



Freedom Star

Connie Winters

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V. de P. Perry
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“You sure do have lots of books, Grandpa,” said Cassie as she dragged another box across the bedroom floor. “What are you going to do with all of them?”

“Well, when your grandma and I move to our new house, we won’t have as much room as we do here so we can only take some of these with us. I imagine most of them will go to the library sale,” explained Grandpa.

“Seems like most of these are school books,” Cassie said, piling the books into neat stacks. “They look hard.”

“Those are from the college science classes I taught,” replied Grandpa, adjusting his glasses.

“Here’s one that looks like a kid’s science book,” Cassie said, pulling a worn copy from the bottom of the box. “It’s about stars. Do you want to keep it?”

“Well, I’ll be. I haven’t seen that in many years,” said Grandpa, carefully lifting the little book from Cassie’s hand.

“Is it your book from when you were little?” she asked.

“Yes it is,” said Grandpa, taking off his glasses. “I got this book from my teacher, and I learned about a lot more than just stars that day.”



“What did you learn, Grandpa?” Cassie asked moving closer to him.

“I took the book home from school and waited for hours until dark. I wanted to take it outside, look up at the night sky, and see if I could identify the stars, but Mama said I had to ask Great-Grandpa if I could sit outside with him. He lived with us then. So I went outside on the porch and said, ‘Great-Grandpa, is it all right if I set with ya a bit? Mama says I have to ask ’cause you might be too tired.’”

“‘It’s all right wid me. Your mama just worry ’cause she think I’s too old. Show me what you got.’”

“‘I have a new book about stars and I want to see if I can find ’em in the sky,’ I said, sitting down on the step and leaning my head way back to look up at the night sky. ‘We’ve been studying ’em in school. Look, Great-Grandpa, there’s the North Star!’ I shouted, pointing.



“Well, well. You don’t say. We had ’nother name for dat one.

We call it Freedom Star.”

““Why?””

““Cause back when I’s young, our people was all slaves and freedom was jus a dream.””

““What was it like being a slave, Great-Grandpa?””

““Well, some white folks own some of us black folks like we own dem cows out yonder.””

““People can’t own people. It ain’t right!’ I shouted.”

““Dat’s true, but it happen jus de same. When I was ’bout you age . . . how old is you, boy?””

““I’m almost ten,’ I told him.”

“Well, I recon’ I a bit bigger than you is now when my grandma pointed her crooked old finger to dat star and tol me...



Toby, dat's de way to freedom.”

“Great-Grandpa, you know we got the same name,’ I said.”

“Dat a fact, yes is,”

