist Church Summer Bible School. I had my own Bible School where I DID belong.

In fact I had not one but two. I had my Daddy’s Old Testament Friday Night Bible Lessons. Even better, I had my Pearlie May’s Every Day Breakfast Bible Lessons. They were really her AHAs! and understandings of what’s good and true and right. They came from TWO Bible books, she said – the Old Testament AND the New Testament – and they could sprout up anytime anywhere as long as they came straight from the heart. Knowing all that took a long time coming, which is why Pearlie May said she called it a revelation.

Come to think of it, Summer Bible School or not, Donna Sue and Mary Jo wouldn’t understand a word of Pearlie May’s lessons. For that matter, they wouldn’t

understand anything I'd be doing this summer. Like for instance, my writing in this Writer's Notebook the way I've done every summer since Second Grade when I won the Catherine Lee Whitcome Library Contest. That's when Miss Beaumont declared me an Honest-To-Goodness Writer and gave me my very first Writer's Notebook. Donna Sue and Mary Jo wouldn't care that I can write anything, about anyone, anytime, any way I choose. This summer I might even try doing some of Miss Beaumont's creative writing exercises to help me with my descriptions.

If only Donna Sue and Mary Jo knew Miss Beaumont chose ME, Essie Rose Ginsberg, to be the very first reader of that new book *Charlotte's Web*. Though I still don't know why because it's about a spider and a pig and she knows I like my stories true.

They'd never understand why I love to visit Daddy's variety store on Murdock Row. It's on the wrong side of the GM&O Railroad tracks where the colored people of Tipton do their shopping. I didn't know there was a wrong side until I overheard Donna Sue's mama use those words. Now what she said got me to thinking. If Daddy's store was on the right side of the railroad tracks, would I or wouldn't I get so many teasings?

Come to think of it, I don't understand how being on one side or the other side of a railroad track has anything to do with right or wrong. Anyway, if Donna Sue and Mary Jo ever found out that piece of information, I know I'd be in for even worse teasings than what they dished out today.

I can only imagine what they'd say about my hanging out with Pearlie May, which I would never, ever tell them. What I wanted to say was, "Donna Sue and Mary Jo, you are mean, pig-headed and stupid" If only I'd been brave enough. Of course, if I said those words and Pearlie May learned about it, she'd have my head.

"Get your tall skinny self over here right now!" she'd say. And then I'd be in for a Pearlie May You-Forgot-to-Mind-Your-Mouth scolding.

All I wanted was to get myself home to my best and only friend Pearlie May Gibbs for one of our Two-Peas-in-a-Pod hugs and even a Thinking-On Time about this sorry day.

I ran past the Catherine Lee Whitcome Public Library so fast I knocked down the sign announcing the August 1 Tipton, Mississippi, Centennial Celebration:



One Hundred Years in the Wheel of Progress and I kept on going. I was that angry.

I kept on running with the sweat pouring down my face, past all those big old prim and proper houses on Magnolia Avenue standing tall and important, not like me or my house that we rent.

One more block to go and I'd be safe because that's how Pearlle May makes me feel. And I'd be yanking open our squeaky kitchen screen door. One more block and I'd be yelling, "Pearlie May! Pearlle May! I'm home! School's out. It's time to start planning my Number 11 Birthday." I was certain this would be the birthday Pearlle May thought I'd finally be ready to hear the story of her red bandana. The one she wore every day. The one I stared at with what she called my dark Old Soul eyes she always said looked just like hers.

But none of that ever happened, all because of Pearlle May's note I found waiting for me on the kitchen table. There it was, propped up on her tall cracked coffee cup, the one she used every morning.

Maybe copying Pearlle May's exact words right here will help me understand them. Or maybe not.

*Miz Essie Rose,*

*You know I love you like my own kin  
and I'd never leave like this if I could  
help it, but something has happened  
to my sister Flora Belle over in Spring  
City. She's taken real sick and has  
no other kin. I promise to get back soon  
as I can.*

*I'll try for Tipton's Fourth of July Picnic,  
or if not, then for Tipton's August 1  
Big Birthday. But no matter what for  
YOUR August 16th Birthday.*

*Don't you fret now, child. Get on with  
your business and make me proud.*

*Your Pearlie May*



## **No Fretting**

*Wednesday, June 24*

It's almost bedtime. I've wasted the whole day moping and fretting, and I still haven't figured out a single thing. Like, for instance, why Pearlie May up and left.

I remember clear as a bell the day she promised me she'd never leave. It was the day we met. I heard a knock at the kitchen door. Mama said, "Essie Rose, I'll bet it's Pearlie May Gibbs, the woman I hired to look after you and the house. Let's go welcome her."

Pearlie May took one long look into my eyes. Then she took my hand. She held it tight and said, "Why you must be Miz Essie Rose. You're the child I've been

waiting for. I know right away we're Two-Peas-in-a-Pod, and I'm going to mind you 'til you don't need minding any more. I'm never going to leave you...no matter what."

But she did.

Now that she's gone and I can't have our Two-Peas-in-a-Pod hug, the only thing I'm left to hug is Sophia, the cloth doll Pearlle May made for me when I was five. That's how old I was when Pearlle May first came to help us, and the first birthday we had together. We had just moved here from up North because Daddy believed he could make a better living for us down South like other Jewish storekeepers he'd heard about. "What I am ever going to do now, Sophia?" I kept asking, hugging her harder than ever while I cried.

I know that was silly. I know cloth dolls can't speak. But for now, talking to Sophia makes me feel like I'm with Pearlle May. For now Sophia is all I have. Come to think of it, Sophia Sunday is the only doll I've ever had and the only one I've ever wanted. I never wanted one of those Toni dolls that Donna Sue talked about at school, bragging to all the other girls how she spent hours giving her Toni doll a permanent. No, Sophia Sunday is the one and only doll for me.

