



INTERNATIONAL
STORYTELLING CENTER

Freedom Stories at the National Storytelling Festival Transcript

(Please note: This transcript was created from closed captions and as such may have errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics.)

KIRAN SINGH SIRAH: Good afternoon, everybody. Are you having a good festival? As president of the International Storytelling Center, thank you for coming here and supporting the 47th National Storytelling Festival. It's wonderful to see you all. So this is a very special session. So, I'm not going to do any other announcements. I'm just gonna get to it. Alex Haley, the famous author and fellow Tennessean, performed at the National Storytelling Festival in 1986. When he was here, he said without storytelling we'd have no roots. It's a memorable phrase and one that I personally quote all the time. It's a great metaphor because roots provide strength and nourishment and they form complex systems on the ground that mingle and overlap while we can't necessarily see them. Freedom stories, the ISC's newest initiative aims to take a closer look. We're fostering intentional engagement with the whole narrative of this country, not just the comfortable and happy pieces of history that have been favored, told and retold.

It is a first earmarked project as we head towards the 50th anniversary of the National Storytelling Festival in three years' time. For a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we will embark on a two-year journey to seek out and illuminate the underappreciated and neglected stories of African-Americans in our Appalachian region. The project will marry performance and discussion, connecting prominent African-American storytellers, humanities scholars and community experts to trace the rich history of African-Americans in Appalachia. From the first African arrivals in Appalachia to the shaping of a distinct culture, to the struggles for freedom and equality. The project will also produce podcasts and other multimedia resources that will be accessible to a wider national audience. We celebrate the founding of this country in 1776, but we wouldn't be who we are, we wouldn't have won our independence if it wasn't for the people who were brought here beginning in 1619.

In August of this year, The New York Times launched the 1619 project which aims to take a look at the role of slavery in this country. Just to read a quote from this project's introduction, In August of 1619, a ship appeared on this horizon near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the British colony of Virginia. It carried more than 20 enslaved Africans who were sold to the colonists. No aspect of this country will be formed here has been untouched by the years of slavery that followed. In the four hundredth anniversary of his fateful moment, it is finally time to tell our story truthfully. The Times also says the 1619 project aims to reframe the country's history, understanding 1619 at our true founding and placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are. Freedom Stories aims to be part of this reframing as well, looking specifically at our region to understand all the stories that makeup who we are.

ISC's goal with Freedom stories is not to abandon the stories we know, but to bring to the surface other stories that have been underappreciated or even untold. And that can be challenging work because not all these stories are celebratory. They are dark and they are full of cruelty and injustice. But they need to be told and heard. Here at the International Storytelling Center and producers of the National Storytelling Festival, in our capacity as an internationally renowned art and cultural organization, we have worked to increase representation and include black storytellers and black artists but we need to push the boundaries further. We need to be unafraid to explore stories and all that are uncomfortable and unflattering. One thing that the project is designed to come to confront is the question of who are we really as an institution? What are we

about and are we living up to our own mission and vision every day? Which stories have we been neglecting as a country, as a region, as an art form and as an institution?

With the help of master storytellers like Sheila Arnold, Freedom stories will be a two-year process of unpacking these big ideas and most importantly, sharing previously unwritten histories. Miss Arnold is helping us to remember and explore and unpack and have discussions relevant to today this explored spectrum of feelings that are good and bad. These are essential conversations to have, not just in the arts, but as a nation. This very region was the site of some of the best and the worst of humanity. From the nation's first abolitionist newspaper to the lynchings that took place near this ground. All sides of these stories are essential to understand the story of us. The work that Sheila Arnold would share today is designed to make you interrogate your perspective. The history of our culture is complex. She'll be telling us about Elihu Embree who embodied that complexity, an ardent abolitionist who owned slaves, sold and separated them. He purchased them, provided for them in his will, but ultimately he did not let them go free.

