The Promise Season 2
Episode 4: What You Can't Unsee
By Meribah Knight

MERIBAH KNIGHT: Previously on The Promise…

> **BRANDY FENDERSON:** Everyone's going about their business like it's — it's OK that we have an almost entirely white school within a mile and a half of an almost entirely Black school.
> **HEATHER WOOD:** I can't believe we're just doing this again.
> **JOHN F. KENNEDY:** You must decide, as Goethe put it, whether you will be an anvil or a hammer.

> **MK:** OK, I just want to do my levels.
> **WILLIE SIMS:** Ok, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1, 2 what what what
> **MK**: So introduce yourself.
> **WS:** Ah, Willie James Sims Jr. also known as Big Fella. Live from the east side it's going down at NPR. Me and Meribah in this thang. We're trying to figure out what's going on. What's the problem? All up in Lockeland. Mm, mm, mm gentrification.
> **MK:** Ok, so we'll just start from the beginning.

MK: Willie Sims' daughter Nia started kindergarten at Lockeland in the fall of 2017. His older daughter had gone to Warner Elementary. But it had started to really deteriorate. The leadership was weak. The resources were waning. Behavior issues were on the rise.
Then he heard about Lockeland from Nia's godmother, who's white.

> **WS**: So in search of what elementary school we were gonna send the baby to, you gonna send her to the best school. You gonna at least go for it, you know? And it's a lottery. So we applied for the lottery and she got in so boom, there she is.

MK: The year was going well, Nia loved her teacher, she was making friends. Then the pumpkin patch happened.

> **WS:** The first time I realized it was real — I didn't even realize it. So went on a field trip to the pumpkin patch, right? So we get to the school, I'm chaperoning. I go outside to get on the bus and I look around at all the kindergarten kids, and I say 'Damn, is she the only Black kid in the kindergarten?' So I'm like it's got to be a couple more Black kids. She can't be the only Black kid in the whole kindergarten. It never even crossed my mind that she possibly would be, you know?

MK: East Nashville had tons of Black families. And the fact that his daughter was the lone Black child in her entire grade—of 3 classes—didn't sit well with him. He went home and talked to his wife about it, started calling Nia "little Diversity," a joke to ease the awkward reality of it all.

> **WS:** That's my baby, Diversity. She's diversifying uh, haha the whole thing.

MK: Then he started hearing murmurings from other families…white families…concerned about the issue. They were mobilizing. They wanted to push Lockeland to acknowledge the fact that families of color were becoming scarcer and scarcer at the school. Did he want in?

> **WS**: I didn't participate. I was like — I was like 'I'm with you, but I don't want no smoke, you know what I'm saying? I don't want no problems. It's already going to be interesting for being the only Black kid in the kindergarten. I don't want to add nothing to that. I'm like y'all do that, you know what I'm sayin?'

MK: Willie didn't want to jeopardize his daughter's experience at the school. But he also knew, this issue was much deeper, much more profound, much more historic than most of the white families probably realized.

WS: If Black people could do something about the way America is, and the way things are, and the way we've been done or the way that it goes we would — it would be changed. Evidently this is a white people issue. Good white people have to talk to white people who may be less informed and they have to work ,that out amongst theyself. You know what I'm saying? If Black America could do something about the problem, the problem would be solved. You know what I'm saying? So we can't. So, hey y'all fix it then. If you feel like it's a problem? Good! Do something about it, you know?

MK: You're listening to The Promise, a podcast from Nashville Public Radio. I'm Meribah Knight.

This season on The Promise we take on one of the most contentious topics in America, what has been deemed as the "Great Equalizer," but more and more feels like the Great Divider: public education.

Episode 4: What You Can't Unsee

DAVID BRILEY: This is a story about a school…
RICHARD TENNANT: Lockeland Elementary at first probably came together in David Briley's living room.