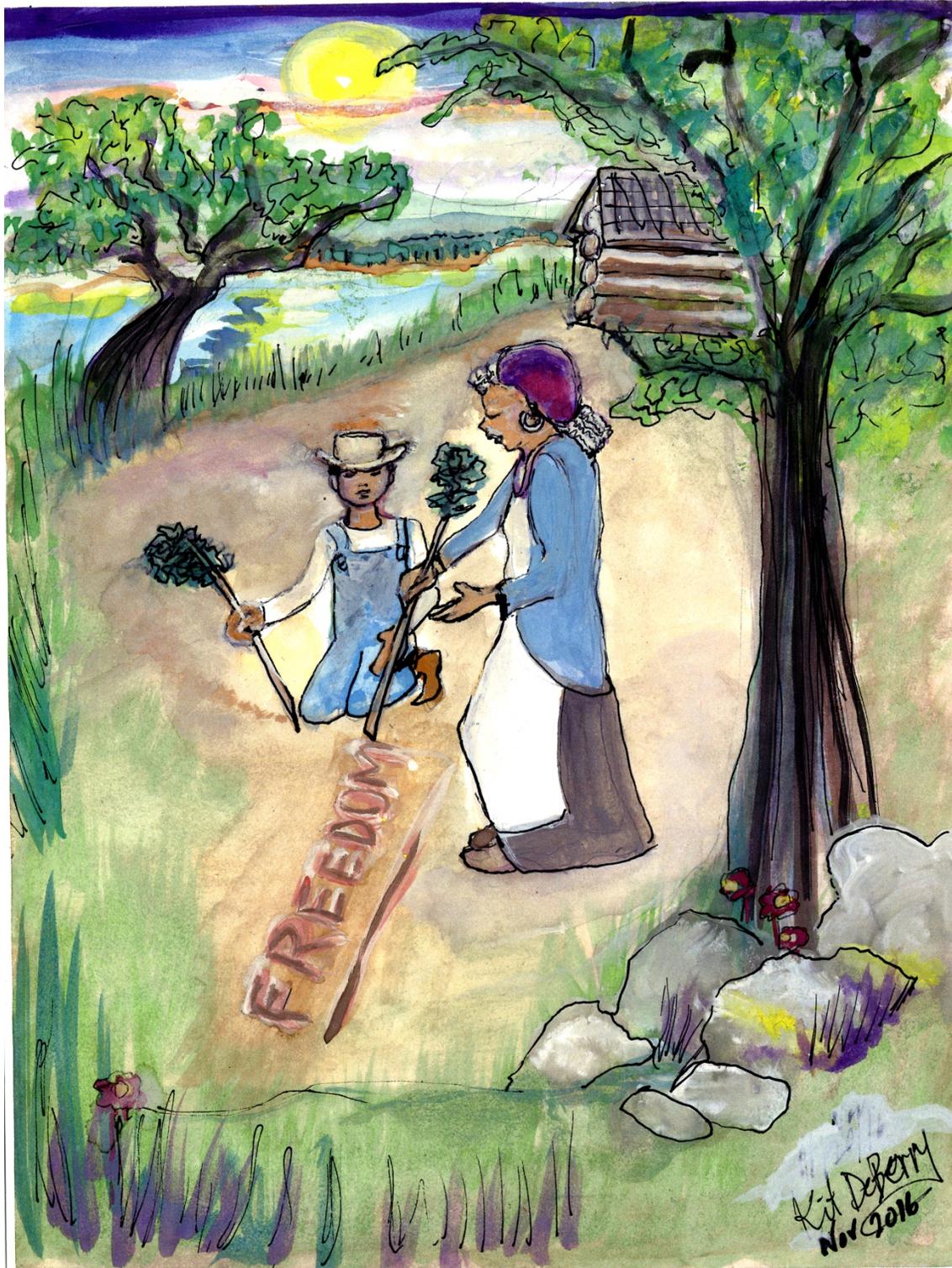
“What happened after your grandma told you ’bout the Freedom Star?’ I asked.”

“Well, for de longest time freedom was jus a dream. Not a night time dream, but a all de time dream. I was dreamin’ it every mornin’ when I get up. I was dreamin’ it whiles I weed de vegetable garden or tote water from de creek wid my sister. An’ when my mama and I hide ’hind de cabin so’s she could teach me de few letters she know, I’s dreamin’ freedom.”

“Why was you hiddin’?’ I asked.”

“Cause in dose days, our people weren’t ’lowed to learn no reading and writn’. Mama jus know a few letters so she write ’em in de mud with a pointy stick and I copy what she done. See?”

“I see.”



“Yes, I’s all de time dreamin’ freedom. I dream ’bout walkin’ into a store wid my own money and buyin’ me a sweet treat. I dream ’bout whistlin’ loud ’nough so’s all de birds could hear and not gettin’ tol to shut up. But my biggest freedom dream was holdin’ my head up and lookin’ any man in de eye when I talk wit him.”

““What happened to your dream, Great-Grandpa?””



