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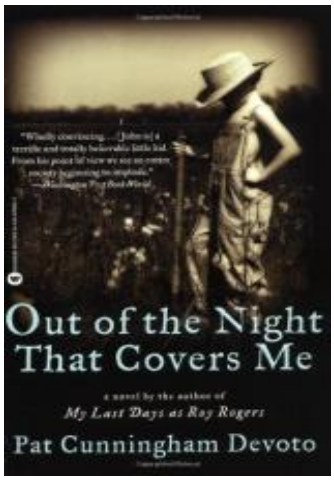
Out of the Night That Covers Me

by Pat Cunningham Devoto



About the Book

John McMillan was only eight-years-old when his mother died and he was ripped, without warning, from his sheltered world of books and gentility. Now on his aunt's run-down tenant farm in southern Alabama, abused by his alcoholic uncle, and completely bereft, John longs for escape?his only hope for survival. He's about to get his wish in a way no one could ever predict...

A twist of fate will bring John to the Bend, a black settlement that has become a refuge for outcasts, where he'll join Tuway, a black man who helps others leave the South and find a new life in Chicago. But neither will be ready for the brutal confrontation about to change their lives, challenge the prejudice of an era, inspire the courage of a people, and most of all, touchingly reveal the secrets of one boy's heart.

Discussion Guide

1. In the long run was it best for John that he was not spared his struggles? Do you think children today are too sheltered? Not sheltered enough?

2. Was Aunt Nelda trapped in her way of life any more so than women today?

3. If you were spirited back in time to live in the story, which female character would you most want to be?

4. Did Uncle Luther have any redeeming characteristics?

5. The book did not end with everyone living "happily ever after." Were you satisfied with this ending? Do you think it was realistic?

6. What elements in the story point out the good and bad sides of small town life?

7. What do you think were the most important factors in precipitating the civil rights movement? Rank in order of importance, 1 being the most important. Rosa Parks--Martin Luther King, Jr.-Television--E.D. Nixon--The automatic cotton-picking machine--John and Robert Kennedy.

8. Did John's transition match, in any way, the transformation that was taking place in the South as it was drawn kicking and screaming into a new era?

9. Was there that much difference in the life of the poor blacks and the poor whites in this story?

Author Bio

PAT CUNNINGHAM DEVOTO was born and raised in Alabama and lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and Alabama.

Critical Praise

"Wholly convincing....[John is] a terrific and totally believable little kid. From his point of view we see an entire society beginning to implode."

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