MK: Lockeland's origin story is a significant one. And it's a sort of a civic engagement fairy tale. A group of nearly all white neighborhood parents got together with a city councilman, David Briley, also white, and decided to make a school in their vision.

This was 2002 — four years after the city had settled its epic desegregation lawsuit. And the neighborhood was starting to attract more white families. It was walkable, close to downtown. The houses were affordable and picturesque. A dense mix of bungalows, craftsman and tudor style.

But there was a problem.

> **SARA PLAMBECK:** People would have children and move away.
>
> **DIANE BANKS:** They would move somewhere else where the schools were better.

MK: Just so you know what's happening here, this is a video for councilman David Briley's first—and unsuccessful — run for mayor in 2007. David Briley is also the grandson of Beverly Briley, Nashville's mayor in 1971 — during the city's first busing order. The guy who criticized the judge for what he called "the worst busing order in the country."

And now 40 years later, a different Briley was pushing for his own kind of change in educating children.

> **RT:** I think his role was bringing people together and giving us the support and confidence to make it work…

MK: At the time Lockeland had been an under-enrolled middle school that was closed a few years earlier.

As part of the desegregation order, the city committed to renovating and re-opening Lockeland as an elementary magnet lottery school with a priority zone. Meaning that anyone across the city could apply, but the children who lived in a specific area around Lockeland would get priority in the lottery.

And that zone was drawn, very deliberately, to be as diverse as possible. It included single family homes, but also a bunch of Section 8 housing as well as the city's largest public housing complex, the James Cayce Homes. In fact, the same places where Warner gets much of its students.

The school was seen by its founding families as an absolutely necessary addition to the neighborhood…which did have other elementary schools, Warner was one of them. They were all mostly African American, with about half the students living in poverty, and all struggled academically. But Lockeland's families wanted a new school, a school *they* would send their children to…diverse…close-knit…high achieving. So they worked tireless to make their vision a reality. And it worked.

> **SP:** Certainly the fact that young couples aren't moving away anymore because there is a place to send their children to school that is amazing, really strengthens the neighborhood.
> **RT:** The truth is Lockeland made everybody's house values double. That's just the truth. Lockeland really built a community that stayed.

MK: With a dedicated principal, a diverse student body, and the resources attached to these new white families — whose home values were now doubling — the school began to thrive.

> **DAVID BRILEY:** Lockeland is a model. And the model is: get involved with your local elementary school. Get to the school board. Tell them what you want to do with the school, and you'll be able to transform every elementary school in this community.
> **RT:** Lockeland is a school where the parents, we know each other.

MK: When Lockeland opened in 2004, it was almost dead even with Black and white students. But that quickly began to change as the neighborhood began to gentrify and get more expensive. Within five years the number of Black students had dropped by half. Five years after that, another half. And then another. White families just kept coming. They bought up the homes around the school whose listings boasted access to it. They told their friends. They took advantage of the guaranteed spots for siblings.

And by 2017, Willie's daughter Nia was the only Black child in the school's incoming class.

When he was approached by other Lockeland parents about the issue of diversity, one of them was Heather Wood.

> **HW**: I remember feeling like, 'Oh my god, like are we going to do this again? Like another generation? We're gonna do it again? No! I can't.'

MK: Heather was so unmoored by seeing the racially divided classrooms at Warner and Lockeland, she'd spent months unable to shake the image. So she began reaching out to other parents…parents like Willie.

And while Willie had gracefully kept himself out of the fray, it turns out, another Lockeland parent had been sounding the alarm on this issue for years.

> **[DOOR OPENS, DOG BARKS]**
> **MK:** Hi!
> **BRANDY FENDERSON**: I forgot to mention I have a dog.

MK: Brandy Fenderson enrolled her daughter, Ella, at Lockeland in 2015, as a kindergartener. Ella is an extrovert with a deep love of rollercoasters.

> **ELLA FENDERSON:** It like launches you, and then you go in loops and you go upside down and it's really fun.
> **MK:** Do you ever get nauseous?
> **EF:** No.

