

# THE POSSIBLE DREAM

---

This Ladder Edition was adapted to  
an English vocabulary of 2,000 words.

---

MARTHE GROSS





# THE POSSIBLE DREAM

*by*

Marthe Gross

A Ladder Edition at the 2,000-word level  
Adapted by Jocelyn W. Franklin

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

# THE POSSIBLE DREAM

Martha Gross

Copyright © 1970 by Martha Gross

This book is published by arrangement  
with Chilton Book Company.

All rights reserved.

Ladder Edition

First printing: December, 1972

Second printing: April, 1975

Printed in the United States of America

**BALLANTINE BOOKS**

A Division of Random House

201 East 50th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022

## FOREWORD

In this book you will meet eight Americans who are very successful in their careers. How did they become so successful? Was it hard or easy? What problems did they have to face? As you read these stories you will see that the success these eight individuals enjoy came to them only after hard work and failure.

These eight Americans came from different parts of the country, from big cities and small. But you will see that they all have certain things in common. They discovered when they were young that doing a particular thing—their “own thing”—in sports, science, music, or politics made them feel especially alive and satisfied. They received a special excitement from this that came in no other way.

They were determined to excel. They studied, questioned, and practiced until they had mastered their specialty completely. They knew they would make mistakes—and were patient with themselves when they did. They had firm faith in their own future—even when no one else believed in them, when others discouraged them or questioned their ability.

These eight individuals know the excitement and happiness of success. But they know, too, the struggle—physical and mental—that the young person faces when he decides to be the best.

In trying and failing, in trying and succeeding, these eight men and women show us what is needed to reach . . . The Possible Dream.



## ARTHUR ASHE, JR.

The boy stood at the rear of the tennis court, ready for the player on the other side of the net to hit the ball. The ball came at him and rushed past. He tried to hit it but was too late. He had lost the game and also the chance to continue playing in the tournament.

Arthur Ashe, Jr., 16 years old, walked slowly away. Around him on all sides were the beautiful grass courts of the most famous tennis club in the United States, Forest Hills in New York. Men in white shorts and shirts, and women in white tennis dresses were playing their first games of the tournament. Every year in late summer, the best tennis players came to compete in the U.S. national tournament at Forest Hills.

Arthur heard the sounds of rackets hitting balls and the cheers of the crowd as he went into the clubhouse and prepared to go home. Tomorrow he would be back home with his family in the southern city of Richmond, Virginia. He could rest there. The world of tennis would be 300 miles away.

Would he ever be a good tennis player? Would he

ever come to Forest Hills and win? Or was he only imagining that he could do well? Other Negro players from Virginia had shown plenty of desire to work hard and win at tennis, but they had lost hope and finally stopped trying. Now they were probably working at dull, uninteresting jobs. Would he be any different?

Arthur had started playing tennis ten years before, at home in Richmond. His father, a policeman, worked at the Negro playgrounds in the city. The family lived in a house on one of the biggest parks, Brook Field, with their two sons, Arthur, Jr., and John, the baby.

Surrounding the house on all sides were ball fields, a large swimming pool—and tennis courts. For six-year-old Arthur, life was perfect. He could watch people playing sports all day long. He tried to play, too, and although he was very thin, he quickly learned how to play the various games.

He liked to watch tennis best of all. The men who came to play on the courts outside his house would hit the ball back and forth across the net. Arthur especially liked the sound of the ball as it hit the racket. One day he borrowed a racket and a ball and began to practice hitting. He was six years old and the racket was big and heavy, but Arthur tried to hit the ball. Only once in perhaps a dozen tries would he succeed, but he continued his efforts hour after hour.

The summer Arthur was eight, he began watching carefully when the men played. One of them, an 18-year-old college student named Ronald Charity, was very good. He practiced every morning before



his classes and again in the evening. He noticed that whenever he came to play he always had someone watching him: the thin little boy who lived in the house nearby.

One day, Arthur had the courage to ask Ronald, "Would you teach me how to play?"

