

The Road To Freedom

By

Emily Vanchella

Atlanta, Georgia

Teacher: Christine Vanchella

It was a quiet February night in Atlanta. In her family's house on the outskirts of town, fifteen-year-old Sophie Green was bustling around her room, packing for a sleepover at her best friend Keyara's house.

Sophie and Keyara Harrison had been friends for as long as both of them could remember, and they were alike in many ways. Both were fifteen, had younger sisters who were twelve, and older brothers who were away fighting in Vietnam. They were animal freaks and music lovers who played guitar. And, both had fallen in love with the Beatles in early 1964!

But, as all friends do, they had some differences. Sophie was quiet and tended to daydream, while Keyara was very down-to-earth and not shy at all. Sophie's room was neat as a pin; Keyara's was a disaster area. But the biggest and most obvious difference between them was that Keyara was black and Sophie was white. In 1965, at the height of the civil rights movement, friendship between a black girl and a white girl was something one didn't see too often. It could also be dangerous, especially if one was rebellious like Sophie and ventured into "blacks only" sections.

Sophie's hardheaded loyalty to Keyara caused a lot of tension in her family. Many people on both sides of her family had segregationist leanings. It was even rumored that her uncle was a part of the dreaded Ku Klux Klan. Her father, who was a policeman, didn't make his opinion clear. However, Sophie felt that him being a Jim Crow lover, as she called them, was likely given his background.

Her mother, on the other hand, supported the civil rights cause and was not afraid of showing it. Sophie, her brother Eric, and her sister Pattie were also desegregationist. They attended speeches and rallies led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., participated in sit-ins with Keyara's family, and refused to follow the "whites only" regulations. This sometimes got them into trouble with the local police.

Sophie reflected on all this as she packed. She reached under her bed and dragged out a milk crate full of Beatles vinyl. Over the past year, she had bought every recording that had been released in America. Yesterday, February 25th, had been Sophie's birthday, and the best present of the year was a Beatles album and their newest single, *Eight Days A Week*, which had hit the stores ten days earlier. She carefully pulled out the albums and put them in a small bag.

Finished packing, Sophie hauled her things downstairs to the kitchen. Her mother took one look at the bulging bag of albums and said, "Goin' to Keyara's again?"

"Yep."

"Say hi to Jazmyne for me!" Pattie interrupted.

"You bet I will!" Sophie replied. Jazmyne was Keyara's younger sister, and she and Pattie were also good friends.

Mrs. Green kissed Sophie on the cheek. "You two gals have a grand time. See you tomorrow."

“Thanks, Mama,” Sophie said, heading out the back door.

It was a relatively warm night for February, but then again, it was always warm here in the South. She whistled loudly and yelled, “John! Paul! George! Ringo! C’mon out, boys!”

After a moment of silence, four young beagles bounded out of the darkness toward Sophie. They all crashed into her, knocking Sophie over, covering her face with wet, sloppy kisses.

“Stop it,” Sophie shouted, laughing, “get off, all of you!”

The four dogs rolled off, sitting with tongues hanging out and tails thumping on the porch. She contemplated her dogs for a moment. John had one blue eye and one brown eye and no left hind leg (his former owner had chopped it off with a shovel). Paul had light brown eyes, very long legs, and constantly kept on John’s left side in case he fell over. Ringo, the smallest of the four, had large sky-blue eyes, a consistently easygoing nature, and a skinny dash of dark brown fur on his left ear that resembled a drumstick. George, whom Sophie considered the handsomest of her dogs, was quiet and friendly, a fast runner, and had beautiful velvety brown eyes. You only had to look at that dog’s eyes to fall completely in love with him, which was what had happened to Sophie when she adopted the four beagles about a year ago.

“C’mon, we’re goin’ to Keyara’s,” she told them, clipping on their leashes. Sophie went around the side of the house, grabbed her bike, and tied the leashes to the handlebar. The five of them went out onto the road and headed for the lively, mostly-black neighborhood near downtown Atlanta, a 20-minute ride from Sophie’s house.

Soon, they reached Keyara’s house, a modest one-story brick building with laundry flapping on a clothesline in the yard. Sophie leapt off the bike, untied the dogs, ran up to the door, and knocked.

“Hey, Sophie,” Keyara said as she opened the door.

“What’s shakin’, Kiki?” Sophie teased.

Keyara’s grin immediately left her face. “That ain’t funny. You *know* I hate bein’ called that,” she said, scowling, as the nickname had come from her baby sister’s inability to pronounce Keyara’s name.