MK: Ella is also biracial. Her mom, Brandy, is white, and Ella's father is Black.

BF: So her kindergarten year there were Ella and one other child of color in the class of 20 students. So two out of 20. And then in the next school year she was the only one in her classroom of color.

MK: Brandy happened to work with a lot of kids from Warner at a literacy non-profit she managed in the neighborhood. And what she saw in her daily commute from Lockeland to Warner left her troubled.

BF: It just felt disturbing to me. We would drive one mile down Woodland Street to my work from her school, and we would go from a world of white children to a world of Black children, one mile apart but not attending the same school.

MK: It ate away at her conscience.

So she emailed other parents, the school's principal. She contacted the PTO president, asking to discuss the issue at an upcoming meeting. She'd been volunteering most mornings at the school, tutoring kids in reading, so she figured her feedback wouldn't be unwelcome.

Could they survey parents to see if others were concerned about diversity? Could they get Lockeland's few Black families to help recruit at the district's annual school choice festival? She wrote: "We cannot and should not ignore these statistics. We cannot hide behind this being a district problem."

But she was met with vague indifference.

This was not a PTO matter they responded. It was out of their hands.
These issues were for the school board and the district to deal with, the PTO president wrote back.

Plus, he added, this was a “tricky topic.” “We all have opted to send our kids to Lockeland, in lieu of sending them to more diverse zoned schools or other more diverse choice options,” he wrote. “Trying to change the makeup of a school is particularly difficult.”

But, he added, “There is no harm in trying.”

Brandy was vexed. For one, the “more diverse” options the PTO president was talking about were not diverse at all. Most of Lockeland’s families were zoned for Warner, practically all Black.

In Brandy’s mind this was a civil rights issue. She wrote: “We cannot ignore that white kids in the neighborhood are receiving a top-notch education a mile down the road from a school where Black children are not learning to read.”

Eventually the PTO had a meeting about diversity, and Lockeland’s principal addressed Brandy’s concerns directly.

> **BF**: The response I received was ‘You know, we have a long waiting list at Lockeland. So, you're suggesting that maybe we do some outreach to, to make people feel welcome, but people do feel welcome here. Let me show you our waiting list.’ Then I said well maybe I'm — maybe I'm not clear: I'm talking about people of color. You know, my experience is people are saying that this isn't a school for Black kids. And when you walk in it doesn't really look like it, if you just look at the faces. I said ‘So I think that maybe we could do some outreach to make people feel welcome.’

MK: And still, nothing happened.

Frustrated, Brandy applied for another school in the neighborhood. Maybe it was time to leave Lockeland, she thought. Even though taking her biracial Black child out of the school would only worsen its diversity problem.

But other pressing issues presented themselves. Her daughter Ella had been born with only one ear and now needed a number of surgeries to construct it.

At the same time, she and Ella's dad were divorcing. Then she and Ella moved.
The last thing Brandy wanted was any more changes for Ella.

> **BF:** So me personally I thought this is not my… this is not a war I'm going to fight on my own. And I was ready just to do what was right for my child.

> **BF:** And then during her second-grade year, some work came home from her class. Just when I thought, 'Hey this is how it is, but we're just we're just going with it.' Ella was maybe going to be the only kid of color in her class, but we're just we're just sticking with it. And then some work came home. It was about it was about Ruby Bridges.

MK: 60 years ago, Ruby Bridges was the first Black child to desegregate a New Orleans elementary school. She'd walked to school flanked by Federal Marshals for protection.

The assignment asked the children in Ella's class, to read about Ruby and mark what aspects of her story were *fair* and *unfair*.

> **BF**: And one of the things they marked as "fair" was separate but equal schools — as fair. And the other thing they marked as fair was Ruby Bridges had to take an entrance exam to get into the white school. So my alarm went off. This is important stuff.