Ronald Charity put the racket in Arthur's hand and showed him how to hold it properly. Then, standing several feet away, he began to throw balls to him. Every evening that summer Ronald worked with Arthur, throwing balls and teaching him the various ways to hit the ball and swing the racket. Charity then went to the other side of the net so that the boy could develop what he had learned in actual play.

As the young college man watched Arthur play tennis, he began to see unusual qualities in the boy. He was naturally quiet and had much better self-control than other eight-year-olds. His mother had died when he was six. Her loss, added to his father's deep concern for him and his brother, had made Arthur a serious-minded child.

There were hours of sport and play for both Ashe boys all summer. But they knew that they must never wander from the Brook Field playground without getting permission from Mrs. Berry, who cared for them during the day, or from their father if he happened to be home.

Years later, when he was in college, Arthur Ashe, Jr. was asked to describe his childhood. He answered that his father had been "firm but fair." He remembered that he never once argued with his father, although his younger brother would sometimes question him. "I would feel awful if I ever did



anything at all bad that my father learned about. He trusts me completely."

The day that young Arthur was to enter school for the first time, his father walked with him to the building. "Walk along now at your own speed," he told his son. As he studied the boy's manner of walking, he continued at his side. When they arrived at the school, Arthur's father looked at his watch. "Ten minutes to reach here," he said. "When school ends, I want you home in ten minutes—not eleven, and no excuses."

There were times in the years to come that Arthur wanted to stop at a friend's house on the way home. But his father's orders were clear in his mind. Mr. Ashe was not unkind to his sons; he really loved them very much and had great hopes for them. He would spend thousands of dollars from his small salary for sports supplies for them in the years to come. But first he wanted his boys to obey him. In his work as a police officer, he had seen too many boys—some of them as quick to learn as Arthur and John—sent to prison for various crimes. This would not happen to his sons. Mr. Ashe was a friendly man who smiled a lot and joked easily. But he was also very determined that his sons would not ruin their lives by making foolish mistakes.

When Arthur was 11 some of his friends had jobs delivering newspapers. He wanted to do this too, but Mr. Ashe said no. He thought it was too dangerous. So there were firm rules in Arthur's life, but they were tempered by his father's strong love and a childhood that was perfect except that it lacked a mother.

Talking about it when he was older, Arthur



remembered that he didn't live in a poor section of town and never was in trouble. "We were never poor, things were not that hard for me. . . . the field behind my house was like a huge back yard. I thought it was mine. Brook Field was . . . a dream world for a boy who liked to play sports. . . . The swimming pool was so full of children in the summer you couldn't see the water. I had no problems at all. There was really no reason in the world for me to leave the place. Everybody came to me. The sports supplies were stored in a box in our house."

One day Ronald Charity told Arthur that he was organizing a small tennis tournament for the children who had been playing at Brook Field. "You should enter, Arthur; you would have a good chance." He entered at age eight but lost to an 11-year-old. However, he didn't mind losing the competition at all and continued to enter tournaments at other Negro parks in Richmond. Soon he began winning.

For his ninth birthday, an aunt and uncle used some money they had saved and gave Arthur his first really good tennis racket, one that cost more than 22 dollars. His tennis game was improving steadily, and Ronald decided it was time for Arthur to receive more training.

In Lynchburg, Virginia, lived a man with a dream—R. Walter Johnson. Dr. Johnson, a Negro doctor, loved tennis so much that he wanted to do everything he could to teach Negro boys and girls to play. Every summer six or seven Negro boys and girls who showed promise of becoming good tennis players came to live at Dr. Johnson's house. They



were given free tennis lessons, and in return they worked at various jobs around the house and garden.

Organizing such a free tennis camp was costing Dr. Johnson a lot of money—but he did it willingly. He hoped that a few of the boys or girls would somehow become as successful a tennis player as a girl he had trained in the late 1940's, Althea Gibson. Althea had come from New York City to get lessons at Dr. Johnson's tennis camp, and she had later become the U.S. women's champion. Success like that was very satisfying to Dr. Johnson and encouraged him to help other promising Negro players.

