Lynching stories and memories helped weave the color line through Grant County’s fabric to the end of the twentieth century. There was every reason to believe that W. E. B. Du Bois had been correct in predicting in 1903 that the color line would be the problem of the century. By 2000 the line was certainly more fluid and more ambiguous than at the century’s beginning. Some would still see a glass half empty, a color line still too sharp, still too tragic; others would see a glass more than half full, a line weakening to faintness as this ordinary place moved toward fulfilling America’s ideals. Few could deny that times had changed.

During the last half of the twentieth century African Americans in Grant County began to struggle more forcefully against the lines of color and to raise their expectations about equality and justice. Fewer whites found it possible to remain silent; more joined the struggle. What would eventually be known as the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s occurred in places like Marion, Indiana, as citizens agonized over such issues as integrating swimming pools. Indeed, what happened in such places as Marion, in the end, was the core of the civil rights movement. That movement let loose a continuing self-examination within communities and between local communities and the nation, a conversation and argument, locally and nationally, about liberty and justice for all.
the beginning of the twenty-first century Grant County citizens would still have memories of the lynching. And as part of their ongoing dialogue about race they would also have an elected black sheriff.

TWO BLACK KIDS AND A SWIMMING POOL

Born in Marion in 1937, Tom Wise and Oatess Archey played together as kids, went on as adults to careers in law enforcement, and, at the end of the century, worked together in Grant County politics. A generation separated them from James Cameron: they became in some ways Cameron’s students, their lives crossing with his, affecting their willingness to forgive and their determination never to forget the past.

Wise and Archey grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, when the Courthouse Square was still the town center. Families from town and from Grant County’s farms came there on Saturdays, packing the sidewalks in good weather, shopping in the Woolworth’s and Penney’s stores, buying a nickel Coke, going to hear a touring band such as Artie Shaw or to watch a Hollywood western. In nice weather men would sit and talk, remembering the old days. Former Sheriff Jake Campbell spent lots of time with friends on the square, telling stories. At home people listened to the radio, WOWO from Fort Wayne, WLW from Cincinnati, WLS from Chicago. On summer evenings they sat on their front porches. Few bothered to lock their doors at night.

Tom Wise grew up in South Marion, where black kids learned to negotiate a fluid color line. His family lived on West 34th Street, in a neighborhood of many black families. Most of his friends were also black, though sometimes white kids joined their games. He attended McCulloch Elementary School, a mixed school with more whites than blacks. He belonged to a black Boy Scout troop that met at Allen Temple A.M.E. and went camping and swimming. He played on a black baseball team against white teams in the city’s Matter Park and went on picnics there with his Allen Temple Sunday school class. Like nearly all Hoosier boys, Wise played basketball. Games at the YMCA were often with white boys, but after the game only the white kids were allowed to jump in the pool; Wise and his black friends could only play ping-pong.