How did the slaves reconcile his devotion to the cause of their freedom with the fact of its lack and what are we to make of it now? In exploring these questions, we couldn't ask for a better guide than Sheila, who not only is deeply involved with historical storytelling but stayed at Elihu Embree's renovated home, which is now owned by Pat and Patricia Stern during her first time performing at this festival. She's also a current research fellow at Mount Vernon, George Washington's home. As you listen today, I invite you to have an open mind. This is a process, and all our stories are starting here together to return to Alex Haley's famous phrase, we're finally getting back to our roots. Thank you for listening and please join me in welcoming Sheila Arnold to the stage. Thank you.

SHEILA ARNOLD: #Oh, freedom. Oh, freedom. Oh, freedom over me. And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave, and I'll be home with my Lord and I'll be free. Ooh, freedom # Really, freedom? What does that mean? What does that look like? And how can we help all people to have that? That is what I will be sharing with you today through the lives of the people called abolitionists. Those who oppose slavery, who stood and made a stand, as so many still do today. And I hope that as we go through these stories together, that you might see or ask the question, freedom, really? And if not, how do I make it so? And I get to start over with Eli Elihu Embree, one of the folks from right here in Jonesborough. He was a Quaker man that came here and he was the one that began the first abolitionist newspaper in all the country called the Emancipator right here from Jonesborough. 1820 is when it began. But I want to take you to a part in 1820, August 1820. Frames, frames, Eli, who got up from his seat in his office and he took the quick walk over to the where the front door was and he opened the door frames.

Yes, sir. The young man lifted his head and then stood up his six foot one tall body. His strong muscles were covered with dirt on his hands and his clothes working in the garden. Yes, sir. Frames, if you have a moment, I need your assistance. Mr. Embree went back inside, Elihu went back inside and Frames took his hands and shook off that dirt and brushed off what he could and tapped his feet against that part of the entrance of the door and went on in. Standing in the door frame, he filled the door frame completely. He was a tall young man, he was and he was very light-skinned. Embree Eli Elihu looked at him again and thought, yeah, folks would call him a yellow one right there. Light skinned he was, so different than his own mother. Frames, I need you to help me put these words back up again. Frames walked over and picked up a picture with a frame that inside was encased some words. He had put this up now at least two times before it would fall in the wind. Sir, I think that there'd be a better place for you to put this on sir.

I don't think putting it in front of the door is what folk need to do. It blow over all the time. I need for the words to be their son. I need them to be there. Now go on and make it happen, I'll watch it. Frames took the frame in his hand and positioned himself in front of the door, in front of the outside entrance door and looked up above, there it was. Right here sir, right here. That would be good. So why are you putting this up?

You putting this up because you want folks to always see it all the time? Yes, I do. Well, what's it say? Now Frames, I've been teaching you to read a bit. You read it now. I don't feel comfortable doing all that reading, it's hard on my eyes. Alright, Elihu smiled. Frames had no trouble reading. He was a slave that had learned reading real quick-like. What he had trouble with was his worrying if too many people found out he could do that reading, there might be trouble. It says freedom is the natural right of all men. And I acknowledge as a member of the Tennessee of this, I acknowledge as a member of the Tennessee Society for the manumission of slaves.

Those are pretty words. Those are pretty words sir. It's good that folks are not wanting to have no slaves. Frames started to turn around, but then turned back. Sir. Yes. Sir, do you believe them words? Do you believe them words? Elihu looked into the eyes of that young man and he wanted with all of his heart and soul to say, I believe those words with all my heart. Isn't that why I started the newspaper? Isn't that why I take the money out of my own pocket to make it work? Isn't that why I have been a stocks person and have done all I could for the sake of those that have come from Africa. Aren't I the one that have faced the ridicule of the people out here in Jonesborough in Washington County, in Greene County all about here, aren't I the one? But he couldn't. He couldn't speak like that because he knew his walk had not always been pure. Frames knew the same. You see frames and his mother and younger siblings had all been purchased well over 10 years before by Elihu himself. When Elihu married his second wife, Elizabeth Williams, she bought slaves into the marriage.