“All right, I won’t call you that,” Sophie replied, “for now!”

“C’mon in,” Keyara said. Sophie stepped inside, leaving her bike on the porch and her dogs at her heels. The girls went down the hall to Keyara’s room. It was exactly as Sophie had last seen it: magazines and clothes covered the floor, the bed was unmade, and she guessed that if she peeked under the dresser, she would see the same old dust bunnies the size of ping-pong balls there. Sophie set her bags down on Keyara’s bed and sat down.

Keyara reached up on top of her dresser and pulled down a fresh bouquet of blue chrysanthemums. “Happy birthday!” she said as she gave them to Sophie. “Sorry they’re late.”

“Oh, that’s okay. They’re really awesome!”

“Do you know what mums stand for?”

“No. What?”

“You’re a wonderful friend.” Keyara smiled and gave Sophie a hug.

“Guess what?” Sophie said. “I got the Beatles’ new album and single for my birthday!”

Keyara’s eyes brightened. “Well, let’s see them, then!”

Sophie dug into her record bag and pulled out the album – *Beatles ’65* – first. Keyara took it from her and put it on. As the first notes of *No Reply* sounded, Keyara murmured, “Oh, wow. They’re so great.” She was staring longingly at the album jacket.

“Yeah,” Sophie agreed. She followed her friend’s gaze and found it set on Paul McCartney. Sophie giggled, knowing that Keyara was particularly fond of Paul. “Did you write to them yet?” she asked.

“No. I chickened out,” Keyara said quietly. “I ‘spect I ain’t allowed ‘cause I’m black. Anyways, they prob’ly wouldn’t care.”

“What? Of course they’d care!”

“I know they wouldn’t wanna have anythin’ to do with me. What would four rich and famous white men want with a poor black girl like me?” She looked away from the jacket, frowning bitterly.

There was an awkward silence. Both girls gazed at the record spinning on the turntable for a minute, and then Sophie decided to steer the conversation away from the Beatles. “Latest word in the papers is that LBJ is thinkin’ ‘bout passin’ the votin’ bill for blacks.”

Keyara’s black mood evaporated almost as quickly as it had come. “Yeah, ain’t that great?” she said. “Mama and Daddy are gonna get the vote!” The two girls spent the rest of the evening discussing the bill, the war in Vietnam, and the guitar, with Sophie’s Beatles albums playing in the background.

When Sophie came home the next day, she found her parents waiting for her at the kitchen table. “Unpack your things, get your sister, and come back downstairs,” her father said. “We gotta talk to you.”

“Uh-oh,” Sophie thought as she went upstairs. “That can’t mean anything good.”

She dumped her stuff on her bed and crossed the hall to Pattie’s room. She knocked on the closed door.

“What’s the password?” came a voice from inside.

“C’mon, let me in.”

“No. Not until you say the password.”

“Okay, okay. ‘Ringo’s the cute one,’” she mumbled.

“I can’t hear you!” her sister sang annoyingly.

“ ‘Ringo’s the cute one!’ Ya happy?”

“Now I am,” Pattie said, smiling sweetly as she peered out the door.

“Considerin’ I’m older’n you, I shouldn’t have to do that,” Sophie said.

“Forget it. It’s my room, after all.”

“Yeah, well, c’mon downstairs. Daddy wants to talk to us.”

“In all this world, Sophie, there is nothin’ more frightenin’ than the words, ‘Daddy wants to talk to us,’” she said wisely as they climbed downstairs. “That mostly means we’re gonna get in trouble.”

Sophie opened her mouth to reply, but by now they had reached the kitchen. The two sisters sat down next to each other at the table. Their father looked unusually grim.

“Sophie, Pattie, you can’t go visit Keyara anymore.”

“What?!” she said, shocked. “But she’s my best friend! Why?”

“ ‘Cause I’ve seen enough of you hangin’ out with the likes of them,” Mr. Green replied.

“Blacks and whites should be kept separate. It’s the way God intended things to be.”

With those words, Sophie’s worst fears about her father were confirmed. She felt a wave of anger. As far as she knew, God had not created the human race just so that they could be kept separate!

“That’s a load o’bull!” she yelled. “Keyara’s my friend, and I don’t care what you think ‘bout it, what the government thinks ‘bout it, what ANYONE thinks ‘bout it! Jim Crow laws can

keep Keyara from usin' the same bathrooms or doorways as me, but they ain't gonna stop her from bein' my friend!"

"Them's dangerous thoughts, young lady!" her father yelled back.