MK: The worksheet came home with a big pink smiley face on the top right corner.

When Brandy saw the assignment, she pulled Ella aside. ‘Did you talk about this in class?’ She asked. ‘Why did you mark these as fair?’

> **BF:** And she says, ‘Oh yeah, we all thought that was fair because it says “equal.”’ And I said, ‘Do you understand that that means Black kids would go to one school and white kids would go to another school. That's what they mean by separate.’ She said ‘Yeah, we, we know,’ she said, ‘but it says equal.’

MK: Brandy immediately called and scheduled a meeting with Ella’s teacher. Who apologized profusely, and said the assignment had been given by a sub.

> **BF:** But it was sort of like a breaking point for me, Meribah. I just thought to myself, ‘Wow. You know my child has been in an almost entirely white class, and now after three years of the school she goes through a lesson and is sent home with an understanding that separate but equal was fair — and not only my child but every other child in that classroom.

MK: So she took her concerns to social media, posting on Facebook about the assignment and tagging more than 80 others. Parents, teachers, friends, even the school district itself. And the mayor. Brandy got a tidal wave of responses.

“I don’t think anyone meant for this to happen,” one parent wrote. “But here we are, we are the only ones who can change it and we have to start somewhere.”
“We are one unhealthy neighborhood,” wrote another.
One said “wow…just wow”

Not all were so supportive though. Some people claimed Brandy had misinterpreted. Others simply unfriended her.

But Brandy was undeterred. She knew it was time to start talking, again, about the glaring divide in the neighborhood.

> **BF:** I wanted people to really confront the fact that in this progressive neighborhood — this very liberal East Nashville — everyone's going about their business like it's, it's OK.

MK: And so, in early 2018, Brandy was ready to mount another push to get Lockeland talking about its race problem.

Heather Wood, who'd heard about the post, was ready to help. She contacted Brandy…

> **BF:** And said 'I think that we should… I think that what we should do is submit a letter to the school and let them know how many parents are concerned about this and that we want to do something to change it.'

MK: After the break, parents speak up. But one letter wasn't going to solve Lockeland's segregation crisis.

> **[BREAK]**

MK: The letter is really pretty innocuous.

"Dear Principal Lewis: This letter comes to you from a group of parents who love Lockeland Design Center and our school community, but who are also concerned with the school's growing lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity."

It goes on to say that they know there are proactive measure the school can take to spread "the message" about Lockeland.

“We firmly believe that with your leadership, and the support of Metro Nashville Public Schools, we will be successful,” the letter concluded. Followed by a request to meet with Principal Lewis.

It’s signed by 57 parents.

And while by all accounts it’s timid. It got people’s attention — mine included. I wrote a story about it. And then it made it to the nightly news.

[FOX 17 NEWS CLIP]

MK: Here is where I should say that Lockeland’s principal, Christie Lewis, has declined my multiple requests for an interview. When I asked the district why, a spokesman told me she didn’t want to be the face of this problem.

But you will hear from her later in this series.

Following the letter, a meeting was scheduled. Between Lockeland’s principal, another Metro Schools administrator and Chris Wood — Heather’s husband. Somehow Chris became the group’s representative and was the only person asked to meet.

> **CHRIS WOOD:** You know. And I just told her it was an issue and that I was hoping we could make some progress on it. And they said that they knew it was an issue and it was difficult to solve and they'd been thinking about it and working on it, and would love to hear, you know, any ideas that I had or we had for ways to try to fix it.

MK: It seemed it was up to the parents.

So Chris put his lawyerly skills to work. He filed a public records request with the school district and discovered what he and other concerned parents had always suspected: The neighborhood had plenty of kids of color. In fact, two-thirds of the rising kindergarteners in Lockeland's priority zone were African American.

Chris and Heather and Brandy Fenderson, urged Lockeland's PTO to spend some money on mailers to start recruiting around the neighborhood — which they did. They spent a few hundred bucks on them—which, for context, is less than 1/100th of Lockeland's PTO budget.