And he, as he always at least told himself, well, at that time I was a deist and so my religion wasn't as good as it should have been. And so he bought slaves too, eight slaves. And then he bought two families of them, Nancy and Frames and the siblings of Frames but also a husband and a wife and a child. But not long after the wife had a second child and it was too much to bear to be able to provide for all of them, so Elihu in that moment sold the husband off and then lived with that. He would go to the meetings, he started to go back to Quaker meetings, to his own roots and he realized that something wasn't right. He had done this and he could see the sadness in their faces and he could see the fear in even the child Frames of six years old, how afraid he was. How we cling to his mother now afraid he would be the one cent. And so he knew he had to fix this but it was three long years. Every day, the pressing upon him that this was not right or good. But he must fix this. And so three years later he sold the mother and the two children in partial payment to help get the father purchased by another friend so that eventually they could all come back as family.

He never looked at himself or said, well see, how good I have done. He looked at it himself and said this is who I could be. This is who I was and could turn to any moment. Now, he had Nancy and her children and he wanted badly to be able to just give them their freedom, but the laws prevented the separating a children from their mothers. So if he freed the mother, the children could not be free. He did not know what he could do and if he had the money, he would try but he didn't have the money anymore. He had spent so much in purchasing the slaves again and then re-giving them away. If only he could say the words. Truthfully, he knew that he would be looked at in history for the worst of what he did, but he accepted that. He should be known for this and if history should desire not to allow him to be accepted into the public for what he had done good, so be it. He had made the decisions of his own free will and he would accept the just judgment. But he would still continue for freedom.

Frames, you deserve freedom. You have a right to freedom and I am sorry that I am the cause of you not having that right. I know. I know I am free. And no matter what happened to me, sir. No matter what happened to me, I'll always be free inside myself. You think you can take away a person's freedom just because you got them in a piece of paper? Elihu knew that boy was wise beyond years. I want everybody to see this sign when they come in the door. But frames, I want you and your mama and your sisters and your brother to see it most of all. We do, sir, we do. I'm going back to gardening. Mama said there's some food in the kitchen you might wanna go eat it, good day, sir. Good day frames. #Oh freedom. Oh, freedom. Oh,

freedom over me. And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave, and I'll be home with my Lord and I'll be free. # I have more stories, sit down. Y'all are being so kind, thank you. I think it's important for us to have a story that doesn't fit well in a box because it's part of what we're struggling with even today.

But how many would actually step back and say about themselves, I deserve the just judgment for the decisions I made? How many of us would say that? Abolitionists use lots of different ways to be able to speak what they had passion about, about the end of slavery. And so one of those ways was the newspaper, The Emancipator. Now, I will tell you that if you want to, this is my you know, this is a wonderful plug. Great book, The Emancipator. You can purchase it in our books here and that's why I did. And it's just filled yet all the issues, there's only seven. Because he died in December 1820 and with it, it was taken over by Benjamin Lundy for a short period of time. But by the time we get to the 1830s, abolitionists here in East Tennessee are in danger at all times. And so you begin to see that slip away. But others used other forms to be able to speak the words, to be able to show the passion. And there are abolitionists of all kinds. One of the things that is most interesting is we generally hear of abolitionists and we think of those that are Quakers.

We think of those that are white and yet most abolitionists were black. But they could not come out in any way, shape or form to show what they had done because their work was so dangerous. And just now, we're beginning to see those who stepped into places but there were others who were free and had a fine voice and they spoke out and they use their art. They use poetry and story to be able to advocate for the freedom and manumission of those called slaves. One of them is Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, born over in Baltimore. Her parents died early and then she was raised by family and soon went to Philadelphia. She was a good writer from the time that she was young. And she was a good speaker as well, but you all know how it is a prophet in their own hometown. Like Francis, we've heard you. And so she traveled far all the way to Maine and she began to speak and people began to listen and hear her. And when she said her poetry, people cheered and jumped in. Suddenly she became a force to be reckoned with.