Ronald Charity called Dr. Johnson and told him about Arthur. The older man knew Ronald—and every other young Negro tennis player in the southern United States—and trusted his judgment. He agreed to give the boy a chance to improve his tennis game. That summer ten-year-old Arthur left his home to spend the first of many summers at Dr. Johnson's house.

It was hard for Arthur to leave his father that first time, although there would be many partings between them in the years to come. The thin ten-year-old boy riding away on the bus would someday travel by airplane to Spain, Sweden, Australia. He would be driven to Wimbledon, England, from his London hotel to play tennis before royalty. But that morning the longest journey in the world was the three-hour bus ride to Dr. Johnson's house in Lynchburg, Virginia.

There, Arthur and the other five tennis students had something to do every moment from morning



until night. After making their own breakfast and cleaning their rooms, they would practice tennis for three hours. After lunch they would practice again and also do the necessary work around the house and garden. In the late afternoon, when Dr. Johnson had finished taking care of his patients, he would watch his students play to see how they were progressing. He would notice any faults and tell them how to correct them.

After supper Arthur and the others watched movies about tennis and studied its many rules. Dr. Johnson felt that knowing the rules was so important that he gave tests on them. While Dr. Johnson was not impressed by Arthur's tennis ability that first summer, he did notice the boy's willingness to practice. "Arthur was quick, he had fast eyes—and he worked harder," said Dr. Johnson about the thin beginner.

Every summer for the next seven years, Arthur went to Dr. Johnson's house. There he received the best training that was obtainable anywhere in the southern United States—and it was free training. Tennis can be a very expensive sport. Lessons cost as much as 10 or 15 dollars an hour. Tennis rackets may cost 500 dollars a year. Tennis shoes and clothing are also expensive. When a boy starts to play in tournaments, someone must pay the expenses of travel and the amount required to enter the tournament.

Arthur's father tried to pay most of these expenses by working at extra jobs. But the rest of the family also needed money. Dr. Johnson again came to Arthur's aid. Arthur later said that Dr. Johnson must have spent more than 3,000 dollars to give him the



kind of help that young white players in Richmond regularly received from wealthy tennis supporters.

The Virginia doctor believed that spending his money to help young Negroes excel at tennis was a lot better than saving the money in a bank. It could change the lives of these young people. They might not play in the most important tournaments, like Althea Gibson, but for some there was always the possibility of receiving a tennis scholarship from a college. More than 100 of his students had done this. As he watched Arthur's tennis develop summer by summer, Dr. Johnson was sure Arthur could win a college scholarship too. First however, he needed to win some tournaments.

Arthur had his first chance at tournament competition during his second summer at Dr. Johnson's. He played in a tournament organized by the American Tennis Association (ATA), a Negro group similar to the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA). Competing in the class for boys less than 12 years old, he defeated every player he faced. The next year he won the ATA National **Championship** for boys less than 13. Dr. Johnson would pack Arthur and his other tennis players in his big car and drive from city to city to play in the tournaments. He had good friends in the cities they visited and they welcomed his young tennis players warmly and gave them food and shelter.

Dr. Johnson wanted to see Arthur and his other young students compete in tournaments organized by the USLTA. But before he brought them to play white boys before white crowds, he wanted to be sure that they had plenty of tennis ability—and emo-



tional control. Dr. Johnson had seen too many instances of bad manners by white boys in tournaments. He was determined that his young Negro players would be different. "Never complain when you are out there on the court," he told his students. "If a ball lands even an inch outside the line, hit that ball. You will make mistakes; everyone does. . . . But keep your temper under control. Smile."

The summer Arthur was 15 years old, Dr. Johnson made several successful efforts to enter him in USLTA tournaments. In one, Arthur lost only in the last few games. In another, he won after defeating 150 other boys. He played well in other tournaments too that year. But his failure at 16 to win any games in the U.S. national competition at Forest Hills showed he still needed to work harder.

