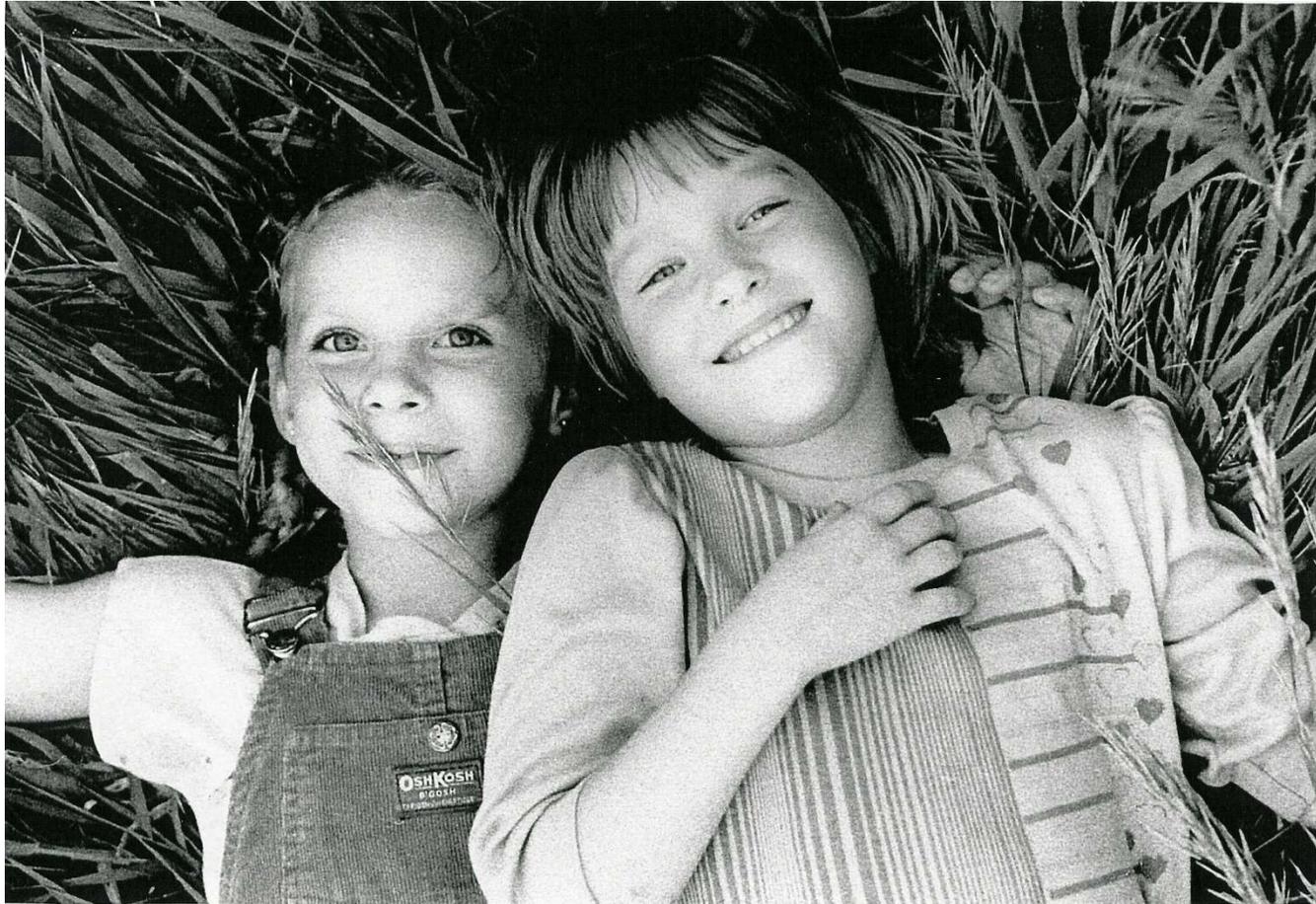


# I Am A Witness

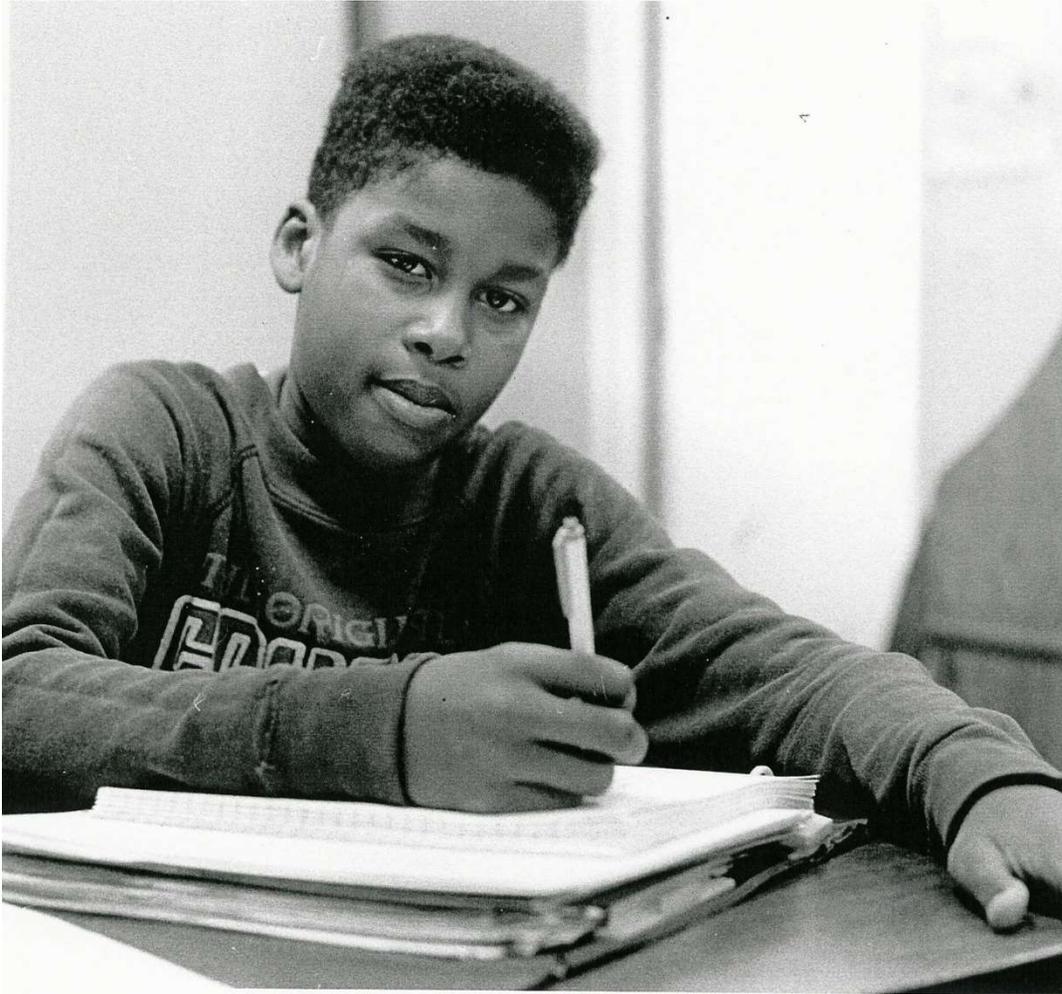
Poem: Megan Tschannen-Moran

Pictures: Carolyn Prieb Backis



I am a witness to the stunned disbelief  
on Marie's face  
who by third grade had failed  
twice  
when I told her, after six months tutoring,  
that the passage she had just read  
was the same as the good readers in her  
class.  
I watched that disbelief work its way  
into a beaming, broad smile.  
I am the recipient of her exuberant hug,  
her muffled gasp  
"Oh Megan!"  
I watched as what she believed about  
herself  
as a failure  
as stupid  
as nothing  
gave way to a glimmer of hope  
maybe  
maybe she could  
be  
somebody  
after all.

