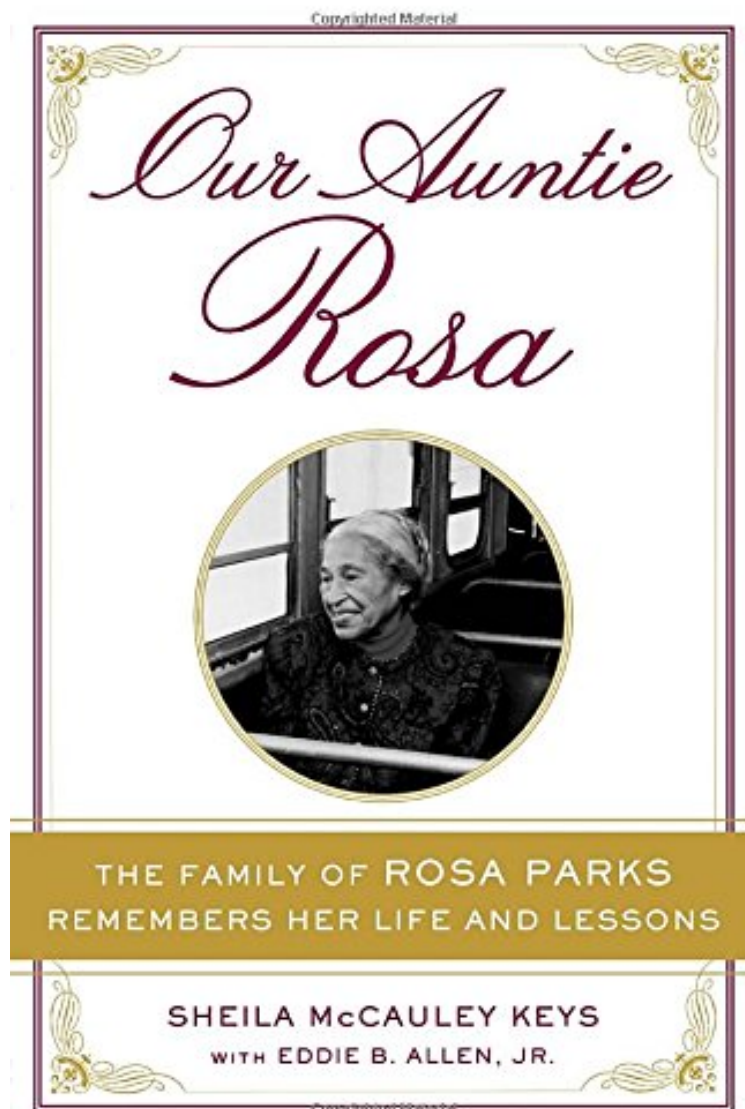


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# Our Auntie Rosa: The Family of Rosa Parks Remembers Her Life and Lessons

*Sheila McCauley Keys, Eddie B. Allen Jr.*  
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**Sheila McCauley Keys, Eddie B. Allen Jr. : Our Auntie Rosa: The Family of Rosa Parks Remembers Her Life and Lessons** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Our Auntie Rosa: The Family of Rosa Parks Remembers Her Life and Lessons:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Life lessons from a Civil Rights Icon By Joi C. Hatch A great insight

into the iconic figure's life from family members that were impacted in the best possible way, through loving and sharing her quiet courage and dignity. An enjoyable read from beginning to end. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Good Read By Amy Reader Very interesting look at the life of Rosa Parks from her family. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Sandra Whitehead I haven't finished reading it yet but I am enjoying reading about such a brave woman.

Our Auntie Rosa is the most intimate portrait yet of the great American hero—"the lady who refused to sit in the back of the bus." The family of Rosa Parks share their remembrances of the woman who was not only the mother of the civil rights movement, but a nurturing mother figure to them as well. Her brave act on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, was just one moment in a life lived with great humility and decency. After the deaths of Rosa Parks's husband and brother, her nieces and nephews became her only family and the closest that she would ever experience to having biological sons and daughters. In this book, they share with readers what she shared with them about her experiences growing up in a racist South, her deep dedication to truth and justice, and the personal values she held closest to her heart.