Frederick Douglass had met her earlier and had been one of those pooh-pooh baby kind of people on her but went up to Maine and heard her speak and said, my, what a voice you have and he began to support her dearly. But her words were written to make you feel, to make you for a moment remember humanity. Remember that what people call somebody, does it make them what they are? Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, the slave mother. "Heard you that streak, it rose so wildly in the air, it seemed as if a bird in the heart was breaking in despair. Saw you those hands, so sadly clast, the bowed and feeble head, the shuddering of that fragile form, that look of grief and dread. Saw you the sad imploring eye, its every glance was pain, as if a storm of agony was sweeping through her brain. She is a mother, pale with fear. Her boy clings to her side and in her girdle, he vainly tries his trembling form to hide. He is not hers, although she bought him for him a mother's pains. He is not hers, although her blood is coursing through his veins.

He is not hers, for cruel tear them rudely apart. The only rethe of household love that binds her breaking heart. His love has been a joyous light that oover her pathway smiled a fountain gushing new amid life's desert wild. Her lightest word has been a tone of music around her heart. Their lives a streamlet blent in one oh father, must they part? They tear him. They tear him from her circling arms. Her last and fond embrace o'over evermore made her sad eyes gaze on his mournful face. No marvel, then those bittersweet disturb the listening air. She is a mother and her heart is breaking and despair". The slave mother by Francis Ellen Watkins Harper. She's a little-known abolitionist that not many people know as much about her and her writing is, as you can see, very piercing, very clear. And I encourage you to read some of what she does. The bottom line is, no matter whatever movement any of us have, we use what we have on us. We use whatever skill we have. We take what little we have at hand and that's what we use to encourage freedom to happen for others.

To help those who have less than ourselves. We wonder all the time. I hear it in my own head, what can I do? The problem is so big and I am so well, at least I am one person. And the answer, as I've read and looked and looked and read through all the lives of these people, these abolitionists and others, is you use what is at your hand. A newspaper, a poem or maybe just information. That's what happened with Robert. Roberts who eventually became no, Robert Jackson, who eventually became known as Wesley Harris. He was born in Martinsburg, Virginia. And from the time he was a little boy, he had been rented out often to people to work around their places. In 1853, he was rented out to a woman, Mrs. Carroll, who was the owner and proprietor of a hotel called the United States Hotel in the Harpers Ferry, Virginia. This is, of course, before West ever happened in Virginia. So in Harpers Ferry and so he worked there. She was a kind woman and was kind to all of her servants and slaves and had even promised upon their death that all of her personal servants and slaves would be freed.

She even apologized to them that she could not free them immediately because her husband had died and left debt for them. But she was kind at heart and treated all equally. How some ever, the man that was the foreman at that hotel that demanded the work to be done, he was a different case entirely. He had no worries about using a whip, about slapping a face, about giving penalty and he did such. Just as freely as she gave goodness, he gave cruelty. That is what it was. There was a day that Robert/ Wesley, that that day Robert, he had done something wrong, but a miniscule thing and so he was to be flogged. Taken he was over to the flogging posts and he was to have his hands held high. He refused to do such. And so the foreman lifted up the whip anyhow and was just about to bring the whip down when Wesley turned around grabbed the whip from him and flogged down the man. Yeah, that sounds all good but there's a little bit of a penalty of beating the person that was supposed to beat you. But the foreman men was well aware of the fact that he could be outdone by Wesley.

So he had another plan. He informed the master of Wesley, made sure that word got back to him that his slave had turned around and tried to whip a white man. To turn a flogging on him, what could be done? He asked in the letter. The response was swift. Beat him as necessary, jail him, sell him, at least wait till he's offended you first, though. And if he does not offend you, sell him at Christmas time anyway. The foreman received that letter with great joy but went as a foreman did and says, Madam, I have received this letter Mrs. Carroll, and it has given me words about how to handle that, Wesley, that Robert and I will do such with him. I am letting you know he will be sold by Christmas. We must make other arrangements for someone to work. Miss Carroll nodded her head. Thank you for your good work. The foreman was waiting to see, he was hoping that he would do something. Come on now, give me something wrong. I'm ready, please. Miss Carroll called Robert in one day, send Robert into me.