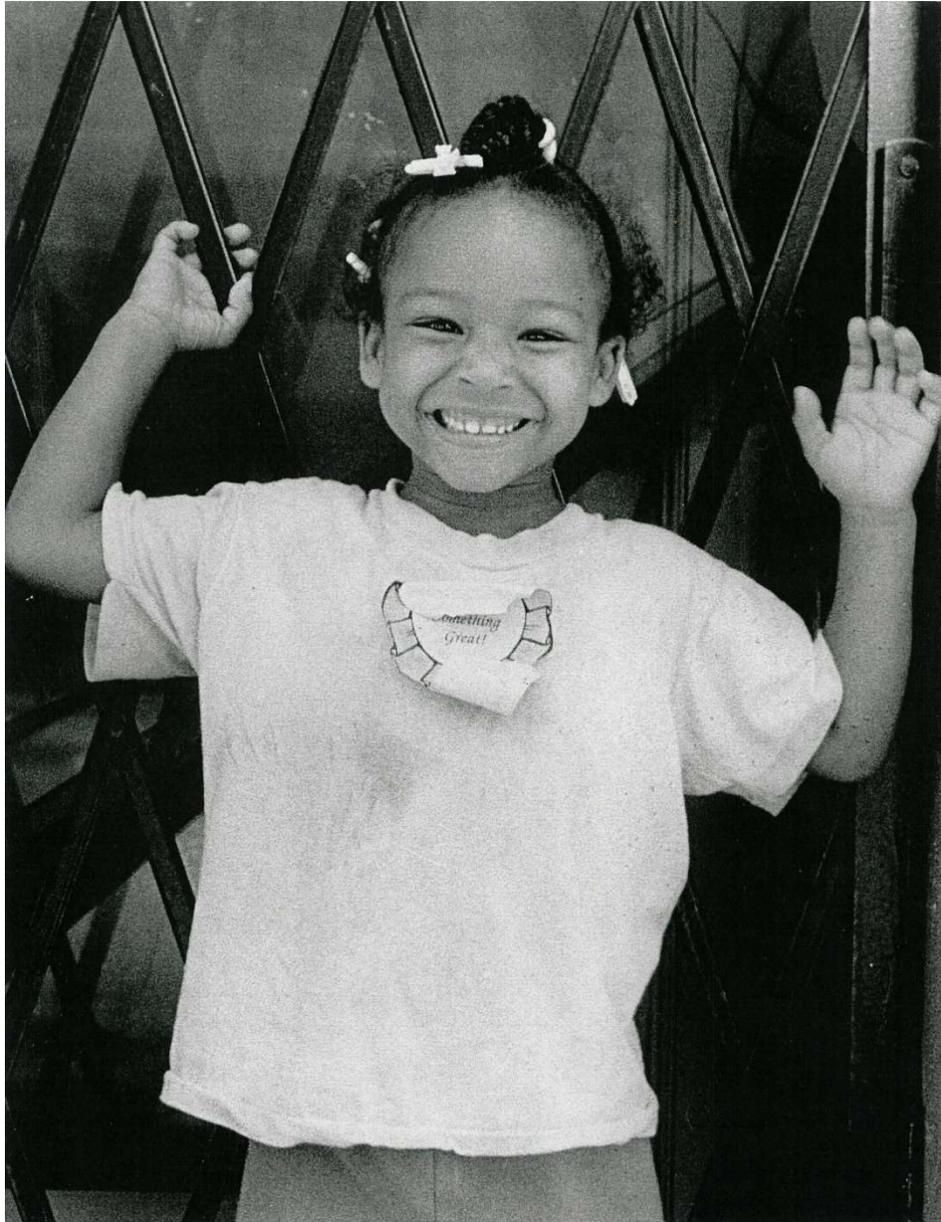




I am a witness to the re-forming of Jesse  
cool, proud Jesse  
who was bound to wage war on schools.  
Jesse  
whose duty it was to disrupt  
a system  
that found him  
worthless.  
Until he came  
to my school. We said  
You're smart.  
You can do it.  
Stick with it.  
I'll stay here with you while you try.  
And he found out that he liked math,  
he found out he was good at it.  
He found out he liked the feeling it gave  
him  
to help other students  
who didn't understand.  
He found out  
he was  
a teacher.

I am a witness to  
the birth of a dream for Eddie.  
Eddie,  
a clumsy, dirty, tangled-up little boy  
who liked to dig in the dirt  
in a play-yard corner alone,  
whose social skills were painfully  
inadequate, and  
whose reluctant muscles made writing  
legibly  
maddeningly difficult,  
but who liked science  
and who was the first one to read  
Ranger Rick  
cover to cover  
as soon as it came.  
Eddie  
who was captured by the dream  
that one day  
he might be  
an archaeologist.





I am a witness  
to the breaking forth of the courage of Latrice.  
Latrice, whose young life had left her so frightened  
that dark clouds  
and wind  
made her tremble with thoughts of hurricanes  
and cracks in the floor tile  
made her shrink in fear  
of earthquakes.

Clouds and wind and cracks  
became metaphors  
for all that felt  
out of control in her life.

What an amazing day  
at swimming lessons  
when she closed her eyes  
and held her breath  
and plunged her face  
under  
the blue water  
and emerged  
sputtering and grinning.  
She did it again  
and again  
and then tempted herself  
to walk out into the deep  
until that cool wetness  
reached her neck  
her chin  
her lips.

Jump to me, I'll catch you.  
Float here on your back, I promise I won't let go.  
Stretch out, pull hard, reach for where you want to go!  
And she did.

I am a witness to lives transformed  
by the unleashing of  
the power of education.

I am a witness  
to hopes hatched  
dreams born  
artists emerging  
voices found  
stories told  
conflicts solved  
injustice confronted  
disrespect overcome  
kindness nurtured  
pride rekindled.

I am a witness  
to the unleashing of  
the power of education  
in the lives of city kids  
poor kids  
wounded kids  
irrepressible kids.





I am a lover of children  
who at twenty-two  
was captured,  
mind, energy, imagination,  
by the idea of creating  
a sunny, fertile garden  
in a crowded, rough corner  
of a big, tough city  
where children could grow  
in their feelings of self worth  
in the skills they need to be productive  
citizens  
in their courage to confront the truth;

to learn and love and laugh  
all at the same time.