A year later, when Chris filed another records request to see if his efforts had moved the needle, he was disappointed with the results.

Just one African American rising kindergartener had put Lockeland as a first choice on the school application, compared to 39 white kids.

It seemed the problem was bigger than just a mailer. And it revealed just how starkly divided the neighborhood is. It seemed its Black families either didn't know about Lockeland in the first place, or they simply didn't see it as an option. And the fact that it didn't offer transportation was yet another hurdle.

In the past, Lockeland had been called "East Nashville's best kept secret." And Willie Sims, the father of the school's only Black kindergartener, wondered aloud if his daughter's godmother — who'd told them about the school — had broken some unspoken rule.

> **WS:** I think her godmother… she might have messed up and gave away the sacred white secrets, you know what I'm saying? She might have gave away the secret that we were — maybe we weren't supposed to know that. If her godmother wasn't a white woman, then maybe we wouldn't know this. You know what I'm sayin'?

MK: If Willie hadn’t been told about Lockeland, who knows where his daughter would be, but it definitely wouldn’t have had everything Lockeland has. Few schools in the neighborhood do.

> **WS:** We just want her to get an education. She's learning Spanish. When my other daughter was at Warner, they weren't learning no Spanish. They didn't know nothing about no damn Spanish over — they weren't teaching them Spanish. They weren't giving them no resources. So to see the difference in the same age kids, and what you get over here and what you don't get over here. So I'm like… she's learning a lot of stuff she's not going learn if she goes to any of the other schools that’s right by us. She's not going to get these same resources, education. It’s not going to happen.

MK: To Willie, this all felt intentional. Even if most white families had no idea what they were doing, they were participating in a system that was keeping Black children out of one of the best schools in the state.

> **WS:** That is on purpose. It is this way it is on purpose. I'm not saying they purposely keeping Black kids out, but they're not actively trying to get Black kids in. And if you're not actively trying to get Black kids in, then you're keeping them out**.**

MK: With no progress made at Lockeland, Heather Wood got increasingly frustrated. And it appeared that Lockeland’s principal didn’t share her sense of urgency.

> **HW:** The principal said that maybe I should look at other schools, because it was maybe not a fit for us. And she was right. But when I heard that, I was like, ‘OK, this isn't something that they're really concerned about,’ you know. I don't think it was something they were really concerned about.

MK: Heather realized that if she really wanted to find the solution to Lockeland's problem, it was going to take more than recruiting a few kids of color to the school, which it seemed wasn't a real priority anyway.

But isolating kids was benefitting no one, she thought. Not white kids, and especially not kids of color. The data showed that clearly. And the courts had too. Separate schools were "inherently" unequal. Schools should look like how the world looks, Heather thought.

> **HW:** Why are we separating them? And a lot of times I feel like it is for the convenience and comfort of the white families.

MK: For years white people, here and beyond, had huddled together and pooled their resources, Heather thought. *They* have controlled the outcomes And Lockeland was a perfect example of those outcomes.

Lockeland's PTO—which could raise money and use it however they wanted—had spent $101,000 in the 2018 school year. They used it to hire some part time teachers, hold events and buy extra materials for staff.

Meanwhile, Warner didn't even have a PTO. That's not to say parents weren't active — they were constantly at the school. Dropping off birthday cupcakes during a work break. Coming to a teacher conference. Picking up their kid for a dentist appointment. But that formal parent body — it didn't exist.

And the other schools in the neighborhood reflected a similar disparity. At Hattie Cotton Elementary, filled with mostly low-income children of color there was just $11,000 in its PTO account. While Dan Mills, a mostly white school with a higher income population, had spent more than $130,000.

What's more, once a family got into Lockeland, it gave them a guaranteed spot for any siblings.

And this “sibling preference,” as it’s called, is a big factor in how the school’s demographics shifted at such a rapid pace — shrunk the number of open spots every year to almost nothing.