Certainly, ma'am. Robert came in close the door. I need to talk with you. The door was closed. Robert, I have been given word that you are to be sold one way or the other. If I were you, I would find my way to a place far from here using whatever means you need. Robert must have been shocked. To have this woman who was in a position to hold him forever or hold him until this time? Instead, take the very information given to her to keep him locked down and use it to help open the cage. He thanked her. Be silent on this. Be silent on this. You are dismissed, Robert. I shall not see that again. Yes, ma'am. And he left, he picked up two other guys, the Masterson brothers and they ran and he didn't get whipped before he did it. They made their way trying to figure out where was this thing that they had heard about, this thing called an underground railroad. This complex bit of roots, all scattered about, where it was this thing? They had heard word if they followed the stars. He didn't really know what that meant, but they went a direction that sounded good and ended up in Maryland in Terrytown.

And they met some people that saw them walking and they didn't mean to be caught, but the people talked like they were Quakers, so they knew they were friends and the people in the house, they hid them in a barn. But not everyone who speaks of freedom or like freedom gives that. Before dusk, they could hear the sound

of riders coming and the sound of men yelling. And when they peaked out between the bonds bit of wood there, they saw seven armed men to surround the barn. They had been given over. Even the train was sad about it, they had been given over. But they did not come unprepared for the fight. One of them had a pistol in hand and Robert himself had a sword and they were ready. The door was banging, the barn door was banged upon and it was kicked in, the men came in and a shot rang out, but it missed the men. The slave catchers come in, but they shot back and they shot and they hit Robert. He lay upon the ground, the Masterson brothers dropped whatever was in their hands and just handed themselves over.

They went to the jail. They put Robert in his own cell and so they could patch him back up to send him back home. A slave woman, a cook, would come in to bandage him and care for him and provide him food and a little bit of information. Along the way, more information was given and so finally, he had a moment where he was able to wrap up, just like in some old movies, some blankets together and make himself go down the window and out. Still bruising but waiting for him was a colored man, an abolitionist, to get him to Gettysburg and on to freedom. He was given information and that information guided his way to a place where he was caught but given more information guided his way to a place of freedom. Sometimes that's all you got, just a little bit to help somebody. But you have a know, and I know you know, particularly you ladies, don't you just love it when your husband asks for directions? He just go, if you just get a little bit of information baby, we could go the right way. And so it was even for the slaves, even if we could just get a little bit of information, we could make it to freedom's lands.

We're gonna let the train roll. #Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children, there's room for many more. Get, # OK, now. OK, you ain't gon clap right, don't clap. So we gon work on this. #Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children, there's room for many more. Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children, there's room for a million more. The train is coming and picking up just fine. It's got so many rooms, it got to get right downtown. Oh, get on board, little children. Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children. Get on board, little children, there's room for many more. Get on board little children, get on board little children. Get on board, little children, there's room for many more. There's room for many more. There's room for many more. There's room for many more. There's room for many more.# Oh, the train. I love that train. Can you all hear me OK, because I can wait a little bit, I don't mind waiting.

Let me look at you can hear me OK? I didn't see that. OK, OK. OK, very good, alright. You give whatever you have at hand, but some give even more than you would ever expect. There's a book that I love and some of you, if you saw me last year, if you hear me in some programs lately, it's a book that I'm doing a lot of programming out of. It's a primary source document, it's called the Underground Railroad by William Still, S-T-I-L-L. And it is a book that was written in 1872 to the first Underground Railroad book written after the Civil War. William Still was a man who was a conductor, often called the father of the Underground Railroad, although it had been around before he even began. But he wrote this book by keeping notes. Notes that could have had him arrested, notes that could have had him fined, notes that could have had him hung in some places, notes that as a colored man could have him so, thank you. Notes that could have had him as a colored man sold down south. But he kept the notes anyway and after the war, he put all those notes of the people that ran and how he helped them.

