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General

The Long Journey
Wayne Greenhaw
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As World War One draws to a close in the spring of 1919, sixteen-year-old Harold Reed is content with his job shining shoes in the Town Creek, Alabama barbershop. A letter arrives saying that Harold's older brother, Bosworth, a war veteran, will soon be arriving in Decatur after several months recuperating in a hospital. Somebody from the family will have to travel thirty miles to meet him and escort him home. The trip will take two days each way on horseback, and Papa can't take that much time away from the family farm, so the responsibility to fetch the family's oldest son is passed on to Harold.

This first journey away from the security of his family and his small village is fraught with adventure. Harold hooks up with Antony Katanzakis, a Greek who introduces him to the thrill of riding in a circus balloon. Along the way they meet Sean O'Donohue (who is the second cousin to leprechauns in County Cork) and a Choctaw Indian woman named Powtawee.

Arriving in Decatur, Harold is exposed to the excitement of big-city living, from the mysterious intrigue of Mrs. Purdence Longshore, owner of the boarding house where Papa directed Harold to stay, to the allure of Moccasin Alley, where women of ill repute work. Harold is a long way from the safety and tranquility of his family's farm.

?Every moment now the world was growing larger for me, filled with more possibilities, while some questions were answered, more were posed.?

The author sets his novel in the real-life town where he grew up; he studied writing both in Mexico and at the University of Alabama. He has published fifteen books and written two plays, prize-winning TV productions, and hundreds of articles for publications such as The New York Times, Atlantic Monthly, and Reader's Digest. His tale of a small-town boy's exposure to new people, locales, and culture provides a story about a rite of passage that results in self-discovery.

The reader finally does get to meet Bosworth towards the end of the book, but only briefly. Greenhaw leaves one wanting to learn more about the two brothers and their parents in their small rural Alabama village as the WWI era fades into history. This story about an America long ago gone is intriguing, captivating, and full of charm.

John R. Selig