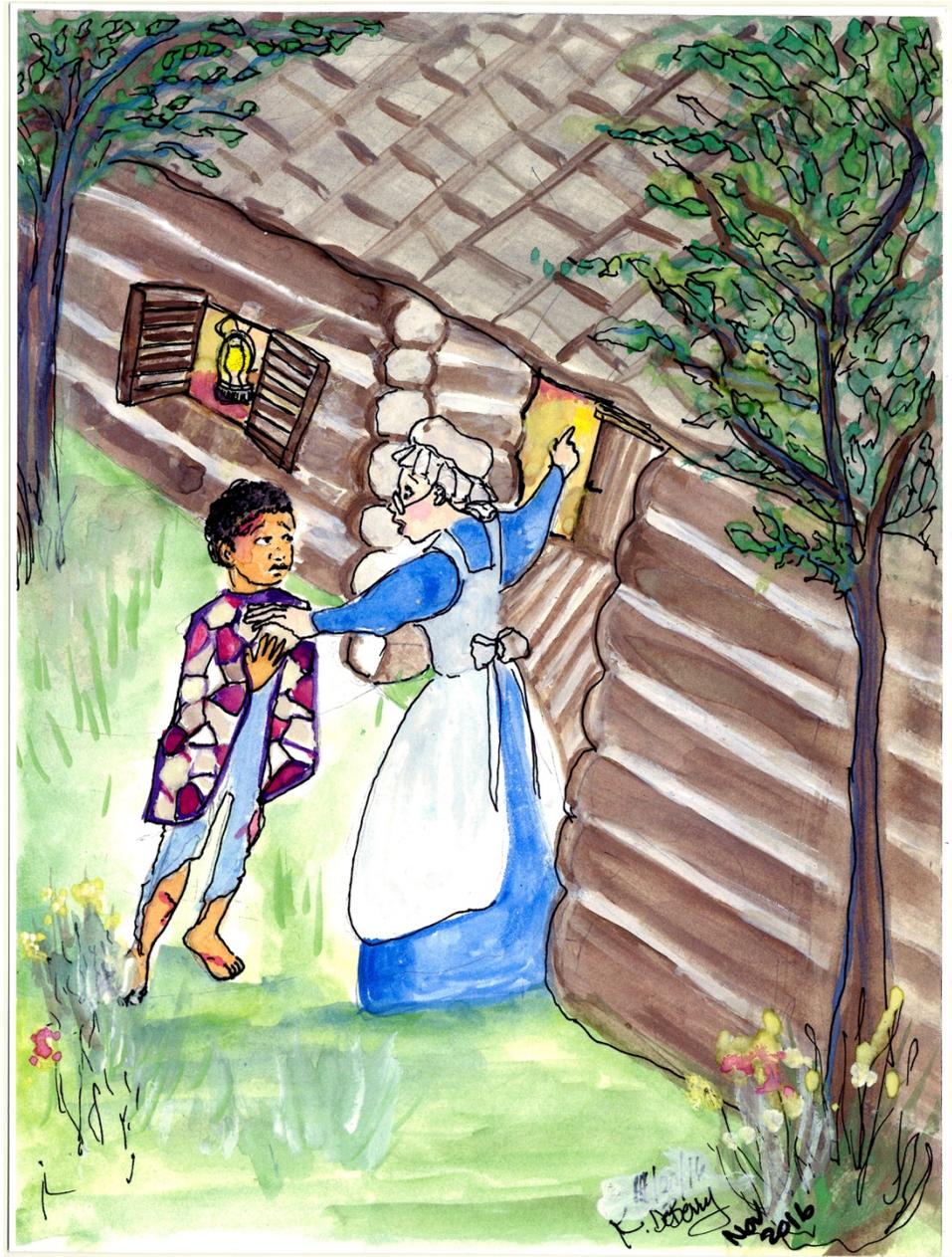
“Well, one dark night in 1860, I kiss my grandma goodbye and set my eyes on dat star.”

“I sneak away from de cabin and took off fast into de woods. Somewhere ’hind me voices took to shouting, and de overseer starting chasin’ me. I must have run six miles ’fore de hounds quit baying. For weeks, I hid in de day and run in the darkness. But as I get closer to de Ohio River, I gets restless. So one afternoon I come out of hiding and start up in de mountains. The day was warm an new buds was comin’ out on all de trees. High up blue sky stretchen’ on forever. Down low, mud cool my sore feet. Birds was singin’. I even got to whistlin’ back at ’em a bit. Next thing I knowd I was staring down de barrel of a shotgun, and de white man on de other end was shouting to see my Freedom papers. I did’n have no papers, so’s I run. I dodged through de trees while gunshot crack all ’roun me. I stumble in de river and never did notice de cold. I ain’t much of a swimmer, but I keep my head ’bove water and the current carry me downstream. I climb out on de far bank and curl up, shivering, under a fallen tree. When night comes, I seen a lantern in a farmhouse window. I ’membered my grandma saying dat some white folks use a light as a sign for de Underground Railroad. Not a real railroad wid tracks and engines, but a secret group of people who

help runaway slaves, like me, gets to freedom. I's scared, but I got no choice.

I knock on de door and a little gray hair lady say,

“Oh Lord!
Quick, come
inside.”



She took me to a secret room 'hind her chimney to sleep in. Come mornin' I was jus startin' to feel safe when de sheriff come a yellin' to search de house. But the lady tol 'em that no one is dere and den talk 'em into eating breakfast and praying wid her family. Now don dat beat all? While dey was a socializing, her son led me away through de woods. I's nearly ten miles north 'fore dey finish singing hymns. Den her son give me a bit of money and disappear back de way we come. By afternoon, I walk to a small town. I thinkin', *I's free. I'm goin' to dat general store and get me my own sweets.* Inside, three men was a sittin' next to a dirty window playin' checkers. De old one had a beard and muddy boots. De youngen kept on shuffling his feet back and forth whiles he plan his next move. De third one was a teasing de old one.