He put them in this book. He did it so they could find their family, so people could find the ones that had run before and he left them there. In this book, it was printed three times previously when he was alive until people forgot that book and went on to others. And so it has become a book that's just coming back. This story is far more than Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, who, of course, should be known and remembered but there are so many stories. There are so many people that helped make this happen, freedom. And it is the first story. The one story that he begins with because it of all stories is the one. Now I'm going to read all, no I'm teasing. I'm not going to do that, but I am going to read to you what he says

in the beginning. In the long list of names who have suffered and died in the cause of freedom, not one perhaps could be found whose efforts to redeem a poor family of slaves were more Christlike than Seth Conklin's, whose noble and daring spirit has so been so long completely shrouded in mystery but it won't be a mystery to you anymore.

Seth Conklin happened per chance, you know, about those per chances, those coincidences that change everything in your life. He happened across a pamphlet, a pamphlet about Peter Still. It was called Kidnap, you know, a pamphlet that was part of the Pennsylvania free man report at one point in time, a newspaper article, and he looked at it, it was called Kidnapped and Ransomed. Peter Still had been had been in Alabama. He had been a slave, but he worked for a Jewish man and he was able to purchase his freedom even though it was against the law. He still was able to purchase his freedom but he had to leave Alabama and he prepared his way and he made his way as a free man. He had had in his head, Peter did that he had seen a notice, a notice that had been in churches that 42 to 43 years earlier, there was a man and his wife who had left for freedom and had to leave two boys behind. If anyone had word of those boys, let them know. He thought those were his people because he had been left behind by his mother and his father, not because they meant to, he knew that in the bottom of his soul.

But when you have the opportunity to run, you take what you can. He was left in the charge of his grandmother and he knew that his mother would come back, but she never had his other brother had died. Peter found a way to get his freedom, made his way to Philadelphia, where he had heard in Philadelphia you can find assistance. He knocked on the door on Fruct Street in Philadelphia. A man opened the door, his name was William Still. William Still knew that the man in front of them, Peter, was a runaway slave just by the clothes that he wore. He invited him in. His home had always been open for those that ran. And he began to ask him questions as he asked every slave. Only to find out that the man sitting in front of him. Peter, this man sitting in front of him was his brother. You see, the mother and father had moved and gone to New Jersey and left and tried to get those boys and they couldn't. But they continue to have a family, 17 children and all. William was the youngest and there was that moment where he opened the door and he was his brother, huh.

It was a beautiful story and made for good reading, I will tell you. So when Seth Conklin read that, he was impressed, but then he read how Peter so longed because he had to leave his wife, daughter and two boys behind. They have been on different plantations from one another and so he wanted to get them. Seth Conklin had never made his way out to do anything to help those in slavery. But he read this one report and his heart was fixed. He made his way over to William Still and told William Still that he would be glad to embark to go down and to get Peter Still's family and bring them back. William Still looked at him and actually wrote, It was a foolish man's idea. To go down south to Alabama? Did he not know the law? They would not just find you and they would not just jail you, they would kill you. The law in Alabama said you couldn't even free your slaves for penalty of being arrested and jailed, go down there and get them? He would not be deterred and so Peter was brought in and Peter said, no, sir, you do not know my family it is not yours to do.

But Peter went down to Alabama with thoughts to purchase his family. Being back there, he knew he couldn't do it. He knew his family could be too hurt if he spoke up. So he came back and he said to Seth Conklin, if, if you can, bring them to me. While Peter had been down there, he had picked up some things from his wife, he had picked up a cape and as a sign and had told her, I think there's a man who may come get you and if he's, if the man that talks to you presents your cloak back to you, he is safe, follow him. Peter and Seth sat down, they talked about the lay of the land, they talked about the rivers, they talked about the tributaries, they talked about all the different angles. They talked about what the plantation looked like and the whole setup, they talked about where the boys would be working. They talked about the people. He gave him the cloak of

his wife. The next morning, there in the end of January 1851, out the door with Seth Conklin. He was a carer of his sisters, they were older and he didn't say a word to them at all.