The year Arthur was 16, Dr. Johnson received a telephone call from a tennis supporter in St. Louis, Missouri. Richard Hudlin, a Negro teacher and former university tennis team captain, wanted Arthur to live at his home in St. Louis that winter. There he would have the opportunity to play on inside courts against some of the best young players in the United States. While it was hard for Arthur to leave his home and school in Virginia, it was an excellent chance for him to improve his tennis.

Living with the Hudlins included periods of more difficult training than Arthur had ever experienced at Dr. Johnson's. Richard Hudlin felt that Arthur could be the Negro tennis player who would someday defeat the best white players. Therefore Arthur trained hard—exercise in the morning, school until noon, tennis all afternoon, and more exercise and



running in the evening. That winter Arthur learned to play tennis inside, on courts made of wood. He learned to move faster, and as a result improved his game.

After he completed school in June with the best marks in his class, Arthur began to consider his plans to enter a university. He had received offers of scholarships from several of the best universities in the United States. He decided to accept a scholarship from the University of California at Los Angeles, or UCLA, a good university also well known for its tennis team.

Arthur enjoyed the less hurried way of life at the West Coast university and welcomed the change after all the years of training. His classes interested him, and he was able to combine study with tennis. The best thing about UCLA was that Arthur was a member of one of the country's best tennis teams. He felt a sense of belonging that he had never experienced before. He had been playing tennis for ten years before he came to the university, but he had felt alone, an able young Negro tennis player from the South, not completely comfortable at the white tennis clubs.

At the university he trained and competed with some of the best players in the country. Pancho Gonzales, a famous tennis champion of the 1940s and 1950s who was still winning tournaments, played against Arthur and considered him a very good player.

Arthur continued to practice and improve his game, and soon he was one of the team's best players. "At one time or another I won every college tourna-



ment that UCLA entered," Arthur later wrote. By the summer of 1963, at the end of his second year at the university, he had moved up to 18th place in the national men's rankings of the best tennis players.

In mid-June, 1963, Arthur left for England and the famous tennis tournament at Wimbledon. There the best players from many different countries compete every year for world tennis championships. While Arthur defeated players from Brazil and Australia, he lost in the third round of games to a U.S. player, Chuck McKinley, who later won the tournament.

After England, Arthur was invited to a tournament in Sweden with two other U.S. players. He was given a warm welcome everywhere, something that as a Negro he did not always receive in certain parts of the United States at that time. As he told his father when he returned home to Virginia, "I enjoyed every hour of it."

Appointment to the famous U.S. Davis Cup team, which competed against Davis Cup teams from other countries, came late that summer. Although he was to play only once—against Venezuela—he won easily. Several months later when the 1964 tennis rankings were announced, Arthur Ashe had moved from 18th to 6th place in the United States. The following summer Arthur won two important tournaments, and he was then rated as the third best men's player in the United States.

In late August, 1965, he entered the U.S. national tournament at Forest Hills, New York. Near the end of the tournament, he defeated the previous year's winner, Roy Emerson of Australia. The large crowd



that had watched the exciting game stood up and cheered Arthur's victory for several minutes.

The next day, however, Arthur lost to Manuel Santana after playing a disappointing game. People who had seen him play excellent tennis one day and only fair the next wondered what would happen to him. Would he lose his ability after he left the university and the training of the tennis team? And how would he do in Australia that winter, playing against the powerful Australian Davis Cup team? He had defeated Roy Emerson at Forest Hills. But could he do it again?

That winter, during a trip to several cities in Australia, Arthur defeated Emerson twice to win a regional tournament. But in the more important Australian national tournament, he lost to Emerson. Once again his supporters wondered about his future.

In June, 1966, Arthur finished his university education and began his required army duty. For the next year, most of his tennis playing was limited to teaching soldiers the game. He played in only a few tournaments and then not very well.

But by spring, 1968, Arthur had begun to return to serious tennis practice. His friends recognized his former tennis style that had won so many tournaments. He flew to England in June and almost won the championship at Wimbledon. In August, he did win an important national tournament in Boston. But the big test was to be the famous tournament at Forest Hills.

In 1968, for the first time, the tournament organizers had decided to allow professional tennis play-