

A black and white profile photograph of John Lewis, looking down and to the right. He is wearing a dark suit jacket with a white striped collar. The background is blurred.

*WALKING WITH
THE WIND*

A Memoir of the Movement

JOHN LEWIS
with Michael D'Orso

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*SIMON & SCHUSTER
Rockefeller Center
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020*

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Designed by Edith Fowler
Additional photo research: Natalie Goldstein
Manufactured in the United States of America*

ISBN 0-684-81065-4

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHEN I DECIDED to write this book, I realized I could not rely on memory alone. During the winter of 1996, I set aside time from a very busy schedule to go back to Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham, and Nashville. This was more than a sentimental journey. It was a precious opportunity to thank all the brave and courageous men and women who participated in a freedom movement that changed our nation and the world. My visit to these places, crucibles where so much of the history of the struggle for civil rights was forged, reminded me in a way that mere memory could not of what it was like to have lived through those years. More important, it fortified my conviction that the story of my journey through this great period in our history had to be told.

My life as a participant in some of the most significant events in the twentieth century would not have been possible had it not been for the inspiration, influence, and friendship of Martin Luther King Jr. He will always have my gratitude and respect.

My participation in the Movement afforded me an opportunity to meet and come in

contact with hundreds and thousands of individuals whose lives shaped the arc of this story. To all of you — wherever life’s journey has taken you — thank you, and don’t give up the good fight. For those who have died, who lost their lives so others might be free, you should be honored by our country for your raw courage and patriotism. I honor you.

I am extremely grateful to members of my family: my brothers and sisters, who have helped me in more ways than they know; my father, Eddie Lewis, a remarkable man whose memory burns brightly within me; and my mother, Willie Mae Lewis, whose sweet spirit and abiding faith in God and her family have touched my life in so many ways. I cannot thank any of them enough.

I am deeply grateful to so many friends and colleagues for being so patient in seeing this effort through to its completion:

My editor, Alice Mayhew, who never gave up on me; My agent, David Black, who kept telling me, “We are going to do this book, and it is going to be a book you will be proud of.

My friends Ronald Roach and Linda Chastang, who encouraged me from the beginning; All of my colleagues and staff, who

have been with me in all of my endeavors, for your support and patience:

Don Harris, Danny Lyon, Harriett Thornton, Ora Crawley, Ethel Tyner, Elizabeth Stein, Mildred Johnson, David Potvin, Rickey Wright, Earl Swift, and Larry Copeland; and so many other individuals — too many to name here — who offered their support, friendship, and advice.

I am more than grateful to Mike D'Orso for having patience with me. In the process of working on this book, we became more than friends — we became brothers.

Finally, I am forever indebted to the wonderful, powerful, magnificent spirit of history. I was touched by that spirit long ago, and I have followed it ever since. I only hope and pray that my journey will continue to be blessed.

Atlanta, Georgia
January 27, 1998

*To my beloved wife, Lillian, and our dear son,
John-Miles, and to the countless unsung heroes
who cared deeply, sacrificed much, and fought
hard for a better America.*

J.L.

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Praise

PROLOGUE

I want to begin this book with a little story. It has nothing to do with a national stage, or historic figures, or monumental events. It's a simple story, a true story, about a group of young children, a wood-frame house and a windstorm.

The children were my cousins: Roy Lee and Jinnie Boy, Naomi and Leslie and Willie Muriel — about a dozen of them, all told — along with my older sister Ora and my brothers Edward and Adolph. And me, John Robert.

I was four years old at the time, too young to understand there was a war going on over in Europe and out in the Pacific as well. The grownups called it a world war, but I had no idea what that meant. The only world I knew was the one I stepped out into each morning, a place of thick pine forests and white cotton fields and red clay roads winding around my family's house in our little corner of Pike County, Alabama.

We had just moved that spring onto some land my father had bought, the first land anyone in his family had ever owned — 110 acres of cotton and corn and peanut fields,