Holding Sophia, fingering her black yarn hair, makes me remember how Pearlie May and I named her.

“Her name’s Sophia,” I told Pearlie May, “because Sophia sounds strong and sure and that’s how I want to be someday.” It was Pearlie May who insisted she have a last name. A whole name.

“Then you pick,” I said. Pearlie May didn’t blink an eye.

“Sunday, that’s what her second name must be for sure, child, because I’ve spent more than a month of my praise days making her. That’s all there is to it.”

Another thing I still can’t believe: our Thinking-On Time didn’t happen yesterday, the one I needed so I could tell Pearlie May about the mean teasings that had happened at school and on my way home. I know she’d tell me not to worry my 10-going-on-20-year-old-head about anything Donna Sue and Mary Jo said or did. She’d say, “Child, they don’t know any better. Just because all your right words are stuck deep inside you doesn’t mean that’s the way it’s always going to be. The day will come when they’ll bubble up and you’ll say what you need to say the way I taught you to say it. I’m sure of it.”

Well, I’m not so sure of it.

Having my own Thinking-On Time with Sophia Sunday here in bed got me fretting about Pearlle May's note: *Get on with your business and make me proud!*

What IS my business I'm supposed to get on with? As far as I'm concerned, my business is noticing, worrying, reading, and, of course, my number one best thing I do: writing.

Other than that, I don't do much else. I do take pictures with the Brownie camera I redeemed for Mama's twelve books of S&H Green stamps from Kroger. The pictures are tucked away in that old red-and-black checkered hat box Mama brought from up North. And that's where they're staying – right next to the dried four-leaf clover Pearlle May and I found last summer and my filled-in Writer's Notebooks.

But I don't think picture taking is what Pearlle May meant.

So I'm trying to stop my worrying and fretting. After all, Pearlle May did say she'd try her best to be home for the Fourth of July and that's only days away and Pearlle May always does what she says.

Just now I crayoned "NO FRETTING" in purple on a blank piece of paper and Scotch-taped it to the back

of my door, right above my sign that reads “DON’T TWIRL YOUR HAIR!” (as a just-in-case reminder).

I’m back in bed with the sheet pulled over me, using my flashlight so I can see to write. It’s way too hot for me to snuggle under my favorite purple-striped quilt. I’m too tired to write another word. Except...

I, ESSIE ROSE GINSBERG, PROMISE TO  
FIGURE OUT MY BUSINESS

AND I PROMISE TO MAKE PEARLIE  
MAY PROUD.



## ***Thunder and Trouble***

*Thursday, June 25*

It's been a long day. I'm tired from writing too late last night. I had planned to sleep until lunchtime today, but loud booms of thunder roaring across the sky and bright streaks of lightning coming through my curtains woke me up at the crack of dawn.

If Pearlie May were here she'd be sitting on my bed saying, "Child, no need to be scared. The thunder, why that's the Good Lord rolling his potatoes around. And the rain, why that's going to make my daisies grow. And all that lightning, why that's the Good Lord's artwork."

She always finished with, "You're safe and sound."



I'm right here." And I always finished with, "That's where I want you to be until I'm umpteen years old."

Anyway, I didn't want to fret, so I decided to pull my shade down, cover my ears and go back to sleep.

I finally woke up when I heard Mama call New York City and her only sister.

"Good morning, Rachael, I need to talk to you," I heard her say.

I'm guessing she didn't want Daddy to hear her conversation. That's probably why she came home from the store. One thing I've noticed ever since I realized I was a noticer: Mama will go to any lengths to keep Daddy from getting riled up. They both will go to any lengths to keep what they consider "grown-up" matters a secret from me.

I shouldn't have, but I listened in on the phone conversation. This is what I heard, but wish I hadn't.

Mama told Aunt Rachael that she is worried about Daddy lately. She said that Daddy gets upset over every little thing, not just his usual upset. Like, for instance, if she makes something other than meat and potatoes for dinner. She thought maybe it had something to do with Daddy's saying things like this slow sleepy town

isn't anything like New York. That's why he's missing the hustle and bustle, the skyscrapers and especially his childhood synagogue.

Then Mama told Aunt Rachael she wondered if Daddy's nerves got jangled by that New York newspaper article she'd sent about mischief makers down South marking up stores owned by Jewish merchants with troubling words like "JEW STORE."

"Things are beginning to change here," Mama said in a voice I never heard her use before. It was all quivery.

So now I think I may have a new worry and one I can't do anything about. I'm wondering what "things are changing" means. All I know is, it better not mean we'll have to leave. We can't budge from this house until Pearlie May comes back.



***"There are so many things  
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND."***

*What happens when the lone Jewish girl in a small Mississippi town challenges the rules of segregation in the hot summer of 1953?*

Essie Rose Ginsberg, writer, loner, and all-time worrier, is hoping for a carefree summer. But when the family's beloved housekeeper is suddenly called away, Essie Rose must figure out how to "get on with her business" and make her Pearlie May proud.

When Daddy's store is vandalized, mean girls bully her, and her entry in the essay contest is jeopardized because Pearlie May is not a Caucasian, Essie Rose's worries become a reality.

Read over her shoulder as Essie Rose chronicles a summer of friendship, love, loyalty, and "getting on with her business."

*"Yasner is a new talent to watch, and Essie Rose is an unforgettable character. Don't miss this story."* – **Anna Myers**, author of 20 books for young people, including *Tulsa Burning*

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*Inspired by the author's childhood experiences in the Jim Crow South, Yasner's coming-of-age debut novel is a moving, multi-layered, and meticulously researched story of loneliness and loyalty, bullying and friendship, loss and courage.*

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