"I don't give a hoot 'bout them crazy Klan people," Sophie muttered. "Just 'cause my family are Jim Crow lovers don't mean I gotta be one too." She turned on her heel and stomped off to her room, slamming her door shut.

"I need something to kick!" Sophie thought. She kicked her desk, but that didn't help at all; all it left her with was a throbbing pain in her toe. She hopped on one foot to her bed and flopped down next to her dogs. Tears of anger and frustration welled up in her brown eyes. This was so unfair! She decided right there and then that she refused to stand for it. She would continue to visit Keyara, but how would she pull it off?

There was a soft rustling noise behind her, and she turned to see George nosing through her record bag. He slowly raised his head from the bag, the album *Meet The Beatles!* – Sophie's favorite album – gently clutched in his teeth. He bounced over to her and dropped it in her lap.

Despite her black mood, Sophie felt a grin spread across her face. "How'd you know Beatles music helps me think?"

George blinked at her.

"You know, sometimes I think you know more'n you let on," she told him as she put the album on the turntable. Sophie sat down at her desk, pulled a sheet of paper and a pen towards her, and started to write out her ideas. By the time the album was done, Sophie had gotten a pretty good list of strategies together:

1. Run away and live with Keyara.

2. Both of us run away, catch the nearest boat to England, meet the Beatles, Paul McCartney falls in love with Keyara and marries her. (Just kidding!)
3. Continue visiting in secret.
4. Convince Daddy to change his mind.

When she was finished, she tucked the list in her pocket, grabbed Pattie, and ran back downstairs. After telling their mom that they were going for a bike ride, the girls bolted back to Keyara's.

"Well, hi!" Keyara said as she answered the door. "Did you leave somethin' here?"

"No, no," Sophie said impatiently. "Listen Keyara, I gotta talk to you. It's important!"

"Are you OK, Soph?" Keyara asked as she let them in. "You both look awful pale."

"We're fine, now let's go to your room. Jaz can come too."

The foursome retired to Keyara's room. Sophie closed the door and said to her friends, "I got bad news. I just figured out that my daddy's a Jim Crow lover."

Keyara and Jazmyne groaned.

"Yeah. So, out of the blue, he decided we can't hang around with you anymore," Pattie chimed in.

"Because we're black," Jazmyne finished for her.

Sophie nodded. "But we ain't about to let Daddy keep us away from y'all."

"He can't choose our friends!" Pattie declared.

"But you'll get in awful trouble!" Keyara said. "Anyways, ain't your uncle in the..."

Here she leaned in close to Sophie and whispered fearfully, "...the Ku Klux Klan?"

“I dunno. But them white-hooded cross-burnin’ maniacs can’t scare us,” Sophie replied. Keyara and Jazmyne grinned. “Besides, I got a plan so we can keep seein’ you. I wrote down my ideas.” She showed them her list. After they read it, she asked, “Which do you like?”

“The one ‘bout you comin’ to live with us,” Jazmyne said. “Kiki?”

“Don’t call me that! I like the one ‘bout me marryin’ Paul.”

Everyone laughed, despite the dire circumstances. “I think we’ll keep visitin’ y’all in secret, so Daddy don’t notice. I think if we ran away to England, he’d know somethin’ was up.”

“Let’s hope he don’t notice what you’re doin’,” Jazmyne said nervously. “I don’t wanna see you and Pattie get turned over to the Klansmen.”

“Don’t be silly, he’d never hand his own daughters over to them!” Pattie said. “Now, we gotta go.”

“When’ll we see you again?” Keyara asked.

“Every Saturday night, we go for a long bike ride. We’ll come and see you then. We can only stay for ‘bout an hour,” Sophie said.

“Should we tell our parents?”

“NO,” Sophie and Pattie said in unison.

“Nobody can know that we ain’t supposed to come over here ‘cept us. Do you swear that you won’t say anythin’?”

“On our Beatles singles,” Jazmyne said solemnly, and the girls hugged.

“See you tomorrow night,” Sophie said. “And we’ll try and bring a couple albums with us.”

The next night after dinner, the girls got their bikes ready. Before leaving her room, Sophie grabbed two Beatles albums, zipping them up inside of her jacket. She was lucky that it was cold tonight.

Sophie met Pattie in the kitchen, her arms folded tightly over the albums. They exited the house as quickly as they could without arousing suspicion. They would have some interesting questions to answer if anyone spotted the album-shaped lump in Sophie's jacket. Once they were safely outside, they grabbed the bikes and set off casually. However, when they got far enough away from the house, they pedaled full-throttle to Keyara's.