“Hey Earl, you gonna let this here youngen beat ya? He's got ya in a tight spot now. Looks like you ain't such a hot shot player after all.’

Den he laugh an' his fat belly shook. Dat's when he sees me. Everythin' get real quiet. All's I can hear is de youngen's feet swishing 'gainst the floor. *Swish, swish, swish, swish . . .* and den dey stop too. All three of 'em is starin' at me. Real slow, I look down while I walk pass

'em toward the counter. All six eyes follow me. Dey never say a word. Den, they gets up and come over. My stomach tie up in a knot. I tol myself, *It all right cause I's free now*, but dey don seem to care.”

“I suppose you're a runaway slave, right?”

“Yes sir,’ I answer.”

“Well, you don't look so bad off to me.”

“They give you them clothes down there?”

“Yes sir,’ I say again, still lookin' at my feet 'cause I's 'fraid to look up.”

“They feed ya good?”

“Fair, sir.”

“They beat ya much?”

“No sir, never.”

“You hear that, boys? This fellow left a place that gives him free food and clothes and never beats him to come up here and work hisself to death.”



“Dey all laugh. De old one spit at my feet. I jump back.

De youngen shove me from behind. I start a shaken. Tears burn de back of my eyes. I's scared . . . again.



And den I 'membered . . .

I 'membered de long days workin'. I 'membered hidin' to learn my letters. I 'membered grandma's worn, wrinkled hand pointin' to Freedom Star. I's still scared, but I not a slave no more. I's free, an' I can talk and act free. So, real slow, I raise up my head. Oh, I was shakin', but I look straight into his mean eyes. 'Sir,' I say, 'As far I as I know, my old position is still open if you want it. Well, his face got redder and redder. Den dem other two fellows start pushing him and laughing.'"

““He holler, ‘Let’s get outta here. I ain’t staying where dey sell to the likes of him!’”

““I watch him go. My eyes never leave his face. Den I pay for de sweets, step out into the sunshine, and start a whistlin’ so loud dat all de birds could hear me,’ Great-Grandpa finished, his eyes glistening.”



“What happened next?” I whispered.”

“Well, next come all de things dat get us to right now, I recon.”

“I’m glad we’re free now,’ I said and leaned my head on Great-Grandpa’s shoulder.”

“I glad, too. But right now you gots to get to bed so’s you can go learn at dat fancy school of yourn,’ Great-Grandpa said, and he gave me a hug.”

“Okay. Are you coming in?’ I asked him.”

“No, not quite yet. I recon’ I gonna stay and visit wid Freedom a bit more,’ Great-Grandpa smiled, looking up at the starry sky.”.



“So that was you; the little boy in the story?” asked Cassie.

“Yes, that was me,” Grandpa said, replacing his glasses, “And Old Toby was your Great-Great-Great-Grandpa.”

“That was a long time ago,” Cassie said.

“It was indeed, but not so long ago that we can forget it. Some things are so important that we must remember them even after a long time has passed,” Grandpa said.

“Well then, I think we better put this book in a special place,” Cassie said, gently taking it from Grandpa, “because it needs to last another very long time.”



“Yes, indeed it does, a very long time.”

THE END

Freedom Star

Written and Narrated by Connie Winters

Produced by WOUB Public Media

Executive Producer: Thomas S. Hodson

Coordinating Producer and Audio Supervisor: Adam Rich

Associate Producers: Mark Brewer

Artwork: Kit DeBerry

OH FREEDOM sung by David Emerson Toney

Music Accompaniment by Celia and Charlie Lewis

Pre-production Audio Script V/O: C.M. Coleman

CAST LIST

CASSIE	Stella Rose
GRANDPA	Dale Ricardo Shields
GREAT-GRANDPA	David Emerson Toney
TOBY	Kaila T. Benford
GRANDMA	Patricia Ann Thomas
EARL	Jeremy Ludemann
OLD JOE	Joe Balding
CHARLIE	Charlie Lewis
WOMAN	Karen M. Chan
MAMA	Ayesha Nizhoni
SHERIFF	Cecilia Rinaldi
CHOIR	Jim Parsons Celeste Parsons Joe Balding Rochelle Reamy Cecilia Rinaldi