

Dear Jeff is a chronicle of adventure in cross-racial adoption, growing up black and white, fighting racism in rural Mississippi in 1965 and experiencing an integrated family's hope and disappointment, despair and joy, and posthumous reconciliation. Writing with candid and often brutal honesty, Gough discusses the abuse Jeff suffered as a foster child and victim in a failed early adoption, his troubled relationship with Jeff, the mistakes he made as a father, and those precious moments when Jeff was the charming, loving, mischievous son and brother the family longed for. Dear Jeff offers a collection of letters written by Gough endeavoring to reach a posthumous emotional reconciliation with his adopted African American son, Jeff. Seeking to fill voids in his relationship with Jeff, Gough shares experiences which greatly impacted his decision to adopt six year old Jeff and his twin sister Sheila. He describes emotionally moving events of his childhood, empathizing with the traumas of Jeff's early years; his awakening as a young soldier to the evils of race discrimination when he ran Fort Ord's off post housing service and blew the whistle on the Army's unlawful connivance in racial discrimination; his summer as a civil rights volunteer in rural Mississippi in 1965; and his work as a Justice Department attorney in Mississippi in 1966 and 1967. When Gough and his wife adopted six year old Jeff and Sheila, their goal was a happy, racially integrated home. Jeff, however, proved difficult to love. Either as the result of foster home abuse or some hidden mental issue, the young man was prone to angry and destructive outbursts. Truancy, illegal acts, and incarcerations were common events. At times, in desperation Gough wondered if the family had made the right choice. He would never know. Jeff's life was cut short by a motorcycle accident. An insightful, personal look at both Gough and his son, exposing the intricacies of interracial adoption and raising troubled children, Gough's letters ultimately seek peace for himself, for his family, and especially, for Jeff. Jeff and his adoptive mom, Judy, had a special relationship, some sort of a shared quirky ability to create a joke at the temporary expense of others, as illustrated in the following excerpt from Letter 13, White Folks Store: Dear Jeff.... I am sure you remember the Safeway incident.... Judy was doing some grocery shopping at the Safeway...in the Rockridge neighborhood...back then Rockridge was 99% white and patronage at the Safeway reflected that demographic. As she waited in the crowded checkout line, you and one of your friends suddenly appeared. What are you doing here, boy? This is a white folks store, Judy said, so loud that everyone in the checkout lines could hear. You dissing me, old lady, Jeff replied, equally as loud. Everyone froze in place. Conversations were cut in mid-sentence. The clerks stopped ringing up purchases. Tension reigned. What in the world would happen next? Ten or fifteen seconds passed as you and your mom locked mean-looking stares. The tension grew. Then Judy broke into laughter and Jeff's laughter joined in. Hi, mom. Give me a hug, Jeff, Judy replied, opening her arms and giving you a big squeeze. Oh, Jeff, how I wish I could have been there to see that moment. To see the shoppers and clerks freeze in fear and tension and then watch as their bodies relaxed in relief. What fun! Dad

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