When they reached Keyara's house, they were both extremely out of breath. "Hi," Pattie gasped when Keyara opened the door.

"Save your breath and get in here!" Keyara hissed. She grabbed both of their arms and pulled them inside.

"Did y'all get caught?" Jazmyne said as they went in the bedroom.

"Have y'all got albums?" Keyara asked.

"No and yes!" Sophie said triumphantly, unzipping her jacket and revealing the albums. She put *A Hard Day's Night* on, and the four of them got down to having fun. The hour visit seemed to fly by. The friends parted reluctantly at the front door. "Same time next week?" Sophie said as she gave Keyara a hug.

"We'll see y'all next Saturday."

The girls sailed through the next six months without getting caught. Of course, whenever a new Beatles recording came out, Sophie managed to get it to Keyara's, even though the warmer weather made smuggling harder.

On July 31st, Sophie and Pattie paid Keyara another visit. When they got to her house, they were met with an extremely happy family. Keyara's mother was crying, her father and Jazmyne were dancing around, and Keyara herself was grinning from ear to ear as she pulled Sophie and Pattie in the house. She gave both girls a tight bear hug, saying, "Did you see? It's wonderful! Oh, I can't believe it!"

"What?" Sophie said, bewildered.

Instead of answering, Keyara shoved the Saturday paper under Sophie's nose. There it was, on the front page: *PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO PASS VOTING RIGHTS ACT FOR BLACKS!*

"Wow!" Sophie said. "That's great! Now y'all can vote!"

"And that ain't all," Jazmyne said, flipping through the paper. "Look at that!" She pointed at an article, and Sophie and Pattie looked at it.

"*Beatles to set foot once more on American soil,*" Pattie read out loud. "Great! You think we can see them again?"

"I want to!" Keyara said enthusiastically. "Where're they stoppin' at?"

"Says here they're comin' to New York, Toronto, Houston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, San Diego, L.A., San Francisco, and Atlanta!" Pattie squealed.

"Wait. Did you say they're comin' here?" Jazmyne gasped.

"Where?" Keyara asked.

"And when?" Sophie added.

"Hey, y'all slow down there!" Pattie said, laughing. "They'll be playin' at that new ballpark on Capitol Avenue on the 18th at eight."

"That ain't too far," Sophie said. "We can ride bikes! How much do tickets cost?"

“It don’t say.”

“Dang it!” Keyara and Jazmyne said in unison.

The rest of the visit was spent discussing the concert, the new possibilities for blacks now that they could vote, and playing Keyara’s singles in celebration. On the bike ride home, Pattie said to Sophie, “You know the ninth’s Keyara’s birthday, right?”

“Of course I know,” Sophie replied, “and I got the perfect idea for a present. C’mon, let’s get to that ball stadium ‘fore it closes for the night.”

Pattie smiled as they turned onto Capitol Avenue. “I see where you’re goin’ with this,” she said. “You’re gonna buy her a ticket, ain’t you?”

“Yep, and one for the rest of us too. I got twenty bucks just itchin’ to be spent. Let’s hope it’s enough!”

The sisters got there just before the booth closed, and Sophie bought four tickets.

“You girls goin’ with your folks?” the man at the booth asked as he handed Sophie the tickets.

“Are you kiddin’?” she said. “My folks ain’t never liked the Beatles, and they ain’t gonna start too soon. We’re goin’ with our friends. One of them has a birthday, so this is her present.” She took the tickets, thanked the man, and the sisters headed home.

When the ninth rolled around, the Green sisters paid the Harrisons a visit. “Happy sixteenth!” Sophie said when Keyara answered the door. She gave her friend a card.

“Aw, you shouldn’t have done that,” Keyara said. The girls sat down together on the couch in the living room.

“Open the card!” Pattie said. When Keyara did, two little slips of paper fell on the floor. Jazmyne picked them up and looked at them. “Oh my gosh. Kiki...”

“How many times I gotta say it? Don’t call me that! Now what?”

“They’re tickets,” Jazmyne said weakly.

“Let me see.” When it registered in Keyara’s brain what the tickets were for, she screamed. “Oh my gosh!!”

Sophie grinned. “You’d better believe it,” she said. “The other one’s for Jaz. We’re goin’ to see the Beatles. Just the four of us.”

“Sophie Green, you’re the best friend ever!” Keyara threw her arms around Sophie. When the hug ended, she said, “C’mon! Let’s go listen to some music!”

