

Voices of Experience: Ben A. Jobe Weaves 'Common Thread'



By Deborah Wilbrink

"I'm not made to sit around," Ben Jobe declares. The active senior is teaching nine classes of speech and music appreciation this semester at Tennessee State University, Volunteer State Community College and Motlow State Community College. "I like the interaction in the classroom, seeing students grow and learn. At some point, a transformation takes place that's very exciting."

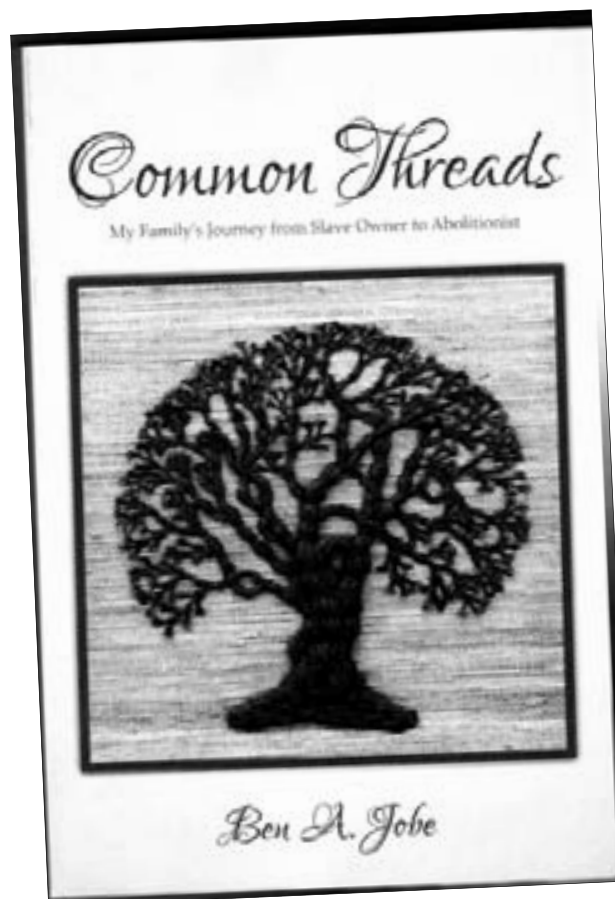
Transformation travels from student to teacher, too. From a student speech, Jobe learned about human trafficking, the selling of people against their will. Soon he used the topic to inspire activism and awareness. He became a volunteer "abolitionist" for the nonprofit End Slavery Tennessee. Statistics show that there are multiple cases of girls, and sometimes boys, being sold in our area. Their average age is 13, and their lives are not their own.

Jobe's 2013 book, "Common Threads: My Family's Journey from Slave Owner to Abolitionist," is an entertaining family history. He opens the family story during the Civil War, when ancestor Elihu Jobe owned slaves Scott and Frank Jobe. Another setting is Paris, Tenn., home to the Jobes and their retail store, founded in 1900. Jobe learned about racism and desegregation there, sharing many insightful memories, such as beloved teacher Ruby Krider orchestrating the annual Old Tyne Minstrel Show. And when the family visited the nation's capital for vacation, Jobe's father scheduled a tour of a mosque, passing the value of tolerance to his son. Finally, Jobe himself roamed the world and embraced diversity. Jobe is a former journalist, copywriter, Baptist book editor and composer. His favorite musicians are Beethoven and The Beatles.

At times Ben A. Jobe was mistaken for famous basketball coach Ben Jobe from Nashville. Coach Jobe is the subject of the film "Black Magic" and wrote his own memoir, "Staying Ahead of the Posse." The men met and found that Coach's ancestor was



The Two Ben Jobes



Common Threads book cover

Frank Jobe, emancipated slave of Professor's great-great grandfather. Coach shared that the practice of taking a former owner's name was meant as an honor and would not be done if there was not liking and respect. The two Ben Jobes of today are fast friends.

Making a new friend is one of the joys of reading memoir. I always feel that I know the person well when I am finished reading. Share an intimate glimpse of a fascinating family with "Common Threads" and make some new friends! "Common Threads" can be found at bookstores and Amazon. Contact End Slavery Tennessee at 615-806-6899 or visit www.endslaverytn.org.

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