



God Knows His Name: The True Story of John Doe No. 24

Mr. David Bakke

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Police found John Doe No. 24 in the early morning hours of October 11, 1945, in Jacksonville, Illinois. Unable to communicate, the deaf and mute teenager was labeled “feeble minded” and sentenced by a judge to the nightmarish jumble of the Lincoln State School and Colony in Jacksonville. He remained in the Illinois mental health care system for over thirty years and died at the Sharon Oaks Nursing Home in Peoria on November 28, 1993.

Deaf, mute, and later blind, the young black man survived institutionalized hell: beatings, hunger, overcrowding, and the dehumanizing treatment that characterized state institutions through the 1950s. In spite of his environment, he made friends, took on responsibilities, and developed a sense of humor. People who knew him found him remarkable.

Award-winning journalist Dave Bakke reconstructs the life of John Doe No. 24 through research into a half-century of the state mental health system, personal interviews with people who knew him at various points during his life, and sixteen black-and-white illustrations. After reading a story about John Doe in the *New York Times*, acclaimed singer-songwriter Mary Chapin Carpenter wrote and recorded “John Doe No. 24” and purchased a headstone for his unmarked grave. She contributes a foreword to this book.

As death approached for the man known only as John Doe No. 24, his one-time nurse Donna Romine reflected sadly on his mystery. “Ah, well,” she said, “God knows his name.”

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