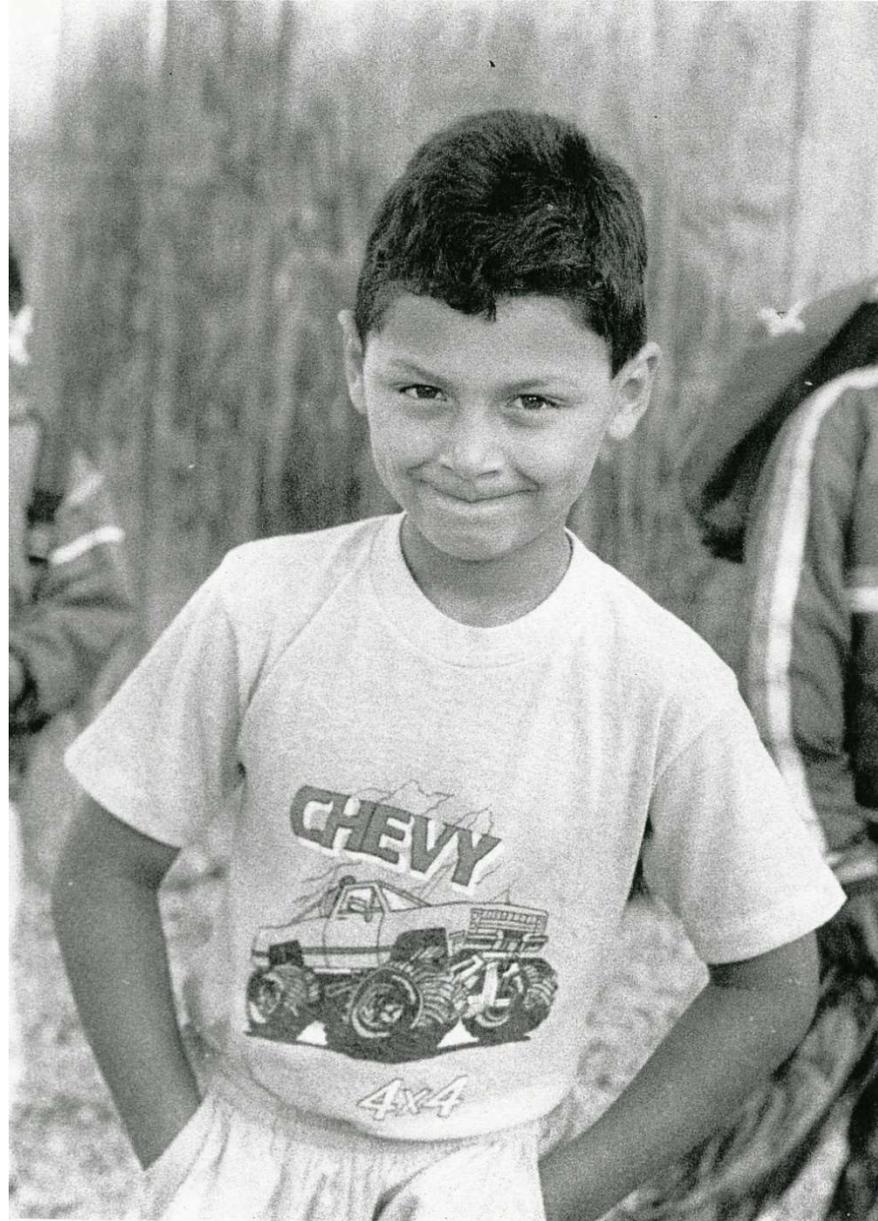
A place where teachers could be creative  
and support one another  
in a non-hierarchical structure.

A school  
where from each of us  
would be evoked  
our best selves.

For fourteen years I was blessed  
with sweetness, struggle, anger, outrage,  
hugs, tickles, affirmations, challenges,  
conflict, sadness, hope  
humor, cleverness,  
problems,  
resolutions, community,  
courage, determination  
joy.

In return  
for the hope I sowed,  
these children  
took me by the hand  
and led me inward to find my own pain  
and by their example  
helped me find the courage  
to face my own wounds.  
Their love,  
and the nourishing spirit that pervaded the  
school  
helped me to heal.

I, having grown exhausted  
with plunging into the swirling muddy waters  
of the river  
to pull out floundering little souls,  
am on my way up the river  
to find out who's throwing them in  
and try to put a stop to it.





I came to the BigFarm  
to find out what others have found out  
about creating fertile, irrigated spaces  
in which  
to grow children,  
to engage in discourse,  
to run into roadblocks  
and search  
with others  
for ways around those roadblocks.

So that I can raise my voice  
to speak the truth I know,  
to use my energy and what gifts I have  
to unleash more power  
in the lives of more of God's children.



**I am a witness.**