Brothers
In the Cause
Of Freedom

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN
An Autobiography
By Ralph David Abernathy
Harper & Row 638 pp. $25

By Juan Williams

RALPH ABERNATHY spent the most important years of his life as Martin Luther King Jr.'s closest confidant, his best friend, his second-in-command in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and even, when necessary, his stand-in. Now when Abernathy might finally have center stage to himself, there is great irony in finding that Abernathy's own life story is the closest that researchers and students will ever get to a full autobiography of King, much closer than the brief account of his own career that King himself wrote.

Unfortunately, this valuable personal portrait of King may be missed in the uproar surrounding Abernathy's revelations about the night of April 3, 1968, the night before King's assassination. Abernathy's account suggests that King separately slept with two women that night—neither his wife—and he writes that he witnessed King striking another with whom he had had an ongoing sexual affair. They fought because the woman was angry at finding King's bed empty when she came to have sex with him at 3 a.m.

That report comes in the middle of a book that offers a very human, realistic look at Abernathy and King. All childish dedication of King is dismissed here by his best and closest friend and replaced by the reality of King's mortal struggle to deal with the pressures of competitors, the media spotlight and the civil rights struggle. The book deserves attention for its loving depictions of the true friendship between Abernathy and King, his account of major moments in the civil rights movement and the personal crises in King's life as he struggled to become a great American leader.

Even before he met, there were close parallels between the lives of Abernathy and King. Like King, Abernathy came from a strong, basically middle-class family that enjoyed a certain status in its community despite the realities of Southern segregation. Both families lived well. Abernathy in rural Alabama, King in Atlanta. And, like King, Abernathy had almost no brushes with racist whites as a child. When he did happen into a drunken white man in a grocery store who called him a "nigger" and threatened to hit him if he didn't finish the drunk's Nellie soda, the white storeowner defended young Abernathy. "Don't you touch that boy," he cried. Then he added, "That's the son of W.L. Abernathy."

Abernathy's account of his childhood, his family and even his time in the segregated Army is a charming memoir. There are beautiful anecdotal touches: Abernathy and his 11 siblings nervously waiting for their favorite treat—the sugary drops of their parents' evening cups of coffee. In this loving family, young David came to realize that "the preacher, after all, was the finest and most important person around, someone who was accorded respect wherever he went."

Once he left the Army and Alabama State University—where he honed his leadership skills as a sergeant and as president of the student council—Abernathy began to follow the preacher's path. He spoke at various churches in Alabama, and in the surprisingly young age of 24, was selected as pastor of the prestigious First Baptist Church in Montgomery. Abernathy's account of his life as a successful young black Southern preacher is a sociological.

---

VLADIMIR NABOKOV — 3
JOSEPHINE BAKER — 6
ANDY WARHOL — 7
MYSTERIES — 10
Abernathy: A Personal Account of the Civil Rights Movement

By David Abernathy
 Reviewed by Stephen Birmingham

Abernathy has a new book, an elegant, sweet story of youth, love, and political development. He shares his memoirs with a clear reminder of the struggle of the civil rights movement. His account is a personal account of the Montgomery bus boycott and King's leadership in the movement. Abernathy shares his experiences as a young man growing up in the deep South and his journey to become a civil rights activist.

The book is a personal account—one of Abernathy's many, limited life experiences. It focuses on Abernathy and King, but also includes other players, even those who worked closely with them. Abernathy's book is different from previous accounts, as it does not make Abernathy a victim or a hero. Instead, it makes Abernathy a real person, with his own limitations and flaws.

Abernathy's book is a special place among civil rights histories. Only Abernathy can write about King's leadership in the civil rights movement. He shares his thoughts and experiences with a sense of honesty and humility.

The book is not about Abernathy himself, but about King and Abernathy's relationship. Abernathy and King were close friends, but their leadership styles were different. Abernathy's book is a reminder of the importance of having a clear vision for the movement.

Although the book is not about Abernathy, it is a personal account of the civil rights movement. Abernathy's book is a unique account of the movement, and it is a reminder of the importance of having a clear vision for the movement.