"Rosa Parks inspired millions of Americans in 1955, including a nine-year-old boy in Arkansas learning about her story. Through the pages of *Our Auntie Rosa*, her family captures the quiet dignity—and commanding conviction—of one of the civil rights movement's bravest champions." —President Bill Clinton "For years Mrs. Rosa Parks's family graciously shared her with the world. Yet the civil rights icon revered as the 'Mother of the Movement' was also their beloved 'Auntie Rosa,' and with *Our Auntie Rosa* they are now just as generously sharing their personal memories and photographs to give us all a chance to better know the extraordinary real woman and family whose courage changed history." —Marian Wright Edelman, president, Children's Defense Fund "What a joy to discover that Rosa Parks, an international figure and 'Mother of The Movement,' was as dignified and heroic a private woman as she was a civil rights icon. This beautiful tribute, lovingly written by family members, completes the picture of a 20th century inspiration. As compelling as what she sat down for on a bus is what she stood for at home." —Mitch Albom, author of *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *The First Phone Call from Heaven* "Our Auntie Rosa gives us a glimpse into the private life of an extraordinary woman who played her part in American history with courage, intelligence, and grace. We are inspired by her life and forever grateful to her family for sharing her with us all." —Pearl Cleage, author of *Things I Should Have Told My Daughter* "Rosa Parks's bus-sitting was a stand-up call for millions and I was one of them. Yet there was a personal and public price to pay for her undaunted commitment to social justice and her people. Our Auntie Rosa is a powerful new telling and an insightful love note from her 'daughters and sons' whom she did not birth biologically, but through cultural and familial bonds they are linked nonetheless. This is a critical and contemplative immersion into their stories of their aunt and is a must-read if we are to accurately understand one of our nation's most revered women and mother of the civil rights movement." —Haki R. Madhubuti, author of *YellowBlack* "Our Auntie Rosa is an enjoyable read about an icon shared through stories of family life, legacy, and living that convey Rosa Parks's unmatched voice and influence on the modern-day civil rights movement." —Joyce Beatty, U.S. congresswoman for Ohio's 3rd Congressional District About the Author Sheila McCauley Keys is the seventh niece of civil rights heroine Rosa Parks. In 2013, Keys was featured in PBS's live television broadcast of the National Day of Courage, celebrating what would have been Mrs. Parks's hundredth birthday. That same year, Keys joined President Obama and legislators in unveiling a statue of Rosa Parks in the Capitol Rotunda. Keys has become an active voice in efforts to preserve her aunt's legacy. Eddie B. Allen Jr. is the author of *Low Road: The Life and Legacy of Donald Goines* and is an award-winning reporter and freelance journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times* and the *Detroit Free Press*, on BET.com, and with Reuters and the Associated Press. A Rosa Parks Scholarship recipient at age seventeen, he later covered Parks's nationally televised funeral, as well as various aspects of the freedom struggle that carries her footprint. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Our Auntie Rosa THE WOMAN WE KNEW Coming from such a simple background in rural Tuskegee, Alabama, Rosa Louise McCauley probably never imagined she would one day be known around the world. Born to our grandparents James and Leona McCauley on February 4, 1913, Auntie Rosa was introduced to struggles and poverty long before she would be introduced to foreign dignitaries. The separation of our grandparents when she was still just a girl added to her responsibilities at home, including helping look after her younger brother, our father, Sylvester. It would be decades later before she earned even more responsibility, including her most honorific title, "Mother of the Movement," when she defied legal segregation on a Southern bus line in 1955. After largely disappearing from the public once she moved North, our aunt became more widely acknowledged as a hero. She went on to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom; a spot on *TIME* magazine's "100 Most Influential People of the 20th Century" list; forty-three honorary doctorate degrees; and streets, buildings, and monuments named in her tribute. Throughout all this, she still found her way to our weddings, birthday parties, and other family events. She was there encouraging and helping us throughout our lives. To the world, she was Rosa Parks, but to us, she was, simply and wonderfully, Auntie Rosa. This book is about the woman we knew.—Deborah Ann Ross Rosalind Elaine Bridgeforth and son, Alan