The school was filled with the children of prominent Nashvillians: public interest lawyers, politicians, city officials, artists, musicians, and those with flexible schedules, business owners, stay at home parents.

> **HW:** If you get a critical mass of those people, there's always going to be someone that can come in — right? — to the library at a school like Lockeland.

MK: In other words, the school had an almost endless supply of extra hands, and the resources that came with them.

Clay Haynes, in many ways, is one of those parents.

> **MK:** Hello!
> **CLAY HAYNES:** Welcome…

MK: He’s the co-owner of a firm specializing in sustainable real estate development. And his daughter Julia is a now a first grader at Lockeland.

And when he’d drop Julia at school in the morning, her toddler brother in tow, it was sort of a magical experience.

> **CH:** And it is this… it's this kind of joyful bubble. There's like this this really kind of like you enter this kind of happiness bubble. When you up, you know, kind of are walking up to the school hand-in-hand with your two kids who are super happy to go into it. And, you know, you feel like all these other families are kind of converging on it. And then you realize it's like… It it really is this kind of bubble, right? And that's not like the rest of

the world. And that is intentionally, it feels like, intentionally keeping other… other people out.

MK: Once Clay realized this, he too began to get more and more uncomfortable. Since gentrification had taken hold in East Nashville, the number of Black middle-class families had dwindled. And now, many of those Black families who remained were concentrated in low income housing — of which the neighborhood had lots. It meant that race and economics were closely tied.

CH: This is really a conversation about resources. It requires those with resources to share those resources, right? And so sometimes that means that there's fewer resources for those who already have them. And those with resources and power have to release their grip on those in order to share those with the rest of the world.

MK: It was a big idea, put on a very small community. But Heather felt the same way — If white people were the ones flocking to a choice school like Lockeland, one of the best schools in the state, if they had the resources to spend the time fundraising and organizing, volunteering, maybe Willie was right.

It was a white people issue, and it was on them to fix it.

More than anything, what a school like Warner needed was community investment — from the whole community, not just its low-income families. More people with different kinds of resources.

HW: It just needs an influx of more people with flexible schedules and a little bit extra income so that they can do the things that at the higher income schools they can do.

MK: It seems simple. But it's not—Heather knows she's walking a fine line between supporting a struggling neighborhood school and acting as some kind white savior.

HW: It's, It is very common I think where parents are like 'Oh this is a new project, this is a new blank slate. We're going to make this great in spite of the kids who are already here.' Well I love the kid's that are already there.

MARION WOOD: I am a star of hopscotch. I like butterflies. I like butterflies.

MK: With Marion's first year of school coming up, Heather had a decision to make. Would she send her to Lockeland, with Oscar, now almost 90 percent white and financially well off?

Or would she send her to Warner, their zoned neighborhood school, where it was almost all Black and poor?

HW: I felt like that the sort of just decision you know would be to send her to our zone school.

MK: When she broached the topic with Chris, he was open to it, but he needed some guidance.

HW: I made him read some Nikole Hannah-Jones articles.

MK: Nikole Hannah-Jones is a Pulitzer-Prize winning investigative journalist who pretty much put this issue of American schools re-segregating into the public consciousness.

[NEWS CLIP]
Host: Why are American schools so segregated?
NHJ: I mean the simple answer is American schools are segregated because um, they

were created to be segregated from the founding of public schools in this country, and because large numbers of white Americans choose it to be that way.

MK: Hannah-Jones has been writing about this issue for the better part of a decade — exposing inequalities in education, and the hypocrisy of liberal whites.

[NEWS CLIP]

NHJ: As long as we continue to have a system of racial inequality in this country Black children have to be where white children are to get the things that white children get.

MK: Heather knew that if Chris would just read what she read, and see what she now saw, he too would see sending Marion to Warner was the *just* thing to do.

