

I remember the summer of 1956. School was out, and my brother Rudy and I were roaming the streets all day and we'd come home hungry. My father was somewhere across town painting signs and we looked down the streets every few minutes hoping we'd see Bird come with a bag of groceries, maybe hamburger and hot dogs. Maybe, if she spent all her day's pay, chicken and potatoes. Usually she kept only enough for bus fare to go to work the next day for some white lady in the Highlands I never met. She'd get up early in the morning, walk four blocks to catch a bus, ride up where the white folks lived, clean house, clean toilets, cook food, take care of babies – all for four dollars a day. Sometimes she came home too tired to cook.

There was seldom enough money for Rudy and me to have bus fare for school, not both of us at the same time. This is the real reason why I began to race the bus to school. But since my ambition was to be the World Heavyweight Champion, I could say I wasn't racing the bus because I didn't have any money, I was running to

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get in fight condition.

We never owned a car that was less than ten years old, or even new tires for it. The neighbors could at least buy new tires. Daddy's tires kept blowing out. If we had gotten any money, it wouldn't have gone for cars or tires. It would have been used to fix the house. The rain was coming in through the roof and walls; for four years the toilet needed a new flush unit; for eight years the front porch had been falling apart. The construction man told Dad it would cost two hundred dollars to have it propped up temporarily. That was too much, so we lived with a front porch ready to fall any day.

Most of the clothes we got came from Good Will, including the secondhand shoes that cost maybe one or two dollars. My father had become an expert at cutting out cardboard and putting it in the bottoms. Now and then there would be a new shirt, and once I remember Daddy buying a cheap little suit for me to wear to church and Sunday School.