Bridgeforth Asheber Macharia; wife, Najma Wilson; and daughter, Zakiya Watts Rhea McCauley and daughter, Edria Fussello Robert McCauley Susan McCauley; sons Sean and Broderick; and daughter, Whitney Shirley McCauley and son, Paul Jenkins Sheila McCauley Keys and sons Terrence Jamal Keys and Thomas McCauley Keys Richard McCauley Lonnie McCauley, son of Sylvester McCauley Jr. (deceased) Marc McCauley, son of Mary McCauley February 2015 Painting by Asheber Macharia In a peculiar way, I felt that I knew her well. We spoke only twice, and then I'd imagine no more than twenty or thirty words between us from both events combined: the first when she awarded me a scholarship bearing her name and the second after a home invasion by a man who actually called that name aloud, asking, "Aren't you Rosa Parks?" before he hit her in the face and robbed her. Maybe it was just that same comfort I've often experienced with women who fell into my grandmother's peer group. I've noticed this, increasingly, since "Mama Harriet," Harriet Crain—born, like Rosa McCauley, in Alabama, just months earlier—died in 1996. Yet the truth was, despite the fact that a newspaper colleague of mine was her private photographer, and despite my years as a Wayne State University "Rosa Parks Scholar" in her adopted hometown of Detroit, I knew Mrs. Parks no more on the personal level than any of her distant admirers. I felt privileged, of course, to shake her hand at the scholarship ceremony and pose with her for a quick photo. A few years later, I found myself telephoning her assistant from my desk at the Ohio newspaper where I worked when I needed a quote or two for my story about the heinous attack Joseph Skipper committed against the then-eighty-one-year-old "Mother Parks," as she was known to neighbors. After promising that I'd be brief, since she was tired and recovering from the ordeal, I was connected with Mrs. Parks, who told me she was okay. "Things have worked out well," I remember her saying in our two-minute interview. During our last encounter, she spoke no words at all. On that day in 2005, I'd been asked to cover her funeral for the AOL Black Voices website. I heard President Bill Clinton tell the story of how, as liberal white kids in Arkansas, he and his friends decided they didn't have to ride in the front of the bus upon learning that Mrs. Parks had refused to stand and ride in the back. I watched as she was saluted in a manner befitting heads of state by a string of high-profile dignitaries, including Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and then-senator Barack Obama. It was a most moving day, which concluded as onlookers lined the streets awaiting her funeral procession to the burial ground. Calls of "We love you, Rosa!" were absent of the tone of disrespect most people who were raised like I was often associate with addressing elders by first name. What it really spoke to was the familiar kinship these folks, who probably knew her even less than I did, had developed with our city's best-known freedom fighter. So it was with a renewed excitement that I first met Mrs. Parks' niece Sheila Keys in August 2012. As she entered the office of her family's lawyer, Lawrence Pepper, I immediately spotted a resemblance to her aunt in her eyes and nose, although she was much taller and more statuesque. During the course of our meeting, I also caught a glimpse of what Sheila and her siblings have decided to share with the world in *Our Auntie Rosa*—the familiar smile often found stretched across Mrs. Parks' slender face in photo after photo, but in these shots her smile was accompanied by the smiles of her loved ones. Woven between these intimate images were words and language only family members could construct about a favorite relative. I hadn't truly known Mrs. Parks in life, but I would get to know her now. In making your own acquaintance with the loving mother figure, who never shrank behind her frontline-warrior legend status, don't be surprised to read stories that remind you of your own cherished elders and ancestors. Sylvester McCauley's children serve as guides on a nostalgic, but enlightening, tour through the many years when Mrs. Parks was an influential presence in their lives, particularly after their mother died in 1981. Within these pages, Mrs. Parks' personal humanity emerges, drawing a stark contrast to the bespectacled, solemn-faced outlaw depicted in her infamous 1955 Montgomery County Jail booking photo. I felt privileged, as I hope you will, to learn more about the lady whose soft facial features flicker onto our TVs during Black History Month and on Dr. King's holiday. The bonds described here have survived decades, withstanding physical separation and geographic distance. This rare collection of the combined memories and reflections of Mrs. Parks' closest living kin allows us to join the family in celebrating her spirit 100 years after her birth, and beyond.—EDDIE B. ALLEN, JR. January 2014 Detroit Family Don't make a fuss about me. I'm just your auntie.—ROSA PARKS, civil rights activist The Interview Among her nephews and nieces, she never talked much about That Day. In many ways, she was like a firefighter who rushes out of a blazing structure with a limp body in his arms, just as the roof collapses, and then says, "I was only doing my job." Neither, for some reason, did her surrogate children tend to broach the subject, directly, even as they read about it in history class. She once told *Ebony* magazine that she refused to give up her seat because she was "tired" and her "feet hurt." In other interviews, Mrs. Parks said she was tired all right; tired of being pushed around. Yet if private chats about the civil rights movement showed signs of turning toward her, or if she thought a topic might lead one of her young relatives to ask what occurred on the Cleveland Avenue bus line, she would just flash that disarming smile and reply, "That's not important right now." Then, decades later, she found herself at home with only Shirley, the niece who, as a little girl, became so masterful with a comb that she never failed in putting her aunt to sleep during their special grooming ritual. A full-grown Shirley finally asked the question that got the Mother of the Movement to reveal a version of that historic December 1, 1955, day not quite like any that has been documented since. We were taught a bit about the civil rights movement in school, but a lot of it was glossed over. My teachers in the late 1960s actually told us the movement only made things worse for the people who participated. A lot of these battles were still taking place when I was growing

