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# *I Have a Dream*

The Story of  
Martin Luther King

By Margaret Davidson





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## ***“You Are as Good as Anyone.”***

**I**t was a fine fall day in Atlanta, Georgia—a perfect day to do things outside. Martin had just come home from school. Quickly he changed his good school clothes. Then he ran across the street to the house where his two best friends lived. They were brothers. And for as long as Martin could remember the three of them had played together.

Now, as he had done so many times before, six-year-old Martin knocked on their front door. His friends' mother opened it.

But she didn't smile, or even say hello.

Finally Martin broke the strange silence. "Can Tom and Billy come out and play?"

"No," she answered, "they can't."

Martin was puzzled. This was what she'd said yesterday, too. "Are they sick?" he asked.

"No," she answered, "they're not sick. Just run along now, Martin."

But Martin kept on. "Can they play tomorrow?"

The woman sighed. "Now, look here, Martin." Her voice was not angry. But it was very, very firm. "It was all right for you to play together when you were younger. But now you're all in school. So it's best that you go your own different ways."

Not be best friends anymore? "Why?" Martin whispered.

"Because you're colored and we're white," the boys' mother answered. Then she shut the door.

Colored? White? Martin held out his hands. Yes, they were colored. They were colored a kind of medium brown. But that was just a fact—a fact like the sky was blue and the grass was green. What did it have to do with friendship?

Martin felt heavy and hurt and all mixed up. He decided to ask his mother what this was all about.

Martin's mother took him on her lap. She wiped away the tears from his cheeks. Then she began to talk. She told Martin about a time long ago when men and women and children as young as he was had been taken from their homes in Africa. She talked about how they had been brought here to America and sold as slaves.

She looked at him. "Do you know what a slave is?" she asked. Martin shook his head.

"Being a slave means being owned by someone. Owned the way we own a dog or a car or a washing machine. It means



being somebody else's property and having to do whatever they want you to do. It means not having any freedom at all."

Martin's mother paused for a moment and then she went on. "Here in the South millions of slaves worked in white people's homes and businesses and farms. Then a war broke out between the northern and southern states. The North won the Civil War—and the slaves were all freed."

Martin's eyes began to shine. Free! Maybe this wasn't such a bad story, after all.

"Yes, the Negroes were free," his mother continued. "But our troubles weren't over. Even now, in the 1930's, we still have to live with prejudice."

"Pre-ju . . . ?" It was plain that Martin didn't understand the word.

"Prejudice means that many white people cannot accept black folks as equals. They don't think we're as good as they are."

*Black folks?* Once more Martin held out

his hands. "But I'm brown," he said, "not black."

His mother smiled a little. "I know, Martin. Black is just another word for Negro." But her smile faded as she went on with the story. As Martin said years later, it was a story every black mother had to tell her children, sooner or later.

"Because they wanted to keep Negroes in their place, they started practicing something called segregation."

Once more Martin was puzzled. "Maybe you've had enough big words for today," his mother said. "Why don't you run out and play?"

But Martin begged her to go on. He was never satisfied with words or ideas he didn't understand. His mother sighed and said, "Well, segregation means separate, Martin. Negroes have to live completely separate lives from white people. Separate in almost every way. That's what your friends' mother was talking about."

Martin nodded. He was beginning to



understand. Suddenly he thought about the signs. He was only six and just beginning school. But he could already read. Lately he'd been reading more and more signs. Signs that said things like "No Negroes Allowed" and "Whites Only."

Then he thought about the section of Atlanta where he lived. Almost no white families lived there. He thought about the school he went to. There were no white children in it at all.

Now his mother set him on his feet. "That's enough for today," she said firmly. "So scoot."

But as Martin turned to go she held him back for a moment. "I've given you a great deal to think about today, son. Much of it you'll probably forget. But there's one thing I do want you to remember. You must never feel that you are less than other people. You are as good as anyone."