

# Covered in Flour

1968: A Young Boy's Perspective on School, Family, and  
Changing Times

By Charles Presti

# COVERED IN FLOUR

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those who understand that life, like flour, can be kneaded and shaped into something beautiful, and that in every moment, we find meaning and purpose. May you always be "Covered in Flour," dusted in the messiness of love, tradition, and awe that life brings.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have been my pillars of support throughout the journey of writing "Covered in Flour."

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Your support and presence in my life have made this book possible. Thank you for being part of this incredible adventure.

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## Disclaimer

The language and terms used in this book are a product of the time in which the story is set. While some terms have fallen out of favor or are considered insensitive today, they are used here to faithfully represent the era and attitudes of the time. Reader discretion is advised.

'Covered in Flour' is a work of fiction inspired by elements of truth and personal experiences. While it draws upon real-life events and emotions, it has been crafted for creative storytelling purposes. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or deceased, or events is entirely coincidental. The author acknowledges that some content may not align with historical accuracy, and certain aspects have been fictionalized for narrative purposes. This book is intended for entertainment and should not be considered a factual account of the author's life or historical events.

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## PROLOGUE

1968. Even decades removed, the year lingers in fragments of memory with all the stubborn permanence of a childhood scar. Etched moments, refusing to fade, never losing potency to provoke. For America, a national coming of age carved in blood, bullets, and protest signs. But for me, at eight years old, it was just another year eager with possibility before harsh awakenings stole innocence.

I see it now as a watershed year—a deluge of inflection points where destinies might reshape with a single shove or careless bullet. Martin Luther King Jr. falling to an assassin's shot in Memphis severed a beacon of hope and rattled the nation—the slaying of Bobby Kennedy soon after blanketed dreams of progress in a funeral's pall. As Walter Cronkite's steady voice presided over scenes of blood-smeared clashes at the Democratic Convention, the words "breaking point" took on new potency, though I grasped little.

But back then, I read no budding headlines of history in my Whisper Haven home, humming to the sounds of sizzling garlic and my laughing sisters. Worlds away, cries of freedom met clubs while campaigns toppled to violence.

The ice cream truck's cheerful song held more sway than news of the protests pleaded by frustrated youth against the unfolding horrors in the humid jungles of Vietnam, where year after bloody year, the costs of war mounted. It was a tumultuous time, one where racial prejudices increasingly erupted to the forefront by way of frequent

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race riots that set cities aflame. Meanwhile, anger over the escalation of the Vietnam War similarly spilled into the streets, as youth voices raised in anti-war protests often met police batons. And my little third grade binder cradled only the lessons of a kindly teacher with a rainbow dress, not foresight that the ground under my sneakers and heart alike would soon rupture.

Children see more than adults wish to reveal. But it was a teacher seeing something in me that cracked open doors to ugly truths beyond my leave-it-to-Beaver haven. Does earlier knowledge of humankind's frailties and hypocrisies nurture wisdom or fray innocence too roughly before its time? Even now, I wonder. But I suppose some fruit only ripens through cold whenever the harvest. So perhaps that teacher's unintentional lessons were the first pinch of winter—well-meaning but ultimately hurting towards a brighter, sobered season.

1968 was many things, but we all lost something precious along the way.

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## THIRD GRADE: BEGINNINGS AND BREAKTHROUGHS

SEPTEMBER 1968

I stepped off the bus, clutching my Squiddly Diddly lunchbox tightly and a quarter in my front pocket for milk money. The first day of school is scary exciting. Inside the lunchbox was a salami and cheese sandwich Mom had carefully crafted for me with bread made from my Uncle Stefano's Italian bakery. My uncle, Dad's brother, aunt, and cousins live only one block away from us and share the same neighborhood and friends. They are my very best friends! He started his own bakery many years ago in a different part of the city from Little Italy and worked really hard.

The school's double doors creaked open, and as soon as I rounded the corner, I caught sight of Miss Veezi standing in the doorway of Room 12. She wore her signature polka-dot mini dress, which always reminded me of the confetti sprinkles on a birthday cake.

"Ah, there you are!" Miss Veezi's eyes twinkled with a youthful idealism that set her apart from other teachers as she waved me in. "Welcome to the third grade!"

The classroom buzzed with the energy of rekindled friendships and newly forged alliances. Sunlight poured through the windows, casting patterns on the lift-top storage desks meticulously arranged in rows. There was a ridge at the top to hold our pencils; this year, we would start writing with pens! I brought my 3-ring notebook, ready to get it filled with this year's homework assignment.

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Her classroom was a testament to her philosophy. Charts and maps clung to the walls, and books of all genres filled the shelves—evidence of a world she was eager for us to explore. Even her desk calendar was different. Instead of just listing subjects and tests, it had quotes from philosophers, and historical figures scribbled in the margins—tiny nuggets of wisdom she'd no doubt weave into our lessons.