up, and uprisings were happening in northern cities, too. Maybe the teachers wanted to keep us from becoming rebellious, because I was taught that all Rosa Parks did was sit down on the bus, like it was a simplistic gesture with no connection to change. I would go to class never identifying myself as her sixth niece, but these “lessons” always bothered me, because Auntie Rosa didn’t seem like the kind of person who committed simpleminded acts. Over twenty years later, sometime in the early 1990s, I talked with her about that day. I said, “Auntie Rosa, I’ve done a little bit of reading about our history: People were sprayed with fire hoses. People were beaten. People were taken out into the woods and never found again. What really happened with you?” After she’d been quiet about it for so long, I was about to hear firsthand the story that forever changed her life. She explained that, under the Jim Crow laws, white and “colored” people were segregated in every aspect of life. In bus segregation, when both the “white” section and “colored” section were filled, a black person had to stand and give up his or her seat to the next white passenger who boarded. Auntie Rosa had had run-ins before with the man who drove her bus that day. She had caught his eye from doing her work with the NAACP, possibly in the neighborhood, or mingling with fellow activists when she was helping register black people to vote, and the driver resented her for that. If you were “colored,” you had to pay your fare at the front of the bus, get back off, and enter through the rear door to get to your seat—or stand if the bus was full. Sometimes the driver would let Auntie Rosa pay her fare and wait for her to get off; then he would leave before she could get on again. She was able to make it onto the bus this day, obviously. “I sat in the first seat for colored people,” Auntie Rosa told me, “and a white man got on the bus. Mind you, there were very few white people, so their section wasn’t full, but he sat in the last seat for whites.” I know a lot of stories that have been written tell you the bus was crowded that day, but that wasn’t the reason Auntie Rosa was told to get up. According to the Jim Crow laws, if there weren’t many people on the bus, there should be some separation between the end of the “white” rows and the beginning of the “colored” rows so they weren’t directly next to each other. The man who sat in the last “white” row that day did it so Auntie Rosa and the other black passengers would be forced to move back. The white man “laughed when the bus driver told all the black people to get up, which they did, except for me,” Auntie Rosa said. “Weren’t you afraid of being hurt?” I asked. “No, even though a woman was dragged off the bus and beaten and taken to jail a few days earlier. When the policemen came, they escorted me off the bus. They were very nice to me. They even gave me water at the jail.” Nice? Now, that wasn’t a word I expected to hear! I was reminded of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the Book of Daniel, who were thrown into the fiery furnace and came out unharmed. God put a hedge around Auntie Rosa that day, and she came out of her furnace, not only free of burns, but with a drink to cool off! “Why didn’t you set the facts straight?” I asked her. Auntie Rosa explained that she had tried, but the media didn’t report it all correctly. The part about her arrest was sensationalized into a story that grew wings and took off. But she was never the type of person to run toward a camera. We talked at length that day and, as I was leaving, I gave her a portrait I had painted of her. She was grateful. Before we parted, I asked Auntie Rosa one final question: “What do you think is your legacy, and what do you want for the future?” Auntie Rosa described a world in which people acted without hesitating whenever and wherever they identified a true need. The lady who became known for sitting down told me she wanted us to stand up! From then on, I looked at Auntie Rosa in a different light. She never had talked much, but when she did, her words were filled with wisdom. She felt like she was part of the solution. Not the solution, but part of the solution. When the goal was ending legal discrimination, she made a major contribution to that. She made a contribution of a different kind to our family. We would forever know that we shared the same blood as a woman of great pride, courage, and character.—SHIRLEY