“Pattie and me ain’t got time,” Sophie replied apologetically. “We gotta get home, or our folks’ll worry. See you next time!” She and her sister ran out the front door, hopped on the bikes, and pedaled towards home.

Two more months passed. The four girls went to the Beatles concert and continued spending time at Keyara’s. There was the release of the album *Help!* and the single *Yesterday*. Pattie turned thirteen on September 4th, and Jazmyne followed on the 26th.

Then, one day in mid-October, the front page of the paper changed Sophie’s life. It said that a sixteen-year-old black boy had been mauled by a police dog in a riot downtown, and not by just any police dog.

Sophie’s own father had set the dog on the kid.

When she saw the front page, rage such as Sophie had never known bubbled up inside her. She raced upstairs and showed it to her sister, who looked just as sick as Sophie felt. “I’ve had enough of this!” she raged. “I ain’t gonna put up with our Jim Crow-lovin’ family no more! I’m runnin’ away!”

“What?!” Pattie said, following Sophie into her room. “If you’re runnin’ away, I’m goin’ with you! I’m sick of this too!”

“No way. You’re too young!”

Pattie drew herself up to her full height and declared, “I once fought off a pack of bullies when I was eight. They were all a good two feet taller than me, and I did it all by myself. You can’t tell me I’m too young to leave home with you!”

Sophie sighed. Why did her sister always have to complicate things? “All right,” she said reluctantly. “You can come too. Get your things together, and be quick about it.”

When Pattie left the room, Sophie jammed some clothes, her toothbrush, some toothpaste, and her hairbrush into the largest bag she owned. Then she seized two favorite books and threw them in the bag. She pulled her Beatles poster and a few photographs off the wall, rolled up the poster, and shoved them in the bag with the books. Last, but not least, she pulled out her records from under the bed. By some miracle, all of the vinyl fit in the bag. Sophie slung her pack over her shoulder, said a last goodbye to her room, and went to get Pattie.

The Green sisters went downstairs, where their parents were waiting for them.

“Why you two got bags?” their mother asked.

Sophie and Pattie looked at each other, and both confessed what they had been doing.

“But we ain’t ashamed of it,” Pattie said when they finished.

“What we are ashamed of,” Sophie took over, “is Daddy settin’ his dog on that boy.”

“I had to,” their father replied calmly. “Otherwise I would’ve lost my job.”

“Oh, so your job’s worth more than someone’s life?” Pattie snarled.

Their father didn’t say anything, but Sophie knew what he was thinking.

“We’ve had enough,” Sophie said bravely. “We’re runnin’ away, and nothin’ you say or do is gonna change our minds!”

To the girls’ surprise, their mother got up and went to join them. “I’m glad to hear you say that, ‘cause I’ve had enough too. Your daddy and me decided we’d be better off alone, so I’m comin’ with you,” she told them. “My things are all packed. Let’s go.”

Once Sophie got the dogs ready and everyone got on the road in their mother’s car, Pattie asked the one thing that no one had thought of, “Where’re we stayin’ at?”

“I dunno,” Sophie admitted. “Maybe Keyara’s folks’ll take us in. Let’s go see. We got nothin’ to lose!”

Upon their arrival, an extremely surprised Jazmyne opened the door, “What you carryin’ all them bags for?”

Sophie sat down on the couch with her dogs in her lap. Everyone joined her, and Sophie took a deep breath and began their story. With help from the others, she gave the details to Keyara’s parents.

When she finished, Keyara’s parents looked as if they were thinking hard. “That’s quite a story,” her father said after a long silence. “Y’all are lucky, and I’ll tell you why. You didn’t get caught, and y’all are true to your beliefs and each other. You don’t see that kind of thing very often anymore.”

“I don’t see why we can’t take y’all in,” Mrs. Harrison added. “We got room in our place.” She scratched John behind his ears, adding, “Room enough for the dogs too.”

“Pattie and I can do jobs after school to bring in extra money. I reckon we’ll need it with three more people and four dogs to feed,” Sophie said. “Maybe we can work in the record store? I’d really love that. They say that the owners give free ones to volunteers!” Everyone laughed.

“Then I ‘spose we got ourselves a deal,” Mr. Harrison said, smiling at the Greens.

Thus, it came to pass. The Green sisters worked at the record store. They helped bring in and organize new arrivals, cleaned up as needed, and sometimes took turns working at the cash register. Their reward, other than payment, was to take home whatever records they pleased, within reason.

