

BOOKS

for Children

By DICK MILLER
Highland School Librarian

LITTLE VIC, by Doris Gates. Viking Press, New York. (1951)

IF YOU'RE A HORSE LOVER, this is the book for you.

Little Vic is the son of Victory and a grandson to Man o' War. His heritage is one of race-winning. But from his birth in the blue-grass country of Kentucky until one night in the Arizona desert more than two years later, Little Vic does not look like a winner.

Pony Rivers, a twelve-year-old Negro boy, arrives in Kentucky via a freight train from New York six months before Little Vic is born.



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He is an orphan whose only desire in life is to be around horses. Pony and Little Vic understood each other from the beginning. Indeed, their ties are so close that Pony is allowed to bestow the name "Little Vic" on the colt--a rare privilege for a mere stable boy.

Sadly, Little Vic does not measure up to his famous father, Victory, and is soon sold to a race track gambler in Florida. Pony appeals to the owner to be allowed to accompany the horse. He asks for nothing but "enough to eat and a pair of jeans now and then" in exchange for the privilege of caring for Little Vic.

At the new training farm, Little Vic shows promise in his workouts under Pony's handling. But in his first race he is ridden by a stranger and fails to win. In fact, he comes in last. In his second race, Little Vic throws his jockey. This prompts the owner to sell the horse to a ranch in Arizona. This time Pony fails to convince the new owner that he and Little Vic belong together and Pony stays in Florida while Little Vic goes west. After a summer of jockeying at country fairs, Pony starts west on the trail of Little Vic and eventually arrives at the ranch where his beloved "friend" is being trained.

It is not until now that the uninformed reader becomes aware that Pony Rivers is a Negro. This fact is casually introduced with the disclosure that the new trainer dislikes Negroes and says as much. However, Pony is kept on as a stable boy.

In the first seven chapters, we are led to believe that Little Vic could be a champion race horse if given a "good reason" to run and the right jockey. Now, in chapter eight, he proves it in a dramatic midnight race against a flash flood to save the lives of a family of campers.

Pony convinces the owner that Little Vic can win on the track, but only with Pony in the stirrups. Eventually, they are entered in the Santa Anita Handicap. The outcome of the big race is best discovered by the reader.

LITTLE VIC is written on the fourth to sixth grade level but could be read with ease by some third-graders. It is an excellent story for reading aloud. However, there are some names that may confuse the young reader. Two of Little Vic's trainers (Mr. Baker and Mr. Barby) have names which sound too similar. This is also true of three horses involved in the story--Sun Fox, Sun Alarm and Sun Soldier.

This book is subtly different from the usual run of children's books. Pony Rivers may start young readers from nice homes thinking about the millions of children across the United

Matt Kelly PTA Program Starts Oct. 21

FIRST MEETING of the Matt Kelly School PTA for 1965-66 is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 21, in the multi-purpose room. PTA membership applications should be returned to the school with the 50-cent registration fee as soon as possible.

The successful Project Head Start program of last summer will be continued at Matt Kelly on a modified basis starting this month with organization of a pre-school story hour for four-year-olds. A coinciding program for parents also will be initiated if there is enough interest in such a project. Comments are solicited by school authorities, who may be reached by phoning 649-2328.

A school newspaper, with class reporters, will be published under the supervision of Mr. Van Patten and Mrs. Musgrave to provide opportunities for student expression and to keep those interested informed of Matt Kelly activities.

Parents are advised there will be NO school

States who do not live in neat little subdivisions or fine apartments or rambling houses with manicured lawns. And the character of Pony Rivers does not have to be that of a colored boy to make the book intriguing. But the fact he is a Negro adds a certain flavor that makes the reading more appetizing.

It is significant to note that Pony is not revealed as a Negro until two-thirds through the book, and even then it is not harped upon. It is given as a simple fact. It merely shows that Negro boys can love and ride horses as well as boys or girls of other colors.

The illustrations also follow this theme. Artist Kate Seredy's pen and ink drawings are devoted to many fine portrayals of horses until the reader reaches page 139--and there on Little Vic sits Pony Rivers, obviously a Negro. The suspenseful "build-up" to the big race is artistically handled. The description of the race itself is almost anti-climactic, but natural and well done.

If a book must have a theme, the theme of LITTLE VIC might well be: "faith and love will win in the end."

Miss Gates writes in an interesting style and neatly weaves together the threads of her plot. The reader closes the book with a feeling of satisfaction. Most experts in children's literature seem to think this book a good one. This reviewer agrees. And the fact that LITTLE VIC is in its ninth printing is, perhaps, its best recommendation.

for Matt Kelly students on Friday, Oct. 15, which has been set aside for teacher demonstrations and discussions. Parents also are urgently requested to fill out and return the federal survey cards that will be sent home with their children on Oct. 21. Allocation of federal funds to the school district is based on these cards.

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