Our Family’s Affair

In 1957, Auntie Rosa, Uncle Parks, and our grandmother arrived at our home on Deacon Street in Detroit. When we saw our father, aunt, and grandmother together, we couldn’t help but notice how much they resembled one another. They smiled, hugged, and cried upon their initial greeting. We didn’t find out until years later why this particular day was so emotional: our grandmother and Auntie Rosa hadn’t seen our father in years, since after he’d served in World War II. After reaching Michigan, he vowed never to return to the South because of the ongoing mistreatment of people of color, and he never did. Our parents met at a restaurant in South Carolina when Father—we didn’t call him “Daddy” or “Dad”—was home on leave from the military. They were married soon after. Once Father was honorably discharged, he went back to Alabama for a short time, and soon they began a family. In search of better lives for all of us, they made the trek north to find work and decided to leave the oldest children, Mary and Sylvester Jr., with our grandmother; Auntie Rosa; and her husband, Uncle Parks, who could take care of them until our parents found a new home. After Father secured a job at Chrysler in Detroit, our mother returned to Alabama to retrieve her children, but by this time, a bond had formed between Auntie Rosa and the two oldest children. Auntie Rosa and Uncle Parks provided for Sylvester Jr. and Mary from the time they were infants until their toddler years, so it was tough, at first, for the adults and children to separate. Fortunately, all this was resolved by the time everyone met again on Deacon Street. Father had urged Auntie Rosa, Uncle Parks, and Grandma to come north for quite some time. Looking back, and knowing how Auntie Rosa felt about handling her own responsibilities, they probably hesitated to leave Alabama because they valued their independence, and our parents were the closest family they had in Michigan. She and Uncle Parks were in no position to immediately uproot and settle into a new house of their own. Plus, they knew space was limited and there were now many more mouths to feed at the McCauley residence; in Montgomery, it was just them and Grandma. But back then, it was a lot

more common for multiple families to save money and share the workload under one roof like they decided to do. It was a great reunion, with the understanding that we would have five adults and nine children crammed into a three-bedroom, one-bathroom house. While filled to capacity, it still provided shelter for us and a safe haven for our dear relatives. "There's always room for family," is what Father said. Auntie Rosa's husband, Raymond, who she called "Parks," was a barber. He would get up in the morning and walk down the street to the shop where he rented a chair. It had an old-fashioned barber's pole in front, with red and white stripes. Uncle Parks was pleasant and playful in nature. He told us jokes, and whatever he did for one of us, he did for all of us; he didn't show favoritism among the children. Uncle Parks was the brother our father never had.