As a matter of fact, they were expecting him home for dinner. He left with \$126 in his pocket. 104 William Still's, 26 of his own and with some direction that people would help him along the way. He was given a few names, took a steamboat down. His plan was to connect with Viña, the wife, and the daughter and the two boys, tell them to meet him at a certain place to get on a steamboat right there in South Florence, over in Alabama, and take that steamboat straight back over to Cincinnati and there they would be free, that was the plan. There's something about plans. And the first steamboat that he was going to go out on was three days late. And when he asked about about it, they said, well, they're always like that. It's Southern time, a little bit later than often. He knew he couldn't trust it. He would have nowhere to hide anyone, he would need to get straight on a steamboat. If a steamboat didn't show up, the plan had to change. He did make his way all the way to the plantation. He went first to where Peter had said go to the place where his boys work.

They were hired out to a shoemaker who, unbeknownst to others, was an abolitionist. They arranged a time to meet later. He went over to Vina's master and went up and asked for work. He acted like he was a man who was well known on the gristmill and was just looking for somebody to hire him. And he didn't get hired, but he was able to make contact. In the evening, He met Viña. He showed her the cloak. They agreed, the boys, Viña, Katherine, to meet. They were going to meet on March 1st. He was going to go away for a month and get a skiff that they could go on both the boys and him, Seth Conklin, they were oarsmen. Seth knew that he could do this hard work. He had been in the military and he was a strong soldier, still in his heart. They agreed to meet on that day. Agreed to get passes on that day from their individual masters to go to certain things, but always end at the same place. A month later, Viña and Catherine arrived, Peter and Levon, the boys arrived. Levon gave the whistle. If I was Andy, I would do a whistle, I don't.

He did some kind of whistle and he waited. Thank you. And he waited for the whistle back, it didn't come. Y'all gotta listen to the whole story. He whistled again, don't. But there was no whistle in return. He whistled again and there was no whistle in return and they knew what had happened. They knew that they had been wronged. And now here they were at a place they should not be. They were in a place they should not be. And then they heard the oars and they saw him coming. And saying, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was asleep, I was so tired, and I was just I'm so tired. They climbed in the boat. At first, they were all scared but the longer the road and the more they saw the water, the closer they got to knowing there would be freedom, they knew it would be a long time. He had Viña and the daughter lay on the bottom of the boat, covered them with a blanket. He let the boys do the oars when it got close to dark. One time people saw them. You, you there, he pretended like you didn't hear him.

You there, they shot some pistols up in the air. You there, he just kept rowing and never turned. They were going the way of Illinois up the Wabash and they would end at new harmony and then they would take that and they would go across to Detroit and there they changed the plan to be in Detroit. They were doing so well. They got to Indiana. They went to the side for just a moment and men came over and questioned them. Who are you? Who are you? Who are these? Who are these that are with you? They are mine, I'm taking. We don't believe you. Who are they? Who are you boys? Who are you? This be our master, this be our master. We don't believe you, you don't look right. You don't look right. And they took them, all of them. They bound them. They took them to the jail and they put out an advertisement. Is anyone missing four Negroes? A family, it seems. And McKiernan, the master, replied, those be mine on my way. He came up, he got his slaves back, angry he was that they would run it all. And he said, and bring me that white man, too, I'll take him as well.

They were put on a steamboat, made their way back to Alabama, their way back to slavery. There is no sadness so deep as almost tasting freedom. There was a scuffle on the boat. It was a moment to run away. In

the scuffle, Conklin was able to escape only to be found two weeks later. Still in chains, still bound, floating up off the Tennessee River. He hadn't escaped. He had been set free from life. And he didn't accomplish what he desired. He didn't free that what he went after but does that make it any less of who he was? To step into the fight at all. OK, I know you need to know. Yes, the family eventually was freed. Peter was able to raise \$5000 by traveling all over the Midwest and up into all over the north to raise that money to get his family and ransomed them. But even on their ransom, they had a sadness of heart, they said. For there was one that was not walking beside them in freedom, Seth Conklin. Who gave all he could, his very life. #If I can help somebody as I travel along.