

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Finding Bass

I was first introduced to the Old West by the television and movie westerns of my childhood. My siblings and I watched them all—*The Lone Ranger*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Roy Rogers*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman*, *Bonanza*—anything that involved good guys, bad guys, horses, and shootouts.

We spent hours playing cowboys, eating beans from a can around a make-believe campfire, and straddling whatever we could imagine was a horse. Looking back, I remember an occasional black character in these shows, but never in the roles *we* aspired to play. I came to believe there were few blacks in the West and none who did anything I would have called important.

When I grew older, I learned about the bravery of buffalo soldiers and about black cowboys like Bill Pickett and Nat Love. Then one day in 2003 my husband, an admirer of the Old West, introduced me to Bass Reeves, a black deputy U.S. marshal. I immediately wanted to know more, and my search began.

I found information about Bass in books and articles. But there was nothing factual for children except two pages in a book called *Rough and Ready Outlaws and Lawmen* by A. S. Gintzler. Thanks to historian Art T. Burton and others who are keeping Bass's story alive, I am able to help pass it on.

Many of the western heroes we idolized as children were fictional characters, dramatized by Hollywood. But Bass Reeves was real. How different my childhood view of myself might have been if, when choosing who got the best parts, we'd fought over who got to play Bass Reeves.

Bass's story is so incredible it comes close to sounding like a tall tale. But it isn't. It's true. And I've done my best to tell it true.