My eyes darted across the room, scanning for familiar faces. And then I saw Susan, John, and Patti huddled around a desk covered in carefully sharpened pencils and pristine notebooks waiting to be filled. Their faces broke into broad smiles as I approached, each wearing an expression that seemed to shout, "You're here!"

Susan jumped up first, her blonde ponytail bobbing as she bounded toward me. "I missed you so much! Did you go to that fun camp you were talking about?"

Before I could answer, John chimed in, brandishing a toy dinosaur from his backpack like a newfound treasure. "Check this out! Isn't it cool?"

As I took in the scene, Miss Veezi began to call us to attention; her voice tinged with an excitement that matched our own. "Alright, adventurers, gather 'round. Welcome to third grade, a year filled with discovery, friendship, and the kind of learning that happens when you least expect it! We have a lot to discover this year! You see," she continued, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper as if letting us in on a secret, "this classroom is more than just four walls. It's a place of discovery, where

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you'll not only find the answers to questions but also the courage to question the answers."

The words settled over us, and as I looked around at my friends and my ever-enthusiastic teacher, it felt like more than just the start of a new school year. It felt like the beginning of something magical. This was Miss Veezi's second year of teaching, fresh out of college, but she carried herself with a conviction that made you believe she'd been doing this forever. She was idealistic, sure, but it was the kind of idealism you wanted to buy into, one that promised that school could be more than just rote learning—that it could, in fact, be a grand adventure. She reached for a piece of chalk and wrote her name on the blackboard in cursive, punctuating the final 'i' with a small but vibrant heart. "I'm Miss Veezi, and I'm thrilled to begin this journey with each and every one of you."

After a brief pause to let her introduction sink in, Miss Veezi delved into the heart of her discussion. "Now, let's talk homework." She laid out a colorful calendar on her desk, filled with different areas we'd be exploring. Math challenges, writing assignments, and even some hands-on science experiments that made all of us sit up in our chairs.

"But that's not all," she added, her eyes framed by the blue eyeshadow so emblematic of the 1960s, flashing as if she had saved the best for last. "Your homework will also include something I think you'll find especially enjoyable. Each week, you're to watch the TV show 'Julia.' It's a brand-new series, and we'll discuss it in class. So, make sure you tune in!"

Miss Veezi paused, her expression turning thoughtful. "You know, 'Julia' is a special show for another reason. It has a

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Negro woman as the main character—a nurse who cares for people and is really good at her job. That's something you might not have seen on TV before."

The room went quiet, each of us taking in her words.

"In the past, and even now in some places, people are separated or treated differently because of the color of their skin. That's called segregation, and it's not fair. It's important for everyone to be shown doing all kinds of jobs and having all kinds of adventures. So, when you're watching 'Julia,' think about how special it is to see someone breaking new ground, okay?"

Her words hung in the air for a moment, settling over us like a soft blanket of new understanding. This wasn't just homework; it was a window into a changing world, an invitation to be part of something bigger.

Before I left the classroom, Susan pulled me aside and leaned in, her gaze focused with curiosity. "Hey Carl, isn't it cool how Miss Veezi mentioned that 'Julia' is special because it stars a Negro woman as a nurse?"

I nodded, my eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "Yeah, it is. But did you notice that Miss Veezi also talked of Julia's role as a single mom? That got me thinking about the details of the family and how it's a part of the show."

Susan looked at me, surprised. "Wow, I didn't catch that detail. You're really good at this, Carl. Picking up on little things that people might miss."

"I guess details matter," I said, giving Susan a warm smile. "They make the bigger picture more complete."

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After school, I went home, excited to share my day with Mom and was not sure about sharing with Dad. Dad was working the evening shift, but Mom was really happy for me.

When the school bus dropped me home, Mom was already there waiting for us. She had the day off. "I got a super cool assignment today!" I gushed, practically bouncing on my toes. "We have to watch 'Julia' for homework, and guess what? It's on tonight!" Mom's eyes widened, mirroring my own excitement. "Well, that sounds like some great homework." The show was also gracing the TV Guide's cover, making the homework even more momentous. This wasn't just an assignment; it was a meaningful event. And I couldn't wait to be a part of it.

As the evening sun dipped below the horizon, Sofie, Anna Marie and I huddled on the couch in the family room, our eyes fixed on the TV. Mom had some "me time" and was reading one of her new Best Seller's books in her bedroom. The show flickered to life, and there she was—Diahann Carroll as Julia Baker. She moved with grace and strength, filling the screen not just as a nurse but as a single mother navigating life with her young son, Corey, after losing her husband in Vietnam.

As I watched, seeing Julia traverse life's challenges with resilience and dignity, it struck me that I'd never seen anyone like her on TV before—a Negro woman in a lead role as a fully realized person.