CW: The way the lots of, I think, conversations work in our house is that Heather will propose something, and I may be dismissive. And then she will give me a book to read about it, and I'll read the book, and I will realize that she was right.

HW: I think there's just this assumption that you're just going to do what is absolutely the best and get the absolute best for your child in everything at any given point. And the idea that you would be making a decision where there might be something she has to give up, you know, it's not going to be anything huge, and she's going to gain things from going there too. But like yeah. I mean sure there are some convenience sacrifices, there might be some social awkwardness sacrifices at points, like I don't know, you know? But it's worth it to me.

MK: When she told other parents what she was thinking, that Marion might go to Warner and not Lockeland, some looked puzzled. Others sort of cringed.

HW: A couple people have been like well good for you, you know? We all talk about it, but none of us want to do it.

MK: A few said their children were just too sensitive for a mostly poor and minority school.

HW: They want to shield them from that. I don't know how we are going to raise kids who are anti-racist and like social justice minded if we are shielding them from the awkwardness that comes up with income inequality, or the awkwardness that comes up with race. Like, I mean yeah, I guess, you can keep shielding them, but isn't that where we all — how we all got to where we are now?

MK: So the decision was made, Marion, or Momo as the family calls her, would go to Warner next year. Not Lockeland.

MW: I am Momo, that's me. I am Momo, yeah! I am Momo yeah!

MK: So anyway, with Heather, Chris, and Momo all on board with Warner.
The next conversation, was with Oscar.

OSCAR WOOD: She showed me two pictures: a picture of a kindergarten class at Lockeland and a picture of one at Warner.
HW: And I was like what do you notice about this picture?
OW: The kindergarten class at my school was all white kids. The kindergarten class there was all Black kids.
HW: And he's like, umm…
OW: And I was like I didn't — I thought Martin Luther King got rid of that.
HW: Then I was like yeah, well, you know we don't do it anymore *like that*. But the fact remains that the kids are separate, aren't they, you know?
OW: There was just. They, um, white kids would be allowed to go there, but they don't. There's just so many Black kids there and at Lockeland there's so many white kids.

MK: He was pretty devastated to be honest that he wouldn't be walking to school with Marion. But he knew this was much bigger than a morning stroll.

> **HW**: He just like gave me this look like it was sort of this combination of like 'Because that's the reason, I know I'm not gonna be able to argue you into this.' Like 'I know you're going to do this aren't you? So OK.' He's still not thrilled about it, you know? But he understands. He does.

MK: And so here they were, The Wood Family. Two kids. Two schools. One white. One Black. The neighborhood divide — America's age-old problem with race — would now live and breathe in the home of this white family. They, unlike so many of their white neighbors, were choosing to look race in the eye and do the work that their Black neighbors had done for generations.

Next time on The Promise…

> **RICKI GIBBS:** But somebody believed in me. I had a mom and a grown man I pray for me. I had teachers who said, 'No, you're gonna get an education, and you're gonna stop the nonsense.'
>
> **BJ:** The raptor, even though its head was small and its body was big, it had the smartest brain of all the dinosaurs.
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> **JON WREN**: I mean the system is rigged. The system is rigged against parents. It's rigged against schools, and it's rigged against communities because it's turned it into this just like, turf warfare, over six-year-olds. That's kind of messed up.

MK: The Promise is written and produced by me, Meribah Knight. Editing by Emily Siner and Anita Bugg. Special thanks to Sam Zern, the intrepid intern for this podcast, and its fact-checker. Thank you to Tony Gonzalez, Samantha Max, Sergio Martínez-Beltrán and Damon Mitchell for additional editing. Our advisor on The Promise is Savala Nolan Trepczynski.

This episode was mixed by Jakob Lewis of Great Feeling Studios. The music is by Blue Dot Sessions.

Any many, many thanks to my dear friend, my mentor, and my loyal guide, Alex Kotlowitz.

Find photos and more on how we reported this story at thepromise.wpln.org.

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