One day in early December, Sophie and Pattie came home with two copies of the new Beatles single *We Can Work It Out* and the new album, *Rubber Soul*. They put the album on the turntable as soon as they walked in the door, and joined the Harrisons in making a drawing of the Beatles. Sophie was just putting the finishing touches on John Lennon’s eyes when Keyara’s parents came home from work. “Guess what?” her father said.

“What?” asked Jazmyne.

“We’re movin’!”

Immediately, Keyara said, “Why Daddy? To get away from all this segregation stuff?”

“Yep.”

“Where’re we goin’?” Sophie asked. “New York?”

“Nope. Out of the States,” Mrs. Harrison answered.

“Canada?” Pattie suggested.

Keyara’s parents looked at each other and smiled. “Let’s just tell them,” her father said.

“Tell us what?” Jazmyne prompted impatiently.

“We’re movin’ completely off this continent,” Sophie’s mother said.

“So you’re in on the big secret too!” Pattie blurted out. “How come we’re always the last ones to know what’s goin’ on?”

Mrs. Green ignored her and said, “We’re movin’ to London!”

Dead silence filled the room. Even the dogs had stopped scuffling in the corner, standing still as statues. The only sound was George Harrison's vocal on *Think For Yourself*.

Slowly, the magnitude of the news sank into Sophie's mind. London. Big Ben. Abbey Road. Buckingham Palace.

The Beatles.

All of a sudden, the parents were bombarded with questions.

"When?" asked Sophie.

"How?" Jazmyne blurted out.

"Where?" piped up Pattie.

"Are we gonna meet the Beatles?" Keyara questioned eagerly.

"We don't gotta eat kidney pie, do we?" Jazmyne said, making a face.

"Girls," Mrs. Harrison began, but yet more questions cut her off.

"Will people make fun of us 'cause of how we talk?" Pattie said.

"Is it really always raining in England?" Jazmyne inquired.

"Have they got the same Beatles albums as us?" Keyara asked.

"Can Keyara and me bring our guitars?" Sophie added.

"Girls, that's enough!" Sophie's mother shouted. "We ain't movin' for a while, so relax. Yes, you and Keyara can bring your guitars, Sophie. But I don't know the answers to all y'all's other questions."

"But how'd we get the money?" Jazmyne asked.

"Your mother and I have been workin' extra hours," Mr. Harrison said. "And Sophie and Pattie helped by workin' at the record store."

“Now, it’s gonna be busy these next couple months ‘cause we gotta get passports for you four,” Mrs. Green said. “But I expect it’ll all be worth it.”

That night after dinner, they finished listening to *Rubber Soul* and completed the drawing, but only Sophie’s body was present. Her mind was on the move. London! The dream that had lived in her heart all her life was finally coming true! She could hardly believe her luck.

The next two months were a whirlwind of getting passports, buying boat tickets, collecting cardboard boxes, writing to the brothers in Vietnam, and making arrangements for Sophie’s dogs to go with them. But other than the preparations for the move, life went on as it had before the whole business started. About the only interesting things that happened in that period of time were George Harrison’s wedding in January (Sophie was disappointed that someone else had gotten there first) and Sophie’s sixteenth birthday.

By early March, everything had fallen into place. The Greens and the Harrisons had tickets and passports, the dogs had the okay to come on the boat, and everyone was looking forward to it. The only thing left now was to actually get there.

On March 5th, 1966, the girls all woke up at 5:30 in the morning and had to wait at least an hour before the adults got up. Then, all of them had to eat, load the car, double-check that everything was packed, and use the bathroom, which easily covered another two hours. There was the six-hour drive to Savannah and the wait to get on the boat. Through all of this, the four girls played games like “Guess The Beatles Song” and “Twenty Questions” to keep from being bored out of their skulls.

At last, the dogs and bags were in the cargo hold and everyone was on board. Sophie and Keyara went out on deck.

As they left the dock, Sophie took one last look at the world she had always known and reflected on how dramatically her life had changed in the short space of a year. She and Keyara had become closer friends through their shared love of the Beatles and the civil rights cause. Sophie had left her family, her friends, and her home behind, all for Keyara. Was it worth it?

She looked over at her friend and decided to share her thoughts. “Keyara, do you think we did the right thing?”

Keyara hugged her, replying, “Yeah. I swear on my Beatles singles.”

Sophie smiled. Through their actions and decisions, she had learned a lot about loyalty, justice, friendship, and what she was willing to do for the sake of those things. It had been a long road, but in the end, the road to freedom was the best road she could have ever chosen to follow.